

Daniel T. Foster (1841-1920)

Captain Daniel T. Foster was born on July 22, 1841 in Waitsfield, Washington County, Vermont. He worked as a farm hand for several years before he began working as an engineer on the Vermont Central Railroad. Foster then answered the call to service enlisting in the Union Army on July 14, 1862. He was a member of the Tenth Vermont Infantry Regiment, Company B, First Brigade, Third Division, Sixth Corps. He entered the army as a Private but received several promotions ending his service with the rank of Captain. During his first year of service, Foster was on guard duty from Manxey Junction to Harper's Ferry.¹ He also served in the Wilderness Campaign (May 5-7, 1864). The Wilderness Campaign was a fierce battle fought through two counties in Virginia where General Grant (of the Union Army) and Gen. Robert E. Lee (of the Confederate Army), met in combat for the first time. Although Grant's forces suffered greatly, he pressed the Confederate forces hard marking a milestone in the Union effort. Foster then participated in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign in August 1864. It was during this Campaign that Foster was wounded. At the battle of Fisher's Hill on September 21 and 22, 1864, Foster (then the rank of 2nd Lieutenant) "received a slight wound on the shoulder." It was not a serious wound as he would continue to serve until the end of the Civil War.² Foster also said that he was present when General Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse, VA ending the Civil War on April 9, 1865. He mustered out of service on June 29, 1865 and returned to his home in Vermont.

In 1867 Foster moved to Bloomington, Illinois. Two years later, on October 5, 1869, Foster married Levina Walton a former resident of Waitsville, VT. Levina had moved to Bloomington a few years before their marriage. They resided at 606 E. Mulberry Street all their married lives. They were the parents of one daughter, Myra, who died at the age of nine.

Foster worked a variety of jobs throughout his life. According to the U.S. Census, Foster was a Locomotive Engineer in 1870. In the Bloomington City Directories, he was listed as working as a Baggage Master on the Chicago and Alton Railroad from 1872-1873. He also ran the Union Depot, a restaurant near the C. and A. Railroad, from 1873 to around 1876. By 1883, Foster leased the Ashley House (located at the corner of Center and Jefferson Streets), a hotel that had fallen on hard times. His business partner in this venture was Isaac McBean who was an employee of the Ashley House at that time.³ Foster had hopes of improving the once fine hotel and in an interview with a reporter from *The Daily Bulletin* he stated that...

*"I have a good deal of experience in the hotel business, and feel sure I can make this venture a success. I shall make such improvements as are needed as rapidly as suggested, and I am determined to make the Ashley a hotel in which men can stop with some expectation of receiving decent accommodations."*⁴

The hotel experience Foster referred to came from twenty years of experience with having run the Bloomington Railway eating house and the Derby Line house in Vermont. Because of all his years of business experience, he was considered one of the best known men in Bloomington, being "polite," "agreeable," and a "general favorite."⁵

¹ "Daniel Foster Called by Death," *Daily Pantagraph*, October 14, 1920

² George Brenville Benedict. *Vermont in the Civil War*. (Burlington, VT: Free Press Association, 1888) Volume 2, 322-323

³ *Bloomington City Directory 1882-1883*

⁴ "The Ashley House," *Daily Bulletin*, December 2, 1883

⁵ "The Ashley House," *The Daily Bulletin*, December 2, 1883

Foster also owned and operated an omnibus and carriage company. His first partner in 1887 was Isaac McBean. McBean died later in 1887 and John Eddy, a leader in the local Democratic Party, bought McBean's share of the company. The company then became known as Foster and Eddy and they remained in business until sometime between 1897 and 1899 when, according to the Bloomington City Directory, the Whitsell brothers took over the company by 1899.⁶ The omnibus and carriage line had a previous ownership under Perry McKisson and Leroy Payne. At that time, the bus line included twenty-eight horses, three omni buses, six carriages, several private carriages, fifteen employees, and special United States Mail buses. The employees of the line were paid in total \$110 a week or about a \$1.00 per day each. They were trained to know the streets of the city and the number of houses on each one. The stables for the company were located on East Street.⁷

In 1889 Captain Foster (as he was often called), entered the political arena and ran on the Republican ticket for alderman of the First Ward in Bloomington. The first ward was located from Chestnut St. to Front St. and Main St. extending east beyond Towanda Ave. Foster served as alderman from 1889-91 and then was elected mayor of Bloomington on April 30, 1891. This would be the first of four one year terms serving from 1891-94 and again in 1896-97.

When Foster began his campaign for mayor, there was virtually no opposition. The Captain was heavily favored by the citizens of Bloomington. One local political leader, I.N. Phillips, stated to a reporter from *The Pantagraph* that Foster was "an honest man and a republican from the center to circumferences. He is a patriot and his patriotism has been tried by fire."⁸ Upon Foster's victory, *The Pantagraph* reported that during this election, "it was the largest mayoral vote ever cast." Foster defeated his Democratic Party opponent, Dr. D.S. Dyson, by a 452 vote majority and the Republicans gained in every ward as well.⁹ Many criticized his large poll numbers because of his popularity among Democrats particularly Irish Democrats in the Fifth Ward. Foster's votes far outnumbered previous mayors and broke a fifteen year old record.¹⁰

Much of Foster's career as mayor was clouded with scandals and controversy primarily dealing with an increase in gambling and prostitution in Bloomington during his first three terms as mayor. Accusations were printed in *The Pantagraph* that city officials, in particular Mayor Foster, were ignoring the vice which was "stalking" the streets of Bloomington and did little to nothing to stop such activities as well. In one such letter to *The Pantagraph*, the author stated that one word from the mayor would put a halt to all of these illegal and immoral activities.¹¹

However Foster and some other officials remained silent on this issue. This led members of the community to believe that Foster and chariman of the police committee Maxwell had some knowledge of those illegal acvities or perhaps were even being bribed by those who were taking part in gambling and prostitution to look the other way. Articles continued to be published in local newspapers that blamed Foster and other local officials for the spread of these crimes. Foster finally responded to the public pressure on January 13, 1892 when several of the gambling houses were raided and shut down. A *Pantagraph* reporter quoted Foster as saying:

⁶ *Bloomington City Directory*, 1897 and 1899

⁷ *The Daily Pantagraph*, September 30, 1874 p. 4

⁸ "Capt. Foster For Mayor," *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 31, 1891

⁹ "Foster Flew Fast," *The Daily Pantagraph*, April 21, 1891

¹⁰ Mark Dunn, "The Paddy Ryan Affair," 28

¹¹ *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 12, 1892

“I knew that gambling was going on here but had no idea that it was so open. I spend all of my evenings at home and hence have no occasion to notice the dens when they were in full blast. I never have been in one of them....I am glad...the papers have exposed it in its true light... He further stated that since he was elected mayor “for the whole people,”

he wanted to do “what they demand.”¹² He then issued orders to close all the gambling houses and said that he would see to it personally.

When Foster was re-elected in 1892, the problems of gambling and prostitution had not gone away. In fact, it appeared they were increasing because city officials had either not been able to stop new houses from opening or did not try very hard. *The Daily Bulletin* (Bloomington’s other daily newspaper), reported that upon examining police records, only one raid had been conducted on gambling houses between August 1891 and April 1892. Also, from October 1891 to April 1892, no arrests had been made in prostitution houses. With so much public pressure, Foster could no longer afford to ignore these problems. So, in the summer of 1892, he issued an edict that the city police must crack down on the illegal activities. This mandate required no person to be allowed on the streets after midnight and no young girls to be out past 10:00 pm. The police were directed to arrest any citizen who appeared to be up to no good. This enforcement held up and there was a decrease of these illegal activities.¹³

His third term as mayor, beginning in 1893, was no different than his previous two terms. His third term would be blemished yet again by more accusations that he was doing little to nothing about rampant gambling and prostitution and that he and Alderman Maxwell of the police committee were receiving funds to “ignore” these illegal operations. None of this could ever be substantiated.¹⁴

Foster was not re-elected for a fourth consecutive term in 1894. Many citizens of Bloomington, in particular Republicans, felt let down by Foster and his actions or lack thereof and accused him of not being a true Republican or of representing all of his constituents. In 1896, just two years later, Foster ran for mayor again and was elected to a fourth and final term. Also, F.J. Maxwell (who was an alderman and head of the police committee during Foster’s previous terms as mayor), was elected captain of the Bloomington police.

If Foster had been hoping for a smoother fourth term as mayor he would be sadly mistaken as he was headed down a bumpy path once again. The issue which would dominate almost his entire fourth term as mayor and tarnish his reputation for the rest of his life occurred during the presidential election of 1896. On the evening of October 15, 1896, a large Republican rally was held in Bloomington in relationship to the impending presidential election that November. During the rally, several people from Danvers, IL had their pockets picked. One of the pick pockets arrested and accused of being the guilty party was a man by the name of Paddy Ryan. He was a member of a Chicago gang of pick pockets and burglars. Ryan was taken to jail but later that evening escaped police custody under suspicious circumstances.

According to eyewitness testimony, Ryan was identified as picking the pocket of several people in the crowd at the rally. Ryan was eventually arrested around 6:00p.m. that evening and escaped sometime between 11:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. A witness stated that Sergeant R.T. Dunn (the officer in charge that evening) changed Ryan’s jail cell and put him into a different one. When another police officer arrived later that evening (1:00 a.m.), he found the cell empty and

¹² “Keno,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 13, 1892

¹³ *The Daily Bulletin*, June 17, 1892 and Dunn, “The Paddy Ryan Affair,” 35

¹⁴ Dunn “The Paddy Ryan Affair,” 33

the door unlocked. Sgt. Dunn was first charged with abetting the escape as he was said to have been that last one to see Ryan. Dunn denied having any part in Ryan's escape at first. A committee was organized by the City Council to find out what really happened. They concluded that Dunn was alone with the prisoners after having sent the other officers out on errands. It was believed that it was at this time that Dunn released Ryan. Dunn was summarily suspended from the police force without pay on October 30. Dunn set out to prove his innocence by tracking Ryan down in order to have Ryan to speak to officials on his behalf. Dunn stated that he "knew that his arrest would clear me of any taint of suspicion in the matter."¹⁵

Dunn's story would soon change on the heels of Paddy Ryan's account. Ryan reported that Sgt. Richard Dunn unlocked the cell door and that a friend of his on the outside, acting through Jay Smith, arranged with Mayor Foster and Sgt. Dunn for his release. "Ryan claimed that he paid \$150.00 and a diamond pin worth \$60.00 to be released." After being recaptured in Chicago, Ryan became upset since things were not going as they should. He sent his wife to see Jay Smith and Dunn to get his money back. Mrs. Ryan confirmed her husband's account of the happenings after the arrest.¹⁶

On February 10, 1897, *The Pantagraph* reported Dunn's account of the events of that evening. He gave testimony to the Grand Jury painting a new picture on his involvement. Dunn stated that he

*"turned Patrick Ryan loose on the express orders of Mayor Foster. He called me by telephone, and I jumped on a bicycle and rode up to his residence, when he told me to let Ryan go...I considered it to be my duty to obey his instructions. It was not my place to question his object or reasons...I never received any money or diamonds for turning Ryan out...and did not then and do not now know of any person receiving money."*¹⁷

Mayor Foster denied this and his response was printed in *The Pantagraph*. Foster alleged that he did not see Dunn after 6:40 pm on October 15th after he had left the police station. He also stated that Dunn never came over to his house on a bicycle. The mayor said that:

*"I have always been a good friend of Dunn's...He told a far different story before the police committee than the one he tells now. It is apparent there is a lie somewhere...one thing is dead sure and that is Dunn is mistaken all the way through to put it mildly....If he let Ryan out he did it of his own notion. I never got any money."*¹⁸

Foster was eventually indicted for two offenses: aiding a prisoner to escape and malfeasance in office. Although several witnesses were called to trial, no one story was truly corroborated. The case went to the jury on the evening of April 2, 1897. The next day, Mayor Foster was acquitted and Dunn's suspension was upheld. It was reported by *The Daily Bulletin* that upon hearing the verdict of "not guilty" read, Mayor Foster had tears in his eyes. After receiving congratulations from many acquaintances and friends who were at his trial, he proceeded to hurry home and tell his family the good news.¹⁹

Because this trial occurred shortly before the upcoming city election, the Republican party in Bloomington decided it would be in their best interest to not choose Foster as their

¹⁵ *The Daily Pantagraph*, November 12, 1896

¹⁶ Dunn, "The Paddy Ryan Affair," 22

¹⁷ "By the Mayor's Orders," *The Daily Pantagraph*, February 10, 1897 & Dunn, "Paddy Ryan Affair," 8-15

¹⁸ "Capt. Foster's Denial," *The Daily Pantagraph*, February 11, 1897

¹⁹ "Freedom For Foster," *The Daily Bulletin*, April 2, 1897

candidate for mayor especially since there was the chance he may have been convicted of the crimes of which he was accused. Foster, confident that he would be vindicated, announced that he would run for mayor as an independent candidate. However after he was acquitted, he withdrew his candidacy on April 9, 1897 most likely because he realized he stood no chance of being elected in light of this scandal.²⁰ Two years later he served as superintendent of streets from 1899-1900 but that was the end of his political career.

While his disgraced years as mayor were not forgotten, he did manage a few accomplishments while serving in public office. Mayor Foster can be credited as commissioning the lake that now graces Miller Park. He also aided in contracting a new supplier of electricity which constructed a new electric light plant for the city of Bloomington.

Captain Foster died quietly at his home at East Mulberry Street on October 14, 1920 after suffering two strokes. In his obituary, it is said that he was a man of strong convictions yet possessed a kindly disposition. He was very fond of children and always willing to lend a hand to those in need.²¹ He was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.

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²⁰ Dunn, "The Paddy Ryan Affair," 65

²¹ "Daniel Foster Called by Death," *The Daily Bulletin*, October 14, 1920