

## Richard Blue (1841-1921)

Richard Blue was born on February 22, 1842 in Dayton, Ohio.<sup>1</sup> The names of his parents are unknown, but it was reported that his mother was from Virginia and his father was from Ohio.<sup>2</sup> He was recorded as “mulatto,” an outdated and now offensive term for a person of both white and Black ancestry.<sup>3</sup> According to the 1850 United States Census, Blue was a member of the white Rayburn family household for much of his youth. Because of this, he was likely not enslaved. Enslaved Black individuals were only listed statistically on the United States Census between 1790 and 1860. Beginning in 1850, free Black individuals were listed by name.<sup>4</sup>

Blue appears on the Judge James Rayburn family census by name in both 1850 and 1860.<sup>5</sup> Still, the exact nature of his relationship with the Rayburn family remains unclear. An 1881 article alleges that Judge James Rayburn, head of the Rayburn household, raised Blue, and furthermore, an 1896 article says that Blue “had been taken into the family a few years before” the Rayburns came to Illinois.<sup>6</sup> Both indicate a closer relationship than employer, or parents’ employer.

In 1851, Judge James Rayburn and his family left Ohio and moved to Old Town Township in McLean County, Illinois, which is located southeast of Bloomington.<sup>7</sup> Blue, then nine years old, moved with them and worked as a farm laborer for the family.<sup>8</sup> No other Blues appear on any other Rayburn census, leaving Richard’s parentage a mystery.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, many free Black men attempted to join the Union Army, but were refused. It was not until 1863, after the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued by President Abraham Lincoln, that they were allowed to join.<sup>9</sup> On February 3, 1865, Blue enlisted in the Union Army, joining the 29<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry, Company A, in Springfield, initially serving as a private. Blue was somewhat disabled due to a foot injury he received while chopping wood on the Rayburn farm in 1857. Because of that disability, he was assigned to musician duties, soon achieving the rank of principal musician.<sup>10</sup>

In May 1865 (after the war ended), the 28<sup>th</sup> Indiana, 29<sup>th</sup> Illinois, and the 26<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> New York (all of which were Black regiments) were transferred to Texas for garrison duty, guarding the U.S-Mexican border, as well as looking out for Confederate uprisings. Bad weather forced many of the ships carrying the men to stop off the shore of Galveston for supplies on the way to the border of Mexico. By coincidence, many of the regiments—including the 29<sup>th</sup>—were present

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<sup>1</sup> “Death Comes To Richard Blue,” *Sunday Bulletin*, March 27, 1921

<sup>2</sup> 1900 United States Federal Census

<sup>3</sup> 1920 United States Federal Census

<sup>4</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census; 1860 United States Federal Census; “African Americans and the Federal Census, 1790–1930.” *National Archives and Records Administration*, July 2012. <https://www.archives.gov/files/research/census/african-american/census-1790-1930.pdf>. Accessed June 13, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> 1850 United States Federal Census; 1860 United States Federal Census

<sup>6</sup> Davis Departure,” *The Pantagraph*, October 24, 1881; “The Rayburn Reunion,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, September 25, 1896

<sup>7</sup> 1860 United States Federal Census; Wm. LeBaron, Jr. *The History of McLean County, Illinois*. (Chicago: Wm. LeBaron, Jr. & Co, 1879), 1006

<sup>8</sup> “Death Comes To Richard Blue,” *Sunday Bulletin*, March 27, 1921; 1860 United States Federal Census

<sup>9</sup> Freeman, Elsie, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West. “The Fight for Equal Rights: A Recruiting Poster for Black Soldiers in the Civil War,” *Social Education* 56, 2 (February 1992): 118-120. [Revised and updated in 1999 by Budge Weidman.]

<sup>10</sup> Edward Miller Jr. *The Black Civil War Soldiers of Illinois: The Story of the 29th U.S. Colored Infantry*. (Columbia: The University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 139.

in Galveston when General Gordon Granger issued General Order No. 3 on June 19.<sup>11</sup> This order declared,

*The people are informed that in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States, all slaves are free. This involves an absolute equality of personal rights and rights of property, between former masters and slaves, and the connection heretofore existing between them, become that between employer and hired labor. The freed are advised to remain at their present homes, and work for wages. They are informed that they will not be allowed to collect at military posts; and that they will not be supported in idleness either there or elsewhere.*<sup>12</sup>

The Emancipation Proclamation was issued two years prior to this, but that news had been purposefully kept from the enslaved individuals in Galveston.<sup>13</sup> News of emancipation relied on the ability of Union Troops to communicate that information, thus the news traveled slowly making Texas the last state to free enslaved people.

Texas was not a pleasant assignment. Longing for home and feeling unsafe, William McCoslin—who served with Blue in the 29th and would later work in Bloomington politics with Blue—wrote, “I know I represent the feelings of almost the entire regiment who have suffered with me...If we remain in this unhealthy country, disease will finish our decimation.”<sup>14</sup> The 29th Regiment served along the Rio Grande until they finally mustered out in Brownsville, TX on November 6, 1865, six months after the war ended.<sup>15</sup>

Blue was among the roughly 180,000 Black soldiers who served in the Union Army (roughly 10% of the total Union Army). Thirty-nine of these soldiers were from McLean County, (twenty-six of those served with Blue in the 29th). Thirteen of the thirty-nine died, out of a total 40,000 deaths of Black soldiers during the war.<sup>16</sup>

Black soldiers were almost always treated unequally when compared to white soldiers. They were paid \$10 per month, while white soldiers were paid \$13 (or about \$2,100 and \$2,800, respectively, in 2023).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Black soldiers had an additional \$3 per month deducted from their pay for a clothing allowance, bringing their net pay down to \$7 (about \$1,500 in 2023) per month, while white soldiers received their full \$13 per month.<sup>18</sup> When this discrepancy was protested, it took eighteen months of debate in Washington D.C. to decide on equality for pay and supplies for Black soldiers.

Additionally, Black soldiers were disproportionately assigned “fatigue duty” such as digging latrines and clearing roads. John Abbot, a young Black man from Bloomington serving in the

<sup>11</sup> “United States Colored Troops: The Complete Juneteenth Story.” *Juneteenth Legacy Project*. <https://www.juneteenthlegacyproject.com/united-states-colored-troops>. Accessed June 22, 2023.

<sup>12</sup> The reading of this order was the foundation of the Juneteenth holiday. “General Order No 3.” American Battlefield Trust. <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/primary-sources/general-order-no-3>. Accessed June 27, 2023.

<sup>13</sup> “United States Colored Troops,” *Juneteenth Legacy Project*.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Bowman. “McCoslin, William.” McLean County Museum of History. 2020. Retrieved from <https://mchistory.org/research/biographies/mccoslin-william>; Scott J. Wagers. “McLean County Blacks in the Civil War.” August 2, 1993, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick H. Dyer. *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion, Volume 3*. (Dyer Publishing Co; Des Moines, 1908) 1728.

<sup>16</sup> Bill Kemp. “Black Soldiers Served As ‘Sable Arm’ Of Union Army,” *The Pantagraph*, February 13, 2014.

<sup>17</sup> “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

<sup>18</sup> Freeman, Elsie, Wynell Burroughs Schamel, and Jean West. “The Fight for Equal Rights”; “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment, wrote that his regiment “has the praise of being the best regiment that has ever been in this department, and yet they don’t feel disposed to give us what is the most essential to us as a people and a race—and that is equality with the white man.”<sup>19</sup> McCoslin, echoing Abbot, wrote that the Black soldiers “responded to their country’s call to see the day when justice, according to merit, and not prejudice according to color, would be their reward. Oh my wounded country! suffering, lacerated from slavery’s bloody knife...”<sup>20</sup>

After the end of the war, President Lincoln stated that “without the military help of the black freedmen, the war against the south could not have been won.” Today, Blue’s name, along with the names of the other thirty-eight Black soldiers from McLean County, are listed on the African American Civil War Memorial in Washington D.C., which commemorates the military service of the 180,000 Black soldiers in the Union Army, and the roughly 29,000 Black soldiers in the Navy.<sup>21</sup>

By 1866, Blue settled in Bloomington, and was no longer a member of the Rayburn household.<sup>22</sup> By 1868, he was living at 306 S. Madison Street, where he remained for the rest of his life.<sup>23</sup>

Blue married Emily L. Cooper on May 5, 1870.<sup>24</sup> She was born in Shawneetown, Illinois on March 7, 1840, and moved with her family to Bloomington in 1857.<sup>25</sup> Emily and Richard would go on to have six children, three of whom survived to adulthood. Their first child, born in 1871, did not live long enough to be named.<sup>26</sup> The following year, their daughter Belle was born on April 30.<sup>27</sup> She was followed by a son, James, in 1880, and a daughter, Lutie, in 1884.<sup>28</sup> Another son, Richard, was born in November 1886, but died at the age of three from diphtheria on October 22, 1890.<sup>29</sup> In 1891, Richard and Emily lost another infant.<sup>30</sup> All three of those children, who died at young ages, are buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington.<sup>31</sup>

Unfortunately, Emily (called Letitia in her obituary), died on March 22, 1898. She contracted *la grippe* (influenza) in the fall of 1897, which resulted in kidney trouble. Her funeral was held

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<sup>19</sup> Wagers. “McLean County Blacks,” 8

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Located in the historic “U Street” neighborhood, the monument was created in 2004, and depicts three infantrymen, a sailor, and the Spirit Of Freedom. “The defining moments and historic places of the Civil War.” U.S. Department Of The Interior. April 9, 2018. <https://www.doi.gov/blog/defining-moments-and-historic-places-civil-war>

<sup>22</sup> Today, 306 S. Madison Street is south of the Grossinger Motors Arena and is occupied by small duplexes; *Weekly Pantagraph*, April 11, 1866.

<sup>23</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1868, p. 57; 1870 United States Federal Census.

<sup>24</sup> *The Pantagraph*, May 7, 1870.

<sup>25</sup> “Death Of Mrs. Richard Blue,” *The Pantagraph*, March 23, 1898.

<sup>26</sup> “Bloomington Burial Records,” Infant of R. Blue, section 4, lot 32. “Evergreen–Main Cemetery.” Bloomington. McLean, Illinois.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Yoo. “Claxton, Belle Blue.” McLean County Museum of History. 2008. Retrieved from <https://mchistory.org/research/biographies/claxton-belle-blue>

<sup>28</sup> *The Pantagraph*, March 27, 1880; 1900 United States Federal Census

<sup>29</sup> “Fragments,” *The Pantagraph*, October 23, 1890; *The Weekly Pantagraph*, November 5, 1886.

<sup>30</sup> “Bloomington Burial Records,” Infant of Richard Blue, section 4, lot 32. “Evergreen–Main Cemetery.” Bloomington. McLean, Illinois.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

on March 24 in their home on South Madison Street.<sup>32</sup> She too was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.<sup>33</sup>

Sometime around 1868, Blue opened what would become a very prosperous barbershop in downtown Bloomington.<sup>34</sup> By 1870, Blue was joined in business by Walker Hill and their shop moved to the Royce Block, located on the corner of Main and Front Streets, one of the most prominent commercial buildings in town at that time.<sup>35</sup> Blue's patrons were exclusively white, because at this time it was not considered acceptable for a barber to serve both white and Black customers, regardless of the race of the proprietor.<sup>36</sup> There were instances of barbers having Black and white customers in some northeastern communities where Abolitionism was strong, but the accepted norm was not to "cross the color line."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, with the relatively small population of Black individuals in Bloomington, it was more financially viable to cut white people's hair.<sup>38</sup>

Blue also worked occasionally as a butler and was remembered by many Bloomington residents as a staple of private parties. It was said that "with Dick Blue at the door to receive the guests and to superintend the serving of the refreshments...any party was bound to be a success."<sup>39</sup>

Working as a butler allowed Blue an audience with Bloomington's political class. In October 1881, Senator David Davis offered Blue the position of butler in his Washington residence, but it does not appear Blue took Davis up on that offer.<sup>40</sup> This request was no small distinction. A fellow Bloomington resident, Davis was a close acquaintance of Abraham Lincoln, and served on the Supreme Court from 1862-1877 (resigning to take a Senate seat representing Illinois).<sup>41</sup> Similarly, in 1883, Blue was reportedly offered the position as the "attendant in the private office of the Executive" by Republican Governor of Illinois John Marshall Hamilton, whose campaign Blue had supported and who, "like other prominent politicians, has had an eye upon Dick for a long time past."<sup>42</sup> The position would pay \$75 per month (about \$15,000 per month in 2023), but

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<sup>32</sup> "Death Of Mrs. Richard Blue." *The Pantagraph*, March 23, 1898; "Funeral of Mrs. Richard Blue." *The Pantagraph*, March 25, 1898; *Collins French-English Dictionary*, "La Grippe," <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/french-english/grippe>.

<sup>33</sup> "Bloomington Burial Records," Letitia E. Blue, section 4, lot 32. "Evergreen—Main Cemetery." Bloomington. McLean, Illinois.

<sup>34</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*, 1868-1913, 57.

<sup>35</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directory* 1870-71, 75; Bill Kemp. "Royce 'Block' Loomed Over Busy Corner of Downtown Bloomington." *The Pantagraph*, June 25, 2013.

<sup>36</sup> Abe Williams. "Up Through Boyville in the Old Home Town," ed. Kessler, Clara Louise. *Home Town in the Corn Belt: A Source History of Bloomington, Illinois 1900-1950 in five volumes, Volume I*. (Bloomington: Self Published, 1952), 30; Bowman. "McCoslin, William."

<sup>37</sup> 1850 United States Census; "City Barbering Saloon. William McCoslin," *Western Whig*, June 22, 1850; Jack Muirhead, "William McCoslin" (unpublished manuscript, 2018) 1.

<sup>38</sup> Muirhead, "William McCoslin," 1.

<sup>39</sup> Abe Williams. "Up Through Boyville in the Old Home Town," 30.

<sup>40</sup> "Davis Departure," *The Pantagraph*, October 24, 1881.

<sup>41</sup> "Who Was David Davis?" The David Davis Mansion. <https://daviddavis mansion.org/about-us/who-was-david-davis>. Accessed June 13, 2023.

<sup>42</sup> "Dick Blue Draws a Prize Package," *The Weekly Leader*, June 7, 1883; "John Marshall Hamilton." *National Governors Association*. <https://www.nga.org/governor/john-marshall-hamilton/>. Accessed July 6, 2023.

it would have required Blue to give up his barbershop. Therefore, it appears that Blue did not take the job.<sup>43</sup>

Though Blue was successful in many areas throughout his life, politics proved to be his true passion. He remained active in both local and state politics for much of his life, working towards Black empowerment and fighting for Black rights.

In April 1866, Blue and McCoslin, along with members of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church (to which Blue belonged), helped welcome famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass back to Bloomington. Douglass previously spoke in Bloomington in 1859. Blue served on a three-person committee (along with McCoslin and Samuel Witherspoon) to draft resolutions for the occasion.<sup>44</sup> The resolution they drafted read as follows:

*Resolved, That in the present distracted condition of the country it is eminently proper and necessary that all just and constitutional means should be employed quieting popular excitement, the removal of unreasonable prejudice, and the obliteration of all hostile feelings growing out of the late unhappy civil war.*<sup>45</sup>

On the day of the lecture, this committee escorted Douglass to the stage.

Douglass spoke of the recent assassination of Abraham Lincoln, Reconstruction, and made “well-timed denunciations of President Andrew Johnson.”<sup>46</sup> At the close of Douglass’s message, the AME Church (known as Wayman AME today) committee presented him with a “silver headed cane as a token of our highest regards, hoping he will receive it not for its intrinsic value but as a testimonial from true friends.”<sup>47</sup>

On March 30, 1870, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which granted Black men the right to vote, was formally adopted as part of the United States Constitution. The amendment stated that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”<sup>48</sup>

On April 1, when word reached Bloomington about the passage of the amendment, a large crowd gathered outside the Minerva Block, where Dr. Herman Schroeder resided. Members of the crowd watched as Dr. Schroeder, a white man, walked down the street arm-in-arm with a Black woman, while a band comprised of a fife, tenor, and bass drum performed outside his residence. *The Pantagraph* reported the good doctor “had long ago promised” to do this in order “to show that there should be no distinction on account of color.” Crowds filled the sidewalk to watch the “parade, and in every instance gave way and allowed ample room for them to pass.” However, while “this unique performance was received by some as a good joke on the Doctor, others condemned” the display.<sup>49</sup>

Despite the lukewarm reception to Dr. Schroeder’s demonstration of support for the adoption of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, it was an exciting time for Black citizens. Blue, along with four other

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<sup>43</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*, 1868-1913, various pages; “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

<sup>44</sup> “Honor to Fred. Douglas,” *The Pantagraph*, March 31, 1866; Miller, 139.

<sup>45</sup> “Honor to Fred. Douglas.”

<sup>46</sup> *Weekly Pantagraph*, April 11, 1866.

<sup>47</sup> “Honor to Fred. Douglas; “Fred. Douglas”

<sup>48</sup> “Fifteenth Amendment.” *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1870; “15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Voting Rights (1870).” *National Archives*. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/15th-amendment>. Accessed June 27, 2023.

<sup>49</sup> “Promenade Extraordinary,” *The Pantagraph*, April 2, 1870.

Black men, served on a committee to arrange a public demonstration in celebration of the adoption of the amendment. The committee drafted a resolution saying that “we, as people of color, deeply feel the embarrassing circumstances under which we have for too long been compelled...our condition as a people can best be elevated by such a change in the constitution and laws of our country as shall guarantee equal rights before the law...[we express] our sincere thanks and esteem for the men and party who were the means of carrying the Fifteenth amendment into affect.” At the celebration, which was held on April 6 at Dr. Schroeder’s Opera House on the courthouse square in downtown Bloomington (where the Museum Square is today), the Declaration of Independence was read, and there was music, speeches, and a twenty-nine-gun salute.<sup>50</sup>

The anniversary of the adoption of the amendment was celebrated several times over the next few years, as well. In 1881, Blue, Colonel Isabel, and Robert Savage called a mass meeting to enlist help from the public to plan the celebration of the passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Blue was appointed chairman for planning the celebration, which was held on March 29 that year.<sup>51</sup> Two years later, on March 29, 1883, there was a celebration at the Washingtonian Hall. *The Pantagraph* reported that the hall “was literally crowded” with members of the Black community, and “a few white folks” who joined in the celebration. Blue, Gus Hill, and General Ira Bloomfield were among the speakers, and there was music, dancing, and supper.<sup>52</sup>

Due to newfound voting rights, combined with citizenship which was conferred upon all people born in the United States with the passage of the 14th Amendment, Black men were now allowed to serve on juries.<sup>53</sup> Richard Blue has the distinction of being the first Black person to serve as a juror in Bloomington’s history, and was called for that duty at least four times in his life.

The first case for which he served as a juror was that of Bloomington vs. Bateman in May 1870.<sup>54</sup> H.M. Bateman owned two popular restaurants at 110 W. Front Street and 111 North Street and was charged with violating “The Sunday Law,” a city ordinance that prohibited most business from taking place on Sundays.<sup>55</sup> The evidence presented at the trial stated that “Mr. G.C. Jones purchased some ice cream, and a Mr. Gillespie bought a glass of lemonade” on Sunday, April 24 from one of Bateman’s establishments.<sup>56</sup> The case ended in a hung jury, standing 5 to 1 in favor of the city.<sup>57</sup> The city council voted to direct the city attorney, Stilwill, to discontinue the prosecution against Bateman. Less than a month later, the Sunday Law was amended to

<sup>50</sup> “Grand Celebration,” *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1870.

<sup>51</sup> *The Pantagraph*, January 26, 1881; “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Pantagraph*, February 5, 1881.

<sup>52</sup> “Ratification Rally,” *The Pantagraph*, March 30, 1883.

<sup>53</sup> “14th Amendment,” *Cornell Law School*, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/amendmentxiv>. Accessed July 5, 2023; Equal Justice Initiative, “Race and the Jury: Illegal Racial Discrimination in Jury Selection” (2021). <https://eji.org/report/race-and-the-jury/a-history-of-discrimination-in-jury-selection/#chapter-1>. Accessed July 5, 2023

<sup>54</sup> *Bloomington Pantagraph*, May 18, 1870.

<sup>55</sup> The Sunday Law stated that “all stores and other places of business where goods of any kind, or articles for personal consumption are kept for sale, within the limits of this city, shall be kept closed on Sundays, and no goods or articles of any kind whatever shall be sold, disposed of or delivered on Sunday, by the proprietor, his agent, servant, clerk or party in possession of any store or place of business, under a penalty of twenty-five dollars for each and every offense,” “The Sunday Ordinance,” *The Pantagraph*, February 2, 1870.

<sup>56</sup> *Bloomington City Directory*, 1870-1871. 55; “The First Trial Under The Sunday Law,” *The Pantagraph*, May 13, 1870

<sup>57</sup> “The First Trial Under The Sunday Law,” *The Pantagraph*, May 18, 1870

allow the sale of “cigars and tobacco, refreshments, ice cream, soda water, lemonade, and ice from wagons on Sundays.”<sup>58</sup>

In April 1874, Blue served on a jury again, this time on a coroner’s jury. Augustus Bradley, a railroad agent, was found dead in his bed by his adopted ten-year-old daughter, Carrie, early on the morning of April 28. He was shot through the head. The jury ruled that the wound was self-inflicted.<sup>59</sup> Blue was summoned to jury duty for the third time for the November 1885 Circuit Court session, but it is not known if he was chosen to serve at that time.<sup>60</sup> And in July 1908, he served on another coroner’s jury, which found that a man named C.B. Scruggs, who suddenly died on a streetcar, suffered from heart disease.<sup>61</sup>

Blue was also familiar with being on the other side of a court case. For much of the spring and summer of 1881 he was involved in a property dispute with his mother-in-law Nancy Cooper’s neighbors, Charles and Jane Winslow. The land in dispute, owned by Emily Cooper, was approximately sixty feet long, ten feet wide, and worth \$20 (about \$4,000 in 2023). The Winslows’ claimed that part of Cooper’s property belonged to them. Both sued Cooper on multiple occasions for trespassing, but all suits were thrown out by the courts. Charles was arrested twice for tearing down Cooper’s fence. Cooper was arrested as well, on charges of assault and battery against Charles. The situation continued to escalate until Charles tore down Cooper’s fence with an ax. Cooper retaliated by throwing hot water at him, and they fought to a draw. A judge ruled in favor of Cooper.<sup>62</sup>

In June, a trial over the property saw sixty witnesses testify over the course of two days, but the jury deliberated only fifteen minutes before ruling in favor of Cooper and Blue. This was the Winslows’ seventh suit over the property, all of which had failed. By then, court fees had come to over \$900—or about \$193,000 in 2023.<sup>63</sup> In September 1881, Jane Winslow appealed for a change of venue as she felt that the judge and the county were prejudiced against her.<sup>64</sup> It is unclear whether this was granted, but the following September, the case had appeared before the appellate court in Springfield, and the judge there ruled in favor of Cooper. By this time, court fees had run up to over a thousand dollars (about \$209,000 in 2023).<sup>65</sup>

Aside from his engagement in activities related to the judicial branch of government, Blue became heavily involved with the election activities. He often represented Bloomington at various political conventions across McLean County and Illinois, participating in general Republican conventions, as well as the segregated Black Republican conventions.

In June 1870, Blue represented Bloomington at the County Congressional Convention, a meeting to decide the county’s choice of Congressional candidate and select thirteen delegates to represent McLean County at the District Convention in Springfield later that summer.<sup>66</sup> In May

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<sup>58</sup> “The First Trial Under The Sunday Law;” “Council Proceedings,” *The Pantagraph*, June 4, 1870

<sup>59</sup> “The Inquest,” *The Weekly Leader*, April 29, 1874; “The Pistol Once More,” *The Pantagraph*, April 29, 1874

<sup>60</sup> “November Jurors,” *The Weekly Leader*, October 8, 1885

<sup>61</sup> “Held Inquest On Tuesday,” *The Pantagraph*, July 22, 1908

<sup>62</sup> “Who Owns The Land?” *The Pantagraph*, April 20, 1881

<sup>63</sup> “Tally One More for Nancy,” *The Pantagraph*, June 15, 1881; “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

<sup>64</sup> “Miscellaneous,” *The Pantagraph*, September 23, 1881

<sup>65</sup> “Two Appellate Court Decisions,” *The Pantagraph*, September 29, 1882; “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

<sup>66</sup> “Republican Congressional Convention,” *The Weekly Leader*, June 9, 1870

1872, he was an alternate delegate to the Congressional District Convention in Springfield.<sup>67</sup> Blue served as one of the Bloomington delegates to the McLean County Republican Convention twice, in 1872 and 1874. At the 1874 convention, he was approved by the credentials committee, (meaning that his membership was contested at one point).<sup>68</sup> In 1877, at the Third Ward Republican Primary, Blue was chosen as the delegate to the city convention.<sup>69</sup> In February 1884, he served as a delegate from the 14<sup>th</sup> congressional district and presided over the meeting of the state “colored” central committee in Chicago.<sup>70</sup> And that spring, Blue was an alternate delegate to the State Republican Convention in Springfield.<sup>71</sup>

In September 1886, at a meeting of Black citizens that appointed a delegate to the Black convention in Galesburg, Illinois in October of that year, Blue was elected the secretary. At the convention, it was decided to send representatives to the Illinois State Legislature in order to demand equal rights for Black citizens of the state.<sup>72</sup> In February 1892, at a meeting of the Central Committee of McLean Republicans, Blue and Gus Hill called for Black Republicans to “be represented on the congressional delegation.”<sup>73</sup> Just one month later, Blue served on the Bloomington Republican Central Committee for the municipal campaign, representing the Third Ward, and in April, he was the Bloomington delegate to the 14<sup>th</sup> district Republican delegate convention.<sup>74</sup> In August of 1896, Blue and Robert Savage were elected delegates to the Republican League meeting in Peoria.<sup>75</sup>

In 1879, wanting to move beyond the behind-the-scenes political roles, Blue threw his hat into the ring and ran for local office. On the evening of March 11, 1879, a mass meeting of Black voters was held at Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Bloomington where it was discussed the importance of Black voters to come together “to take into consideration what plan the colored people ought to assume before the day of the election arrives.”<sup>76</sup>

Speeches were made by numerous members of Bloomington’s Black community, including Gus Hill, who stated that “the time had now arrived when the colored people should arise and demand office from the hands of the Republican Party.” Hill continued on further, stating that “If the new City Council failed to appoint a colored man to office, then the faith in Republican promises and pledges was not as strong as it had been cracked up to be.” Other speakers echoed Hill’s sentiment, owing to the fact that the Black population in Bloomington was large enough to demand some kind of representation in the administration of city affairs. Blue spoke as well, stating that it was necessary for Black residents of Bloomington “to unite together in one political

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<sup>67</sup> “Convention to Choose Delegates to the State Republican Convention and Nominate Candidate for Congress, *The Weekly Leader*, May 15, 1872

<sup>68</sup> “Republican County Convention,” *The Weekly Leader*, August 28, 1872; “Republican County Convention.” *The Weekly Leader*, June 10, 1874; *Merriam-Webster*, “Credentials Committee,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/credentials%20committee>

<sup>69</sup> “Third Ward Primary,” *The Pantagraph*, March 31, 1877.

<sup>70</sup> *The Pantagraph*, January 30, 1884; “An Exciting Moment.” *The Pantagraph*, February 2, 1884

<sup>71</sup> “The Convention,” *Weekly Leader*, April 10, 1884

<sup>72</sup> “Delegates Elected,” *The Pantagraph*, September 24, 1886

<sup>73</sup> “McLean Republicans,” *Weekly Leader*, February 19, 1892

<sup>74</sup> “Organized for the Campaign,” *The Pantagraph*, March 24, 1892; “Funk for Congress,” *Daily Republican*, April 26, 1892

<sup>75</sup> “Selected Delegates,” *Weekly Leader*, August 20, 1896

<sup>76</sup> “Black Republicans,” *The Pantagraph*, March 12, 1879

party. If they ever expected to obtain anything in the distribution of office at the hands of the City Council they must be united as one man.”<sup>77</sup>

It was during this meeting that Blue was nominated as a candidate for alderman of the Third Ward, which had the highest percentage of Black residents of Bloomington living in it at that time. Blue was well respected by members of both the Black and white communities in Bloomington. That, combined with his long record of political activities, made him the logical choice for a Black candidate in the upcoming municipal elections.<sup>78</sup> He, along with two other men, co-wrote several resolutions stating that in “looking to the further elevation of our race, consider that positions of trust are the places that raise or lower the standard of men; that the color of the skin should not be the slightest objection as God did not intend all to be white or all black.” And furthermore, “that as colored men were loyal to the government in time of war, so in peace we will be true to our trust and honest with our fellow men” and deserved to have men of their “own race filling positions of trust and honor.”<sup>79</sup>

Blue accepted their nomination for alderman. And while he was running on the Republican ticket, he stated that he would “make the run independent of party.” Blue ran with a broad platform. He wished to be a candidate of “all the colored people, irrespective of party,” and asked for all the votes of good people.<sup>80</sup>

Blue’s active campaign was well-received. According to a *Pantagraph* article on April 19, he was well respected by the citizens of Bloomington. *The Pantagraph* continued by noting he was a man of “good education and practical experience and would no doubt, if elected, serve the people of his ward with credit.”<sup>81</sup> Despite this endorsement and confidence in his abilities, he received only 156 votes, losing to the incumbent alderman, William W. Stevenson, who received 360 votes.<sup>82</sup>

The following evening, a serenading band visited his home to play, honoring him for his efforts in running for political office.<sup>83</sup> Blue never repeated his run for alderman, though he badly wanted the position and many of his friends urged him to try again.<sup>84</sup> However, in the announcement of the birth of his son James on March 26, 1880, it was stated that Blue “doesn’t care whether or not he is elected alderman now.”<sup>85</sup> It would be a full century before Bloomington-Normal elected a Black alderman, which was Eva Jones in 1979.<sup>86</sup>

However, while Blue did not succeed in being elected as an alderman, he did receive a political appointment. He was appointed a mail carrier for the City of Bloomington by newly elected

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> “Colored Politicians,” *The Pantagraph*, March 18, 1879

<sup>81</sup> “Mr. Blue for Alderman of the Third Ward,” *The Pantagraph*, April 19, 1879.

<sup>82</sup> “The City Election,” *The Pantagraph*, April 22, 1879.

<sup>83</sup> *The Pantagraph*, April 23, 1879.

<sup>84</sup> *The Pantagraph*, March 19, 1880.

<sup>85</sup> *The Pantagraph*, March 19, 1880; *The Pantagraph*, March 27, 1880.

<sup>86</sup> Eva Jones was elected to city council in 1979 as at-large alderman, becoming the first Black alderman in Bloomington-Normal. She had previously been the first Black member and president of the District 87 School Board, elected to the board in 1971 and to the presidency in 1977. In 1981, she ran for alderman of the third ward, but was defeated. Ryan Denham. “First And Only: How Eva Jones Broke Barriers In Bloomington.” WGLT, February 21, 2019. <https://www.wglit.org/show/wglts-sound-ideas/2019-02-21/first-and-only-how-eva-jones-broke-barriers-in-bloomington>; Candace Summers. “Eva Jones broke racial boundaries, glass ceiling in Bloomington politics,” *The Pantagraph*, March 28, 2021.

Mayor Elisha B. Steere (a fellow Republican) in May 1879.<sup>87</sup> The role of the mail carrier was somewhat of a political position, often assigned based on partisan loyalty. Blue held the position, in addition to operating his barbershop, for at least one year.<sup>88</sup>

Additionally, in May 1884, Mayor Benjamin Funk nominated Blue for the position of Oil Inspector of the City of Bloomington. Blue's nomination was confirmed by a city council vote, in which Blue achieved an 8-4 majority.<sup>89</sup> Blue received the position and was granted a \$500 bond (about \$99,000 in 2023).<sup>90</sup> He served in this role until at least the following May.<sup>91</sup>

Much of Blue's political work was focused on securing Black rights and advancing Black empowerment. In March 1878, at a meeting of 125 Black voters in Royce Hall (a cultural center located in the Royce Block), Blue was among the speakers who persuaded voters to adopt a resolution declaring "that our freedom as men and enfranchisement as citizens will not be properly exercised until we are rid of political slavery...[in the] future we will co-operate with such men and favor such measures as we believe best for the interests of the colored people and men who make their living by labor."<sup>92</sup> In other words, they felt that their political power was not being used to its full effect and that Black voters should have more power than they had been granted.

Blue was on the state executive board of the Afro-American League, a national organization that worked to end discrimination and lynchings and fought for full equality for Black Americans.<sup>93</sup> Much of their activities revolved around raising awareness and remaining educated on current events. To this end, at a meeting of the Bloomington chapter of the league in November 1895, they heard a speech by Reverend Robinson, who had fled from his home state of Texas because of "his opposition to the mobs." He "told of the recent lynchings and burnings."<sup>94</sup> At the state convention of the Afro-American Protective League the following year, Blue led a discussion of civil and legal rights, considering, among other things, a universal Emancipation Proclamation celebration and a \$100 pension for all formerly enslaved persons over sixty years of age.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *The Pantagraph*, May 3 1879; "Bloomington, Illinois Mayors, 1850-2019," compiled by Bill Kemp; Hasbrouck, Jacob L. *History of McLean County, Illinois 1924, Vol. 1*, (Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Co., 1924), 125; *Polk's Bloomington City Directory* 1879, 171.

<sup>88</sup> "The City," *The Pantagraph*, March 19, 1880.

<sup>89</sup> *Journal Of Proceedings Of The City Council Of The City Of Bloomington, Ill. For The Fiscal Year Ending April 30, 1885* (Pantagraph Printing Establishment, 1885), May 5, 1884.

<sup>90</sup> *Journal Of Proceedings Of The City Council Of The City Of Bloomington, Ill. For The Fiscal Year Ending April 30, 1885* (Pantagraph Printing Establishment, 1885), May 9, 1884; "Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past," MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

<sup>91</sup> "Report Of City Oil Inspector." *Annual Reports Of Bloomington City Officers*, May 1, 1885

<sup>92</sup> "A Significant Political Meeting by the Colored Voters," *The Pantagraph*, March 27, 1878; Kemp, "Royce 'Block' Loomed Over Busy Corner of Downtown Bloomington."

<sup>93</sup> Afro-American Leagues were established all over the United States, in both northern and southern states, but proved ineffective. They faded not long after the turn of the century but would soon be succeeded by organizations such as the NAACP. It is worth noting that the Afro-American Protective League and the National Afro-American League are the same organization; both were founded by Timothy Fortune in 1887. "National Afro American League (1887-1893)." *BlackPast*. <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/national-afro-american-league-1887-1893/>. December 19, 2009; Lee, B. F. "Negro Organizations." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 49 (1913): 129-37. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1011915>

<sup>94</sup> "Colored Men Meet," *The Weekly Leader*, November 14, 1895.

<sup>95</sup> "Afro-American Protective League," *Decatur Review*, June 18, 1896.

Blue eventually served as the president of the state Afro-American League. An 1899 letter to him said that the league was “characteristic of the energy and zeal you have always exhibited in every enterprise with which you have been connected,” praising Blue for both his good work on the league and for every other endeavor he undertook.<sup>96</sup>

In the years following Emancipation and the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Black citizens almost exclusively voted Republican. However, by 1880 (only ten years after Black men received the right to vote), “many in the community felt they were not receiving enough political patronage, considering how overwhelmingly they supported Republican candidates.”<sup>97</sup> At a July 1882 meeting of the Black voters of Bloomington and Normal (at which Blue served as secretary), it was decided that the voters in attendance would stick with the Republican party.<sup>98</sup> An article covering the meeting noted that the attendees were “exercising the same sound judgment and prompt political foresight which has characterized their deliberations in the past.”<sup>99</sup> On the state level, it was decided at the Fourth Convention in Springfield in 1889 that in light of the passage of the 1885 Civil Rights Act, an improving relationship with the Republican party, and the publicized lynchings committed in the Democratic southern states, the Republicans were the best option, even with imperfections.<sup>100</sup>

Blue was extremely active in the Black Republican circles of Bloomington. In August 1872, he was elected one of the 27 vice presidents of the Grant and Wilson Club, an organization of voters who supported the election of Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>101</sup> In the summer of 1884, Blue, along with several others, served on a committee to organize a Blaine and Logan Club of Black voters.<sup>102</sup> When that club met in August, Blue was elected vice president.<sup>103</sup> The following year, he organized and spoke at a Blaine and Logan club of one hundred Black voters in Normal.<sup>104</sup> These clubs supported the Republicans James G. Blaine for president and John A. Logan for vice president in the 1884 election.<sup>105</sup>

At a meeting of the Colored Republican Club in September 1888, a good number of Democratic and Independent voters attended, as well as the usual Republicans. Blue gave “a good sound speech [that was] full of good solid thoughts and was appreciated by the listeners” at the end of the meeting.<sup>106</sup> In March 1892, he was president of the Harrison and Morton Club and in August of that year, he was the vice-president of the Harrison and Reid club, both organizations

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<sup>96</sup> “Colored People to Meet,” *The Pantagraph*, November 24, 1899.

<sup>97</sup> David. A. Joens. “Illinois Colored Conventions of the 1880s.” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 110, no 3-4 (2017), 306.

<sup>98</sup> *Weekly Leader*, July 27, 1882.

<sup>99</sup> “Sound Sense,” *Weekly Leader*, August 3, 1882

<sup>100</sup> Joens. “Illinois Colored Conventions.”

<sup>101</sup> “Grand Republican Rally—Grant And Wilson Club Formed—Schroder’s Opera House Crowded,” *The Pantagraph*, August 2, 1872; *The Pantagraph*, July 25, 1872.

<sup>102</sup> “The Plumed Knight,” *The Weekly Leader*, June 12, 1884

<sup>103</sup> “Nicely Organized,” *The Weekly Leader*, August 7, 1884

<sup>104</sup> “Normal Colored Club,” *The Pantagraph*, September 24, 1887.

<sup>105</sup> Blaine and Logan Clubs were established across the country. Despite these efforts, however, Blaine and Logan ultimately lost the presidency to Democrats Grover Cleveland and Thomas Hendricks. “Blaine and Logan Clubs.” *Kansas Trails Genealogy*. [http://genealogytrails.com/kan/jefferson/Blaine\\_Logan\\_Club.html](http://genealogytrails.com/kan/jefferson/Blaine_Logan_Club.html). Accessed June 27, 2023.

<sup>106</sup> “The Colored Republicans,” *The Weekly Leader*, September 14, 1888

of Black Republicans.<sup>107</sup> At a meeting of Bloomington Republicans in June 1892, the “well-known” Blue “made a stirring address which was heartily received.”<sup>108</sup> He was among those who gave “brief vigorous speeches” at an April 1894 meeting of Black voters in support of Edgar Heafer, a Republican candidate for Bloomington mayor, which was called “one of the most unique caucuses of the present interesting campaign.”<sup>109</sup>

For several years before and after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Blue was employed by the Republican party in Springfield as a doorkeeper, ensuring that the only people inside the chamber were those permitted to be there, as well as enforcing the rules of decorum among the representatives. The position is elected by the House at the beginning of each general assembly.<sup>110</sup> It is unclear how long the job required Blue to be away from home, since he still lived in Bloomington during this time.<sup>111</sup>

He was first up for the job at the Republican caucus in January 1897, but lost it to Captain Ed Harlan.<sup>112</sup> In December of that year, the House of Representatives gave him the position of janitor. He worked twenty days there, earning a salary of \$2 per day (about \$375 in 2023).<sup>113</sup> He did get the position of caucus doorkeeper in 1899 and held it through 1904, serving as a third assistant doorkeeper.<sup>114</sup> In 1905 he was a janitor in the House of Representatives again and kept that job until 1907. Finally in 1908, he returned to the assistant doorkeeper position at the House of Representatives and the Senate.<sup>115</sup> According to his obituary, he was a doorkeeper for the Illinois General Assembly for twenty years.<sup>116</sup>

In addition to his political activities, Blue was involved in a variety of cultural activities and was an active member or officer in many local clubs. In June 1881, he contributed an essay to a meeting of a Black literary society.<sup>117</sup> *The Pantagraph* noted that meetings of the club “are always largely attended.”<sup>118</sup> Black literary societies were becoming popular throughout the United States during this period. Also called reading rooms or debating societies, Black literary societies

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<sup>107</sup> “The Colored Republicans,” *The Pantagraph*, March 11, 1892; “The Colored Republicans,” *The Pantagraph*, August 16, 1892.

<sup>108</sup> “Rousing Ratification,” *The Weekly Leader*, June 30, 1892.

<sup>109</sup> “Miller Was Second,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, April 20, 1894; “The Great Campaign,” *The Weekly Leader*, April 12, 1894; “List of Nominations,” *The Pantagraph*, April 12, 1894.

<sup>110</sup> “Officers, Officials, And Employees.” In *Deschler’s Precedents*, 607. <https://www.govinfo.gov/con-tent/pkg/GPO-HPREC-DESCHLERS-V1/pdf/GPO-HPREC-DESCHLERS-V1-6-4-6.pdf>. Accessed June 29, 2023; “Legislature (25 ILCS 10/) General Assembly Operations Act.” *Illinois General Assembly*. <https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=432&ChapterID=6>. Accessed June 28, 2023; “Illinois House Elects First Female Chief Doorkeeper In State History.” *The Crusader*, March 10, 2023. <https://chicagocrusader.com/illinois-house-elects-first-female-chief-doorkeeper-in-state-history/>

<sup>111</sup> *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*, 1868-1913, various pages.

<sup>112</sup> “McLean Men In It,” *The Weekly Leader*, January 8, 1897.

<sup>113</sup> *Record of the 40th General Assembly of the House of Representatives* (Springfield, December 10, 1897): 13; “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” MeasuringWorth 2023. [www.measuring-worth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuring-worth.com/ppowerus/).

<sup>114</sup> “After the Plums,” *The Pantagraph*, January 8, 1901; *Record of the 43rd General Assembly of the House of Representatives* (Springfield, 1904).

<sup>115</sup> *Record of the 44th General Assembly of the House of Representatives* (Springfield, 1905): 350; “The Minor Officers,” *Decatur Herald*, January 7, 1908.

<sup>116</sup> “Death Comes To Richard Blue,” *Sunday Bulletin*, March 27, 1921.

<sup>117</sup> *The Pantagraph*, June 11, 1881.

<sup>118</sup> *The Pantagraph*, December 9, 1881.

were seen as a way for members of the Black community to become more politically active, as well as better readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers. These groups were a way for “African Americans to develop a literary background as well as the oral and written skills needed to express and represent themselves with confidence” in the safety and comfort of a group of their peers.<sup>119</sup> On the national scale, literacy also supported voting rights, since many southern states required literacy tests to vote—in theory, to ensure an educated electorate, but in practice, a measure to suppress the Black vote.<sup>120</sup> In February 1885, Blue served as the temporary president of the Bloomington Literary and Protective Association, a non-partisan, all-Black club for intellectual pursuits.<sup>121</sup>

Blue was also a prominent figure in the local Black Odd Fellows club, a fraternity based around fellowship and charitable works. In Blue’s time, there were over a thousand lodges in Illinois alone.<sup>122</sup> Blue served as their delegate to the club’s Grand Lodge in Mattoon, Illinois in 1890. He petitioned for Bloomington to be the next venue for the annual meeting of the state organization, which, if successful, would have attracted 15,000 people to Bloomington.<sup>123</sup> He was elected district Grand Master of the club in 1894.<sup>124</sup>

He was a founding member of the Charles E. Hovey Post 786 of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), which was founded in Normal, Illinois in 1897. The G.A.R. was an organization created for honorably discharged Veterans of the Union Army who had served in the Civil War. This organization helped create homes for soldiers, was active in relief work, and in pension legislation. This group was extremely influential in presidential elections. For a time, it was almost impossible to be nominated on the Republican ticket without being endorsed by the G.A.R.<sup>125</sup> The G.A.R. was also responsible for the national adoption of Decoration Day in 1868, held annually on May 30 as “a day for remembering the sacrifices of fallen comrades.”<sup>126</sup> After World War II, Decoration Day became known as Memorial Day. In 1968 the Uniform Holidays Bill was passed which stated that Memorial Day was to be “officially observed on the last Monday of May.”<sup>127</sup> Blue remained a member of the GAR for the rest of his life.

Following his musical experience in the Civil War, Blue continued to perform in a “colored glee club” in Bloomington-Normal, which frequently performed at political events. In October 1880, the club won first prize at a singing competition at a Republican rally in Bloomington, winning \$15 (about \$3,300 in 2023).<sup>128</sup> By December of that year, he was the leader of

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<sup>119</sup> Gholneesar E. Muhammad. “The Literacy Development and Practices Within African American Literary Societies.” *Black History Bulletin* 75, no. 1 (2012); Elizabeth McHenry, “Dreaded Eloquence: The origins and rise of African American literary societies and libraries,” *The Harvard Library*, 47.

<sup>120</sup> “Black Americans And The Vote.” *National Archives*. <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/vote>. Accessed June 27, 2023.

<sup>121</sup> “A Society of the Colored People,” *The Pantagraph*, February 21, 1885.

<sup>122</sup> “History.” *Grand Lodge Of Illinois Independent Order Of Odd Fellows*. <https://ioof-il.org/history>. Accessed June 27, 2023

<sup>123</sup> “Will Try to Bring Them Here,” *The Pantagraph*, August 6, 1890

<sup>124</sup> “Bloomington Honored,” *Weekly Leader*, August 16, 1894

<sup>125</sup> “Grand Army of the Republic History.” *Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War*, Accessed June 24, 2015.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>127</sup> “Memorial Day in United States.” *Memorial Day in United States*, Accessed July 1, 2015. <http://www.time-anddate.com/holidays/us/memorial-day>

<sup>128</sup> “The Heyworth Meeting,” *The Pantagraph*, October 18, 1880; “The Heyworth Rally,” *The Weekly Leader*, October 21, 1880; “Purchasing Power Today of a US Dollar Transaction in the Past,” *MeasuringWorth* 2023. [www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/](http://www.measuringworth.com/ppowerus/).

the club.<sup>129</sup> The club performed at an 1883 celebration of the anniversary of the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment and at a reunion of the 94<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Illinois Volunteers (the “McLean County Regiment”) that same year.<sup>130</sup> In May 1885, he and three other men sang at a celebration of John A. Logan’s election to the United States Senate.<sup>131</sup> Blue and his group made another appearance in April 1887 when he led the quartette at a celebration for the anniversary of the birthday of General Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>132</sup> And by 1888, Richard Blue’s glee club was a frequent guest at meetings of the Old Town Republicans.<sup>133</sup>

Blue’s activities slowed in the years leading up to his death, but he remained prominent in local politics for the first half of the 1910s. He was an election judge for the ninth precinct on at least two occasions, the first in June 1910 and the second in February 1912 for the Republican primary.<sup>134</sup>

In the spring of 1912, he was on the arrangement committee for a rally held in support of the incumbent Republican president William Howard Taft. The rally was held in the Coliseum in Bloomington on April 5<sup>th</sup>, and featured a twenty-five-piece band, as well as an address from former New Hampshire governor Nahum Josiah Bachelder.<sup>135</sup> Blue heartily endorsed Taft, and in September of that year predicted that he would win 108,000 of the potential 109,000 Black votes in Illinois.<sup>136</sup> Taft lost to Democratic candidate Woodrow Wilson.<sup>137</sup>

Blue was among the McLean County delegates to the Republican congressional convention of the 17<sup>th</sup> District in September 1914. At this convention, they endorsed Republican congressional candidates John A. Sterling (who was up for reelection) and Frank L. Smith.<sup>138</sup> In 1915, Blue delivered the welcome address at an entertainment fundraiser for his church, Wayman A.M.E., hosted by “a number of the leading women of the city.”<sup>139</sup>

Blue fell ill within the following two years. His occupation was listed as a barber until his death, but it is unclear how long he actually held the shop for.<sup>140</sup> As of 1920, he was still living

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<sup>129</sup> “Wesleyan,” *The Pantagraph*, December 3, 1880

<sup>130</sup> “Ratification Rally,” *The Pantagraph*, March 30, 1883; “The Gallant 94<sup>th</sup>,” *The Weekly Leader*, September 13, 1883

<sup>131</sup> “Peeps Into Past,” *The Pantagraph*, March 4, 1928

<sup>132</sup> “How Time Flies,” *The Pantagraph*, April 30, 1928

<sup>133</sup> “Old Town,” *Weekly Leader*, November 2, 1888; “Old Town,” *Weekly Leader*, September 8, 1892; “Old Town Republicans,” *Weekly Leader*, September 22, 1892

<sup>134</sup> “Supervisors Disposed Of Much Business,” *The Pantagraph*, June 17, 1910; “Appoint Judges And Delegates,” *The Pantagraph*, February 20, 1912

<sup>135</sup> “Taft Mass Meeting,” *The Pantagraph*, April 5, 1912; “William Howard Taft,” *The White House*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/william-howard-taft/>. Accessed July 5, 2023; “Gov. Nahum Josiah Bachelder,” *National Governors Association*. <https://www.nga.org/governor/nahum-josiah-bachelder/>. Accessed July 5, 2023.

<sup>136</sup> “Richard Blue’s Prophecy,” *The Pantagraph*, September 26, 1912

<sup>137</sup> “1912 Electoral Vote Tally, February 12, 1913. *National Archives*. <https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/1912-election#:~:text=Wilson%20handily%20defeated%20Taft%20and,Roosevelt%2C%20won%20just%2027%25>. Accessed July 5, 2023.

<sup>138</sup> The 17th District included Logan, Ford, Woodford, Livingston, and McLean Counties. “Republicans Of District In Harmony Session,” *The Pantagraph*, September 17, 1914

<sup>139</sup> “Program Benefit Concert,” *The Pantagraph*, May 4, 1915

<sup>140</sup> “Richard Blue, Well Known Citizen, Dead,” *The Pantagraph*, March 28, 1921; *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*, pages 115, 146.

at 306 S. Madison Street, now joined by his oldest daughter, Belle, and her husband James Claxton.<sup>141</sup>

Richard Blue died at St. Joseph's Hospital on March 26, 1921 following a sharp decline after about four to five years of illness. He was universally praised, with *The Pantagraph* calling him "one of Bloomington's oldest and most highly respected citizens," and the *Sunday Bulletin* describing him as a "staunch and influential Republican."<sup>142</sup> He was buried on March 29 in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery after a funeral service at the Wayman A.M.E. Church, of which he had been a long-time member.<sup>143</sup>

Richard Blue was a dedicated member of the Bloomington political community and unparalleled in his commitment to civic engagement. His legacy lives on as Bloomington remains a center for progressive politics in Central Illinois.

By: Madeline DeCoste, 2023

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<sup>141</sup> The 1920 Census lists his address as Bloomington Precinct 17. Today, Precinct 17 is the area around Miller Park Zoo. Two young men, Harry J. Purdy and Harry Vannier, lived with the family, but their relationship to Blue and the Claxtons is unclear. *Bloomington-Normal City Directories*, 1868-1913, p. 146; 1920 United States Federal Census; "Polling Places By Precinct." *City of Bloomington Board of Election Commissioners*. <https://bloomingtonelection-sil.gov/maps/polling-places-by-precinct-2/>. Accessed July 5, 2023.

<sup>142</sup> "Richard Blue, Well Known Citizen, Dead." *The Pantagraph*, March 28, 1921; "Death Comes To Richard Blue." *Sunday Bulletin*, March 27, 1921.

<sup>143</sup> "Funeral of Richard Blue." *The Pantagraph*, March 30, 1921.