In 1875, Governor John L. Beveridge of Illinois challenged the members of a Springfield militia company to be true to themselves, to their country, to their God, to their flag, and to the ladies of Springfield. Beveridge left it to the company members to decide how to demonstrate that they were true men and true citizens, either to themselves or to the ladies. The members of the company might have found this a frustrating task because as the nineteenth century entered its final quarter, ideals of manly behavior and attributes of citizenship were changing rapidly. Literate Americans simultaneously held that American manhood, by which they generally meant the manhood of white, middle-class men, was increasingly under assault by their own civilization, and at the same time they were certain that the increasing power and importance of the United States was a direct result of the manliness of American men. Historians, particularly historians of women and of African Americans, have also made it abundantly clear that for all their concerns about the energy-sapping effects of modernity, white middle- and upper-class American men remained fully in charge of all they surveyed and brooked no challenges to their authority or autonomy. In the midst of living through this period ripe with contradictions, paradox, and challenge, American men of all back-
grounds struggled to find new ways to preserve, remake, and expand the numbers of American men who could be rated as manly.¹

The governor’s audience may have been spared some of the contemporary confusion over the content of manhood, however. Governor Beveridge was addressing a specific group of men, those who had volunteered their time and effort to their local militia company. The members of the Governor’s Guard had turned voluntarily to the old American tradition of the militia in search of a way to express culturally approved manliness and responsible citizenship. The men the governor was talking to did have a rough idea of what it meant to be true. They were being true to their nation and their flag by volunteering to serve in their local militia company and training themselves to support and defend the nation at need. They showed the ladies of Springfield how true they were by donning the uniform and embracing their role as handsome and manly civic performers in parades and funerals and dances and drills. They demonstrated to themselves that they were true by making a promise to serve nation and community by volunteering for military training and responsibilities, and living out these promises in their militia membership.⁴

In the early 1870s, membership in the Illinois state militia jumped from just under 250 men in 1870 to over 1,500 members by 1874.⁵ The new members, who ranged from Civil War veterans to young men just coming of age and who included both white and African American men, devoted their time and effort to the task of creating volunteer militia companies throughout the state. In doing so, they embraced a traditional way to put their manliness and their claims to citizenship on public display. Individually, the volunteers had reasons that were as diverse as the men themselves, ranging from an enthusiasm for military uniforms and weapons to Civil War memorializing. Together they found a single home in the Illinois militia, and once active companies demonstrated the rewards of militia membership to local audiences, more and more companies formed. The upcoming centennial celebrations also provided a tantalizing opportunity for a public display of responsible manhood. Men from all over Illinois seized the chance to be part of the celebrations as uniformed members of their local company.⁶

Manhood on Parade

In the early 1870s, militia volunteers paraded regularly and often as they worked to establish their claims to the history and social prestige of the elite bands of citizen-soldiers of the antebellum era. They liked parades,
and parading in general, because it was such an excellent way to establish their credentials as responsible and attractive men in the eyes of their communities. As a result, volunteers pounced on those special occasions that allowed members to dramatically link themselves to the nation and its military history by participating in particularly important civic events. For example, on October 15, 1874, five Illinois militia companies marched in the procession leading U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant to the unveiling of a statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois. By marching in this particular parade, company members visibly tied themselves to two U.S. presidents and to the Union general who won the war. The University Cadets, the militia company from the Industrial University at Champaign; the Sterling City Guards; the Governor’s Guard, the veteran Sherman Guards; and the Springfield Zouaves were hardly alone in the parade. They joined several other military-style fraternal organizations in the two-mile-long procession, among them the national Union veteran officers’ organization, the Army of the Tennessee; the Springfield Fire Department; the German Catholic Church Society; a number of bands; and many, many carriages of national, state, and city notables, all seeking to benefit by association with national heroes.

The day of the parade began with rain, almost as though “nature was weeping over the memories of the past,” but by midmorning the weather had cleared, and the members of the procession began gathering in the middle of the city. Residents of Springfield had decorated almost every square inch of public space with flags, banners, flowers, and evergreens, and as the participants gathered, cannons set up at the cemetery began to fire at regular intervals. The procession finally headed out just after noon and wove its way through the city, up and down all the principal business streets and with a special leg that brought all past the Lincoln home, before ending up at the cemetery just outside of town. The march took about thirty minutes, but it was an hour before the entire procession was finally through the decorated gates of the cemetery. Crowds lined the parade route and filled the cemetery; by some estimates, as many as 40,000 people came to Springfield to participate in the ceremonies or watch them. So many people were pushing into the cemetery to gain a good view of the statue and the ceremonies to come that many militia members had been detailed directly to the cemetery and crowd control. The cannon continued firing even as the many bands that were part of the parade played marching music. The sounds ceased only once the last of the parade had entered the cemetery, when the cannon and the bands fell quiet, in a silence all the more imposing for the noise that preceded it. Each division of the march separated into the areas near the statue.
that had been set aside for them, and the speeches, anthems, and sermons began. Bishop Waymen, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, opened the ceremonies with a prayer, and they concluded with a song.9

The militia members who marched in the Springfield parade and participated in the ceremonies were able to draw on a long tradition to secure the most important spots, those closest to the dignitaries, in the parade honoring Grant and Lincoln.10 In the early nineteenth century, militia companies had begun appearing in public parades celebrating the United States, its holidays, and its heroes.11 By marching in these parades, militia members helped to define a form of American patriotic manliness marked by uniforms, weapons, and martial music. Members used the orderliness of their processions to set themselves off clearly from the much rowdier crowds of banner-waving craftsmen or firemen also commonly found in antebellum parades. In particular, militia members used military funeral parades—both real and symbolic, both types fully under their control and authority—to cement their position as chief arbiters of the most solemn and impressive forms of patriotic behavior. Antebellum militia members successfully claimed a special and unique patriotic authority through the “precision of the march to the cemetery” while wearing fancy dress uniforms and accompanied by bands, gongs, and rifle salutes at graveside.12 Militia members in 1874 were able to draw on both traditions in their quest to establish their new companies in the hearts and minds of their communities.

By 1874 these prewar conventions were so well understood that reporters in Springfield reviewed the procession to the monument dedication against this standard. They knew that what they saw was a civic pageant with widely understood meaning and roles. Reporters noted that the residents of the city had dressed the set with care, draping their city in bunting and flags and constructing six triumphal arches around the center of the city. Each of the five divisions marching in the parade provided the music of at least one band—marching, brass, or drum corps.13 The local reporters particularly enjoyed the band that accompanied the African American Springfield Zouaves. The local audiences also judged the militias’ efforts, seeking signs of seriousness and military bearing and style in both costumes and well-drilled marching. Local reporters reflected these conventions when they admired the nearly 300-strong University Cadets and “their neat, unpretending uniform.” Reporters also noted that the Sherman Guards were “one of the great features of the processions . . . made up exclusively of veteran soldiers, commanded by old officers, [they] wore the uniform of 1861–5, and the manual of arms and drill in use during the war.”14
The parade marked the first public appearance of the Governor's Guard, re-formed out of another defunct Springfield company only a month previously. The new Governor's Guard won the honor of directly escorting (preceding) President Grant, Vice President Wilson, Secretary of War Belknap, and other VIPs to the ceremony. One local reporter wrote, “Not withstanding its youthfulness, [the Governor's Guard] made a creditable and dashing appearance, with its seventy-six men in imposing uniforms, and gaily caparisoned staff and drum corps.” Altogether, the reporter from the Daily State Journal concluded, “The procession made a most imposing appearance. The military with their fine uniforms . . . together with the other societies, went to make up a picture worthy of the pencil of an artist.”

The reporters of 1874 were alert to the diversity of men—Irish, German, native-born, Civil War veterans, college students, and African Americans—who were members of the militia companies and military-style clubs in 1874, and they made much of the variety of ethnicities and ages. In many antebellum cities, socially prestigious militia organizations had sought to define patriotism beyond the reach of the masses when they paraded in expensive uniforms with expensive guns. In Springfield in 1874, the much wider range of men who marched used this same form to illustrate their own claims to patriotic leadership and meaningful citizenship. These men embraced this older strategy for claiming their space in the public pageant with uniforms, guns, and orderly performances because in the postwar years this option appeared readily available to any male group that could organize itself into a military-style company and join in the march. In 1874, university students seeking a connection with the all-important manhood experience of soldiering, reenacting veterans recalling their own wartime experiences, and African American men reinforcing the link between their service in the Union Army and their citizenship, all used the authority of brand-new, state-associated militia companies to publicly claim their identities as men and as citizens.

Militiamen Become Gentlemen

Militia members used their membership in a militia company to link their existing patriotic authority to a new social and cultural authority. For example, in March 1875, as a fund-raising and publicity-raising event, the Governor's Guard of Springfield staged the play Color Guard in the Springfield Opera House. According to the advertisement that ran in the papers, the play abounded in “thrilling situations, beautiful
Tableaux, Striking Military Scenes, Drills, Marches, Exciting Battles, &c., and is the most perfect and life-like representation of army life during the great rebellion, ever written." The advertisement went on to boast that the play would be performed by "the best amateur cast ever put on the stage in the city of Springfield."  

A traveling theatrical manager, W. H. Gunn, and the “Dutch Comedian,” Charles Collins, assisted the Governor’s Guard with the production, and at several points in the play directed the entire company, some seventy members strong, to take the stage to perform drill revolvements. The play opened to encouraging reviews and, according to the papers, improved with each performance. The high point of the run was on the fourth night, when the female lead, Miss Emma Hickox, representing the “Ladies of the city,” presented a U.S. flag to the company before the curtain rose, and Governor Beveridge, in attendance to accept the gift, offered thanks on behalf of “his” company.

In speaking on behalf of the community, Emma Hickox was a new figure on the American scene and a far cry from her antebellum sisters, who had appeared in public only as mute figures, dressed as Lady Liberty but rarely granted significant speech. Hickox spoke not as a vague feminine symbol, but rather as the representative of the very specific women of Springfield. Hickox also claimed patriotic authority for herself, when she declared: “In the confident assurance that I entrust [this flag] to the keeping of brave men and true; that, should the ‘long roll’ ever hurry you from peaceful pursuits to form in earnest in the serried ranks of war, your record as soldiers will be as honorable as it now is as business men and citizens.”  

In his reply to Hickox, Governor Beveridge concluded his long and gracious thanks on behalf of “his” company with a warning about the seriousness of their endeavor, and an injunction to do their best with it. Drawing on his own identity as a Civil War veteran, Beveridge contrasted civilian training with the harsh realities of wartime service, “[w]hether in civil or military life; whether parading in your armory or in camp; whether marching in the streets of your city or upon the field of strife;
whether you are decked in your bright uniforms or are clothed in the nation’s blue, all dirty, worn, tattered and torn; whether your bright muskets are resting in their racks, or, powder-burnt, are under your head for a pillow, as you lie down to dreams upon the battle-field, waiting for the coming of the bloody morrow.” Despite the contrast between war and civilian life, Beveridge, like Hickox, assured his listeners that he fully expected them to shine under any circumstances, as long as they remembered to “be true to yourselves, be true to your country, be true to your God, be true to that old flag, and be true to the ladies of Springfield.”

Governor Beveridge and Miss Hickox together reiterated the antebellum linkage between gentle birth and certain types of public volunteer soldiering, but they reinterpreted it for the conditions of the 1870s. Rather than gentlemen claiming exclusive patriotic authority, as in antebellum communities, here in the Springfield of 1875, Governor Beveridge and Miss Hickox implied that patriotic military exhibition itself could establish an acceptable claim to the status of gentleman. They clearly believed that the volunteer soldier was by definition an admirable man, worthy of respect and deference. Miss Hickox, representative of the ladies of Springfield, played a traditional role in placing a symbol of the nation (the flag) in the care of recognized defenders of the home and hearth. She also took it upon herself to grant all members of the troop clear manhood status and social rank as gentlemen.

More interesting, Miss Hickox and Governor Beveridge also stressed the interchangeable qualities needed to perform well the roles of both soldier and citizen. Miss Hickox assured the militia members of her belief that their “record as soldiers will be as honorable as it now is as business men and citizens.” She, and the ladies of Springfield, gave the flag as a testimony of “respect for you as gentlemen, and their appreciation of your admirable proficiency and soldierly bearing as a military organization.” The governor urged his listeners to bring the same convictions to their soldierly activities that they would “in every circumstance in life,” that they be true to their belief in themselves, their community, their faith, the nation, and “the ladies of Springfield.” Miss Hickox and Governor Beveridge saw no contradiction or potential conflict in the roles of citizen and soldier. In their construction of the identity of the militiaman, they believed that citizen and soldier could coexist in harmony, each relying on the same attitudes and behaviors of self-discipline, honor, and personal integrity.

The governor also used his status as an acclaimed veteran of the Civil War (he had commanded a cavalry unit at Gettysburg before being promoted to the rank of general) to speak to the younger men about the mysteries of warfare they had not as yet experienced for themselves. Even
here, though, and following in the footsteps of fellow Illinoisan John Logan, the governor implied that those same values of civilian life would serve well on the battlefield. The governor, the militiamen, the ladies of Springfield, and the theater crowd all drew on memories of war-torn Civil War battlegrounds as they listened to the governor’s description of the dreams of the “coming of the bloody morrow.” In this context, the audience and the militiamen appear to anticipate that the citizen will become the soldier in a distant geographic space, where the values of honor and personal integrity that serve him at home will also see him through the turmoil of war. The speeches, and the play itself—a Civil War drama—all served to present the community with a unified figure of the citizen soldier, honorable man at home, honorable warrior on the field. Illinois men, it turns out, could meet the governor’s challenge to be true by donning the uniform and preparing, however awkwardly or theatrically, to be soldiers should the nation ever need to call on them.

New Companies Build on Antebellum Militia Traditions

The burst of growth in the Illinois Militia between 1870 and 1876 was dramatic and had far-reaching consequences for the Illinois militia and for the broader militia resurgence nationwide. At first, Illinois militia volunteers relied on antebellum models and practices as they rebuilt old companies or created entirely new ones. Gradually, the new militiamen discarded many of the older practices in favor of developing new forms that better suited their needs and concerns. They lived in a rapidly maturing urban and industrial society that demanded ever more sophisticated and professional structures for managing ever-larger enterprises, and they needed an organization that suited their times.

In 1870, five volunteer militia companies existed in Illinois. These scattered companies represented tremendous effort and devotion on the part of their members. As companies were completely voluntary, first a man and his friends had to decide they wanted to try to form a company; then they had to canvass their community for the thirty or so members necessary for a minimum-strength organization. Once gathered together, the new members chose a company name, elected their officers, located an armory, and then, if still together and if so desired by the majority, authorized their officers to apply to the state for membership in the organized militia. (Not all such companies, before or after the Civil War, desired or sought a spot in the organized militia.) “Membership” was, at best, a tenuous connection to the state in 1870. Under the Illinois state law of 1845, a company was recognized when the governor
issued commissions to the officers. Noncommissioned officers and privates took no oath of office, there was no official mustering in of new companies, and only the members' own inclinations kept them active from one month to the next. As late as the early 1870s, the governor's recognition of a company could provide very little beyond the occasional loan of ordnance in the form of outdated weaponry. As a result of these conditions, the connections between state governments and military companies were so vague that in 1870, Illinois officials reported to the federal government that they currently recognized no active militia organizations, even though according to the state roster of 1874 there were at least five volunteer companies (then or later) affiliated with the state active at that time.\(^{29}\)

As the 1870s progressed, an increasing number of determined citizen-soldiers braved the difficulties attendant on starting a local militia organization and maintaining state recognition. For example, in 1872, The Grand Army Zouaves, the Mulligan Zouaves, the Sheridan Guards, the Rantoul Guards, the First Battalion of Whiteside County Militia (made up of the Sterling City Guards and the Rock Falls Zouaves), the McLean County Guards (colored), and the reorganized Ellsworth Zouaves all joined the state militia.\(^{30}\) These new companies represented 400 men, with an average company strength of fifty-three members. In 1875, the Chicago papers recognized the Clan-na-Gael Guards, the Alpine Hunters, the Irish Rifles, the Montgomery Light Guards, the Mulligan Zouaves, and the Hannibal Zouaves, along with six new companies in the Chicago First Regiment, for a total of twelve militia companies in Chicago alone.\(^{31}\)

The popularity of Zouave companies highlights the persistence of antebellum practices common to many companies formed in the early 1870s. In 1859, Elmer Ellsworth of Chicago initiated the pre-Civil War Zouave craze with his company, the United States Zouave Cadets. He trained the Zouave Cadets in the gymnastic drill of the French-African Zouave regiments, which he had picked up from a veteran of those corps a few years earlier. Essentially, under Ellsworth's direction a Zouave unit was a drill team with an emphasis on athleticism and group precision in both marching and marksmanship. The flashy and distinctive Zouave uniform consisted of a red cap, short jacket, sash, and baggy trousers. Ellsworth drilled his company so well and was so encouraged by the result that in 1860 he took it on a successful twenty-city tour, and Zouave companies sprang up all over the country in his wake. There were many Zouave regiments during the early years of the Civil War, in both armies, but they never made headway with the professional officer corps and quickly disappeared.\(^{32}\) In Illinois, however, the Zouave model retained its
fascination and romance for militia volunteers even after the war. The Springfield Zouaves, the African American company based in Springfield, marched in the parade honoring Presidents Grant and Lincoln in 1874. Highlighting the vagueness of “official” status until a new militia law came into effect in 1877, the Springfield papers accorded the Springfield Zouaves the same recognition as the other militia companies present that did have state-commissioned officers, even though the adjutant general listed the company as “disbanded” in 1872. In Chicago as late as 1875, there were still at least two companies of Zouaves. The Zouave model remained popular long after other forms more closely tied to the U.S. Army became the norm among volunteer militia companies.

Upcoming Centennial Pushes Company Formation, 1874–76

Thirty-five new companies entered into state service between October 1874 and December 1, 1875. Momentum continued to steamroll through the first half of 1876, and thirty-eight more new companies were accepted into the Illinois militia and their officers commissioned between January and July. The sheer size of the increase in membership, from under 900 members to more than 5,000, is remarkable, as was its wide geographical distribution throughout the state. (See appendix J.) Despite the presence of new companies in thirty small towns around the state, the urban character of most guardsmen is also apparent. In 1876, twenty-one militia companies located in Chicago officially belonged to the Illinois State Guard, and several smaller cities, including Sycamore, Peoria, Pontiac, and Quincy boasted at least two active companies.

The catalyst for this statewide burst of company formation was the upcoming centennial celebration. Certainly the brand-new First Regiment of Chicago had high hopes for their participation in the July 1876 celebrations. “The drill of some of the companies, owing to careful handling, is really excellent, while in others it is not so good, but it is believed that the entire regiment can be so drilled between this and July, 1876, as to allow them to enter into a contest with the eastern regiments for supremacy.” The best contests were far away, and therefore a “movement is . . . on boat, looking to the sending of the 1st regiment to Philadelphia, during the centennial next year. The state officials and centennial commissions have pledged to work for this end, and it is believed that some aid can be secured from the state to assist the movement.” The reporter added, “[i]t is known that nearly all the states of the
union will be represented by companies or regiments at Philadelphia, and the city of San Francisco has subscribed toward sending forward a regiment. It is estimated that 30,000 or 40,000 militia will be assembled in Philadelphia for a couple weeks during next year, and grounds for the purpose have been set apart. To this reporter, the absence of the Chicago Regiment from these patriotic celebrations and competitions seemed a sad prospect indeed.

The leadership of the Illinois State Guard appeared to agree. In his third General Order of 1875, Brigadier General Ducat established a committee of senior officers to report any plans to participate in the National Jubilee in Philadelphia. Garrison equipment was to be furnished by the centennial commission for all military organizations visiting Philadelphia on or before July 4, 1876; but the various committees involved needed to be notified well in advance.

No companies from Illinois actually made it to Philadelphia, but the Fourth of July, 1876, was the focus of their attentions nonetheless. The First Regiment, Illinois State Guard, was invited to Madison, Wisconsin, along with many other companies and regiments from the surrounding area. There they paraded through the city in the morning, and in the afternoon they performed on the drill ground, and companies competed for the drill “Championship of the Northwest” and money prizes. The Second Regiment, Illinois State Guard, which was identified as Irish and wore the uniform of the famous New York 69th (also Irish, and with great Civil War renown), had Chicago to themselves and provided a day-long schedule of activities in honor of the centennial. In the morning, they paraded in Chicago to the enthusiastic cheers of their many supporters, and in the afternoon and evening they performed drill revolutions at the Exposition building. The evening show was apparently the highlight of the day for this regiment.

The celebrations of the centennial marked the peak of the 1874–76 growth of the Illinois State Guard. In his autumn 1876 inspection report on the First Regiment, H. B. Maxwell wrote, “[i]t appears to me, there is not as much interest taken in the organization as there was a year ago. The excitement about the presidential election may be the chief cause; many of the members holding position of officers in the torch light marching societies necessitates their giving much time to the latter at the sacrifice of the regiment.” The decline of interest in the new regiment, and the Illinois State Guard in general, after the centennial celebrations and in deference to the upcoming election is another measure of how strongly militia members felt the patriotic motivation for involvement in the local centennial celebrations in 1875 and 1876.

It is important to note that Maxwell did not link the new companies
of 1875–76 to any particular political party, nor did he link the members to one or the other of the dominant parties in Illinois. The political connections of individual members or specific companies did not give the statewide militia a particular political identity. Chicago itself could hold the First Regiment, which self-consciously strove for social prestige; the Irish and working-class Second Regiment; and the Socialist-identified Bohemian Rifles. Nonetheless, the general importance of membership in a militia company to political identity is highlighted by Maxwell's comment that many members were also leaders in active political organizations. The similarities between the methods of patriotic display adopted by militia members as they celebrated the centennial and the methods of late nineteenth-century political parties to garner and hold support also serve to illustrate a link between militia membership and the role of citizen. Just as men demonstrated their political identification through party activities, they could demonstrate their patriotic and national identity through membership in a local militia company and participation in their public events.

The Creation of the First Chicago, and a New Model for Illinois Militias

In 1874 Adjutant General Higgins wrote, “the approach of our centennial anniversary is increasing the military spirit of our State. During the coming year a large number of militia companies will be organized, provided liberal provisions are made by the General Assembly . . . At the present time there is being organized in Chicago a regiment composed of the elite of the city, which, from indications, will become a permanent organization.” The story of this regiment’s formation provides a glimpse of the individual and community effort and dedication needed to get a militia organization up and running in the early 1870s. These men’s interest in militias was a response to a felt need for a new organization that would tie men to their community and their nation through the model of military service.

The first organizational meeting for the proposed troop was held toward the end of August 1874. “We, the undersigned, desire to form a military organization to consist of at least 100 and not more than 1,000 persons, subject to such regulations as may hereafter be determined upon by a vote of the whole.” Organizers rapidly decided that there were enough interested recruits to justify organizing an entire regiment of eight to ten companies, rather than one or two companies, or even the four to six companies that would form a battalion. A prominent Chicago
businessman and political figure, Guerdon S. Hubbard, Jr., made the lofts of his building on State Street available to the new regiment, free of charge. On September 8, the first three companies of the new “First Regiment Illinois State Guard” were enrolled. Unlike any other companies then in the state militia, these three companies were assigned only letter designations A, B, and C, indicating the seriousness of their intentions to be a modern military organization. These companies continued the tradition of electing their officers, however, and the seniority of the three captains was determined by lot. These first officers were commissioned by the state that same day. When a fourth company, D, was enrolled, a “General” Frank T. Sherman was elected major by the entire battalion.

According to Holdridge O. Collins, one of the founding members of this new regiment, Governor John L. Beveridge and various leading local citizens pledged to support the new regiment almost from its inception. There was some criticism in Chicago about this new regiment at the time, however, and the governor himself claimed to have looked on the early efforts of the regiment’s founders with “indifference, not to say disfavor. But when he saw the young men who joined the organization persevered so untiringly, and seemed bound to make it a success, he felt his heart going out toward them and he resolved to exert his influence as an executive officer, and do his best for them.”

When news of potential public support and government supplies got around, several existing Chicago-based companies applied for membership in the new regiment. However, “[a]s their tenders of service were accompanied . . . with the demands that they be accepted with their individual uniform, and take rank in the Regiment according to the date of their Captain’s’ commissions, etc., etc., it was not thought expedient to receive any old commissioned company.” Class and ethnic differences also had something to do with the reluctance of the founders of the new regiment to accept existing companies, several of which had strong Irish ethnic and working-class connections. The new regiment hoped to appeal to the city’s elite for support, and judging by the following 1875 reports, they succeeded. A Harper’s Weekly correspondent wrote, “[the Regiment] is to-day as great a favorite in Chicago as the ‘Seventh’ is in New York, for like the last-named Regiment, it is composed of men of high standing, whose great aim is to excel.” A reporter from The Chicago Times noted that the “only thing to be regretted concerning the display [a parade] was, that it occurred at a season of the year [July] when a large number of the members of the regiment are absent from the city, on their summer vacation, causing the number participating in the parade to be much smaller than it otherwise would.” The reporter claimed that
almost 200 members (out of some 500) were absent that day. A rough count of membership lists suggests that almost 60 percent of this regiment were clerks and bookkeepers who, according to the Chicago Tribune, could not afford their own uniforms. An alternative explanation was that these members were at work, and unable or unwilling to take a day’s vacation for the parade.58

With the October 1874 addition of eighty-four new members in two companies, E and F, the regiment began to drill, and the members decided that the issue of uniforms was crucial. As the regimental leaders did not intend for its members to outfit themselves, they relied on “assurances” that sufficient funds could be raised from Chicago residents through a subscription drive and the support of the Chicago Tribune. The Chicago Citizens’ Association, an organization of business and community leaders devoted to civic improvements and good government, was called on to review the regiment and give its recommendation for support, which it did.99

The Citizens’ Association judged the regiment against standards that reflect the contemporary understanding about the nature and function of militia companies. First, the members of the Citizens’ Association were interested in the physical size and vitality of militia members. “From our observation and inspection, and from what we can gather in reply to our inquiries, we do not hesitate to report that the materiel composing the First Regiment Illinois State Guard, is excellent, both physically and morally, in the military acceptation of that word.”96 This interest in size and appearance turns up again and again in commentaries on militia companies and reflects a broader concern with the physical condition of American men.61 Along with judging the men, or “materiel,” of the regiment against current measures of physical fitness, the committee members also looked for attitude and enthusiasm. They reported “that there is an evidence of quiet, determined ambition to excel as citizen soldiers, of willingness to undergo the ordeal of drill and discipline, that cannot fail, if proper encouragement be given them, to make them into a good and serviceable Regiment, worthy of the sympathy and support of our citizens, and we cordially recommend them to your favorable consideration and that of the Community at large.”162

Judging by the language they used in their report, the committee members seem to have been looking for taller and broader men who would avoid the classic temptations of the soldier, including alcohol and rowdiness, and who showed a willingness to accept military discipline as a personal challenge. That these were the committee members’ preferred qualities suggests that for them, the first role of a militia organization was to be a successful performance and social group in the context of the
local community. The members needed to be attractive, and to be responsible about learning and playing their assigned roles.

With the recommendation of the Citizens’ Association in hand, the captains of the six companies formed a committee to organize the canvassing of the city—“visiting all the more prominent citizens.” By late December 1874, the Chicago Tribune reported that there were already six organized companies of 84 men each. In an editorial supporting the new organization and seeking public donations to assist them, the paper claimed that the “personnel of the regiment is excellent . . . all young men from 20 to 30 years of age, of respectable parentage, education, and of personal good habits and character.” The editorial continued, “[t]o organize a regiment of soldiers is attended with considerable expense, and more so than these young men can reasonably be expected to bear. . . . It costs, on average, to uniform these men $50 each. The young men give their time and services without pay, but the tax for uniform is more than all can stand . . . there would be no lack of men to fill all the ten companies—each 100 strong—were it not that the purchase of a uniform is beyond the reach of those who will join it.”

The Chicago Tribune editorial appealed to “those of our citizens who can afford to do so to contribute of their means; let each furnish a uniform for one, two, three or ten men, and thus get the six companies already organized into uniform.” The editorial writer insisted that this “is not an appeal to public charity; it is an appeal to the self-interest of property-owners as well as to public spirit and pride . . . Can property-holders afford to refuse the necessary assistance and encouragement which this military organization requires?” These efforts were so successful that “[a] sufficient fund was raised by the personal solicitation of members of the Regiment to warrant the renting of a permanent Armory and to purchase the uniform.” Chicago residents eventually pledged $13,468.50 toward the equipment fund, and members of the Regiment contributed $2,349 to their own maintenance.

At this point, it would seem that the organization was off to an excellent start. However, following in the long American militia tradition of electing officers from the ranks, the rules members of the First Regiment adopted in September of 1874 mandated that elections for all officers were to take place annually. Accordingly, the members held new elections on December 2, and eight of twenty offices changed hands. Stability of command would not mark the early years of this regiment at any level. A variety of reasons for the revolving nature of commissions is suggested in Collins’s book, but the time conflict between the demands of career and regiment was most often put forward as the reason for resigning.
At the December 1874 meeting, the regiment also voted to break its own resolution and admitted the Ellsworth Zouaves to membership. The Ellsworth Zouaves in turn agreed to become Company G and don the gray uniform selected by the regiment. There are some indications that this company was composed of better-off men, which may have made them more acceptable to the First Regiment than were other, preexisting militia companies in Chicago and, of course, that more than rank was at stake in the initial decision to reject other extant Chicago companies. In March 1875 an eighth company, H, joined, and the regiment had the minimum companies to elect a colonel. The last two companies, I and K, joined later in the year.

The regiment first appeared on the Chicago streets in May of 1875, escorting the Grand Army of the Republic to its annual meeting. Their first formal parade was July 28, 1875, when Governor Beveridge; Lieutenant General Philip H. Sheridan, United States Army; and Brigadier General Arthur C. Ducat, Illinois State Guard, reviewed the troops. The parade excited so much local attention that it was written up in Harper’s Weekly of August 21, 1875. “At its first parade, [the First Regiment, Illinois State Guard] was enthusiastically received by the citizens and distinguished visitors from abroad, and from Gen. Sheridan and other military men received high commendation.” The next day’s headline in The Chicago Times read, “PLAYING SOLDIER. The Gallant First Marched to the Field for the First Time Yesterday. By the Aid of the Railroads the Warriors Reached It Very Comfortably.” The headline is a little mocking, but the general tenor of the article is more positive.

In his speech after reviewing the Regiment on July 28, Governor Beveridge spoke openly about his initial apprehensions about the formation of this Regiment. However, he pronounced them quite over, owing to the dedication and superior performance displayed during the inspection and revolutions. The governor then went on to compliment the “boys of the regiment on their splendid physique, their tasty uniform, the perfect order and neatness of each individual member, their efficiency in the school of the soldier, and the care and correctness with which they performed the most difficult evolutions in the battalion drill, and the success of the organization generally.” The governor’s (or the reporter’s) ordering of the fine qualities of the regiment begins by praising the individual members, laying stress on their physical vigor and attractiveness, their good taste in uniforms, and their discipline as soldiers. The governor praised the contribution of each to the performance of the whole only after noting the vitality and personal appearance of each member.

This ranking offers another reading on the popular conception of the personal rewards and benefits for a man, young or old, contemplating
joining a militia organization. First, the body is improved. The reporter began by recognizing each individual for seizing the opportunity to attain a "splendid physique," which in the image of the day meant visibly muscular. This emphasis on physical vitality and strength was emerging as one of the most important aspects of what it meant to be a man in these years. During these decades of intense industrialization and urbanization, commentators and the public alike became consumed by worries that American men were losing their manhood. In response to that worry, in fits and starts, more and more men turned to shaping their outer bodies as a reflection of the man within. The militia proved to be one more place where men could acquire and display these outward signs of strength and vitality that were increasingly being connected to a healthy and strong manhood. The Chicago Times reporter (and the governor) next noted the neatness of the presentation and the "tasty uniforms," again an issue that was frequently addressed in advice books of the age when advice givers sought ways to encourage men, young and old, to present themselves as men before a skeptical world. The militia, to these observers, was an excellent vehicle for demonstrating these visually desirable characteristics of manhood.

The physical skills of the soldiers, especially with regard to marching in complicated patterns and as part of a unified whole, attracted the reporter's praise. In this regard, the militia performance bears a close resemblance to the rise of team sports, both professional sports and the vast numbers of amateur leagues, in these years. In the case of the militia, alone or in competition against other companies, the whole "team" also served the community as a model for vigorous, manly comportment and loyal patriotic duty. All aspects of the military performance were graded and judged by an audience well aware of the categories and the standards for achievement. The linkage of manly vigor and patriotic authority certainly had its roots in the antebellum model, but it was in many ways ideal for the new concerns of a new era, including fears of failing physical vitality in an urban and sedentary environment, the lost sense of possibility for individual independence for every man, and at the same time the fears of social anarchy set loose by the anonymity of the city.

Class, Ethnic, and Racial Diversity

Not every new organization had it so comparatively easy. Prokop Hudek was commissioned captain of the Bohemian Rifles, located in Chicago, on August 9, 1875. The story of this company is quite different from that of the First Regiment, which was comparatively wealthy and "appealed
to prestige-seeking property-holders.” The adjutant general issued the company eighty Enfield rifles for drill purposes, but their available drill space was so small that they had been forced to break up into two detachments, headquartered in different buildings, for weekly drilling purposes. Company members had put great effort into these spaces, however, and built locked gun racks to hold state property. As the company was already fifty dollars in debt for the purchase of fatigue uniforms for the men (the cheapest blouse and cap combination) and rent for the armory spaces, these racks represented a considerable investment of time and care. In 1876, ING inspection officer Maxwell noted, “A monthly assessment of 25 cents is levied on each member of the company for the purpose of paying rent of armories, &c., but the assessment is too small for the purpose . . . The members are poor, and cannot stand a larger assessment than 25 cents per month. I am informed it is very difficult for many of the members to pay even this sum.”

At the time of the first general inspection of the Illinois militia in the fall of 1876, Captain Hudek informed the inspecting officer that the company had only lately re-formed. Presumably, the company collapsed between August 1875 and June 1876 owing to the difficulties attendant on maintaining an organization under such trying circumstances. The inspector was nevertheless pleased by the “good sized” men and their soldierly bearing, and wrote of the officers, “I was much pleased with [their] appearance . . . They are justly entitled to great credit for accomplishing so much in so short a time and without aid or assistance from any quarter.” Without much else to praise in this impecunious company, Maxwell placed his emphasis on the size, appearance, and attentiveness of the men as qualities valued by the militia. Inspector Maxwell concluded his report on the company on an upbeat note. “I would respectfully state that I was agreeably disappointed at the condition in which I found [the company], and I would earnestly recommend that the organization be fostered and encouraged in every possible way.” Maxwell went on to offer that, if “new uniforms could be provided for its members and small sum of money raised from some source to pay the rent of a proper armory, I am assured that the company could be quickly recruited to its maximum strength, and I believe that in a short time it would compare favorably in drill and discipline with any other in the city.” For Maxwell, at least, neither the poverty nor the ethnicity of this company stood between them and admirable service.

In the early 1870s, along with native-born men and recent immigrants, African American men created state militia companies. In histories of these companies, later members of Illinois African American regiments explained that African Americans created companies in the
1870s because a militia company was a tangible demonstration of independence and self-reliance. 76 As Eric Foner has argued, one freedom African Americans sought after the Civil War was the freedom to do the same kinds of things white people could. 77 And one thing white Illinois men were doing in the early 1870s was raising and sustaining militia companies. 78 By doing the same thing, African Americans demonstrated their belief that equality of military service could carry with it equal citizenship. With equal citizenship would come many rights, among them equal access to the public space. In public spaces, namely city streets, African American militiamen could perform in one common act of responsible citizenship and disciplined manhood—the formal military parade. African Americans actively serving in militia companies also provided a forceful reminder to Illinois residents, both black and white, of the importance of the role that African American troops played in the Civil War. Not only did African American troops tip the balance toward victory for the Union Army, but as Frederick Douglass put it, “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S.; let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth that can deny he has earned the right of citizenship.” 79 Even if many whites remained skeptical of this argument, many African Americans put their faith in it. The connection that Douglass drew between the uniform, weapons, and citizenship highlights the importance of a recognized militia company for African American men in the 1870s.

The idea of citizenship itself was under great stress in the late nineteenth century. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments shattered the previous linkage of whiteness and citizenship. The continuing pressure of the women’s movement challenged the necessary maleness of citizenship. Militia volunteers across Illinois saw their organizations as intimately involved with the issue of redefining citizenship in this new era, repeatedly stressing the ability of the militia to recognize, foster, and even create model citizens and manly men. Like Governor Beveridge, they believed that the role of the citizen-soldier in civic pageantry, especially parades, and the responsibilities of the citizen-soldier for national defense and maintaining order placed the militia squarely in the midst of the general debates about who was a citizen, what responsible citizenship was, and how a citizen might be made. By parading publicly as members of the state militia, African Americans secured their own place in the larger public dialogue about who was a representative, responsible citizen.

In 1870 and 1871, African Americans formed the Hannibal Guards in Chicago, though like many local companies in these early years their
formal tie to the state militia forces remains ambiguous. In the state capital, the adjutant general commissioned officers for the African American Springfield Zouaves sometime between 1870 and 1872. This company may have evolved from Company C, an African American company recognized by Governor Palmer in July of 1869. In 1872, the McLean County Guards (colored), formed by residents surrounding Bloomington, joined the state militia. On October 15, 1874, the Springfield Zouaves were among the five companies more or less associated with the state that marched in the procession leading U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant to the unveiling of the statue of Abraham Lincoln in the Oak Ridge Cemetery, in Springfield. The Springfield Zouaves were listed as disbanded by the state in 1872, but the company must have re-formed sometime before this occasion, though without seeking new commissions for its officers. Regardless, the Springfield papers accorded it the same recognition as the other companies with state-commissioned officers.

In late February 1875, there were “riotous demonstrations . . . directed more especially against the treasury and building of the Relief and Aid Society” in Chicago. Militia companies mobilized all across Chicago to protect the Relief and Aid Society from attacks by putative “communists.” Among the militia companies were the Hannibal Zouaves, which were very likely the same as or a version of the Chicago-based Hannibal Guards. In time the Hannibal Guards (or Zouaves) became known as the Cadets. Like the Hannibal Guards, the Cadets never formally belonged to the state militia, though the newspaper reports do not make this distinction.

The brief, flickering existence of these ethnic and African American companies offers a testament to the interest and willingness on the part of their members to serve, and on the part of the state militia to accept their service. These brief histories also highlight the importance of money to the continuing existence of any state militia company.

Paying for an Expensive Hobby

The myriad needs of the average militia company—armories, uniforms, weapons, supplies, and special activities, like the 1875 Springfield play—had to be paid for. As the state had no funds to offer, the money could only come from the members’ own pockets or from those of their neighbors. To raise the money to pay for their activities, militia members had to present a compelling case to their communities and, in time, to the state legislature, and they had to devote significant time and energy
to these nearly constant fund-raising activities. They began with themselves. In 1874, Illinois companies required members to pay annual dues, ranging from a dollar twenty to twelve dollars. However, the amounts raised this way never came close to providing for a company's total expenses, which varied widely among the several militia companies recognized by the state. In 1874, expenses per company ranged from $285 to $2,075, depending on the size of the company, the cost of the uniforms, and the amount needed to rent the armory space. Each company selected its own uniforms, resulting in huge variations in taste and expense. For some, the uniform of the private was as simple as a blouse and a cap, which could be had for as little as five dollars per man. For one Chicago company, a private's uniform cost forty dollars in 1874, and the First Regiment assumed a cost of fifty dollars per man.

The state provided no funds for its troops during these early years. Under the operative 1845 militia code with 1874 amendments, the annual military outlay was barely sufficient to cover the salary and expenses of the office of the adjutant general. The position of adjutant general, or AG, was that of chief administrator of the state military department. The AG's duties included overseeing the militia and forwarding all pension or disability requests from resident veterans of national service to the War Department in Washington, DC. The only support the state offered to the individual companies was the loan of guns and a limited supply of ammunition. Many guns owned and loaned by the state were so obsolete that the adjutant generals regularly proposed selling them off at a public auction just to get them out of the way. Even these small measures were unreliable, dependent as they were on Illinois' share of the annual federal militia appropriation of $200,000, established in 1808.

However, in the 1870s Illinois was receiving no money from the federal government. War Department accountants charged $163,674.40 to Illinois' portion of the annual distribution for supplies issued to state troops in 1863, 1864, and early 1865. From the 1860s through the 1870s, the $200,000 annual federal appropriation was apportioned based on the number of congressional representatives, and in 1872 Illinois was receiving only an $8,760.58 annual credit against its overdrawn account. Because of this debt, Illinois was receiving no guns or other ordnance supplies from the federal government in the early 1870s. Between 1872 and 1874 the efforts of AGs Dilgar and Higgins were rewarded by the subtraction of $65,000 as “improperly charged,” and AG Higgins claimed that with a further search in the records, the remaining $41,125.20 could also be removed, giving the state a positive balance of $60,000. His calculations are difficult to follow and, in any case, were never performed. In 1878 Illinois was still listed as $98,674.40 overdrawn. As a result of
these problems, the companies of the state militia had to supply themselves with armories, uniforms, and weapons from their own pocket and/or raise the money required from the local community.

Financial issues were paramount to a company's success in these early years, and financial concerns drove a large portion of any company's daily and weekly calendars. The imperative to earn money for its own support, and to get whatever money it could from state and federal coffers, far more than any other single concern, affected the health of any company. If the company could not pay its bills, it could not stay alive as an organization. As a result, the success of any individual company was entirely dependent on the enthusiasm of the members and the skill and leadership provided by their elected officers. It should not come as a surprise that the half-life of most companies was little more than a year. In 1874, of the twenty-four companies listed on the rolls, four were disbanded; four more failed to report, leading the adjutant general to suspect they were disbanded in actuality if not formally; and one company had failed to complete organization, fizzling out before it ever got going. The oldest active company dated to 1869, and the most recent had been in existence barely two months. Adjutant General Higgins suspected that the state militia included only about 850 active volunteers. Of those volunteers, Higgins remarked, “It would be difficult to find an equal number of men in the service of the State willing to donate their services without compensation, at a cost of over twenty dollars per man. The cause of four companies disbanding and four failing to report this year is plainly to be seen from this report.”

Most of the new companies of 1875 and 1876 were located in small towns, and some were created by ethnic groups—Irish, Bohemian, and African American. The militia was a sufficiently flexible institution that its appeal spoke to men of different backgrounds and living disparate lives. The militia connection between the individual and the state, both Illinois and the Union, carried across class and ethnic background the opportunity to participate in representative citizenship in highly personal and evocative ways. The inspector general reports filed during 1876 indicate a broad range of background and economic standing of the militia as a whole. Almost all rural companies had poor attendance at weekly drills. But they reported they had no trouble with attendance for parades or state occasions. As always during this time, inspectors noted the men’s physical size and the general appearance of the uniforms and the men whenever they could. Where any indication is made of the members’ occupations, it seems to be primarily as clerks, skilled tradesmen, or small merchants. If indebtedness is one marker of less elite membership, then most companies were made up of common men. Many companies, especially those located
in rural towns, had difficulty paying for all they felt they needed, from uniforms to armories. At the end of 1876, the new Second Regiment, formed in Chicago by primarily Irish ethnic companies at the end of 1875 and early 1876, was $8,700.00 in debt for uniforms and rent.  

A Larger Militia Leads to a New Militia Structure

By 1875, the Illinois militia was quickly growing beyond the ability of the governor and the adjutant general to oversee it on top of all their other duties. In 1874, an addition to the old militia code (1845) was approved, giving the governor power to appoint an unlimited number of major and brigadier generals. This new power had serious implications for patronage offices, but because the sitting governor was a cautiously serious supporter of the militia, in 1875 he chose to appoint only one brigadier general and delegated to him the authority to organize the rapidly growing state forces. On June 8, 1875, Governor Beveridge commissioned Arthur C. Ducat brigadier general of the Illinois State Militia. Ducat, who achieved the rank of inspector general of the Army of the Cumberland during the Civil War, was an able officer and organizer. In August he issued his first general order to the state militia, creating one brigade and appointing his staff officers. By December the militia had grown from 895 members when Ducat took office to more than two thousand. In December, General Order 4 reorganized and consolidated the then greatly expanded state forces. General Ducat also established the office of Inspector General of Illinois, and he received the first ever inspection reports of the ING in 1876. He announced that the regulation drill would be that of the U.S. Army, eliminating the Zouave drill from formal, but not informal, use by any recognized ING company. Governor Beveridge, who had publicly claimed a deep personal interest in the success of the state militia forces, also appointed a new adjutant general in 1875, Hiram Hilliard. Hilliard, like Ducat and Beveridge, was a Civil War veteran. The efforts of Generals Ducat and Hilliard represented the first implementation of any sort of organizational plan in Illinois that included not only rank charts and organizational tables, but actual systems of staff officers to track and teach the new companies and maintain and improve the old. This introduction of a new ethic of military professionalism learned during the Civil War marks a significant turning point in the development of the Illinois militia, away from the older antebellum volunteerism and toward the new forms of civic engagement emerging with a maturing industrial capitalism.
Between 1870 and 1876 a new generation of men entered the Illinois Militia, slowly at first and then with gathering steam as the centennial drew nearer. This rush of new members gave the larger organization the clout it needed to seek out changes in current militia law, and to begin to organize their forces in new, modern ways. The pattern of growth in Illinois, clearly preceding the centennial celebrations of 1876, suggests that the dramatic growth of state militias in other midwestern states may have also been spurred by the centennial and not by the strikes of 1877 as has been long argued.

The new Illinois militia members first replicated the small, antebellum militia companies, but they quickly began to dream of bigger, more organized, and more dynamic militias that would capture the imagination and the financial support of larger communities. Toward that end, these new militiamen crafted elaborate public performances to engage and teach their audiences that these new members embodied a national patriotism and manly attributes. The roots of the militia resurgence in Illinois in the 1870s are to be found in individuals who flocked to the revived militia and the communities that came to the support of their local companies.