CHAPTER 3

Confused Missions: The First Twenty Years of Strike Duty, 1870–90

Next to serving the government there is no more patriotic manner of paying tribute to the flag than in that of serving the state faithfully and loyally under all circumstances.¹

—Rufus S. Bunzey, private, ING

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Illinois militia companies attracted new members and local support based on their presentation of manly men and responsible citizens. Guardsmen demonstrated their responsible citizenship largely through local performances of respectable patriotism and practice soldiering, performances that their local communities generally greeted with approval and applause and supported with community funds. However, in the later nineteenth century, the responsible citizenship of guardsmen also carried with it the potential call to riot and strike duty, and such duty turned out to be a controversial activity that earned the militia criticism and complaints rather than applause. In the early years of the militia revival in Illinois, some guardsmen embraced strike duty as a mission that was central and important to the militia and its future, and many more accepted the maintenance of order, if not the suppression of strikes, as an integral aspect of their civic responsibilities. Even then, though, enthusiastic supporters of strike duty were rare, and by the mid-1880s, guardsmen were expressing growing frustration with strike duty and its attendant difficulties.
Since Shays’s Rebellion in 1786, state governors had deployed their active militia organizations to deal with civil unrest. Although few were completely happy about this, most citizens and militia members considered such service to be appropriate and useful. At first glance, civil unrest triggered by strikes or labor disputes in the middle and later nineteenth century seemed to be the same sort of duty. By the end of the 1880s, however, most militia members in Illinois had come to see that policing strikes was quite different. For one thing, strike duty for the ING, and for most other state militias, could and usually did coincide with the failure of the strike. Many observers, focusing on this much-publicized activity, did form the idea that strike breaking was the primary function and purpose of the state National Guard. This idea left National Guardsmen in the difficult position of attempting to disprove what people believed they saw with their own eyes. It also left guardsmen struggling to satisfy competing constituencies. They had to respond to the state government that contributed—however insufficiently—to their upkeep and in exchange asked them to respond to moments of public unrest. Defending and maintaining public order was also an obvious act of responsible citizenship. At the same time, guardsmen in Illinois sought to avoid any service that rendered them little more than a private force for corporate ends, which would jeopardize their stance as responsible and representative citizens. Guardsmen needed to keep their reputation for military training and sociability focused on the positive rewards of admirable citizenship and on an honorable manliness, or they risked recruiting and fund-raising failures. Strike service inevitably placed these needs in direct conflict with each other.

Strikes and Strike Duty in Illinois

Striking was endemic in the late nineteenth century in the United States, and no industry or region of the country was without labor walkouts over the conditions or wages of work. However, the overwhelming majority of strikes held in Illinois—and throughout the nation—were resolved at the local level, without appeal to the state government for aid or for intervention. In the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, twenty-six of forty-five state militias went into action in strike-affected regions, during moments of extreme crisis, during times when local authorities felt they did not have the power or the ability (or perhaps the willingness) to calm angry crowds and face down private security forces. Such service represented only a little more than a third of all state militia and National Guard instances of active duty, but strike duty was performed on a larger
scale, and for a wider audience than almost any other single type of active duty. The ING, located in the heart of the central coal fields, had the greatest number of instances of strike service of any state militia between 1877 and 1900. On the thirty-three occasions that ING members performed strike duty between 1870 and 1908, they found themselves grappling with situations that had already strained the ability and resources of local authorities. (See appendix C.) They also found themselves in situations for which they had no training and no real power, and in which it was difficult to determine fault and responsibility. To make matters even more frustrating for ING members, they often bore whatever political fallout could be pushed onto their shoulders—an outcome that was clear to them ten years before they figured out how to finesse the problem.

When Illinois governors did turn to the state militia to intervene in strikes, they sent the ING into service at the scene of a strike to restore a public order that local authority was temporarily unable to sustain. Guardsmen were ordered to restore order in whatever way they could, remand any captured “criminal elements” into local police hands, and then return to their homes. After that, state officials expected the local authorities to carry on themselves. It is in this simple, highly visible narrative that many, then and since, have read the interests of state authority in maintaining state military organizations to preserve public order and so have implied backwards that, therefore, this must be the reason why such organizations came into existence. Critics of the assaults on organized labor have also tended to read in this narrative the clear relationship between industrial managers and the state governments that protected their investments. Given the relative rarity of the call to the ING to police strike-related disorders, this reading has come much too quickly. Strikes that turned into community confrontations that led to state National Guard interventions were extraordinary moments and they do not, cannot, serve as a vehicle for understanding the history of strikes in general, the role of the state in labor/capital disputes, and these interventions definitely do not reveal much about the origins or purpose of National Guardsmen.

The simplest narrative of state-supported strike-breakers also obscures the wicked undercurrents of local politics and disputed situations. The process of even acquiring state aid in a strike was complex. Local authorities—in the body of the county sheriff or city mayor—had to confess to the governor their inability to handle the strike situation and had to ask the state to intervene in their county (or city) to restore an order that they were unable to maintain. In essence, the request was itself an admission of weakness, if not of total incompetence. Even then,
it was up to the governor to decide how to respond, and the governor did not have to send troops. In fact, Illinois governors often showed little inclination to rush troops into an unsettled local situation, learning over the course of the 1880s and 1890s that there was no political good to come from such involvement. Quite the contrary, it was often nothing but trouble, not to mention being quite expensive. Instead, Illinois governors could and often did choose to send a supply of state-owned weapons for deputy sheriffs, a personal observer, or some combination of the two rather than actual troops. When governors did send troops, uncertain relationships between local and state authorities, illustrated by the frequent disagreements among the various parties concerned about when or even if disorder had taken or would take place, regularly complicated the situation on the ground even further. The history of ING service in strike-related locales is fraught with tension between the local sheriffs and the ING commanders who arrived in their jurisdictions to assist in order restoration. Once on the ground, commanders regularly encountered uneasy local alliances and continual local bickering about the legitimacy of the need for state troops. Public opinion, local, statewide and national, was divided on how, or if, to police disputes between capital and labor. Public sentiment was in a contentious and unsettled state about striking and strike policing, and about what role, if any, the state should play in those disputes. Nonetheless, ING officers found themselves in situations where, by default, they were expected to act clearly and decisively. Those who lived in strike-affected regions recognized, even agonized over, the problem that strikes were not a simple good vs. evil—labor vs. the state—situation. They also had a clear interest in limiting any disruption to their own daily lives. The simple narrative that casts ING strike service, and all state militia service in strikes, as tools of the emergent corporate class in their effort to squash labor organization is to miss both the political complexity of strike service, and, always, its relative rarity.

Chicago Militias and the Relief and Aid Society, 1875: Hints of Future Troubles

Toward the end of February 1875, the Chicago newspapers were reporting that Socialists were threatening to march on the Chicago Relief and Aid Society to demand that the society change its policies to better respond to the desperate need created by the ongoing economic downturn. Critics charged that the overseers of the Relief Society were mismanaging something between $300,000 and $1 million in resources and
yet were denying relief to those who applied for help. Some protestors even gave dramatic speeches about storming the society’s building and seizing the funds. Many Chicagoans became convinced that civil war was going to break out over the dispute. According to Holdridge Collins, writing some years later, “riotous demonstrations . . . directed more especially against the treasury and building of the Relief and Aid Society” posed a significant threat to local order and required a strong response. Opponents of the so-called Communists mobilized all across Chicago. The police stockpiled weapons in preparation for anticipated demonstrations in front of the society’s building. The First Regiment, which then consisted of six companies, on its own initiative assembled at its armory to drill in preparation “to sally forth at a moment’s notice,” as Collins later described it. According to the Chicago Times reporter, Lieutenant Colonel McClurg of the new First Regiment did not “feel over confident that the troops under him [would] be called upon; nevertheless, he [had] felt it proper to make preparations for any emergency that may occur, and [was] determined to have the men in good condition for actual service, provided it [became] necessary to use them.”

Several other military companies located in Chicago also assembled at their armories to drill and otherwise gird themselves to defend the city from riot and war. The companies that readied for duty included the Clan-na-Gael Guards, the Alpine Hunters, the Irish Rifles, the Montgomery Light Guards, the Mulligan Zouaves, and the Hannibal Zouaves. All these militia members took it upon themselves to prepare for action in defense of the Relief and Aid Society; there was no larger brigade or division organization in Illinois at that time. Individual companies reported directly to the adjutant general and the governor, and no orders issued from either of them about the situation in Chicago. It is not even clear if all the companies listed in the papers who were reported prepared for action were formally connected to the state, especially as an official connection in 1875 consisted of little more than a commission for a company’s officers.

Although the existence of a formal connection between all the various mobilizing military companies and the state government is unclear, the daily newspapers in Chicago made no distinction between the organizations along those lines. It is unlikely that the general public was able to do any better. Nonetheless, the inability of the governor or his appointed generals to mobilize, demobilize, or control all of the military-style companies in Chicago that would have liked to participate in some sort of domestic order maintenance action in 1875 would not have shielded them from being held responsible by the majority of the general public for the outcome of whatever actions taken by these companies.
The vision of barely disciplined companies sallying forth with the “newest and best arms known to modern warfare” into a riot must have given Governor Beveridge a variety of nightmares. At the very least, when he had the opportunity later that spring to address the members of the First Regiment, he explicitly warned them against unauthorized activities in the name of the state. He announced that he was glad their “warlike” movements “meant nothing beyond display” until they were called to serve. But, in “time of peace,” he desired them to “bear in mind, they had no authority to act, except by direction of the civil authorities—the mayor and the police officials [my emphasis].” Beverly touched here on tensions that were the result of the tenuous and semilegal ties of the militias to the state. There was nothing the governor could do to prevent the militias from acting as a posse comitatus except revoke the commissions given to the officers and demand the return of state-owned armament. That the officers of the First Regiment were not equally concerned by the vagueness of their claim to act as soldiers of the state or their potential personal liability should the state disclaim them is clear from Collins's memories of these events. Collins wrote that his regiment's preparations “probably [sic] had a greater effect than any other cause in preventing an outbreak of the communistic element at that time.” The attitude of Collins and others like him lay at the root of Governor Beveridge's warning to the militias, the First Regiment in particular. It also marks the first of many differences in opinion, even among guardsmen and their friends and supporters, regarding the proper role and stance of militias toward intervention in domestic order issues.

The Great Strike of 1877 and the Illinois National Guard

Illinois militia members seized on the dramatic growth of the volunteer forces in 1875 and 1876 to revise the Illinois laws that governed the state forces. By the end of the 1876–77 session of the General Assembly, militia members had succeeded in securing the passage of a new bill, and the entire state militia was mustered out on July 1, 1877, in preparation for a complete reorganization of the state forces. National events intervened soon after, pushing all organizational concerns into the background. The Great Railroad Strikes of 1877 were about to begin. The economic downturn that began in 1873 and triggered the problems at the Chicago Relief and Aid Society in 1875 had deepened into a terrible depression by 1876 and early 1877. Railroads suffered particularly badly during these years and turned to massive rate cutting programs to keep business up, though many railroads failed despite this tactic. In order to continue paying dividends to
shareholders of 2 to 8 percent, railroad managers repeatedly cut wages across the board by 10 or 20 percent. Railroad workers did not take these cuts passively. They struck often, and a series of strikes in December 1876 and early 1877 on eastern railroads had successfully pressured management to reinstate the most recent wage cuts. The successes of some railroad strikes was not shared across railroads or in other industries, and the strikes served ultimately to harden the position of industrial managers around the nation, on the theory that concessions had only yielded further trouble. Further, labor disputes had been anything but calm and orderly in the 1870s. The anthracite coal regions of Pennsylvania had been torn by spectacular violence for years. On June 10, 1877, several alleged members of the Molly Maguires, a suspected terrorist association with Irish nationalist overtones believed to be one of the most violent of the secret labor associations in the Pennsylvania coal fields, were hanged for labor violence.21

Beginning in June and July 1877, yet another 10 percent wage cut went into effect on a number of large eastern railroad lines. On July 16, workers on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad struck in Baltimore to protest the further cut, with little immediate effect. However, down the line in Martinsburg, West Virginia, striking railroad employees were far more successful in stopping railroad traffic and tying up miles of freight trains.22 By July 18, rail traffic was backed up two miles east and west of Martinsburg, and the strike had already begun to spread to other shipping trades and to other cities.23 Strikes spread rapidly across Pennsylvania, and on the weekend of July 21, the worst riots to date erupted in Baltimore and Pittsburgh. State governors began calling up their militias. In Baltimore, a Maryland militia regiment marching toward the train station fired on the crowd and at least ten bystanders and onlookers were killed outright, and dozens more were wounded. Then on the night of July 22, a score or more people were killed in Pittsburgh by Philadelphia militiamen. The militia were vainly defending themselves from being burned out of the roundhouse where they had taken shelter for the night after being unable to find crews to run trains on newly opened tracks. Rioters torched oil carriers and ran them down the grade into the roundhouse itself, starting the fires, and at eight o’clock on Sunday morning the militia regiment was forced to abandon the shelter to the fire.24

The horrifying news spread rapidly across the country, and Illinois authorities watched the progress of the strikes with increasing apprehension. Chicago seemed a powder keg, and several unions with far more ambitious programs than those of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers were attempting to gain control of the various labor activities and forge a general strike. The Workingmen’s Party of the United States
mobilized in Chicago in an attempt to provide leadership for what up to that point had been mostly independent strikes. The WPUS held a meeting on Sunday, July 22, as news from Baltimore and Pittsburgh reached Chicago, followed by a rally on Monday evening with some 6,000 in attendance. Albert Parsons, Philip Van Patten, and John McAuliffe led off the oratory. The leading speakers announced resolutions calling for the nationalization of the railroads and support for trade unionism. Railroad executives in the city professed calm, but tensions were seething throughout Chicago.25 Describing the feeling several years later, Collins wrote: “Sunday and Monday, July 22d and 23d, were days of feverish uncertainty and repressed excitement at Chicago, Peoria, Galesburg and East St. Louis.”26 Late Monday night, a group of switchmen working for the Michigan Central line declared themselves on strike.27

On Tuesday, July 24, two days after the riots in Pittsburgh, Chicago workers began walking out. According to Holdridge Collins, “It was evident that unless the troubles were checked at this point, the Country would be thrown into a revolution. The time had come for the Militia to show whether it were capable of the stern duty and exacting discipline of the soldier.”28 Collins was apparently oblivious to the irony of his sentiments. Of the dozens killed and scores more wounded in the rioting up to July 22, rifle-toting militiamen were responsible for most of the deaths. Several of the riots were triggered by the appearance of militia troops on the streets. The Pittsburgh roundhouse was specifically targeted because the Philadelphia militia had taken shelter there. A militia regiment attempting to leave their (very poorly situated) armory and march to the railroad station provoked the killings in Baltimore. Eleven people killed by Pennsylvania militia in Reading were members of the crowd harassing militia progress toward the railroad station in that city. Although a few militia members were killed and dozens more wounded by rioters with guns and stones, the militia killed randomly, shooting into the crowds and hitting a variety of strikers, bystanders, and even a few policemen.29 Only three or four men known to have been associated with the railroad strikers were killed by any militia troops, firing randomly into hostile crowds. There is no doubt that the crowds were quite hostile and would have liked to do more damage to the militia than they did. Militia troops fired in the belief that they were protecting their own lives, a belief that witnesses and militia officers did not see as unjustified. Nevertheless, their superiority of firepower gave them the killing advantage. At this late date, it is difficult to understand why Collins could not see the militia as potentially fanning the flames, but he, and many, many others like him, did not.
Worried that the situation in Chicago could explode at any moment, city and state officials moved to prepare for possible violence. On July 23, Illinois Adjutant General Hiram Hilliard summoned the brand-new Brigadier General of the Illinois State Guard, Alfred Ducat, back to Chicago from his vacation in Wisconsin. Ducat was in the city by 4:00 P.M. but was informed by Mayor Monroe Heath that the services of the militia were not wanted just yet. A Republican, Monroe Heath was then in his second term as mayor. Elected in 1876 after a series of election scandals and charges of corruption in the previous administration, Heath won his second term by campaigning on a pledge for honest government and reduced taxes. According to Ducat, “His honor informed me that he was desirous of suppressing the disturbance without the aid of the military, if possible, and for the present he did not want a soldier seen on the streets, as he believed the military had much to do with exasperating the people of Pittsburgh, a few days before.” Given the events of the previous weekend in Maryland and Pennsylvania, Mayor Heath’s observation was sound, though General Ducat did not share it. On the morning of July 24 Ducat telegraphed the governor, “I don’t think the authorities here fully appreciate the gravity of the situation. Although the city was quiet last night and this morning, I believe trouble will occur here about tomorrow.” General Ducat grew increasingly concerned about the situation in the city as more and more shops were closed down on the 24th and 25th, but the mayor still refused to call the troops, and until he did so they could not act. Ducat did all he could by way of preparation. Revealing his own strong class and ethnic biases, he disarmed the two companies of Bohemian Guards, reporting later that “some of their officers [were] found in full sympathy with the riotous portion of the populace.” He made plans with the superintendent of police to have the bridges across the river opened, so when he had the use of his troops he could guard the approaches, and keep the crowd out of the central downtown districts. He ordered his Chicago-based troops to guard their armories in heavy rotations. He asked Governor Shelby M. Cullom to request the aid of six companies of U.S. Army Infantry who were currently in Rock Island, and Cullom did as Ducat requested.

After being assembled in their armories on the evening of the 24th, Ducat had his troops move across the city to better accommodations on the following evening, the predominately Irish American Second Regiment to the Michigan Southern Depot and the First Regiment to the Exposition building. During the day of the 25th, Ducat continued to ask Mayor Heath for permission to use the troops, which Heath continued to refuse, preferring instead to rely on the regular police, supplemented by “several hundred specials” paid for by a “prominent citizen.”
Given the events in Pennsylvania, Heath had every reason to fear the provocation for violence sending the Illinois Militia into the streets might prove to be. He also had good reason to distrust the reaction of the Illinois militia troops themselves, as the majority of the deaths in other states were the result of militia fire power. Ducat was clearly growing frustrated, and gangs of men continued to shut down the city, putting into effect a kind of general strike, and the railroad blockade continued to grow. Strikers in Galesburg took up the movement. By this time, some 600 Civil War veterans were drilling in Chicago with breechloaders, the police were breaking up crowds with clubs, and the militias continued to wait in their temporary armories. Police confrontations with the crowds grew more violent during the night, with more and more gunfire exchanged, though no reported casualties.\(^{35}\)

As tensions mounted and sporadic violence erupted, on July 26 Mayor Heath replied to Ducat’s latest request to use the militia: “You are hereby authorized to use whatever military you have in this city subject to your command to suppress the riots now in progress in different parts of this city, subject to my orders [sic].”\(^{36}\) The same day that six companies of the Ninth Infantry, U.S. Army, arrived in the city from Rock Island, several citizen-organized, military-style companies were ready to render service, including an artillery battalion. Ducat had called up a volunteer militia cavalry company and posted the veterans’ company around the city. The U.S. Army troops went to the stockyards to prevent any disturbances there, and they were then broken up by company and posted to various locations deemed important by Ducat (though the troops were not under his control, he suggested the placement to the U.S. Army officer in charge).\(^{37}\) During the night, the Second Regiment, Illinois Militia was stationed on the Halstead St. viaduct and bridge near the stockyards. They fired two volleys, about an hour apart, over the heads of the crowds that were harassing them with stones and pistols. Although there were fears that the whole city would be burned (the 1871 fire was hardly a distant memory in 1877), nothing came of them. The following day, hundreds more police “specials” were sworn in, amounting by some reports to 5,000 men working as temporary law enforcers. The total forces stationed in the city smothered the protests by sheer numbers. The U.S. troops never even engaged the crowds and were used to guard industrial property.\(^{38}\) By the end of July 27, “the Chicago riots melted away.”\(^{39}\) The price was high, however. At least eighteen men and boys, many onlookers, were killed by police or militia gunfire. Scores more were wounded, many brutally beaten, by club-wielding police.

Illinois was not past the crisis, however. The strikes spread throughout the state, just as they had in Pennsylvania. The governor himself handled
militia operations in East St. Louis. The Second Brigade of the Illinois militia was called into action on July 27. The four regiments of the Second Brigade reported to Alton, and on the 28th, the brigade moved on to East St. Louis, where the governor was already in place. A crowd reported to be 10,000 strong was congregated at the Relay House, and so the militia headed right for the scene. They were able to disperse the crowd “without the loss of life or the shedding of blood.”

Companies were stationed throughout the city, holding strategic points. Civil authorities, with detectives and police, arrested many perceived crowd leaders. On Sunday, the first attempt was made to get a mail train out of the city; it ended with the brutal beating of the engineer and fireman by the crowd. The second attempt went forward under heavy guard. A company escorted the engine to the roundhouse, where the train had been left by the switch engine. There a large crowd, “estimated at several thousand,” announced a “determination to prevent this the first train, from moving out at any sacrifice” which “was openly and loudly proclaimed by a large majority, who were generally well armed and displayed their weapons.” Five companies surrounded the train, and the rest of the command was ordered into line around the train yard. The militia kept the crowd away from the train until it was clear of the other trains, and “with sufficient open space for action,” the train sped away. The troops previously surrounding the train turned at a signal and surrounded those who had been closest to the train, disarmed them and marched them away as prisoners. “The consternation of the crowd covering the cars, buildings, and lots in the vicinity was complete, and the panic which prevailed dispersed the crowd in all directions without even the slightest attempt to release the prisoners, who were safely delivered into the custody of the civil authorities.” With constant patrol, the city returned to business, and the militia troops were dismissed to their homes on July 31.

Meanwhile, General Ducat turned his attention to strikes and race riots in Braidwood and Joliet. Braidwood was a coal-mining town, and the striking miners there seized the opportunity presented by the general confusion to stage a race riot. The governor informed Ducat that the strikers had “driven the colored miners, with their families from the city, that the poor people had been violently treated and robbed, and were without food or shelter on the prairies and in the woods,” and that the strikers “were about fifteen hundred strong, well organized, armed and desperate.” Worried that striking miners from Streator and Joliet might reinforce the Braidwood strikers, Ducat rushed to get to the scene with two regiments of militia. Arriving on the evening of the 28th, Ducat and some 700 militiamen faced about 500 rioters. Ducat ordered the mayor to tell them to disperse and return the arms stolen from the African
American mining families within twenty-five minutes. The crowd dispersed, but the guns were not returned. Ducat then marched in and established control of the city, instituting a search for the missing guns, which he found and gave to the mine superintendent. During the night some shots were fired at the pickets, and fire was returned, but as far as Ducat knew there were no casualties.

The next day, trains came into town with some 350 of the African American refugees. They were returned to their pillaged homes, and Ducat gave them a day's rations, “notifying the owners of the mines that hereafter they would have to provide for them.” The same day, the governor ordered Ducat to detail companies to Mattoon and Galesburg to protect the black miners at those spots and to leave a company in Braidwood “to protect property until colored miners are allowed to work unmolested.” The orders for forces from Ducat’s command to go to Mattoon and Galesburg were later rescinded, but a company from Peoria did serve, briefly, in Galesburg, quieting the crowds mostly by marching through the streets. By July 30, order was sufficiently restored that, according to Ducat, all local authorities felt able to cope. All currently activated militia companies were then dispersed to their homes.

Strike and riot duty proved chaotic and confusing, combining wildcat walkouts, race riots, and an organized general strike, and ING officers were not able to draw many shared conclusions to guide their future activities when they were called in to protect lives and property. In Chicago itself, riots resulted in the deaths of at least eighteen people, some from the rifle volleys fired by Illinois Militia members on the night of May 26, 1877. In East St. Louis, disciplined general strikers faced troops under the direct command of Governor Shelby M. Cullom, himself a Civil War veteran, and no rioting broke out. In Braidwood, miners turned the confusing situation into a race riot and terrorized and evicted all the African American miners and their families in the town, and the state militia restored the refugees to their homes. Ethnic and racial tensions also affected service in Chicago itself. In the midst of the crisis, General Ducat disbanded one company for their “sympathy” with the strikers, and he ignored the offers of service made by the African American Hannibal Guards, much to their displeasure. “This caused the members of our organization to feel somewhat ‘miffed.’” The commander of the Hannibal Guards, R. E. Moore, came just shy of accusing ING leadership of overt racial discrimination when he concluded that “[f]eeling that recognition in time of peace is an assurance of
recognition during time of war, and also feeling determined to discharge our duty as becomes all law-abiding citizens and soldiers, I sincerely hope this will satisfy the minds of many of our inquisitive friends."

Moore was not the only critic of Ducat's handling of the 1877 crisis who skirted an open discussion of the ways racism impacted the unfolding events. Nearly two years later, in 1879, the Chicago Tribune was still recording the lingering effects of the controversy created by the governor and Adjutant General Hilliard's decision to send troops to Braidwood to protect the black miners there. "There as been considerable discussion, since the time of the riot, upon the subject of Braidwood, and the fact that a small army was moved down in front of that small city in order to terrify its inhabitants into an unconditional surrender." It seems that the critics felt that the white inhabitants did not deserve to be "terrorized," despite their attack on the black inhabitants of their town. The paper quoted "a trustworthy source" who claimed that generals Ducat and Joseph T. Torrence believed that a mere twenty-five ING troops would have sufficed to quell the disturbance. When writing his own report at the end of 1877, General Duct did not sound like a man who thought less was more. He proposed a massive, ten-thousand-strong militia armed with Gatling guns to face down strikers. He was soon replaced, suggesting that neither Governor Cullom nor the rest of the Illinois militia leadership thought that was a good idea, and certainly not an idea anyone appeared willing to pay for. In the end, no formal changes as a result of the 1877 strike service were made in the Illinois militia's structure, training, or public funding.

Types of Strikes in Illinois

Between 1877 and 1908, twenty-two of thirty-three strikes (or 67 percent) in which Illinois governors sent militia troops were strikes or walkouts called by bituminous coal miners in dispute with the operators of all the mines in a given region or across the state. Another nine strikes (or 27 percent) were related to railroad disputes. The remaining two incidents occurred in Chicago: the ING served briefly in the Union Stock Yards in 1886, and again in the Sanitation District in 1893. Patrolling railway strikes presented specific challenges to the ING and to all state militia forces. In Illinois, railway strikes were usually focused in the two large rail hubs located in the two significant urban areas of the state, Chicago and East St. Louis. Strikes in these locations often quickly spread to related industries, and then to general trades in the urban environment, shutting down increasingly large areas of the
affected cities. The combination of the excitement of the strike and the larger-than-usual numbers of people milling about on the streets had a frightening way of shifting gears and developing into an urban riot only tangentially related to the original intentions of the strikers and their unions. Rail strikes could also spread across the industry as members of the various brotherhoods struck in sympathy. Crowds would gather to block the tracks out of rail yards and to discourage, often violently, any man willing to run the trains past them. The ING’s job in these situations was to break up these crowds to allow the trains to get through, and to guard the trains until they were safely out of the city. Making matters still more difficult for National Guardsmen, their presence in these urban strikes often acted as a goad to the crowds, turning previously nonviolent crowds into frightening mobs. Urban crowds could outnumber the Guard companies by the hundreds and even the thousands. These crowds presented special challenges because the only real training guardsmen had for dealing with large, hostile forces was military—despite the name “riot duty”—and yet firing lethal weapons into the crowds was possible only as a last desperate resort, owing to the fear of killing unarmed participants by the score.

Despite getting most of the historical interest, the ING was called to rail strike duty only nine times. The ING was far more likely to find itself, during strike duty, in coal-mining country. In the twenty-two cases from 1877 to 1908 when county sheriffs turned to the governor to request state troops to intervene in coal mine strikes, they asked for assistance because of physical violence, ongoing or potential. Such violence was generally focused around striking miners attempting to shut down operations that were continuing to work and/or to prevent strikebreakers from either working or arriving to work. Illinois coal mines tended to be located in rural areas, usually on the outskirts of small towns, but sometimes near nothing at all but the railroad tracks laid to the mine itself. Thus, ING leadership generally focused their activities around the mines themselves, though general “order maintenance” duties could involve patrolling, eventually with the aid of something close to martial law, neighboring towns as well. Any actual confrontations in these localities tended to be limited to strikers, their supporters, the various private guards and strikebreakers hired by the coal operators, and the militia volunteers. Illinois National Guard officers quickly developed the practice, during mine strikes, of literally inserting their troops between the opposing parties and enforcing a cooling-off period, a practice that was largely useless in the larger, urban environments because the Guard itself was so likely to become one of the combatants. In all twenty-two cases of mine strike duty, the state com-
manders on the ground and their superior officers in Springfield, including the governor, refused to sanction the use of troops as guards for private property or in aiding the direct importation of strike breakers, and did so only under the rarest of circumstances.\footnote{51}

In Illinois, the governor’s staff of militia officers, as well as the individual officers who commanded each strike policing expedition and, as far as may be determined, the membership at large, together sought to preserve a formal neutrality on the issues of the strike when called upon to intervene in a locality stressed by strikes.\footnote{52} This was the only possible response to the varied conditions and issues that confronted the ING when they were called into service if they were to retain the ability to function effectively, both during the strike situation and afterwards as an institution that relied on community and public support for its own future maintenance. Each strike had its own history and each strike locality its own political and economic tensions that predated the strike itself. The challenges faced by the guardsmen in handling themselves in such a manner as to be regarded as neutral in intention if not result were extremely difficult to overcome, and the ING rarely managed to do so. Because ING leadership failed to overcome these difficulties directly, in time they moved to redefine those situations that required state militia involvement and simultaneously to more explicitly define the responsibilities and tactics available to local authorities when they were faced with “disorderly,” as opposed to “violent,” situations.

In many cases, the ING commanders on the ground were critical, indeed often scathing, in their judgment of the behavior of the county sheriff and his inability or unwillingness to handle the tensions himself, and they regarded state intervention as something that ought to have been unnecessary. And in fact, during the vast majority of strikes, even mining strikes, throughout Illinois during the forty years covered by this project as a whole, participants did not seek or require intervention by the state. For example, in early May of 1886 a wave of strikes peaked, and between May 1 and 3, 64,000 workers in Chicago went on strike. Despite the massive walkout, the ING was not called to strike duty in the city of Chicago in May 1886, and local authorities managed without militia intervention.\footnote{53} Illinois National Guard commanders came to resent being placed in situations that required delicate negotiation but not necessarily sizable military forces. They regarded the tendency of some county sheriffs to rely on the Guard to restore order, because doing so relieved them of the burden of making locally unpopular political choices, as a direct assault on the very premises on which the state militias were based. They also resented such service as an uncalled-for drain on limited ING finances. The active-duty pay, the supplies, and the
transportation required to put and keep the state militia in the field while policing strike-related events all came out of the annual militia budget, and when expenses went over that sum, the Guard and their creditors often had to wait two or more years for the next session of the General Assembly to receive their payment. As a result, other items in the militia budget—like summer camps, new uniforms, and new armament and ordnance supplies—all had to be deferred as well.54

Madison and St. Clair Counties: 1883 Mine Strike

On the night of Wednesday, May 23, 1883, the striking bituminous coal miners of Madison and St. Clair counties, surrounding East St. Louis in southern Illinois, held a mass protest and strategy meeting. As the “machine miners” in the area remained unwilling to strike, those traditional miners who had walked out May 1 decided to close the “machine mines” by force. About two o’clock in the morning of May 24, some 400 strikers—marching to the music of fife and drum—surrounded the machine miners’ boarding house at Abbey Mine No. 4, a few miles outside Collinsville, and demanded that they join the strike. When the 150 machine men refused, the strikers physically removed them from the boarding house and force-marched the machine men at gunpoint the twelve miles to East St. Louis. Any machine miners who objected to this proceeding were assaulted. The strikers further threatened to kill any men who returned to work. Throughout Thursday, strikers ranged throughout the area, forcing the rest of the Abbey machine mines to close. Early Friday morning, the strikers returned to the area to satisfy themselves that the Abbey miners had stayed away.55 On Friday, May 25, the deputy sheriffs of Madison and St. Clair counties, the mayor of Collinsville, a justice of the peace, representatives of two coal mining operations, and a prominent local citizen wired to the governor:

We the undersigned, testify that there are from 250 to 400 men armed with revolvers, clubs and stones, threatening the peace of this and adjoining towns. That they are preventing men employed in the mines here from pursuing their lawful business and threatening the public peace, and that further, in our opinions, the sheriff is not able to provide the necessary protection to life and property and the exigencies of the case demand the interference of the state militia.56

In the second half of the nineteenth century, bituminous (or soft) coal was mined throughout the state and shipped by rail to St. Louis or
Chicago and beyond. Coal mining districts throughout the nation were notorious for harsh conditions, frequent strikes, and strike-related violence. Illinois coal fields were no different, and 1883 was another bad year for management-miner relations in several mining operations surrounding Belleville, Collinsville, and Troy, all in Madison or St. Clair counties. There were two types of mining operations in the area surrounding East St. Louis. The majority were traditional coal mines, and the rest, a small number of newer mines, were known as “machine mines.”

Owing to disagreements between the traditional miners and the operators of traditionally worked mines over wages and, more particularly, over the manner in which wages were assessed, some 2,000 coal diggers went out on strike on May 1. The striking miners had already won a concession of a 1/2 cent increase in the piece rate per bushel, but they were unhappy with the manner in which the coal was weighed and wanted scales at each mine entrance rather than the single scale located at a midpoint between the mines and East St. Louis, as was then the case. They also wanted to have a miner-selected scale checker to ensure the honesty of the coal companies. The striking miners were determined to stick to their resolutions and to continue the strike until their demands were heeded.

The counties had remained calm until May 23, when the striking traditional miners decided to force the issue with the nonstriking machine miners through a direct assault. Even then, the sheriff and his deputies declined to define the situation as disorderly, until it was clear that the striking miners would not allow the evicted machine men to return to work. It was only at this juncture that the deputy sheriffs turned to the state to request military aid in restoring the evicted miners to their jobs. In this particular case, order was related to the sheriff’s ability (or willingness) to protect the lives of those machine miners who still desired to work in the face of the strike, and to protect the property of the machine mine owners. When leading local men became concerned that the sheriff was no longer able to adequately protect the interests of property owners and mine managers and to protect the lives of mine employees who were continuing to work in defiance of the strike, they requested outside assistance.

Colonel Barkley of the Fifth Regiment, ING reported to the governor that there were no further disturbances in Collinsville after the arrival of the militia on Friday night; and on Saturday, 110 machine miners returned from East St. Louis and started back to work. With the mines back at work and no “mobs” in evidence, Barkley “felt that the civil authorities should from this moment on, preserve order unaided by the militia.” Order, in this case, is synonymous with conditions prior to the
specific events of May 23–24, and not conditions prior to the event of the strike itself. At least in this case, order was not the prestrike condition; rather, it was all conditions under which local authorities are able to prevent or punish harm to life or property on their own. So once the specific instance of the forcible closure of the Abbey machine mines had been rectified, order was once again under the jurisdiction of the local authorities, and the militia’s duty had been performed.

When solicited by E. J. Crandall, president of the Crandall Mining Company located outside Collinsville, to keep the militia in the area, Governor Hamilton refused. Hamilton explained in his letter to Crandall that the “militia cannot be kept there to guard your mine indefinitely. Civil authorities must use the powers of the militia promptly if needed to disperse rioters and arrest them & turn them over to civil authorities for commitment to jail.” However, “[a]t the earnest solicitation of some of the mine operators and citizens . . . [Barkley—the commander on the ground] consented to remain till Sunday evening, as [he and his troops] could not have left East St. Louis before that time, at any rate.” Barkley had a strategy up his sleeve for determining if tensions had truly cooled enough for the ING to return home. He believed that the strikers were unlikely to cause any disturbances where the National Guard companies were in place. So Barkley loaded his men onto a special train Sunday night and pulled them out, letting the public assume they were going home. In reality, the train stopped at a switching station a few miles away. There, the militia companies waited out the night and then returned to the Abbey mines outside Collinsville early the following morning—where everything was quiet. The train passed machine mines at Confidence and Troy as well, and again, all was quiet and all the men at work, so the train went on to East St. Louis with all the militia aboard. Because in the judgment of their commander the militia’s responsibilities in this case had been fully discharged, he prepared to relieve the men of active duty and send them home. Order, or those conditions predating the specific outbreak of violence that compelled the local sheriffs to turn to the state for aid, was restored.

Events then took an unexpected turn for the worse Monday afternoon, May 28, just after Barkley and his three companies arrived in East St. Louis. While the men were waiting for trains to their home stations, Barkley received an urgent request for immediate help from Sheriff Ropiequet in Belleville, St. Clair County. “Cannot master mob at Reinecker Mine, No-1 on L. & N. R. R. There are about 300 men and fifty women that want to destroy pit. I just received telephone by L. & N. R. R. to ask you for militia & I hope that you will send a company immediately on special train to Birkner Station, about one mile from pit,
or to pit itself if you can do so.” Barkley also received personal appeals from employees of both the Reinecker Mine and the L. & N. Railroad. The Reinecker employee told Barkley that the strikers had taken Reinecker himself prisoner and trapped his miners inside the mine, and were threatening to burn the shaft and “leave [the] work-men at the bottom to the mercy of the flames.” (The story in the Chicago Tribune claimed that an “Amazon Mob” had trapped Reinicker in his house and were threatening to tear it down around him.) Once he was apprised of the sheriff’s request, the governor sent word to Barkley to take whatever speedy action he felt was advisable, but he added the proviso, “Sheriff must take command and capture as many as possible to be turned over to the civil authorities.”

In Collinsville, the forcible, and potentially lasting, closure of a previously working mine prompted the county authorities to declare the situation disorderly without any actual confrontation between the local authorities and the strikers. In St. Clair County, by contrast, the Sheriff’s request for state aid came in the midst of a large-scale attack on men and property that the county sheriffs did not have sufficient manpower or authority to handle alone. In particular, sheriff deputies used the presence of female strike supporters at the Reinecker mine attack to suggest a spectacular break with order, and as such, demanded an equally spectacular response on the part of local authority and state military aid. They clearly identified the disorder as ongoing violent actions and threats, in this case to the lives of trapped miners.

Spectacular was what they got. Because of a (deliberate?) misunderstanding, the engineer running the special train taking the ING troops to the Reinecker mine did not halt the train one mile away from the mine entrance and allow the troops to disembark and proceed on foot. Rather, he ran the train right up to the mine entrance and into the middle of the hostile crowd. While the troops were attempting to get off the still-moving train, shots were exchanged in the confusion, and one striker was killed and one was wounded by militia fire. This action broke up the crowd, and the male strikers fled into the woods and down the tracks. Many of the women, however, refused to abandon their position at the mine entrance. “Deputy Anthony went up to the shaft and called on the women to disperse and go home. They refused to do so and he was obliged to take a club away from one of them who threatened him. He called on me [Barkley] for assistance; I went up to the shaft, where the women had possession; I spoke kindly to them asking them to disperse and go to their homes; which they finally did under protest, and taking their own time in withdrawing slowly.” After the women left, the trapped miners were allowed to leave the mine, and the detained
mine manager/owner was released. The crisis past, the county authorities were assumed able to resume sole responsibility for order, and the troops left the area shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{72}

Growing Frustration

The precipitating events in Madison and St. Clair counties in 1883 are the outside poles on the range of situations that prompted county authorities to request state militia intervention. (See appendix D.) In Madison County, deputy sheriffs and local leading men turned to the state for aid in reopening forcibly closed mining operations. Sheriff Ropiequet of St. Clair County begged state intervention to quell an attack in progress on miners and mine property that he was unable to disperse alone with the aid of his few deputy sheriffs. Because of this wide range of situations, there was often significant local disagreement on the moment when, or if, conditions warranted an appeal to the state for help. The variety of people who appealed to Illinois governors for aid is one reflection of these multiple perspectives on local strikes. For example, in the 1883 mine strike in Collinsville, one of the first people to urge the governor to intervene was George Parker, president of the St. Louis, Alton & Terre Haute Rail Road Company. Parker wrote to Governor Hamilton to complain that Sheriff Hotz of Madison County was failing to preserve order because Hotz was “either afraid to take action, or, what is more probable, is in sympathy with the strikers.” Parker informed the governor that the strikers were attempting to close down the railroad lines, like his own, that were continuing to transport coal from machine mines into St. Louis, and that Sheriff Hotz had declined to interfere with these activities of the striking miners.\textsuperscript{73}

Parker’s 1883 letter did not lead Governor Hamilton to inquire directly of the sheriff of Madison County for an account of the local situation. Rather, Hamilton chose to send a militia colonel to personally inspect the local situation and report directly back to him.\textsuperscript{74} Colonel Barkley, the man Hamilton sent into the area, did not arrive in Collinsville until after the strikers forcibly evicted the “machine men,” and events pushed local leadership to act quickly. As a result, it is difficult to predict what Barkley’s role might have been in the particular situation without such a provocative action on the part of the strikers. It is telling, however, to note that Barkley must have been involved with the decision to request state aid, though exactly what role he played will never be known.\textsuperscript{75} Reports suggest that subsequent Illinois governors also used this method of information gathering (personal militia representatives), both to
determine the seriousness of the situation and to prevent local leaders from turning too quickly to the state for military intervention. According to at least one adjutant general, and despite the 1883 case, the presence of ING officers as observers worked against local desires to turn to the state for militia aid in difficult situations and toward some "peaceful" settlement of the issues under contention.\textsuperscript{76}

Back in 1883, however, Colonel Barkley criticized the local sheriff, George Hotz, in his report to the governor, saying that Hotz was "not able to provide the necessary protection to life and property."\textsuperscript{77} Whether Sheriff Hotz was even party to the decision to ask for state intervention is unclear, though the absence of Hotz’s name on the request for state aid is a meaningful omission in this context. At least one newspaper reporter noted that "the Sheriff and his posse early threw up the sponge, and the citizens, miners, and operators were placed in great bodily danger."\textsuperscript{78} When Colonel Barkley wired Sheriff Hotz to ask for instructions once the request for state intervention had been made by Deputy Sheriff Lanham, Sheriff Hotz replied:

\begin{quote}
I feel unable to come, Please consult with Deputy Lanham.
George Hotz, Sheriff Madison County\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

Hotz’s apparent unwillingness to participate in any measures aimed at constraining the activities of the strikers in forwarding their cause reinforces the significance of his failure to personally request state aid.\textsuperscript{80} Barkley wired him again to urge his speedy arrival. Hotz answered: "Will be down as soon as we can get there according to your order."\textsuperscript{81} Barkley wired again to make it perfectly clear that he had no intention of letting Hotz off the hook, "Am here to act under your orders in assisting you to preserve the peace [my emphasis]."\textsuperscript{82} Nevertheless, Hotz failed to arrive in Collinsville until well after the ING had established itself at the Abbey mine and the evicted miners were back at work.\textsuperscript{83} Whatever role Hotz played locally, it was not in collaboration with the state troops sent to his county.

In several subsequent cases when the Illinois militia intervened in counties threatened by strike-related violence, the sheriffs did not actually request state intervention, either; what they requested was the loan of state arms for use by deputy sheriffs. The state did lend arms to county sheriffs on request until they no longer had arms to lend, at which point, if in the judgment of the adjutant general and the governor the situation warranted it, they ordered troops into the county.\textsuperscript{84} On other occasions, the county sheriffs were in regular contact with the state authorities, apprising them of the situation from day to day and reserv-
ing judgment to themselves on when or if they needed state intervention in their jurisdictions.\textsuperscript{85} On still other occasions, the sheriff repeatedly asked for assistance in dealing with mobs, but the ING officers on the scene felt that the sheriff was looking to get out of doing his job and rebuffed the requests for as long as they could.\textsuperscript{86}

Disagreements over “if or when” state intervention was absolutely necessary could, and frequently did, extend from the local all the way to the state level. Community members and striking workers protested that militia troops were unneeded, and city authorities argued with county officials or corporate representatives over the need for troops.\textsuperscript{87} Illinois National Guard officers frequently contested the legitimacy of intervention requests when in their judgment the county sheriff had not done all that he could have to prevent the outbreaks of violence that ultimately required militia presence. They also complained when they believed the sheriff exaggerated what threat there was in order to secure state aid in policing a situation for which he would rather not be held responsible.\textsuperscript{88}

Perhaps the most dramatic example of this belief in exaggeration came during the railroad strike in East St. Louis in 1886, when Sheriff Ropiequet of St. Claire County insisted for weeks that he could do nothing to stop the mob. Even the ING officers on the scene, up to and including Adjutant General J. M. Vance and Governor Richard J. Oglesby, were convinced that there was much more the sheriff could do to ensure the peace. They continued to feel that way, right up to the evening of April 8, when shooting broke out between strike breakers and strike supporters and poorly armed deputies, and seven people died.\textsuperscript{89}

Over time, ING officers grew more and more willing to argue that some sheriffs, like Ropiequet of St. Claire County, failed to exhaust their full resources in the task of order maintenance in their jurisdictions, and to place full responsibility squarely on the sheriffs’ shoulders for what harm to persons or property subsequently occurred.

Despite the efforts of ING officers to shift blame for bad situations onto the heads of uncooperative county sheriffs, they could not escape all criticism. Feelings could run very deep about the conflicts during strikes. For example, after the events in Collinsville in 1883, J. D. Miner wrote a personal letter to the governor, in which he passionately declared that “it is now 20 years since we fought for freedom of the African Slavery which there was 1,000,000 men sacrificed there [sic] lives and we are as white Slaves in the hands of a few Capitalists which has crushed us to a starvation point these are the reasons for us standing out to try and better our condition.”\textsuperscript{90} Miner went on to call the working machine miners “scab,” and to charge that “when [the militia] arrived here they seen there was no use for them so they went into the City of Collinsville and
some pertook of Ice cream but most of a good Stomach full of Beer & Whiskey in which they have been keep over dozed with the Stimulant from Sunday 27th until Monday 28th ult [sic]. . . .

Miner was not the only critic to cast aspersions of alcohol abuse toward the ING. In 1882, Jas. Magie drew on a popular conception of the militia as heavy drinkers in his condemnation of the state militia when he wrote “It is very fortunate for these poor sick soldiers that, in addition to all other pay, that state pays their medicine bills. There are many soldiers who, when they meet each other, need some medicine. If they don’t happen to have their bottle with them it makes no difference, Fleury or Weinberger keep bottles, and fill them with medicine when required, and the languid soldier after dress parade can have his drooping energies revived by the medicine which are thus furnished. Generous, noble state of Illinois!”

ING officers were obviously concerned about the issue of drinking and in their reports stressed that there was no drunkenness or “vice” among the men on active duty.

To kill someone while policing strike-related disorders brought the most violent kinds of condemnation down on the heads of the ING and the governor as commander-in-chief. The death of miner Henderson at the Reinecker mine confrontation in 1883 was exactly the type of outcome that militia officers spent much time trying to avoid in subsequent years with their search for new tactics and strategies to calm confrontational scenes. When the worst came to pass and shooting did break out, the commander’s first reaction was to stop the firing on the part of their troops. Once the firing was stopped, Colonel Barkley’s next act was to assure himself that it had been no breach of discipline on the part of his men, but rather their proper response to a direct order from local authority. “The deputy sheriff, Anthony, then at my request, in the presence of General Reece, Col. Mills, Major Culver, Captain Ridgeley, Captain Wilson, Captain Fahrenstock, Captain Crooker and myself repeated the statement that he, Anthony, after calling on the mob to surrender in the name of the people, and being fired upon by the rioters, had returned their fire himself and ordered the men to fire upon them. I had this done in order to show clearly that the men had merely acted under the direction of the civil authorities.” These steps were dramatic in their formality, but fearing the likely consequences of the death of the striker, Barkley acted quickly before the deputy sheriff had time to reconsider the act of publicly and officially accepting responsibility for the striker’s death.

Barkley’s efforts notwithstanding, the death of the striking miner at the Reinecker Mine was the focal point for criticism that rained down on Governor Hamilton and the Illinois National Guards in the after-
math of the ING’s 1883 strike-policing activities. In his letter to the governor, Miner blamed the alcohol, claiming that “in there [sic] Drunking [sic] state [the militiamen] fired on the strikers without orders and killed a young man woman & child.”

Local residents held mass meetings to denounce Governor Hamilton and the Illinois National Guard for the killing and to demand that the company(s) responsible be discharged from the state militia. The resolutions at one such meeting contained the following points:

Resolved, That we condemn the massacre of miners by the State Militia of Illinois, and declare it a lawless and mean crime and murder, committed on the orders of the coal monopolists, by which the Government of Illinois has proved itself the servant of capital.

Resolved, That we demand the discharge and punishment of the company of State Militia concerned.

Resolved, That we charge the coal miners not to give up a single point of their rights, and to organize themselves into groups, etc., for the purpose of opposing a solid front to such uniformed murderers in the future, and that we oblige ourselves, single as well as common, to avenge the brutal murder of our comrade Henderson.

Barkley’s attempt to clear the ING from all blame and get a public statement to the effect that the order to fire came from local authorities after receiving fire from the strikers themselves obviously failed to convince Miner that the ING had no political or economic agenda.

Conclusion

In the 1870s and 1880s, Illinois militia volunteers joined local companies and then sustained their membership with their own initiatives, by their own enthusiasm, and largely with their own money. They created and maintained their companies from a mixed set of personal goals; including a desire to acquire some military skills, to demonstrate their patriotism, to prove their manliness, and to show the world that they were
admirable and responsible citizens. National Guardsmen chose to be citizen soldiers because they wanted their friends and neighbors to view them as manly men and as worthy citizens who would serve their nation with honor and distinction. Strike service complicated and destabilized this program.

During strikes, guardsmen found themselves in violent, unhappy situations in which they were cursed, kicked, and shot at. Rather than providing an opportunity to serve as model citizens defending order and community, strikes offered the ING chances to argue with local sheriffs, appear to be the tool of abusive corporations, and to be the killers of previously inoffensive fellow citizens. Much as individual guardsmen were frightened by civic unrest and violent riots, and believed that the state could and should use all the power at its command to prevent or quell such outbursts, the periods when guardsmen found themselves trying to bring about local order illustrated just how difficult a task this was. It was also not a task guardsmen were well equipped to handle, but it was not one they yet had a way to reject.

The history of the Illinois militia in the 1870s—explosive growth and development triggered by the centennial celebrations, followed almost immediately by deployment in a politically and emotionally charged strike—was to shape the evolution of the Illinois National Guard for the next thirty years. The Illinois militia grew and sustained itself prior to 1877 out of a combination of patriotic enthusiasm and growing worries about achieving and displaying honorable and true manliness in the modern world. Dramatic growth and the first legislative overhaul of the militia system in Illinois all happened prior to the riots of 1877. This fact should finally put to rest the limited notion that the National Guard was solely created through collusion between business and political interests aiming to smother rebellion out of the “Dangerous Classes.”

Maintaining public order was an important concern of Illinois militia members and most other state forces and their governments, of course, but only after militia companies willed themselves into existence and sought opportunities to demonstrate their worth and importance. 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.