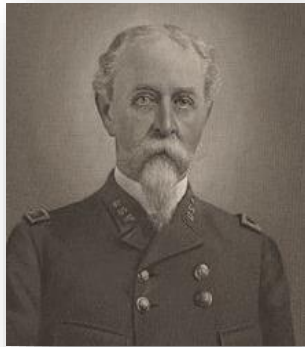


# GENERALS JOHN BRECKINRIDGE CASTLEMAN AND DANIEL R. COLLIER

## How Freemasonry Helped Avert a Second Civil War in Kentucky

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**T**he immediate aftermath of the death of Governor William Goebel in Frankfort, Kentucky on February 3, 1900 brought Kentucky to the brink of civil war within the borders of the Commonwealth. But for the intervention of two prominent Kentuckians, John Breckinridge Castleman and Daniel R. Collier,



*John Breckinridge Castleman*

each of whom were Freemasons, it is likely that armed conflict would have occurred. How these two men, who came from very different backgrounds, helped defuse such a volatile situation, is a story largely lost to history.



*Daniel R. Collier*

To understand how matters in early 1900 reached a boiling point, it is necessary to understand post-Civil War politics in Kentucky. Following the Civil War, Kentucky was politically dominated by the conservative wing of the Democratic Party,

known as the “Bourbon Democrats.” Many of the Bourbon leaders were ex-Confederates. As the 19th century neared an end, and the Bourbons Democrats grew older, their grip on political power weakened and in 1895, Kentucky elected its first Republican governor, William O. Bradley.

The election of the Republican Bradley threw the Democratic Party into disarray. Into the leadership vacuum created by defeat at the polls in 1895 stepped Covington state senator William Goebel.

William Goebel was born in Pennsylvania on January 4, 1856. In 1863, Goebel, along with his parents, moved to Covington, Kentucky. An intelligent young man, Goebel served an apprenticeship with a Cincinnati jeweler, then received a clerkship in the office of former Gov. John White Stevenson where he began the study of law under Stevenson’s tutelage. Upon graduation from what is now the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Goebel began to practice law with Stevenson. His success as a trial lawyer, along with his relationship with Stevenson, facilitated his decision to seek a career in politics.

Goebel was an unlikely politician. His demeanor was quite cold and very reserved. He was a relatively poor public speaker, especially when compared to more colorful contemporaries. Relying on his powerful intellect, Goebel forged for himself a career in Kentucky politics. In 1887 he was elected to fill an unexpired term in the Kentucky Senate. Determined to make an impression, Goebel, a Democrat, decided to cast himself as the champion of the people. He executed this plan by attacking the powerful L & N railroad,

who at that time dominated political life in Kentucky. By opposing the railroad, Goebel also opposed the entrenched “Bourbon” wing of the Democratic Party.

In 1898 Goebel secured passage of a bill known as the Goebel Election Law. The passage of this bill cemented Goebel’s image as a political boss and propelled both Goebel and the Commonwealth toward political and social chaos. The gist of the Election Law was this: The General Assembly, dominated by Democrats, would create an Election Commission. The members of the Commission would be two Democrats and one Republican. The Commissioners would then select an election commissioner for each Kentucky county. The county election commissioner would certify the results of his county’s elections in order for such results to be official. The state Election Commission would have the final determination in any challenge to election results certified at the county level.<sup>1</sup>

It was readily apparent that this arrangement was enacted to preserve the Democratic party’s grip on statewide and county offices. Although Republicans (and a few Democrats) loudly denounced the new law, the Democrats in the General Assembly had sufficient political strength to secure its passage.

The stage was now set for the 1899 gubernatorial election in Kentucky. Capitalizing on the success of Governor Bradley’s victory in 1895, Republicans saw an opportunity to retain the governorship in 1899. The Republican nominee was William S. Taylor, who had been elected Attorney General in 1895.

After a bitter and fractious state convention in Louisville, the Democrats nominated Goebel as their candidate for Governor. Disgruntled Bourbon Democrats nominated former Governor John Y. Brown (1891-1895) to run as a third-party candidate.

While it appeared that there were instances of voter fraud on each side, after the votes were tallied on November 7, 1899, Taylor had been elected Governor by about 2,400 votes. Goebel appealed the results of the election to the Election Commission created under the Goebel Election Law. To the surprise of everyone, the Election Commission upheld the results of election and on December 12, 1899, William S. Taylor was inaugurated as Kentucky’s 33rd governor.

The Election Commission, in its written decision, opined that the General Assembly had the final power to determine the validity of elections in Kentucky. Goebel quickly appealed to the Democrat dominated General Assembly. The General Assembly appointed a commission consisting of ten Democrats and one Republican to examine the election results.

Republicans, fearing that the election was about to be stolen from them, descended on Frankfort in an effort to intimidate the legislature. Scores of armed men arrived by the trainload daily and tensions in the capital ran very high. Many of the armed men who came to Frankfort formed military style encampments just outside of town. In many ways Frankfort was a city under siege.

Upon his election as governor in 1895, William O. Bradley appointed Daniel Ray Collier as Adjutant General of the Kentucky State Guard (the forerunner of our current National Guard). Daniel Ray Collier was born in Garrard County, Kentucky on November 21, 1840. When the Civil War broke out, Collier enlisted in the Union Army and quickly was commissioned as 2nd lieutenant, eventually rising to the rank of Major. He was severely wounded at the Battle of Stones River (or Murfreesboro) and never saw field action again. After the war, he was a farmer, a postmaster, and later a federal pension agent.

Newly inaugurated Governor Taylor asked Collier to stay on as Adjutant General in his administration and December of 1899 found Governor Taylor warily eying the armed men in and near Frankfort and weighing the necessity of using the State Guard to maintain order.

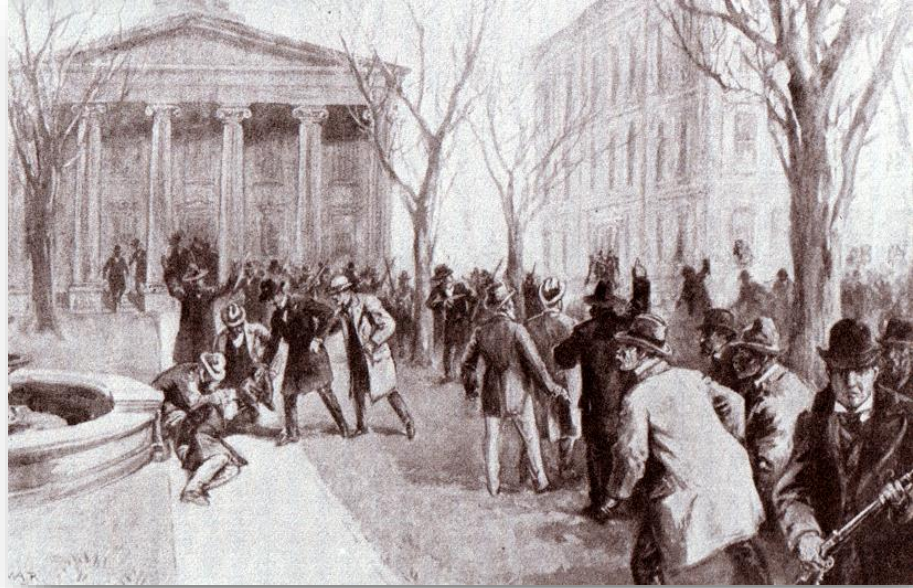
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<sup>1</sup> James C. Klotter, William Goebel: The Politics of Wrath, The University Press of Kentucky, 1977.

The election commission appointed by the General Assembly waited until after the beginning of the new year to meet and prepare its recommendation to the General Assembly. On January 30, 1900, the legislature was scheduled to meet to hear and act on the commission's report. It was widely expected that the heavily Democratic commission would report in Goebel's favor, and that the equally heavily Democratic legislature would vote to overturn the election and declare Goebel governor.

On Tuesday morning, January 30, 1900, William Goebel was shot as he approached the old capitol building in Frankfort. The shots fired at Goebel seemed to come from the third floor of the capitol.

In the ensuing pandemonium, Gov. Taylor called out General Collier and the State Guard to keep the peace and ordered the General Assembly to remove itself to London, Kentucky, and meet there.



**Sketch of the Goebel assassination in *Harper's Weekly*, 1900**

Democratic members of the General Assembly tried to meet in the capitol but were prevented from doing so by the State Guard. On January 31, 1900, meeting (illegally, according to Governor Taylor) in the Capitol Hotel in Frankfort, the Democrats in the General Assembly, which constituted a majority of the legislature, overturned the election results and proclaimed William Goebel the 34th governor of Kentucky. Goebel, although mortally wounded, was sworn in as governor.

Goebel lingered for a few days before dying of his wounds on February 3, 1900. The Democratic Lieutenant Governor, J. C. W. Beckham, who was only 30 years old at the time, was immediately sworn in as Kentucky's 35th governor. Upon taking office, Governor Beckham appointed John Breckinridge Castleman as Adjutant General of the Kentucky State Guard.

Governor Taylor disputed the legitimacy of Governor Goebel's, and consequently, Governor Beckham's, claims to the office and refused to recognize any of their acts. Taylor remained in the governor's mansion and continued to act as governor.

For a period of time, Kentucky had two functioning governments – one headed by Governor Taylor with Daniel R. Collier acting as Adjutant General and the other headed by Governor Beckham with John B. Castleman as Adjutant General.

Frankfort was both literally and figuratively a powder keg at this time. Armed Republicans were enraged at the efforts of the Democrats to overturn the election results. Affronted Democrats called the Republicans murderers and claimed that they were the rightfully elected government. With two rival State Guard factions, the slightest misstep on either side would result in armed conflict plunging the State into partisan civil war.

The Democratic Adjutant General, John Breckinridge Castleman, had been born in Fayette County, Kentucky, on June 30, 1842. Castleman is a compelling figure. Young Castleman joined the Confederate army at the outbreak of the Civil War and was one of Gen. John Hunt Morgan's raiders for a part of the war. Near the end of the war, he was sent to St. Louis with the assignment of burning federal boats docked there. He was captured and sentenced to be hung but was pardoned by President Lincoln just before the war's end.<sup>2</sup>



After the Civil War, Castleman studied both medicine and law, began an insurance agency, founded the American Saddlebred Horse Association which established a national breed registry for the Saddlebred, was instrumental in the design of the Louisville park system and raised the Louisville Legion for service in the Spanish American War. Castleman had previously served as Adjutant General of the Kentucky State Guard from 1883-1887 under Governor J. Proctor Knott.

Castleman and Collier were well known to each other, and both were Freemasons. Castleman was a member of Falls City Lodge No. 376 in Louisville (now consolidated with Buechel Lodge No. 896) and Collier was a member of Bryantsville Lodge No. 197 in Garrard County (which went defunct in 1888).

Because Gov. Taylor had been sworn into office first, the Republicans had physical possession of all the state office buildings, including the state armory. Gen. Collier made his headquarters at the armory and conducted the operations of the Republican State Guard from that post.

Much to the surprise of the clerks and officers on duty at the state armory, Gen. Castleman appeared one morning and asked to speak with Gen. Collier. Castleman was escorted into a room where Collier was working, along with several aides. Gen. Castleman, upon being greeted by Gen. Collier, asked if the two of them could meet privately. Collier instructed the others present to leave the room, then locked the door with he and Castleman inside.

Once alone, Castleman and Collier discussed the delicate position in which they found themselves and the possibility for armed conflict between the two parties. Both men realized that to a large extent, the fate and reputation of the Commonwealth rested in their hands.

Here is Castleman's description of the meeting:

General Collier and I were Masons, and it was upon the obligations imposed by Masonic pledge of brotherhood and fraternity that reliance was lodged to strengthen and make impregnable a fortress constructed on Masonic honor to protect our people.

We knew that the unusual condition would, on both sides, develop impetuosity. This we agreed should not affect either of us and that, dealing with each other on fraternal grounds, we should always find accord in Masonic truth leading to the goal of brotherhood and fraternity.

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<sup>2</sup> John B. Castleman, *Active Service*, Courier Journal Job Printing Co., Publishers, 1917.

To this end, with pledge to each other to this Masonic fulfillment, we agreed to do nothing without co-operative action in order that our Masonic honor might redound to the good of a troubled and infuriated people. <sup>3</sup>

Castleman proposed to Collier that they vow to each other, upon their Masonic honor, not to use force against each other, or to direct others to use force, until the appropriate Courts could decide which party had the legitimate claim to power.

Collier enthusiastically agreed to this proposal and these two Masons pledged to work together to subdue the high political passions that threatened to overwhelm the Commonwealth. From that point forward, tensions gradually (and slowly) subsided and peace returned to the State.

There are two points here worth mentioning. First, Castleman knew that a pledge upon his Masonic honor would be meaningful to Collier. For a Mason to pledge anything upon his honor should be a complete guarantee of truth and integrity. A Masonic pledge of fidelity was so respected that, once given, Gen. Collier could have no doubt as to the outcome.

Second, Collier knew that Castleman's Masonic pledge could be relied upon wholly. And in such knowledge, Collier did, in fact rely upon Castleman's pledge. From that point forward, Collier was free to direct his energies toward reducing tensions among the men that he commanded. From Collier's perspective, a Masonic pledge was an inviolable guarantee.

On May 22, 1900, in compliance with an Order of the U. S. Supreme Court, Gen. Collier yielded the office of Adjutant General to Gen. John B. Castleman. Gov. Beckham's claim to office was upheld and

Gov. Taylor fled to Indiana, where he spent the rest of his life. As an interesting aside, Gov. Beckham was soon to become a Freemason, joining Duval Lodge No. 6 in Bardstown, Kentucky. Perhaps his desire to become a Freemason was influenced, at least in part, by the heroic examples of Bros. Castleman and Collier.

Gen. Collier died at Lancaster, Kentucky on January 22, 1904 and is buried in Lancaster Cemetery.

Gen. Castleman survived until May 23, 1918, when he died in Louisville, Kentucky and is buried in Cave Hill Cemetery.



**J.C.W. Beckham**

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



On November 8, 1913, some years prior to his death, the City of Louisville dedicated a magnificent equestrian statue of Castleman at what is now Cherokee Triangle. Castleman is depicted in civilian clothing and is astride Carolina, one of his beloved American Saddlebred horses. The accompanying historical marker recounts Castleman's military service, his contributions to the Louisville Park System and his founding of the American Saddlebred Horse Association. In recent years, the monument has been vandalized by those who object to Castleman's Confederate affiliation. In an unsurprising display of political spinelessness, the City of Louisville has announced plans to relocate the statute in an effort to appease the willfully ignorant.

In reality, Kentuckians owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to these two men. Daniel Collier was a committed Republican and John Breckinridge Castleman was an equally committed Democrat. Both men viewed the role of government in very different ways. Yet in the hour of crisis, it was these two men, former opponents on the field of battle and political opposites, who, upon their honor as Masons, pledged to put the good of their State above their allegiance to their political party.

The names of Daniel Collier and John Castleman are now remembered by only a few. But their example should be a daily reminder to all of us that application of the Masonic values of truth, integrity and brotherly love are ultimately greater than either the ballot box or the bullet; and thus applied, are capable of healing a broken country's deepest wounds.