

THE STORY OF CAMP FULLER

Located in Churchill's Grove and organized in response to the call of Abraham Lincoln for 300,000 men to fight for the cause of the Union, Camp Fuller was established in July, 1862. The Rockford camp would serve Winnebago, Boone, Lake, McHenry, and Jo Daviess Counties. Four regiments were organized at Camp Fuller -- the 74th, the 92nd, the 95th, and the 96th.

Adjutant General Fuller came to Rockford in July of 1862, to inspect possible locations for the camp. From many possible sites, he selected one about a mile north of town in a beautiful grove on the west side of the Rock River. The area was then known as 'Churchill's Woods' or 'Churchill's Grove'. The owner was M. C. Churchill, a farmer, who leased his land to the U.S. Army. The boundaries of the camp were present day Guard Street, Post Avenue, North Main Street, and the Rock River.

Fuller named Colonel Jason Marsh as commandant. Marsh had also helped set up the first 'common' school system and was Rockford's first School Inspector. Marsh named the camp for Fuller. 'We like it. It is named after a man we like, because he has proven himself a true man and the fast friend of our gallant soldiers.' Those were the words spoken by Colonel Jason Marsh according to an 1862 issue of the 'Rockford Democrat', in explanation of his first order as commandant of the new Camp Fuller.

In its early stage, Camp Fuller was a tent camp. By August 16, the quartermaster and sutler's buildings had been erected. Orders came to build barracks for 4000 troops. The soldiers assisted the carpenters, and the buildings were completed by August 30. The hospital building still stands at 1260 North Main Street.

The Camp became a center of interest for Rockford and area residents. They visited the camp to watch drills and dress parades. The townspeople contributed bedsteads, straw for mattresses, jellies and various delicacies to be used in the hospital. Each week, two members of the Rockford Ladies Soldiers Aid Society served as volunteers in the hospital.

On September 24, 1862, the 74th Regiment marched from Camp Fuller to the railroad station with Colonel Marsh leading the 950 men. At the battle of

Missionary Ridge in November, 1863, the 74th Regiment was one of the first to plant its colors atop the enemy stronghold. Their flag, which went through 16 major encounters, is on display at Memorial Hall. At the end of the conflict in 1865, the 74th Regiment had been reduced from 950 to 170 soldiers.

All the troops had left Camp Fuller by the end of 1862, and the camp was abandoned. The U.S. Government sold 300,000 board feet of pine lumber at auction. The next spring, the land was replanted to corn, as it had been before the war.

(Much of this information was taken from a 1973 issue of 'Nuggets of History' written by William Condon, whose great-grandfather Charles Wilmarth was a member of the 74th Regiment from Camp Fuller.)