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EIGHTH REGIMENT CHRONICLES

Col. John R. Marshall

Part Two

The second part of John R. Marshall's career began with his retirement from the active colonelcy of the Eighth. That was in 1914.

It was quite a surprise to Negro Chicago. As Colonel of the Eighth Illinois, John R. Marshall had become a Chicago institution. He was "The Colonel" and no one thought of him otherwise.

Who would succeed him? Many thought that it would be Major Robert R. Jackson; but when the lightning fell it hit Major Franklin Denison. Denison was not as popular as either Marshall or Jackson; and his succession to the throne proved to be a repetition of the Marshall-Buckner situation.

The years had erased the bitterness in regard to Marshall obtaining the colonelcy instead of Buckner obtaining it. For a while there was to be a new bitterness . . . that on the part of Marshall's admirers and, also, on the part of those who expected Jackson would receive the mantle.

It didn't disrupt the regiment; neither did it render John R. Marshall a fallen leader. Denison the aristocrat

Col. John R. Marshall

Venton Johnson

assumed the reins of the regiment; and Marshall the democrat enlarged his own civilian usefulness.

In 1916 I was a young man active in public life. I was starting my first magazine. Col. Marshall introduced me to the directors of the Western Publicity Bureau of the Republican party.

The colonel discussed politics as one who had a hand in shaping politics. To the politicians he was Jack; to a young man like myself he was the Colonel.

As for Essie I remember her saying in my presence: "That magazine should go over big. We need to show the people out East we can get up something better than their Crisis."

When the Colonel and the business manager of my magazine and I went to the Republican party offices, I noticed that the Colonel had shaved off his mustache. It gave the sandy-haired fellow the appearance of Andrew Jackson, of "Old Hickory" himself.

During this twentieth century when a man reaches his half century mark if he is a man prone to mustache or beard he is apt to eliminate such and assume a true Roman appearance. It is not always a matter of vanity but simply that maturity impels a politician to follow Julius Caesar, the world's greatest politician.

There was that controversy between myself and the so-called business manager of my first magazine. When I started my second

Col. John R. Marshall

Penton Johnson

magazine (1918) Marshall was very much under the influence of Jesse Bings and remarked that I was "a hopeless fellow."

One evening in 1920 I joined the Appomattox Club. I noted that Col. Marshall was at the new clubhouse in jovial conversation with his fellows. There was present also that Kentucky "Colonel," William Randolph Cowan, so engrossed in a game of cards that when I was introduced to him, despite the fact that we knew each other very well, shook my hand listlessly. Cowan was one of the few of his race who held officially a Kentucky "Colonelcy."

When I returned from New York in 1921 the Bings State Bank had been organized and Bings, who was anxious to obtain as many quadroons on his staff as possible, had appointed Col. Marshall as the bank's vice-president. Carroll Langston another quadroon and descendant of Congressman John Mercer Langston, was appointed cashier and secretary of the bank.

Marshall had nothing to do but show his white face occasionally. During the early days of my first magazine Bings had ordered me to take the picture of Robert Russa Moton, distinguished principal of Tuskegee Institute, off the wall.

"I don't care who he is," shouted Bings. "He's too black. Leave Col. Marshall's picture there . . . he looks like white."

Annually Bings tendered the Negro aristocracy ~~with~~ what he styled a "Chicago twilight ball," formal costume requested."

Col. John R. Marshall

Fenton Johnson

As a relative of Binga's wife that same aunt who was my father's younger sister . . . I was forced to attend.

At the "twilight ball" of 1921 Marshall wended his way out of the crowd of merry-makers and shook hands with me.

Before I proceed further with the story of Marshall and Binga, I should intersperse this narrative with an incident characteristic of Col. Marshall. My older paternal aunt had just died. My brother impressed me into service as one who should "watch" all night with her casket.

I went to my late aunt's residence. It was nearly midnight. When I entered the room in which the casket was placed I discovered that Col. Marshall was sitting there in his stocking feet, snoozing Once he opened his eyes, looked at me, and smiled. The second time he opened his eyes he remarked, "I'm going to be here all night."

Upon that I excused myself and went home, to a bride of scarcely six months.

In time I was conscripted into service in the Binga Bank as its "publicity director." The years I spent in that institution were miserable years. Cowan, often enough, cheered me with his bluff good-fellow shouting. (He was a bank director.) De Priest seemed to realize the spot that I was in, a recognized poet in an institution belittling Negro achievement in letters and art. Marshall was always friendly he

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Col. John R. Marshall

Fenton Johnson

would drop in occasionally, sit ~~at~~ his desk in the lobby, and smile at me, ensconced on the mezzanine floor.

I left the employ of the bank and a year or two later the squabble started. Binga's hand-picked directors revolted. Marshall was among them, as was also Langston as well as De Priest.

The bank that had never been a paying institution went down as the waves of the depression engulfed the nation. Marshall and others lost whatever they had invested in the enterprise while Binga ^{lost} merely other people's money, especially his wife's.

Marshall, De Priest, and the other directors sought to save the bank through ousting the incompetent Binga and electing a capable man to preside over the institution and free it of its heavy debt. The egocentric Binga wouldn't stand for it and as through corporation law he controlled the institution the patriotic rebels were at a loss to rescue the savings of over ten thousand Chicago Negroes.

The bank went into receivership during the beginning of the thirties. After that I never saw Col. Marshall. He had reached the period of old age and perhaps disillusionment. The political party that he had served so faithfully (and for a lifetime) went into eclipse, though not out of existence as in the case of the bank.

Col. John R. Marshall

Fenton Johnson

Undoubtedly, as an ailing old man, Marshall, meditating on the busy years of his career, must have had the satisfaction that though some institutions he served did not fare so well others endured. Especially he must have been ~~stated~~ that his first love the Eighth Illinois National Guard had not been swept away but was strong as ever.

Before the scythe of the Grim Reaper reached him two of his successors as Colonel of the Eighth had passed on to that mystic realm. Otis Duncan was dead . . . Franklin Denison was dead. None of Marshall's staff in Cuba survived him but Robert R. Jackson. The Major is yet alive although recently retired from the Chicago City Council.

In 1938 Marshall closed his eyes in death and in paraphrase of biblical language "there was exceeding mourning in the land." He had not lived in vain.

~~Sometime later I saw Essie on one of the streets in the Loop. The red hair had turned white but the smile remained. Although it might have been a social breach I was impelled to offer my sympathy.~~

~~"What was passes," remarked Essie, "and in time we become what was."~~