

WABASH VALLEY

P R O F I L E S

A series of tributes to hometown people and events that have shaped our history.

Nicholas Filbeck

A Civil War hero, hotel proprietor and postmaster, German-born Nicholas Filbeck was a dynamic Terre Haute civic leader for 50 years.

Nicholas was only three years old in 1847 when his parents, Philip and Anna Marie (Winkler) Filbeck, brought him to America from Hesse-Darmstadt. A younger brother perished during the voyage; his mother died two years later in Indianapolis after giving birth. Philip brought his two surviving children to Terre Haute in 1850, opened a grocery store at Fourth and Walnut streets and several years later operated Telegraph Mill at Lafayette and Elm.

On Aug. 24, 1861, contrary to his father's wishes, 17-year-old Nicholas enlisted in August Willich's celebrated "first German Regiment" — the 32nd Indiana Volunteers — an integral unit in every major conflict in Kentucky and Tennessee. During the Battle of Stone's River at Murfreesboro Dec. 31, 1862, a Rebel shell struck Filbeck's right leg, fragmenting the tendons in his calf and foot. Gravely wounded, he was rescued from the battlefield by Confederate cavalryman Richard McCann and cared for by McCann's comrades and family. Filbeck never forgot their humanitarianism.

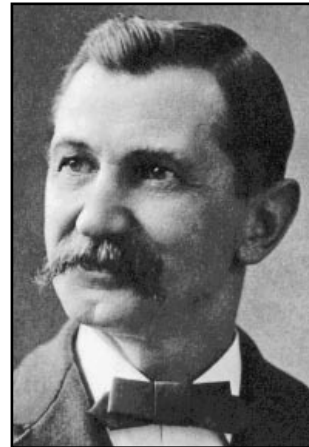
Notified that lockjaw was imminent and death probable, Philip arranged to move his son to a Louisville hospital to treat the gangrene. Nicholas received therapy for two months at the Indianapolis Soldier's Home. Though permanently crippled, he rejoined his regiment supported by a cane in time for the Chickamauga campaign. He was mustered out Sept. 7, 1864, and wrote a history of the regiment several years later.

Filbeck's gregarious personality converted his handicap to advantage. Upon marrying Rosina Kiefner of Lawrence County, Ill., in 1867, he co-managed the Cincinnati House, a hotel at Fourth and Wabash, with a brother-in-law. In 1872 he bought the old Prairie City Hotel at Fifth and Cherry streets, naming it "The Filbeck House." Twenty-six years later he built the four-story 99-room "New Filbeck Hotel" on the site using architect William Floyd's design.

Though Filbeck's leg needed constant medical attention, it was a perpetual reminder of his valor. An energetic politician, he was Vigo County Republican Party chairman for 20 years and beginning in 1873 served two four-year terms as Terre Haute's postmaster. A colonel in the Union Veterans' League, he spearheaded efforts to acquire the building formerly occupied by the State Bank of Indiana (Terre Haute First National Bank's oldest ancestor) for the Grand Army of the Republic and was the first Memorial Hall Association president.

The Filbecks had five children: Anna Marie, who married Robert Hayman; twins Louise and Charles Henry; Rutherford Nicholas "Nick"; and Nelle Cecilia, who married Malcolm Steele. Louise was a gifted elocutionist who taught at Coates College for Women before her death in 1896 at age 26. Charles Henry, manager of The Filbeck and Hotel Deming, wed actress Fanny Garland.

Filbeck died at his hotel apartment May 5, 1915, at age 72. His widow died Sept. 23, 1924. The family is buried at Highland Lawn Cemetery.



TERRE HAUTE

(812) 238-6000



NATIONAL BANK

Always Close to Home