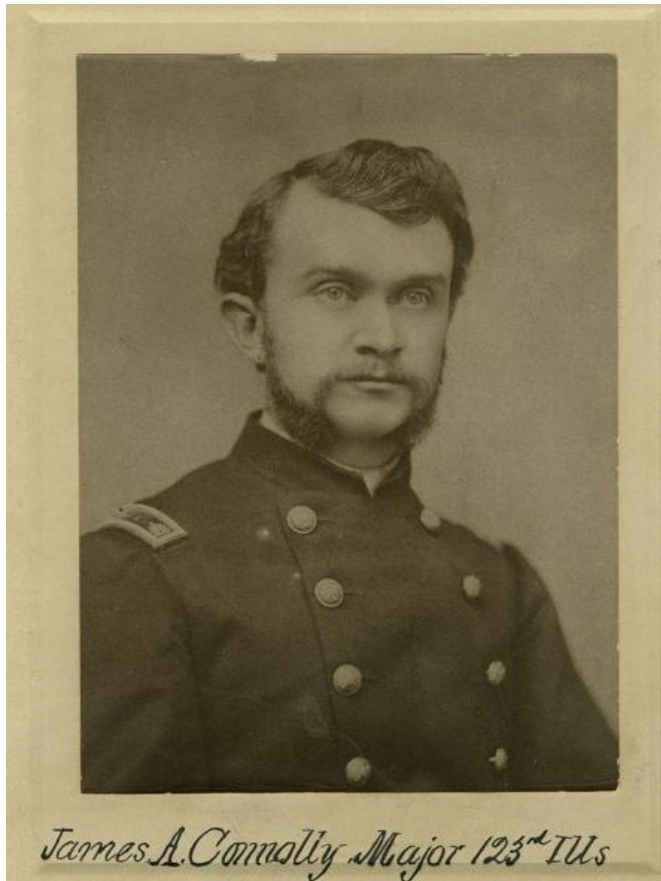


# MAJOR JAMES AUSTIN CONNOLLY



James A. Connolly Major 123<sup>rd</sup> Ills

James Austin Connolly was residing in Charleston when he joined the 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry, but his story bears mentioning here, as he was involved with Colonels Monroe and Biggs from the earliest days of the Regiment.

James A Connolly was born in Newark, New Jersey, on 4 March 1843. In 1859 he was admitted to the bar in Ohio and in 1860 moved to Charleston to begin his law practice.



Connolly was mustered into the newly forming 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry on 6 September 1862 and was elected Captain of Company C. When the Regiment was formed, he was promoted to Major, serving as Adjutant under Colonel James Monroe.

At the battle of Milton, Tennessee, he was thrown from his horse when the pommel of his saddle was shot away. At Bentonville, North Carolina, he was struck by a bullet which hit the buckle of his sword belt. Again, at Missionary Ridge, a shell exploded directly over his head, throwing him from his horse. After the battle of Chickamauga, on 26 September 1863, Connolly was detailed by General Thomas as inspector of General Baird's division of the XIV Army Corps, thus he was not with the Regiment at Farmington, Tennessee, when his great friend Colonel James Monroe was killed. He wrote the following to his wife a few days later:

*"My regiment was the one selected, they dismounted, and took the battery but lost one of the bravest and best officers in the army. That is the only fight my regiment has ever been in when I have not been with it.*

*He was a gallant and accomplished officer, and during our entire period of service, we have become bosom friends... He fell like a brave man by a bullet through his heart while charging a rebel battery, but the regiment, inspired by his example, rushed on and took the battery and routed the rebels."*

Connolly continued to serve as inspector of the XIV Corps until the end of the war. He mustered out, still officially attached to the 123<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Infantry on 28 June 1865.

Connolly returned to Charleston to practice law until 1876 when he was appointed as United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois by President Grant. He served in that position until 1894, with a brief interlude between 1885-1889 when he returned to private practice in Springfield.

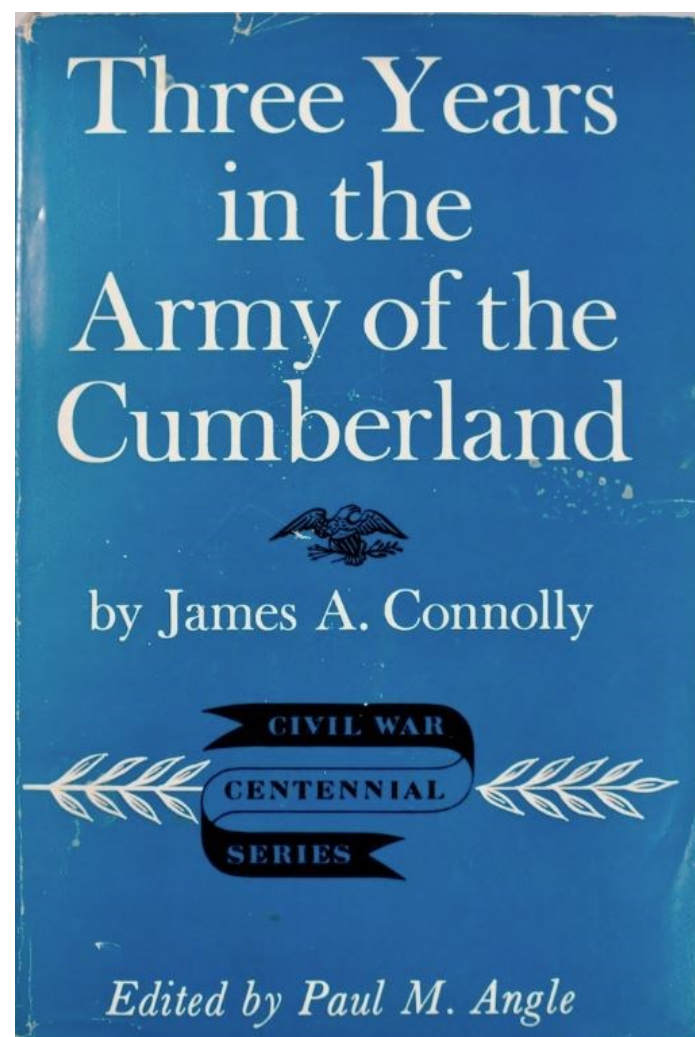
Connolly also served a term as Charleston mayor, two terms in the Illinois Legislature and two terms in the U S Congress. He ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination for Governor in 1888.

Connolly was very active in the Grand Army of the Republic and served a term as Commander of the Department of Illinois.

On 20 September 1899, the 36<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Chickamauga, an 85-foot-high tower was dedicated to the Wilder Brigade at the battlefield. Funds for the monument, were raised by veterans of the Brigade.

General Wilder was on hand to give the keynote address and the dedication address was given by Major James A Connolly.

James A Connolly passed away in Springfield on 15 December 1914.



While James A Connolly had a sterling war record and a very successful postwar career, what makes him important to this Civil War Center is his book: *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland*. This book gives a vivid, almost day by day contemporaneous account of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Infantry during the war years. Connolly meticulously recorded events in his diary and in letters home to his fiance and later wife, Mary Dunn.

A copy of the book can be found in the center bookcase.