

1874: The Brooks Baxter War

Images of period illustrations showing Reconstruction scenes, the photograph of the State House from the 1870s, similar engravings, a photograph of Powell Clayton, historical images of Joseph Brooks and Elisha Baxter, as well as scenes from the Brooks-Baxter War.

The scene shifts to the Governor's Office. Baxter is seen seated at his desk, conversing with his son, age 12 or so. Suddenly the door crashes open and armed men enter the room. One of them is Joseph Brooks.

Brooks hands Baxter a piece of paper. Baxter studies it briefly with disgust.

Narrator Voice Over: Despite the obvious talents of men such as William Grey, blacks received only token representation during Reconstruction. The same was true of native Unionists. Instead the Reconstruction government tended to be dominated by recently immigrated entrepreneurs and ex-Army officers, the so-called "carpetbaggers," headed by a capable and courageous ex-cavalry commander named Powell Clayton.

This split among Republicans became particularly intense after Clayton moved on to the U.S. Senate, culminating in the 1872 election. This pitted two candidates, each seemingly better suited to the opposition. The candidate of the moderate Republicans and ex-Confederates was the fiery ex-abolitionist Joseph Brooks, who felt he had been excluded from the inner circles of power by Clayton. Similarly Elisha Baxter, a moderate native Unionist, headed the slate for the Claytonites.

Baxter was declared the winner in an election marked by irregularities on both sides. Baxter surprised everyone, however, by beginning to dismantle the machinery of Reconstruction. By 1874 the Radical Republicans had shifted their support to Brooks. Surreptitiously they obtained a court order declaring Brooks governor.

Baxter: What is the meaning of this outrage? I have my young son with me.

Brooks: Mr. Baxter, I have a court order for your removal from office.

Baxter: The Supreme Court has already upheld my election.

Armed men lead Baxter and his son out.

Cut to Gen. Catterson directing his men, about half of whom are black. The men hurry off as they receive their assignments.

In the end Catterson is left briefly alone, but he is soon joined by Brooks. The two share a look that seems to indicate that they realize they are involved in a desperate enterprise.

Close up of Lady Baxter, the Old State House cannon.

More historical illustrations from the Brooks-Baxter War.

A portrait of Ulysses S. Grant

Brooks: This is a district writ, but I also have 25 armed men with more on the way.

Baxter: Am I to be summarily executed or merely tortured into renouncing my office?

Brooks: You and the boy are free to go. These men will escort you off the premises.

Catterson: You two men get an ax and hack the front and back door jams wider. I want to be able to wheel our field piece out to cover either the river or the street.

You four break into the armory and start hauling guns and ammunition inside.

Warner, figure how to get on the roof. We need a picket up there.

Corporal, take eight men up to the House and Senate. Station them so they have a full field of fire covering the front and back lawns. Have them use furniture to cover their backside. I don't want anyone shooting through the windows at our men on the opposite walls. Whatever you do, don't let them get between us and the river. There's a boat with a hundred men due within the hour!

Narrator: Baxter took up headquarters at the Anthony House, a tavern two blocks away. Supporters quickly rallied to both sides. Though there were several armed skirmishes around the state, no direct attempt was made to take the State House. Eventually President Grant sided with Baxter rather than call into question his election victories in the South. Brooks

	reluctantly vacated the State House. Reconstruction had come to close in Arkansas.
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