The Battle of Mineral Springs

JOHN HMUROVIC

Late on an October evening in 1912, the patrons of Brown’s Hotel in French Lick, Indiana, heard a voice shout out, “The last car leaves for West Baden Hotel at 11:30 and is just about to leave.” The nearby West Baden Springs Hotel, with its distinctive 200-foot-diameter dome, had been a familiar landmark in Indiana for a decade. Equally prominent in the valley, located just across the street from Brown’s, was the French Lick Springs Hotel. Since its opening in 1901, the names on French Lick’s guest register had included the rich and famous. Like Brown’s and West Baden, French Lick Springs drew visitors for its access to the area’s therapeutic mineral waters. They came to play golf and to breathe the clean country air; to play tennis on French Lick’s grass court; to stroll through the formal gardens and along the flower-filled grounds; to relax while experiencing any kind of spa treatment desired; to dance to the music of the hotel orchestra; to dine on the finest food. They came to enjoy the best of luxurious relaxation that early twentieth-century America had to offer. What drew most visitors, however, may have been the thrill of gambling. ¹

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¹“Gambling Down at French Lick,” Shelbyville Republican, November 2, 1912; James Philip Fadely, Thomas Taggart: Public Servant, Political Boss, 1856-1929 (Indianapolis, Ind., 1997), 71-75.
The French Lick Springs Hotel, 1911. Thomas Taggart’s luxurious hotel and its extensive grounds attracted wealthy and famous guests.

Courtesy, French Lick Resort

Golfers at the French Lick course, c. 1900. Patrons of the local resorts enjoyed golf, tennis, spa treatments . . . and gambling.

Courtesy, French Lick Resort
On that October night in 1912, elegantly dressed patrons were playing roulette, poker, and keno. Like West Baden, Brown's drew a big-spending crowd. With major rail service from Chicago and Indianapolis, the hotels attracted wealthy gamblers from a wide area, especially in May, when horseracing fans en route to the Kentucky Derby filled every room in the hotels. Other casinos in the area accommodated gamblers of more average means, but all of them had one thing in common—they were illegal. Despite the fact that gambling was against the law in Indiana, the casinos of the Springs Valley operated openly. “Gambling is never interfered with” in French Lick, claimed the Fort Wayne News in 1912, “although it is conducted openly on a twenty-four-hour schedule for three hundred and sixty-five days every year.”

More than 250 miles north of French Lick, near the Indiana shores of Lake Michigan in Porter County, a different story played out on the afternoon of October 22. In the town of Porter, a bugle sounded as four men on horseback moved slowly forward toward a line of soldiers pointing Springfield rifles, bayonets attached. The riders brought the horses to a halt just three feet from the tips of the bayonets. “Get ready to go,” came a voice from the side, directed at the horsemen. “Don't go!” shouted the commander of the troops who raised his hand to emphasize his warning. The horses danced nervously while the riders, bewildered, awaited instructions. Then the command came. The jockeys turned their horses around, returned to the stables, and let loose a stream of obscenities aimed at the Indiana National Guardsmen who had stood in their way. At the point of bayonets, the state of Indiana had enforced the law against gambling and put an end to horse racing at the Mineral Springs Race Track in Porter County.

Why did the state send troops to combat gambling in Porter County in northwest Indiana, while allowing it to flourish in Orange County in southern Indiana? Observers in 1912 gave many answers to that question: the state feared that Chicago gamblers might establish a base in Indiana; a faction of Chicago gamblers who wanted the Porter County track to fail had manipulated Indiana officials; a powerful Indiana politician saw the

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2Shelbyville Republican, November 2, 1912; Fadely, Thomas Taggart, 74-75; Fort Wayne News, October 31, 1912.

track as a threat to his business interests; and (in an explanation that still resonates among many residents of the Calumet Region today) state officials had acted under a double standard, treating French Lick and other places in the state (including Indianapolis) one way, and the northwest corner of the state a different way.

To understand what happened at Mineral Springs in 1912, we must begin with the three strong-willed and successful men who are central to the story. From a financial standpoint, the most successful was Thomas Taggart of Indianapolis, the owner of the French Lick Springs Hotel. The most successful in winning political office was Thomas Marshall of North Manchester, the governor of Indiana who stood just weeks away from election to the office of vice-president of the United States. The third man, A. F. Knotts of Hammond, the owner of the Mineral Springs Race Track, never came close to matching Taggart’s wealth or Marshall’s political accomplishments. Yet he possessed an impressive record of success in both arenas.

Ohio-born Armanis Francis Knotts, known to everyone as A. F., grew up on a farm near Medaryville in Pulaski County, Indiana. As a small boy, he often went hunting and fishing along the Kankakee River and developed a lifelong love of nature. He was still in law school at the Northern Indiana Normal School (later Valparaiso University) when he won election as Porter County surveyor. He resigned after eighteen months to move to Hammond and open a law firm. He was intelligent, with a broad range of interests, always developing new ideas and dreaming up new opportunities. In 1896, he led a delegation to Washington to pursue one of his dreams: to turn Wolf Lake at the northern tip of Hammond into a major Lake Michigan harbor. He did not succeed. In 1898, he won election to the Indiana House of Representatives, but only served one term.4

In 1902, Hammond voters elected Knotts mayor. The city was struggling. Its first industry, the G. H. Hammond meatpacking plant, had burned to the ground, leaving many unemployed. The city suffered from poverty, rioting, and labor unrest. In his two-year term, Knotts brought eleven new businesses to the city, replaced all of the city’s old wooden sidewalks, and helped establish its first library.5

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5 A. F. Knotts, City Builder, Is Dead,” The Hammond Times, October 4, 1937.
It was just after Knotts’s term ended that Elbert Gary’s U.S. Steel Corporation decided to build a major plant in the Midwest. The company hired Knotts to buy the land it needed for the project. While Gary had favored a site near Waukegan, Illinois, Knotts convinced him that the Indiana shores of Lake Michigan, a few miles east of Hammond, offered better rail service, lower taxes, and less congestion. Still, the company needed 9,000 acres for its operation and would have to deal with multiple property owners. Knotts knew that prices for the land would skyrocket if word leaked out about the buyer. He secretly purchased much of the land, including seven miles of prime lakeshore, for an average cost of $800 per acre. U.S. Steel built its mill and established the city of Gary in 1906.6

Knotts had a blunt personality. He was “somewhat pompous, a bit aloof, opinionated and not always tactful….He also tended to pontificate,” his great-nephew said, many years later. “He believed he knew how things ought to be and he would tell people without waiting to be asked.” Frank Knotts also remembered his mother telling him “that once in a while….a bystander would toss a rock in the direction of his car. They didn’t aim to hit the car which they easily could have done, but seemed more interested in expressing a feeling.”7

By contrast, those who knew Thomas Taggart probably liked him. “I enjoyed making friends just as a person might enjoy catching fish,” Taggart once said of himself, while his biographer, James Philip Fadely wrote that “there is no one who came into contact with Taggart, friend or enemy, who would ever deny his winning personality and genuine friendliness.” That personality played a major role in his success, and by most measures, Taggart led a successful life.8

Born in Ireland in 1856 (just a year before Knotts), Taggart arrived in America at the age of five. He came to Indianapolis in 1877 and quickly became one of the city’s most prominent hotel owners and operators. He entered politics and won election as Marion County auditor in 1886. After winning re-election in 1890, he demonstrated his generosity and winning personality when, out of concern for the losing candidate’s family, he reimbursed the man’s campaign expenses.9

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9Ibid., 14-15.
Taggart's political and business successes continued through the 1890s. In 1895, he became mayor of Indianapolis and served in that office until 1901. “A good part of the beautiful municipal parks in Indianapolis,” Fadely writes, “stand as a lasting legacy to him.” Important as was his local influence, two developments moved him toward national prominence in the first years of the twentieth century: In 1900, he became the Democratic national committeeman from Indiana; and in 1901, he bought the French Lick Springs Hotel.¹⁰

A fire had badly damaged the hotel in 1897. Taggart rebuilt and expanded it, and by 1912, it was a first-class establishment. At the same time, his power in the Democratic Party was growing. In 1904, after Taggart's behind-the-scenes maneuvering as head of the Indiana delegation played a key role in the party's nomination of Alton Parker of New York for president, Taggart was selected as chair of the Democratic National Committee, a position he filled for four years. After his term ended, Taggart continued to be a political leader, or as his opponents preferred to call him, a “boss.” Like any successful political boss, Taggart often operated behind closed doors, using his intelligence, charm, and power to influence people and achieve his goals.

Thomas Marshall was a small-town lawyer from North Manchester in Wabash County. He was “brilliant…a splendid trial lawyer” and “a man who thought deliberately,” in the later words of journalist John Bartlow Martin. In 1908, Marshall won the Democratic nomination for governor, although he had done little to obtain the nomination, claiming that a group of friends had advanced his candidacy. Marshall's victory resulted largely from a standoff between the Taggart and anti-Taggart delegates at the Indiana Democratic convention. When neither side was able to muster enough votes for their candidate, Marshall, not identified with either faction, emerged as the compromise candidate. He went on to serve four years as governor.¹¹

Marshall's nomination for the vice-presidency in 1912 also came about because of a deadlocked convention. Taggart, who as the head of the Indiana delegation had succeeded four years earlier in obtaining the Democratic nomination for vice-president for Indiana attorney John Kern,

¹⁰Ibid., 29-49, quote p. 34.
once again proved the critical agent of change. After twenty-seven ballots without a decision, Woodrow Wilson’s campaign manager asked Taggart to switch Indiana’s votes to Wilson’s side. Taggart agreed, in exchange for the party’s selection of Marshall as its vice-presidential nominee.¹²

Prior to the 1912 election, Marshall’s only political experience had been his four years as governor. Wilson, whose aides had to persuade him to accept Marshall on the ticket, called the Hoosier lawyer a “small-calibre man.” Some recognized his positive qualities and reasonable temperament. Josephus Daniels, who served as secretary of the Navy while Marshall was vice-president, felt Marshall was underrated, and that he had a “devotion to the public weal.” Most agreed that he was a kind man, excellent as a public speaker and political campaigner and possessed of an irreverent sense of humor.¹³

The story that brought the careers of Knotts, Taggart, and Marshall together at Porter County’s Mineral Springs Race Track in October 1912 begins about twenty years earlier, when someone discovered mineral water near the town of Porter. Entrepreneurs, including Knotts, soon began to bottle and sell the mineral water. Knotts also bought property near the springs, promising “country and homelike accommodations” and trying to lure visitors by advertising “all the advantages of West Baden, French Lick and other health resorts with no gambling or other vices.” Soon, he developed grander plans. The French Lick resort drew thousands of visitors a year, many of them from Chicago. If people were willing to travel all night from Chicago to Orange County, Knotts reasoned, even more would come to a similar resort located just an hour from the city. Using Taggart’s French Lick Springs Hotel as a model, he planned to build a resort not far from the shores of Lake Michigan.¹⁴

Knotts financed his project by recruiting a team of prominent northwest Indiana political, legal, and business leaders to serve as investors. This well-connected team purchased 1600 acres, and by August 1, 1912,
they made their plans public. They would build a grand hotel with baths and spas, as well as a golf course, baseball field, and gardens, located in “the beautiful valley of the Little Calumet River.” In order to bring in more revenue for the project, Knotts proposed to build a racetrack, which he and his partners planned to open in October. Construction had to begin immediately. Investors also had to convince horse owners to bring their thoroughbreds to Indiana to race. Their biggest challenge, however, was also their most basic: horseracing was legal in Indiana, but gambling was not.15

Knotts again used Taggart as his guide. Taggart never admitted that gambling took place at his resort in French Lick. Yet, as Fadely writes, “it stretches the imagination to believe he was not connected in some way.” Knotts likewise denied that gambling would be a part of his Mineral Springs racetrack. He said he would hold expenses to $3,000 a day and

expected that daily attendance of four or five thousand, at $1 each for admission, would bring in enough money to make a small profit in the first year. Virtually everyone else was skeptical. “A betless racetrack will be a good deal like a dance hall without the girls,” said the Chesterton Tribune, “and about as hard to make pay.” If Knotts really believed that he could make a profit on a racetrack with no betting, he based his optimism on the knowledge that Chicago was desperate for horseracing. Horseracing was one of America’s favorite sports in the early 1900s, second perhaps only to baseball. However, for eight years, there had been no horseracing in, or near, the nation’s second city.16

Chicago’s reputation for corruption extended well before 1912. Gamblers controlled the city through bribes to police, judges, politicians, and anyone else who would look the other way while they made a fortune breaking the law. Gambling bosses usually worried more about their rivals than they did about police, politicians, or reformers. One faction set fire to a racetrack owned by competitors; another hired constables to raid the gambling halls of its rivals; bombs mysteriously exploded at gamblers’ homes. By 1904, that kind of headline-making behavior made it difficult for politicians to ignore reformers’ cries, and they shut down the city’s racetracks. The gamblers then looked to northwest Indiana as a place to do business.17

Northwest Indiana offered easy, fast transportation—Chicagoans could get to cities like Hammond in a half-hour. Lake County, the heart of northwest Indiana, was also in the midst of a population explosion spurred by the construction of numerous industrial plants in the wake of U.S. Steel’s Gary development. In 1900, Lake was the thirteenth largest of Indiana’s ninety-two counties, with a population of just over 37,000; by 1920, it ranked second. The region’s courts, police, and entire government structure were undeveloped, overwhelmed, and easy to manipulate. The primary obstacle Chicago gamblers faced was from Indiana reformers, who opposed gambling with the same fervor they applied to the prohibition of alcohol. “Why should I moralize or preach to the Christian Governor

16Fadely, Thomas Taggart, 76; “Indianians Back of Turf Revival,” Chicago Tribune, August 1, 1912; “Horses Are On the Way,” Chesterton Tribune, October 3, 1912; Chesterton Tribune, June 12, 1913; Charles Leerhsen, Crazy Good: The True Story of Dan Patch, the Most Famous Horse in America (New York, 2008), 7.

of a Christian state,” Rev. E. W. Lawhon from the Benton County town of Boswell wrote to Governor Winfield Durbin in 1901, asking him to close down a gambling den in Lake County. The minister continued that he did not want to see “any part of Indiana being made the devil's dumping ground.”

Every Indiana governor of the era was under pressure to deal with violations of the state’s prohibition of gambling. In 1912, it was Governor Thomas Marshall’s problem. From the start, Marshall opposed the Mineral Springs track. The state filed an injunction to prevent the track from operating, but the scheduled court hearing was four days after the track’s October 16 opening day. For the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, the timing could not have been worse—opening day was less than three weeks before the 1912 election, and Marshall was on a cross-country campaign swing.

No one believed Knotts's claim that no betting would take place at the track. “The men who are building the track know they can't run it without gambling,” said Bud White, one of Chicago’s leading gamblers, who saw a way for Chicago bookmakers to make a profit from the track and get around Indiana’s betting ban. “My idea is that the bets at the track should all be verbal agreements, with no money passed,” White explained. “If you come to me and say, ‘Bud, I want to bet $50 on this horse,’ all I do is nod my head. Then the bet is on. Of course, I’ve got to know you and know that your credit is good before I nod.” White planned to collect from the losers, and pay the winners, across the state line in Illinois.

Estimates of crowd size on the first day of racing ranged from three to five thousand. The Lake Shore Railroad ran a special train to the track, as it planned to do every day of the racing season. Depending on which

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20“Arrangements Made for ‘Killing’ at Meet in Porter, In Early Next Month,” Chesterton Tribune, September 19, 1912, reprint of Chicago Record-Herald, September 15, 1912. Pari-mutuel betting was not common at U.S. racetracks at the time. Gamblers placed bets with bookies who stood around the track, set their own odds, and paid off only those who had placed bets with them. See Richard Sasuly, Bookies and Bettors: Two Hundred Years of Gambling (New York, 1982), 71-72, 127.
The grandstand and track at Mineral Springs Race Track. From its opening day on October 16, 1912, the track was popular with Chicago racing fans and gamblers.

Collection of Steven R. Shook

Starting line, Mineral Springs Race Track. The 1912 racing season was cut short on October 22, when the track was closed by two companies of the Indiana National Guard.

Collection of Steven R. Shook

report one reads, the bookies were either hard to spot or easy to find. The day “was marked by open and flagrant violation of the state’s gambling laws,” according to the Chicago Record-Herald. The Porter County Vidette reported that most local people who were there saw no betting, adding that
while Sheriff Clayton Wood and his deputies kept a close watch on the crowd, “sufficient evidence could not be unearthed to warrant arrests.”

“Big Jim” O’Leary, who controlled gambling in Chicago’s Back of the Yards neighborhood, had the betting privileges at the track. Any bookie who wanted to take bets had to pay O’Leary twenty-five dollars a day to operate. Each bookie wore a small white button in his lapel so that O’Leary could make sure no one was taking bets without paying him first. By the end of the first day, some of the bookies abandoned the “nod” system of taking bets. With no law enforcement in evidence, they felt free to gamble openly.

On October 17, the day after the track opened, Marshall was traveling west to campaign. When his train stopped at Chicago’s Dearborn station, Marshall stepped off with his wife and secretary to eat breakfast. He was greeted not by party officials, but by reporters wanting to know why the governor had not shut down the Mineral Springs track.

Marshall was blunt and defensive. Weeks earlier, he had alerted Sheriff Wood to the track and the gamblers’ plans to evade state law. “Anyone violating the law,” Wood had responded, “will be promptly arrested and prosecuted.” Now the newspapermen were claiming that the sheriff was doing nothing while bookies were openly taking bets. The Chicago Record-Herald, already critical of Marshall’s inaction, reported: “While Governor Marshall of Indiana was in Chicago yesterday on his way to La Salle Ill., to make a political speech...the gamblers were making the most of their second day of defiance of the Indiana statutes.” The same article quoted the governor as saying that “the sheriff down there has been ordered to arrest any person seen gambling or making book, and he told me that he would carry out his orders. That’s all I can do about it.” According to the Chicago Tribune, Marshall took a harder line: “Indiana will not become the dumping ground for Chicago handbook men. I gave strict orders to


the sheriff at Mineral Springs to arrest any one found betting on the races and if that man has failed to perform his duty he will get his deserts.”

Within an hour of talking to the reporters, Marshall sent a telegram to Mark Thistlethwaite, his top aide, telling him to put pressure on Sheriff Wood. The next day, Marshall telegraphed again: “If attorney general says law is being violated and sheriff will not do his duty, have militia sent to enforce the law.” He added that, if necessary, he would cancel his campaign stops and return to Indianapolis.

With pressure building on the fourth day of racing, sheriff’s deputies arrested two gamblers, as well as a reporter for the Record-Herald (the Chicago newspaper that had protested most loudly about the failure of the sheriff’s office to arrest gamblers) who had placed a bet as a part of his exposé of betting at the track. While a witness against him showed up in court, and a hearing date was set, the court dropped charges against the two gamblers, one of whom was O’Leary. According to the Porter County newspaper, the gambling boss walked into the courtroom smiling, knowing that the witnesses to his arrest, and to the arrest of the other gambler, would not show up in court. No one, the reporter observed, even seemed to know who those witnesses were. After walking out of the courthouse in Valparaiso, O’Leary handed out sheets of paper containing the odds he was offering on the upcoming presidential election.

October 19 was also the date of the long-awaited court hearing regarding the state’s request to close the track. While the defense came well prepared, the state was represented only by a local lawyer who surprised everyone when he filed a motion to withdraw the state’s case. Chicago’s gambling community celebrated, believing that the state had “surrendered” because it knew it would lose. Hundreds of Chicago gamblers and bookies,


confident that no more attempts to close the track would follow, quickly made plans to go to Mineral Springs. “The first race,” the Record-Herald wrote on October 20, “found them in their places, making bets as swiftly as they could list them, displaying money and offering odds with...non-chalance.”

Not everyone, however, saw surrender in the works. The Chicago American reported that the state was preparing to send in the National Guard. The newspaper was right, but the final decision was still a day away. State officials had hired the Burns Detective Agency to infiltrate the Chicago gambling community and gather evidence. On the morning of October 20, a detective known only as Operative #52 traveled to Indianapolis to report to Thistlethwaite and Attorney General Thomas Honan. Earlier that day, Thistlethwaite and Honan had met with one of Knotts’s partners, who told them that the track owners would do all they could to stop the gambling. Thistlethwaite instructed the detective to return to the track the next day and call him that night with a full report. The track owners had one last chance to stop the gambling.

The next day, Operative #52 brought with him a second detective, Operative #41. On board the crowded train from Chicago to Mineral Springs, hawkers working their way down the aisle offered a twenty-five-cent handicap card, listing the odds on all the horses for the day’s six races and expert advice on which horses would win. At the track, beneath the grandstand, sixteen bookies opened for business twenty minutes before the first race. The large crowd of bettors pushed and fought their way from one bookie to another, shopping for the best odds. Operative #41 placed five dollars on Jacobite, the favorite in the fourth race. The man he approached marked the bet in his book and asked for his initials. “A.R.B.,” the detective told him, and the bookie wrote it down.

Jacobite did not win, but those who had better luck rushed back to the betting ring as soon as the race was over. “You had better stand in


29Operator #52 reports and Operator #41 reports, October 21, 1912, Folder 15 Law Enforcement Race Track Gambling at Porter Co., box 74, Thomas R. Marshall Collection; “Militia Ordered to Stop Racing at Porter Track,” Chicago Tribune, October 22, 1912.
line or you won't get paid,” one bookie yelled. No one attempted to cover up what was going on. The bookmakers openly displayed large sums of money while paying off the bets. George Gardner, an ex-fighter who ran a gambling house in Chicago, and bookie Tom Walters stopped by the bar under the grandstand. “Easy money,” was how they described the scene at Mineral Springs. All of this unfolded before the eyes and ears of the two detectives. At 7:30 p.m., back in Chicago, Operative #52 called Thistlethwaite with a full report. By 9:30 p.m., two companies of the Indiana National Guard, Company F from South Bend and Company M from Rensselaer, had received their orders to proceed to Mineral Springs and put a halt to gambling.30

October 22 was a cold, rainy morning in northern Indiana. The guardsmen arrived at the track at 12:45 p.m., about ninety minutes before the scheduled start of the first race. The ticket seller at the entrance gate tried to stop the soldiers, insisting that each one needed to pay the one-dollar admission fee. Major George Freyermuth, in charge of the companies, pushed past and shouted out an order for his men to take charge of the gate. As an angry Knotts approached, a crowd of about two hundred gathered to witness the confrontation. Knotts defiantly told the Major that the races would start, and the crowd let out a loud cheer. “All right, go ahead,” Freyermuth said. “Just as soon as you do, we’ll stop you.”31

When the first train arrived from Chicago, several guardsmen met it and told the passengers not to disembark. Ignoring the soldiers, people walked on toward the gate until one soldier yelled, “Halt!” With bayonets pointed at them, the crowd obeyed. “But we have paid our money for tickets,” one man protested in vain. Because this was also to have been ladies’ day, when women could get in free, someone asked the soldiers to let the women in out of the rain. “This is the progressive age for women,” Freyermuth responded. “When they come to a track they must take their chances like the men.”32

30Operator #52 reports and Operator #41 reports, October 21, 1912, Folder 15 Law Enforcement Race Track Gambling at Porter Co., box 74, Thomas R. Marshall Collection; “Troops Sent by Governor to Track,” Lake County Times, October 22, 1912.


The crowd outside the track heard the bugle announcing the first race, and hundreds rushed to the fence to see what would happen. The jockeys and their horses came onto the track and arrived at the starting gate. The official starter told the jockeys to be ready; Freyermuth warned them not to go. The soldiers stood their ground, bayonets pointed at the bellies of the horses, and the jockeys turned back. A stable hand tore down an American flag that flew in front of the judges’ stand and cried out, “There ain’t no liberty in this country.” A horse owner bought him a drink.33

As the confrontation ended, rain began to fall in torrents. Under the grandstand, a track employee wrote out an announcement on a blackboard: “Just as soon as executive anarchy is suppressed legal racing will proceed.” The bookies and bettors who had gotten into the track before the troops arrived let out cheer after cheer; some tossed their hats into the air.34

Knotts was visibly angry when he spoke to reporters. “We have only started our fight,” he said. “Governor Marshall has so far exceeded his authority as to make himself ridiculous. The fact that he has sent the soldiers to occupy private property in a time of peace is absolutely unconstitutional and an invasion of property rights.” Knotts said the track was under “martial law,” spelling out the word—“M-A-R-S-H-A-L-L”—to make sure everyone understood. Within days, Knotts moved the battle to the courts, seeking an injunction to force the troops to leave. Superior Court Judge Harry Tuthill, stating that the court could not interfere with the governor’s responsibility to enforce state law, denied the motion.35

Owners shipped out their horses by the trainload as soon as they heard the news. Within days, there were few horses and no need for the soldiers to remain. Knotts, unready to quit, announced that the track would reopen on November 2 and would feature a special race called the “Tom Marshall Derby”—run not by horses but by jackasses. Only two hundred

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33“File Case Against State Officials,” Porter County Vidette, October 23, 1912; Chicago Record-Herald, October 23, 1912.
34Chicago Record-Herald, October 23, 1912; Chicago American, October 22, 1912.
35Porter County Vidette, October 23, 1912; “Fixed Bayonets End Horse Races; Suit Threatened,” Chicago Inter-Ocean, October 23, 1912; “Races Will Be Resumed at Porter Tomorrow,” Chicago Daily Journal, October 23, 1912; “Writ Denied to Track; Marshall is Upheld,” Chicago Daily News, October 26, 1912. Tuthill was judge of the Superior Court of LaPorte and Porter Counties.
people showed up for the reopening, but Knotts posted a defiant notice that Mineral Springs would open again the next year. 36

Racing resumed at Mineral Springs on July 3, 1913. For twenty-two days in July and August, large crowds came to the track, encouraging horse owners, track owners, gamblers, and bookies. Then, in late August, new governor Samuel Ralston called out the Indiana National Guard. As soldiers from South Bend and Rensselaer returned to close the track, the Chesterton Tribune reported that “A. F. Knotts lit out for the Kankakee River the morning after the invasion, and has been spending his time since then telling his troubles to the fishes.” One week later, Knotts returned to meet with his fellow owners and decide upon a course of action. 37

Knotts announced that the owners of the Mineral Springs track planned to sue the state for damages. On September 30, he headed to Indianapolis to urge the governor to let the courts decide who had authority over the track. However, in a letter to Ralston, Attorney General Thomas Honan reiterated the earlier court decision affirming the governor’s power to enforce the law. Ralston wrote to Knotts, saying that he had sent in the troops because the “race course was being used as an instrument of gambling,” and because local officials had been either unwilling or unable to enforce the law. With that, the Mineral Springs track closed for good. 38

Many observers opined that politics lay behind what had happened at Mineral Springs. Knotts had not supported Marshall’s Democratic Party in the 1912 election; he had attended the Bull Moose convention in Indianapolis “wearing a Roosevelt button as big as a saucer.” But Knotts claimed that he was not the one playing politics. The governor, he said, “winked at gambling previously;” but suddenly found religion “because of his vice-presidential aspirations.” One Gary newspaper suggested that


38“Will Begin Suit for $50,000 Damages,” Chesterton Tribune, September 4, 1913; A. F. Knotts to Samuel M. Ralston, October 6, 1913, Samuel M. Ralston Collection, 1913-1917, Correspondence, Indiana State Archives; Thomas M. Honan, Attorney General of Indiana, to Samuel M. Ralston, October 20, 1913, Samuel M. Ralston Collection, 1913-1917, Correspondence; Governor Samuel M. Ralston to A. F. Knotts, October 22, 1913, Samuel M. Ralston Collection, 1913-1917, Correspondence.
Marshall had been in a political bind: As long as he had allowed the track to operate, his opposition could paint the Democratic vice-presidential nominee as “too weak a man” to stand in line for the presidency. Marshall, however, insisted that he was simply doing his job—enforcing the laws of Indiana. Years later, he wrote in his autobiography: “These gamblers assumed they could run these races, get away with them and the money, and that I would give as an excuse that I was absent from home. They also assumed that as a candidate I would be afraid to antagonize the sporting fraternity of the country. Therein they made a mistake.”

Marshall also claimed that he had been concerned about Chicago crime spreading to Indiana: “I was never sworn in as governor for the thugs of Chicago.” Certainly, evidence appeared to back up his claim. Two years earlier, Marshall had confronted a group of Chicago gamblers over a “poolroom” built along the railroad tracks, just west of Gary. The only way to get to the remote location was by a special non-stop train from Chicago arranged by the gamblers. The group had invested several thousand dollars in the facility, certain that they had Lake County officials under control and that Marshall would not interfere. Marshall, however, had forced local authorities to act by threatening to send in state troops if they did not. The poolroom closed. In the same year, Marshall had also threatened to use state troops to close Louisville-controlled poolrooms along the Ohio River. The local sheriff raided and padlocked the poolrooms, which never reopened.

The one gambling site in Indiana that remained in operation was French Lick. In the early years of Taggart’s ownership, Republican governor J. Frank Hanly had tried to close the facility. Hanly, with no allegiances to Taggart, was also a strong opponent of gambling and drinking who would later leave the Republican Party to join the Prohibition Party and run as its candidate for president in 1916. The state of Indiana filed suit to force
the French Lick Springs Hotel Company to forfeit its charter, but the case was still in the courts when Hanly’s term ended in 1909.41

After re-elected state attorney general James Bingham brought the new governor up-to-date on French Lick, Marshall asked local authorities to handle the matter. Few Orange County residents supported the shutdown of French Lick Springs. Six hundred people in the small community depended on the resort for their income, and many area residents believed that Hanly’s attempts to stop gambling had been motivated by his political opposition to Taggart. In March 1910, after four years of investigations and court hearings, an Orange County jury required only a few minutes of deliberation to rule in favor of the hotel.42

Marshall had already decided not to intervene if the jury refused to rule against the resort: “If Orange County juries will not convict, if they choose to judge the law and the evidence in such a way as to enable the game keepers to continue, what are we to do?” That decision inflamed many, who concluded that Marshall had refused to act solely to protect the business interests of fellow Democrat Taggart. The editor of the Fort Wayne News declared that no matter what the people of Orange County wanted, it was Marshall’s responsibility to enforce the law and shut down the resorts in French Lick: “When local self government becomes misgovernment and anarchy, it is time for the state government to assert itself.”43

Marshall’s unwillingness to use the power of the state to end gambling in French Lick was not forgotten when he stopped the horses from racing in northwest Indiana, especially in the midst of a political campaign. Indianapolis’s Republican mayor Lew Shanks said Taggart wanted Mineral Springs shut down so that it would not compete with his resort. Even a supporter of Marshall, such as the editor of the Commercial-News of Danville, Illinois, wondered, “Why doesn’t he stop the Monte Carlo at French Lick, where a health resort is owned and operated by Tom Taggart, Democratic boss of Indiana?” The Lake County Times agreed: “Why

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41David J. Bennett, He Almost Changed the World: The Life and Times of Thomas Riley Marshall (Bloomington, Ind., 2007), 105-107; Fadely, Thomas Taggart, 110-113.
42Thomas, Thomas Riley Marshall, 76-77.
the state troops, costing hundreds of dollars a day, up here and not even a constable at French Lick.”

If Taggart did wield behind-the-scenes influence on his own behalf, there is no evidence of it. As an operation that was barely off the ground and struggling to make money, Mineral Springs posed no immediate threat to his business interests. In addition, French Lick drew high-spending gamblers from Chicago; the typical bettor at Mineral Springs probably could not afford a trip to a luxury resort. There was, however, a political reason for Taggart to show an interest in seeing Mineral Springs closed, and it came to light years later when one of Marshall’s biographers interviewed Mark Thistlethwaite.

Thistlethwaite recounted that Taggart had invited him to lunch in October 1912, in the midst of the Mineral Springs controversy. Unaccustomed to invitations to Taggart’s private dining room in the Denison Hotel in Indianapolis, Thistlethwaite suspected that the reason for this invitation had to be Mineral Springs. As the waiters cleared the tables after lunch, Taggart said that he was pleased with Thistlethwaite’s efforts to close down the Porter County track and told him to keep up the good work. It was the only time Taggart spoke to him about Mineral Springs.

Thistlethwaite later received information suggesting that Taggart was acting on behalf of his friend and political ally Roger Sullivan, the Illinois Democratic Party boss who had close ties to Chicago’s gambling and vice community. Sullivan may have let Taggart know that he would be pleased to see Mineral Springs shut down, and, as a favor to his political ally, Taggart spoke to Thistlethwaite. But even if Sullivan did ask Taggart for help, there is no evidence that Taggart’s efforts to follow through had any impact. Marshall was already moving forward with closing the track before the lunch with Thistlethwaite.

Marshall’s decision to shut down Mineral Springs likely stemmed from two primary reasons: He saw it as his duty to enforce the law, and he felt the need to act decisively in the final days of a national campaign. However,

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46Thomas, Thomas Riley Marshall, 80.

47Ibid., 81.
Marshall’s decision not to challenge the jury verdict that kept French Lick operating opened him up to accusations of a double standard—one set of laws for Indiana, another for Thomas Taggart. In northwest Indiana, it also reinforced many residents’ conviction that one set of laws applied to northwest Indiana and another to the rest of the state.

Even Hoosiers from elsewhere in the state wondered about the existence of such a double standard. In 1901, the *Indianapolis Sun* had wondered why Governor Durbin seemed intent on closing down a gambling den in northwest Indiana that was so remote that few outside of the Chicago gambling community even knew where it was, while at the same time he did nothing about the “undisputed accounts” of gambling around French Lick.48

In 1907, years before his dispute with Governor Marshall over Mineral Springs, Knotts complained similarly when Governor Hanly closed down another gambling den in rural northwest Indiana: “It is strange to me that they can have prize fights and poolrooms in Indianapolis and nothing is said, while if a poolroom is run out in the wilderness of Lake County the papers are full of it, and everybody howls.”49

After Marshall’s closure of Mineral Springs, the *Lake County Times* said it feared what would happen if Woodrow Wilson became president and died in office, and the vice-president became president: “We suppose he [Marshall] would order out a brigade of United States regulars and a fleet of super-dreadnoughts to this corner of Lake County when anybody won a hand-painted pickle dish at a bridge party.”50

Whether based on fact or perception, many early twentieth-century Hoosiers talked about the differences between the northwest corner of Indiana and the rest of the state, often making reference to the influence of Chicago. “Hammond is close to Chicago, and many of the evils of that big city are foisted on this place,” wrote *Indianapolis News* reporter W. H. Blodgett in 1906. He went on to describe Hammond in unflattering ethnic stereotypes, saying that the “big factories, shops and packing houses bring to this city hordes of ignorant foreigners—Poles, Hunyaks, Austrians, etc., who are hand led by unscrupulous politicians.”51

48*Indianapolis Sun*, August 9, 1901.

49“Knotts’ Hot Shots,” *Lake County News*, April 18, 1907.


During his term as governor, Marshall, “restive under the lack of enforcement of law and order” in the new but fast-growing town of Gary, had commented to a reporter: “It would afford me great relief, if some night Gary would slip off into Lake Michigan.” He later called his remark “foolish,” but for some residents of northwest Indiana, the words—compounded by his actions in Porter County and his lack of action in Orange County—offered confirmation that the relationship between the rest of the state and its northwest corner was “them versus us.”

Thomas Taggart continued as a political power in the state and nation. In 1924, he worked to influence the Democratic Party to nominate former Indiana governor Samuel Ralston as its presidential candidate. Ralston was the front-runner until he dropped out due to health issues. Taggart died in 1929. Biographer Fadely estimated that he had made as much as one million dollars from his gambling privileges at French Lick.

Thomas Marshall served eight years as vice-president of the United States, and Mark Thistlethwaite went to Washington as his top aide. After leaving office, Marshall practiced law in Indianapolis until his death in 1925.

A. F. Knotts never again attempted to open a racetrack. He developed an interest in the Indiana Dunes and helped to begin the movement to turn the area into a national park. In 1923, he moved to Florida, founded the town of Yankeetown, southwest of Gainesville, and became its first mayor. He was a leader in the Florida Republican Party and ran (and lost) a statewide race for comptroller. He became the first president of the Izaak Walton League in Florida and established seventy chapters of that environmental organization. He was one of the proponents of a cross-Florida barge canal to connect the Gulf of Mexico to the Atlantic Ocean. He envisioned Yankeetown as the canal’s terminus, predicting that the community “will become one of the largest, if not the largest, cities on the Gulf Coast of Florida.” The project never became reality, and Knotts

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53 Fadely, Thomas Taggart, 184-93, 113-14.
54 “Thistlethwaite Remembered,” Valparaiso Evening Messenger, November 7, 1912.
55 In 1916, Knotts became one of the organizers and the first president of the National Dunes Park Association. George S. Cottman, Indiana Dunes State Park: A History and Description, Publication No. 97, Department of Conservation, State of Indiana (Indianapolis, Ind., 1930), 35; Rebecca A. Shepherd et al., eds., A Biographical Dictionary of the Indiana General Assembly, vol. 1, 1816-1889 (Indianapolis, Ind., 1980), 225.
In 1923, Knotts left Indiana for Florida, where he became active in state and local politics and worked with the Izaak Walton League.

Thomas H. Cannon et al., *History of the Lake and Calumet Region of Indiana*, vol. 2 (1927)

Armanis F. Knotts, c. 1920. In 1923, Knotts left Indiana for Florida, where he became active in state and local politics and worked with the Izaak Walton League.

Thomas H. Cannon et al., *History of the Lake and Calumet Region of Indiana*, vol. 2 (1927)

died in 1937. Today, Yankeetown is a community of about five hundred. In 1975, Eugene Knotts dedicated the town’s A. F. Knotts Public Library as a tribute to his uncle.56

In 1917, lightning struck the grandstand of the Mineral Springs Race Track, and the structure burned to the ground.57 A steel processing plant now sits where the track once stood. Today, five casinos operate along the shores of Lake Michigan and eight others are located across the state, including one at French Lick. Indiana also claims two horseracing tracks—Hoosier Park in Anderson and Indiana Downs in Shelbyville—and at both those facilities betting on horses is legal. Mineral Springs was well ahead of its time.
