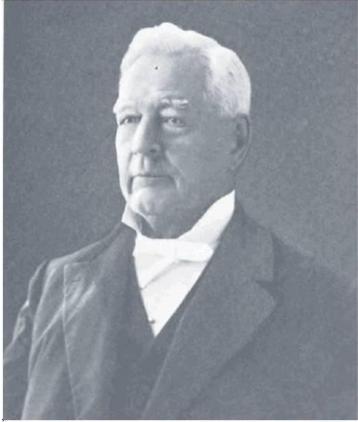


PRESERVING A NATION

Amendments: Civil War about slavery

BY RANDY KOCH

SPECIAL TO THE REGISTER



Warren Perry Noble, a Democrat who represented Erie County in the U.S. House, voted against the Constitutional amendment to end slavery.

The Confederate guns trained on Fort Sumter ripped through the predawn darkness. Across the South, boys rushed to enlist, eager to put a whooping on the condescending Yankees and gain their independence. Their counterparts to the North did likewise, feeling it their duty to punish the arrogant Rebels daring to break up the Union. Both feared their generation's war would end in victory before they claimed their share of battlefield glory.

Few soldiers or civilians imagined on that April day in 1861 that the coming four bloody years of fighting would claim nearly 750,000 lives and would emancipate 4,000,000 enslaved people. The end of the first year of fighting did confirm this war would be bloody and long. Not until Abraham Lincoln announced in the fall of 1862 that emancipation would commence on Jan. 1, 1863 in all territories in rebellion against the United States, did the masses realize that the Union now fought a war of liberation.

With the fall of Atlanta on Sept. 4, 1864, all but the staunchest Confederates realized Union victory was inevitable. Following substantial victories in the polls two months later, Republicans moved forward to convert President Lincoln's wartime edict into Constitutional Law.

With 11 Confederate states still absent from the United States Congress, one would assume the 13th Amendment would quickly pass and be forwarded to 25 Northern states for ratification. As portrayed so dramatically in the movie "Lincoln," the amendment experienced a tenuous journey through the United States House of Representatives.

It finally passed by a vote of 119 to 56 on Jan. 31, 1865, 40 days before Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse and 45 days before John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln. In Ohio, a perceived Union stronghold, the Republican majority elected in 1864 had not yet taken office. Ohio's U.S. Representatives closely followed party lines, with 11 of the 19 representatives voting against the amendment and two abstaining. Five Republicans and one Democrat voted yes. Two of the 14 Democrats abstained. Erie County's Democratic representative Warren Perry Noble voted against the amendment.

As evidenced with bloody conflicts throughout the ages, the end of fighting rarely mandates the desired results. The "War to End All Wars," as the victors naively referred to World War I, maintained peace barely two decades. The Allies crushed Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan in World War II, yet opened the door to the global threat of Communism from the Soviet Union and China, not to mention the introduction of nuclear weapons to the planet.

Ratifying the 13th Amendment 150 years ago outlawed slavery, but did little to modify the environment in which it had existed. The subsequent 14th Amendment, ratified on July 9, 1868, granted citizenship to all persons born or nationalized in the United States, including former slaves.

A 15th Amendment, which was ratified on Feb. 3, 1870, declared that citizens of the United States would not be denied the right to vote on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Those who erroneously claim our Civil War was not about slavery need only look at these three amendments. Had there been no slavery, there would have been no Civil War. We now look back a century and a half and realize the dynamic transformation in American society that this war of epic proportions initiated.

Regrettably, this is the final article in the Sandusky Register's Civil War Sesquicentennial Series, which appropriately began in April 2011 commemorating the attack on Fort Sumter. It is altogether fitting and proper that we conclude by commemorating the states' ratification of the 13th Amendment, finally ratified on Dec. 6, 1865. A number of people contributed to the success of this series, which produced more than 50 articles. Erie County Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee members Angie George, Brenna Walker, Annette Wells, Maggie Marconi, Neil Allen, John Hildebrandt and Jim Barnard have been faithful contributors addressing a number of intriguing subjects. Erie Shores & Islands Welcome Center's Brian Shifiet and California resident Robert Lang Jr. each wrote an article. Kelleys Island author Leslie Korenko submitted several. The Sandusky Register's Tom Jackson and Vicksburg National Military Park Ranger Daniel Koch regularly enriched the series. More than 50 articles by 13 authors – truly a collaborative effort.

Our committee would be remiss by not acknowledging the Sandusky Register's eagerness to provide the venue. Above all, thank you to our loyal readers who have on numerous occasions expressed your appreciation for the series. Our sincere hope has been to augment the knowledge of the students of the Civil War, create the desire for a greater understanding for those with a causal interest, and most importantly, ignite the flame to learn more for those who possessed no prior familiarity with our American Civil War.

Randy Koch is Erie County Civil War Sesquicentennial Committee chairman.