

The Civil War and Clark County

By Josh Braswell, Jason Duzan, and Brad Maynard

The military conflict between the United States of America (the Union) and 11 secessionist Southern states organized as the Confederate States of America is the definition of the American Civil War that lasted from 1861 to 1865. This war was a conflict between different beliefs of people from different regions. The Civil War greatly affected many areas of the U.S., but I'm going to focus mainly on the Civil War in Illinois, and even go further and talk about the Civil War in Clark County. On December 3, 1818, Illinois became the 21st state of the Union. At this time, many of the people already living in this area were pro-slavery. But when Illinois became a state, many anti-slavery people settled here, and this caused a great movement of the pro-slavery group to the South.

According to Ron Powell and Ed Bahr, one of the things that affected this area, and all over, was the use of trains. More troops got involved in the war because of trains. It did not take as long to get from point A to point B because of the increased speed of trains, compared to wagons and horseback. The men could get more artillery, food, clothing, and medical supplies faster than before. All in all, trains speeded up the process of the Civil War greatly.

The use of trains had an effect on the economy of this area, as well. The trains lessened transportation on the National Road. Traffic declined and the Archer House and carriage houses were affected because they had little business. The sharp decline in people passing through early Marshall caused many businesses to close. It was not just in Marshall that the business decline took place. It started in central Indiana and continued to Vandalia. All along the National Road, cities were dying. In addition to the decline in traffic and customers, businesses suffered because business owners and their families were turning their attention toward the war.

Among the people in this fresh, upcoming state of Illinois were many activist groups. Some of these groups were, of course, the anti-slavery groups. These people engaged in many marches, rebellions, and so forth, and these people also played a great part in the war. Another activist group in Illinois was the Copperheads. These were the people that lived in the North and supported the beliefs of the South. This group caused a great uproar among the anti-slavery people and even rioted among themselves. These riots caused difficulties in the lives of many people with both the copperheads and abolitionists living in the same area. One of these riots in Alton, Illinois, resulted in the burning of most of the city and the death of famous abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy.

From Illinois, 256,297 men fought in the Civil War. From Clark County, there were about 1500. Many of them were young men that were drafted because the North wanted a young, strong army. Most of the men from this area fought in either of the 21st, 62nd, 79th, 123rd, and 152nd regiments for the infantry. Some men from Clark County that were in the 123rd regiment of the infantry division were lucky enough to be under the command of Ulysses S. Grant for the first few battles of the war. There were really no famous heroes from Clark County, but our men fought for what they believed in.

One soldier from Clark County, John M. Hollenbeck, kept a journal, which was a brief summary of his war days. He told of accounts where they would charge into war, sometimes in hand to hand combat. He also told of how they would lay on their backs and wait and wait. Another account told how they would set up camp and all throughout the day would fire cannons upon one another for months at a time. John M. Hollenbeck died in the War of Antietam.

Another conflict about the Civil War in this area was the reason for the war. Many men did not believe the war was for slavery, but other men voiced the opinion that if it were not for slavery, they would not be fighting.

Abraham Lincoln was another big issue. He was clearly on the Union's side and so he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which outlawed slavery. Many people around here opposed the Emancipation Proclamation.

The most surprising thing that we learned was how nearly everybody around here was for the South! The people who were known for favoring the South were called Copperheads, and like Ron Powell said, "There were a lot of Copperheads around here." He also said that the people around here hated the Emancipation Proclamation because they were all for slavery. That really surprised us because as we were growing up and going through school, we had always thought that we here in Marshall were against slavery and against the South.

Ron Powell and Ed Bahr are very knowledgeable Civil War buffs. They taught us many interesting facts about the Civil War and Clark County, and we thank them for the information and their time.

We would like to thank everyone who assisted us in writing this report. Their help was of great value to us.