

Document Background

Published in 1868, the Beers Atlas was the first statewide map showing individual houses and property owners. Along with the maps of the state, this atlas includes Delaware history, census information, and agricultural and manufacturing production statistics. The *United States Before the Civil War* map is reproduced here with the permission of J. Weston Walch, Publisher.

Although this map is taken from the 1987 edition of *U.S. History Map Activities*, the company has issued a more recent edition of this publication.

The three other documents used in this lesson are located in the Executive Papers Collection. This collection includes the papers, correspondence, and other materials that chronicled the activities of the state's chief executive and appointed cabinet officials. These three documents can be found in Record Group 1300, Box 319140, Folder 1861, Correspondence Out of State.

Background Information

The story of Delaware's involvement in the War of Rebellion, or Civil War, is one of the most interesting chapters in the state's history. The second smallest state in the Union and a border state between the North and South, Delaware was courted by each side before its legislators ultimately decided upon Union allegiance. Historically a slave state, by 1860, according to census data, only 1,798 slaves remained in Delaware. Fully 75% of the remaining slaves lived in Sussex County.ⁱ On the whole, the majority of Delawareans believed in going to great lengths to avoid entering any conflict, which would pit them against fellow Americans. Many advocated allowing southern states to secede and form another nation within the bounds of this country. It was the physical geography of the state that contributed to the population, economic, and industrial differences between the more urban New Castle County and the rural Kent and Sussex Counties, and these differences played extremely emotional roles in the final decision to remain in the Union. Delaware "represented a microcosm of the country as a whole,"ⁱⁱ and strong tensions existed both before and during the war as the state and individual families divided their loyalties between the Yanks and the Rebels. Wilmington's proximity to cities like Philadelphia as well as its increasing industrialization moved it in ideas and actions much closer to the northern cities with their increasing wealth and population diversity. The lower two counties remained agricultural, much more like the Southern states, and maintained a rural pace of life. The most graphic representation of the division is the actual decision-making process that led to Delaware's continuance as a member of the Union. The political atmosphere in the state revealed that Union support was anything but a certainty. Lincoln had finished fourth in the Presidential election in Delaware, a state dominated by the Democrats. The Governor, William Burton of Milford, was an adamant anti-abolitionist. The Delaware Senate was under the control of the Democrats. The House was in control of "The People's Party" but only by one vote. The entire Congressional delegation was sympathetic to the secessionist movement occurring in the south and believed that a state convention should be held

to decide the fate of the state. However, the legislature voted against the proposal, deciding, instead, to listen to Henry Dickinson, special envoy from Mississippi, address the legislature. After the presentation and long ensuing discussions and debates, Delaware decided not to cast its vote with the south unless Maryland and Virginia did so. The debate over a decision on secession continued to cause alarm and dissension within the state.

Some important figures within the state believed that the secession decision was a sovereign right of the individual states. James A. Bayard, United States Senator, was a Republican by party but believed that war should be avoided at all costs, including allowing secession. An ardent states' rights supporter, he was decidedly against any anti-slavery action proposed or taken because of legislation as they were against the rights of the individual and the individual states.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1860 Willard Saulsbury, Delaware's other United States Senator, proposed that the central states, both slave and non slave holding, should form a separate confederation, distinct from both South Carolina and New England. While Bayard did not agree with the proposal, this is another proposal that demonstrates the belief that Delawareans in Congress advocated against entering into a war against fellow countrymen.^{iv} After the fall of Fort Sumter in 1861, the Georgetown Messenger reported on the June 27th Peace Convention held in Dover and chaired by former congressman William Whiteley, Secretary of State Edward Ridgely, and Thomas F. Bayard, son of Senator James Bayard. The Peace Convention called for an end to the actions of the Lincoln administration, and while they "did not advocate secession as a practical course for Delaware, they urged that the Southern states be allowed to go their way in peace, calling for an end to what they deemed an unconstitutional, as well as fratricidal, war."^v

No formal resolution advocating Union departure was ever presented in the General Assembly. Since Maryland decided against leaving the Union, Delaware, ever the pragmatic state, also decided that it was in their best interests to remain within the United States. However, that did not mean that all Delawareans favored participation in the Union cause. Many people in the southern end of the state, especially in the Seaford area, left Delaware and joined the Confederacy or stayed and worked secretly to assist the Confederacy from within the state. These people were known as Copperheads, or Peace Democrats, because they were considered to be as deadly as their "name-snakes." They gave the South all the help they could and lobbied to bring all of Delaware to that belief.^{vi} Munroe in his *History of Delaware* notes that James Vallandigham, son of the Newark minister, was the brother of famous Ohio copperhead congressman, Clement Vallandigham. The New York Times, August 30, 1861, discusses the general aim of the Order of the Golden Circle, to which most Copperheads belonged. The Order was a secret society whose aim was to raise an army of 16,000, seize Mexico and establish "in that vast Territory ... a strongly organized monarchy, resting on a basis of slave institutions." Members had to be American born, Protestants, and slaveholders or produce that he is "imbued with Southern sentiments."^{vii} In Delaware those with pro Confederacy sentiments "surreptitiously opened a route to the South for both men and supplies,

frequently utilizing the Delaware Railroad to Seaford and then the Nanticoke River to the Chesapeake Bay.^{viii}

With the onset of battle, President Lincoln called for 75,000 men to quell the rebellion. In 1829 state legislation had ended mandatory and universal militia service as a means of protecting the state and its citizens. Recognizing the importance of defensive preparedness, the state legislature passed an act, the Volunteer Company Act, and, by 1860, many volunteer units were already in existence. Delaware's commitment of 780 men did respond to President Lincoln's first call and served in the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers, a unit not well equipped and fully functioning but eager to serve the Union. When it became obvious that the battle would be a protracted affair, President Lincoln issued another call for 300,000 troops. Delaware reconstituted its Volunteer Militia units and also established special Wartime Units. Over the course of the war, Delaware supplied a large number of soldiers to the Union relative to the size of the state: 12,284 Delawareans fought for the Union out of total state population (male and female) of about 110,000 total according to the 1860 census.^{ix} 90,500 were white, and 19,000 were white males between the ages of 15-39. Delaware raised 9 infantry regiments, 1 cavalry regiment, one heavy artillery battery, and one light artillery battery. No major military actions took place in Delaware. 383 men from Delaware were killed or mortally wounded and another 499 died from diseases and other causes, for a total death count of 882.^x

During the War of Rebellion, Delaware played significant roles albeit in different arenas. First, the northern section of the state supplied from one third to one half of gun- powder used by Union troops from the Du Pont mills as well as various other products produced in Wilmington's factories from leather to railroad cars to naval vessels. Second, Delaware housed Southern prisoners of war at Fort Delaware, which was also used to provide "guarded access to the ports and shipyards of Wilmington and Philadelphia. Over 2,400 prisoners died at the notorious Fort Delaware. Third, federal troops were called in to safeguard the voting during several elections held during the War since the loyalty of Delaware's volunteer regiments was sometimes called into question. Fourth, Delaware was the scene of President Lincoln's test of a "compensated emancipation plan" that, if it was successful in Delaware, he was going to propose to all other slave states as a means of ending the war quickly. Under the plan, slave owners would be compensated for freeing their slaves. Compensation would be funded by the federal government and based on the "value" of each slave as determined by a board of local assessors, with payments averaging \$500.00. The proposal failed to pass in both houses of the General Assembly and Lincoln's plan of "the cheapest and most humane way of ending this war and saving lives" became moot.^{xi}

Finally, some interesting Delaware statistics: 12,284 men fought for the Union. 954 former slaves and free blacks joined the United States Colored Regiments. At least 882, or over 7%, perished during the war. 383 men were either killed in action or mortally wounded in action. 356 died due to disease. 75 more died while prisoners of war and 21 died of accidental causes.^{xii}

ⁱNewton, James E. *Lesson Plan 1: Black Americans in Delaware from 1639 to the Present, An Overview*. [Online: <http://www.udel.edu/BlackHistory/lesson1.html>] May 13, 2003. ii “Delaware in Wartime,” *Special Collections Department, University of Delaware*. Exhibition at the Hugh M. Morris Library, August 25 - December 17, 1993. [Online: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/wartime.html#civil_war] May 13, 2003. iii Ibid. iv Munroe, John. “The Civil War,” *History of Delaware*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1979. p. 133. v Dodd, D. “Editorial,” *Georgetown Messenger*, July 3, 1861. [Online: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/wartime.html#civil_war] May 13, 2003. vi “Local War History,” *Sigourney, Iowa*. [Online: <http://www.sigourney.com/history/local.html>] May 13, 2003. vii “The Knights of the Golden Circle,” *New York Times (1857-Current file)*; New York, N.Y.; Aug 30, 1861. [Online: Proquest Database: <http://hn.umi.com/pqdweb>] May 13, 2003. viii Munroe, *ibid.* ix Pickett, John E. III. “Delaware’s Manpower Contribution to the Union in the Civil War,” *First State Regiments*. [Online: <http://www.state.de.us/gic/facts/history/delreg.htm>] May 13, 2003. x “Delaware,” *ehistory Features: Civil War Units*. [Online: <http://www.ehistory.com/uscw/features/regimental/delaware/union/index.cfm>] May 14, 2003. xi Munroe, pp. 137-140. Direct quote on p. 140. xii Harvey, Don. *Deaths of Union Forces by State*. [Online: <http://users.aol.com/dlharvey/stat.htm>] May 13, 2003. Statistics were also taken from John Pickett’s First State Regiment page.