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CENTRE COUNTY — AND THE — Civil War

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INTRODUCTION

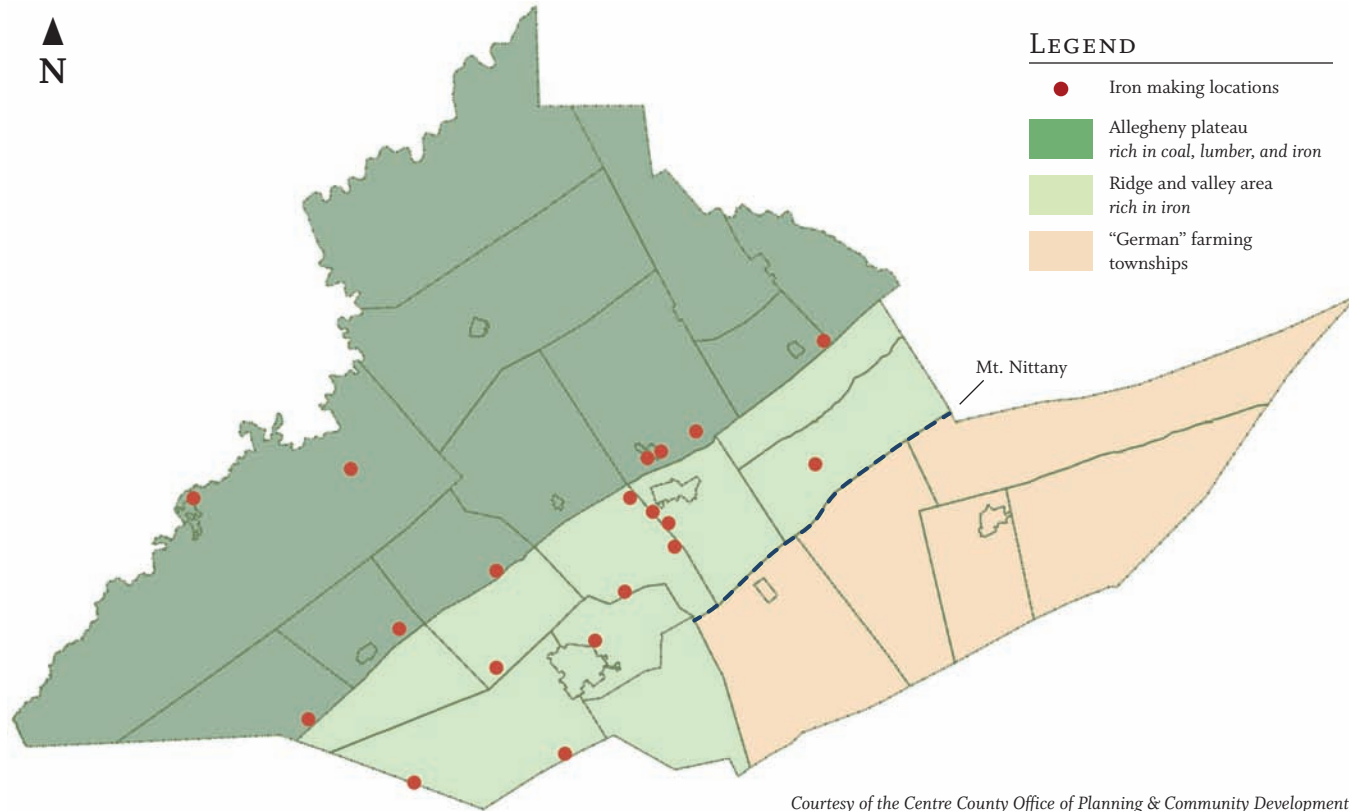
During the American Revolution, the Northern and Southern regions of the United States were united in their fight for independence. That feeling of unity would dissipate in the first half of the 19th century when economic, social, and political differences produced one crisis after another, each resulting in deep-seeded hostility and a growing feeling of separation. This frustration is clearly communicated in an excerpt from an 1851 Alabama newspaper:

We purchase all of our luxuries and necessities from the North. Our slaves are clothed with Northern manufactured goods, have Northern hats and shoes, work with Northern hoes, plows and other implements. The slaveholder dresses in Northern goods, rides in Northern saddles, sports his Northern carriage, reads Northern books. In Northern vessels his products are carried to market, his cotton is ginned with Northern gins, his sugar is crushed and preserved with Northern machinery, his rivers are navigated by Northern steamboats. His son is educated at a Northern college, his daughter receives the finishing polish at a Northern seminary; his doctor graduates at a Northern medical college, his students are furnished with Northern teachers, and he is furnished with Northern inventions.

Many in the South thought that they had become colonized and exploited by the industrialized North. As immigrants poured into the big cities of the Northeast, many white Southerners feared that they would not be adequately represented in government. They envisioned laws that would limit their economic abilities through their cotton trade with Europe; shift the building of roads, railroads and ports strictly to the North; and abolish slavery, an integral ingredient in the Southern agrarian economy. By December of 1860, tensions reached an all time high and South Carolina became the first state to formally secede from the Union.

MAP OF CENTRE COUNTY

In 1791, the first iron making operation was established at Centre Furnace in what would become Centre County. Throughout the 19th century nearly 20 others were created, most of which are concentrated along Spring and Bald Eagle Creeks.



Centre County, Pennsylvania was also divided. The iron, lumber, and coal industries of the County occupied the land north and east of Nittany Mountain, while Pennsylvania Germans farmed the limestone rich valleys in the five southernmost townships. They faced the same political differences locally as the country did nationally with a Democratic agrarian south feeling minimized by the industrialized Republicans of the north.

When the South fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861 anger and indignation spread immediately. Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to protect the Capitol from Southern invaders and patriotic Northerners rushed to serve. Centre County mirrored the excitement of the North with news of the aggression spreading across the mountains and valleys affecting patriotic citizens from

nearly every walk of life. From the seasoned military man to the young student attending the Farmers' High School (Penn State) the excitement and desire to squelch this rebellion swelled, and they enlisted as 90 day men who would restore the Union and preserve the Constitution. Predictably, the southern German townships were not as eager

to join the fight and War meetings in that area were far less enthusiastic.

Mistakenly, many Northerners were certain the rebellion could not last for long. Even Pugh, the first president of the Farmer's High School, warned his students that **the war would not be fought out by the 75,000 men just called, that it**

would not be ended in 90 days, that it would be a struggle for years... Dr. Pugh's words were prophetic as the Civil War lasted for 4 years and affected the lives of 620,000 soldiers — 360,000 of whom were from Pennsylvania.



The Farmers' High School, *Old Main*,
1863

Viewed as one of the most important political figures of the Civil War, Pennsylvania Governor and Bellefonte native Andrew Gregg Curtin was a stalwart supporter of Lincoln. His gubernatorial win in October of 1860 was considered essential to Lincoln's victory and Curtin supported him throughout the War. When preparing his inauguration speech, Curtin asked if Lincoln would like him to address anything specific. This was Lincoln's reply, one day after South Carolina seceded.

Confidential

Springfield Ill, Dec 21, 1860

Hon. A.G. Curtin

My dear Sir

Yours of the 14th was only received last night. I am much obliged by your kindness in asking my views in advance of preparing your inaugural. I think of nothing proper for me to suggest except a word about this secession and disunion movement — On that subject, I think you would do well to express without passion, threat, or appearances of boasting but nevertheless with firmness, the purpose of yourself and your state to maintain the Union at all hazards — Also, if you can, procure the Legislature to pass resolutions to that effect. I shall be very glad to see your friend the Attorney General (Samuel A. Purviance) that is to be, but I think he need scarcely make a trip to confer with me on the subject you mention.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln

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The people of Centre County, who sent over 1,000 of their citizens to war in 1861, were growing less enthusiastic by the summer of 1862. Hopes for an early victory had dissipated and people were growing tired of military defeat and the consistent loss of life. Local leaders tried their best to rally support to meet the President's call for 500,000 volunteers and the looming possibility of a draft was present, the first time the government exerted the power to force service. In August organizers conducted meetings, passed resolutions, and gathered enough support to create the 148th Regiment, commonly referred to as the Centre County Regiment. Those who had ignored the early calls to enlist were now preparing for battle.

Meanwhile, the Governor was attempting to maintain the political troops when he organized the "Loyal War Governors' Conference" at the Logan House in Altoona in September, 1862. The President was faced with mounting criticism, and Curtin called on the governors of the North to solidify support and maintain their loyalty to the objectives of the President. While there are no formal records or minutes of the meeting, the attendees produced a document which was personally presented to Lincoln immediately following. They agreed "to continue in the most vigorous exercise of all our lawful powers, contending against treason, rebellion, and the public enemies until final victory and



unconditional submission." They supported the newly released Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and suggested the removal of General George McClellan as Commander of the Army of the Potomac, whose leadership was sharply questioned by many. This solidarity gave Lincoln the support he needed to pull through these dark days of the War. McClellan was removed by Lincoln two months later, and the Proclamation was passed into law January 1, 1863. Like the efforts of the leaders in Centre County, the rally worked and the War moved forward.

Andrew Gregg Curtin, *Harper's Weekly*, 1863

Despite the state gradual emancipation act of 1780, slavery had a legal presence in Pennsylvania until 1865, shattering many notions that the escaped slaves of the South had a welcoming neighbor in Pennsylvania where they could live a free life among sympathetic Northerners. Federal Fugitive Slave Laws, Pennsylvania Personal Liberty laws, and discriminatory attitudes all created a hostile environment in which the African Americans of Centre County lived. Some moved away from Bellefonte while others were simply “removed” to live in segregated welfare institutions, such as the House of Refuge in Philadelphia.

The Republican organizers of the War Meeting that took place in Bellefonte on August 2, 1862 were very careful regarding the issue of slavery stating in the seventh resolution:

That the preservation or abolition of slavery being a question of minor importance and a side-issue, we distrust the judgment and doubt the patriotism of those who seek to give it prominence by making the support they owe the government of their country to depend on the adoption of the one or the other policy.

While Democrats supported slave owning Southerners, claiming that the master’s right to property must be upheld, Centre County Republicans looked at the Emancipation Proclamation as a military measure that might help to weaken the Confederacy. There was an African American presence in Centre County that provided an environment for possible Underground Railroad activity, and there is some documented evidence of local abolitionist activity. But period newspaper

accounts and other documentation suggest that most Centre Countians, despite their political affiliation, were mostly apathetic toward the slavery issue if not hostile to it.

QUICK FACTS

- 260 African Americans living in Centre County out of a total population of 27,007 in 1860
- 132 African Americans in Bellefonte out of a population of 1477 (9%)
- At least 30 African Americans from Centre County served in the Union Army after the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect in 1863. (15 enlisted, 15 drafted)

Census information documents the growing population of African Americans in 19th century Centre County, which parallels the development of the iron industry in the area. We know that fugitives occasionally came through the area, but to what extent they were helped is unclear. Local historian John Blair Linn in his *History of Centre and Clinton Counties, 1883* cites Samuel Henderson's home in Halfmoon Valley as "one of the stations on the Underground Railroad" while Henry G. Hardstock was described as "a fearless and unflinching advocate of the principles that taught him slavery was wrong. Despite the popular prejudice against his theory, and despite too, the social ostracism to which his course subjected him, he never flagged his outspoken and active zeal on behalf of the American slave...upon his tombstone stands the eulogy, 'A friend to the American slave during American slavery.'"



Charles T. Webber, *The Underground Railroad*, 1893, Cincinnati Art Museum

Centre County soldiers knew what it really meant to be separated from their loved ones for the sake of the country. Sometimes they questioned their own motives for fighting; sometimes they thought of desertion; and sometimes they simply missed home. Their letters are filled with common pleas such as the desire for mail, clothes, food, or a photo. Most were concerned with monetary issues and tried their best to provide help to those at home, passing along suggestions for management or even a few dollars when they got paid. For the first time in the history of the country, women were left at home in large numbers setting the stage for many of them to assume leadership roles or even manage their own property.

On October 17, 1862 the *Bellefonte Central Press* wrote that, “we are all in this war—those who



fight and those who stay at home that their brethren may fight; those who give their hearts to the enemy, and those whose heart strings are lacerated by every ball that comes from a rebel rifle.” While viewpoints differed between Democrat and Republican; German and English; farmer and laborer, no one in Centre County could escape the effect of a war in which American faced American. It seeped into every aspect of their lives and left everyone touched by the far-reaching fingers of a war that had lasting effects in Centre County.

George Lambdin, *The Consecration*, 1861

Indianapolis Museum of Art

The young woman in Philadelphia George Lambdin’s 1861 painting kisses the sword of her loved one consecrating it before battle, while he gently sniffs a rose. Romantic art was common during the Civil War Era as the poetry and emotion of the day lured artists from both sides to convey it with great sentimentality.

CENTRE COUNTY AND THE CIVIL WAR

The Centre County Historical Society, through this exhibit, joins in a statewide and national effort to prepare to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln in 2009, and the 150th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War in 2011. One of the early goals of this Sesquicentennial commemoration in Pennsylvania is to use old collections to offer new narratives that expand upon previous interpretations of the War and its impact on nineteenth century America. An even larger goal is to reflect upon its continuing significance to the country, extending into the twenty-first century.

We invite you to consider, for example:

- The early expansion of the United States and the manner in which it contributed to tensions between the North and South. Were those tensions resolved, or in what ways do traces still exist?
- Was Centre County “free” as it related to African Americans? What role did Centre Countians play in the Civil Rights movement approximately 100 years later?
- Are there parallels to nineteenth century labor needs supporting the cotton plantation economy of the South or the charcoal iron industry of the North, and today’s discussions on immigration policies?

- The number of African Americans living in Centre County had greatly diminished by the end of the nineteenth century. Where did African Americans migrate to, and why?
- How did the role of Centre County women change during the Civil War? How did they respond to national initiatives, such as women’s suffrage?
- Was there a county-wide agreement that the only alternative to the South seceding was to preserve the Union by going to war? Are there parallels in the way Centre Countians responded in their support for the two World Wars, Vietnam, Iraq?

CENTRE COUNTY — AND THE — Civil War

This special exhibit is available to visitors during regular tour hours:

Sunday	1:00–4:00 PM
Monday	1:00–4:00 PM
Wednesday	1:00–4:00 PM
Friday	1:00–4:00 PM

Related Centre County Heritage issues:

- *Centre County's Civil War Division and The Life of General James Sante*
Brisbin, VOL. 42, No. 1
- *Centre County Regiment: Story of the 148th Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, VOL. 36, No. 1*



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Centre County Court House, Bellefonte Pa.