

West Virginia Joins the Union

By MERTON T. AKERS
UPI Correspondent

Rep. Jacob B. Blair entered the White House through a window early in the morning of New Year's Day 1863.

Blair, a western Virginia congressman, was looking for information—not bent on burglary. The information he wanted was vital to western Virginians who were battling to break away from the Old Dominion so they could form a new state and join the Northern side in the Civil War.

Congress earlier had passed the bill which would enable the western Virginians to set up their state.

On New Year's Eve the bill still was on President Lincoln's desk, neither signed nor vetoed. That was the last day on which Lincoln could act.

The President had not made up his mind when the western Virginians, nervous about the fate of the bill they had worked on so long and so hard, went to the White House at 7 p.m. on New Year's Eve to present their case again.

Sen. Waltman T. Willey and Rep. William G. Brown accompanied Blair. They and the other western Virginians in Congress had been seated as representatives of the state of Virginia.

Bitter Against East

Virginia had seceded from the Union in the spring of 1861 and its congressional delegation had been withdrawn. The western counties of the state refused to go along with the Tidewater and Piedmont section of the state which lay east of the Allegheny Mountains. The majority of opinion in the western counties was against slavery and especially bitter against the eastern part of the state.

The western Virginians accused the eastern Virginians of discrimination on taxation and improvements and claimed they were not equally represented in the legislature.

The formed a government, calling it the Restored Government, and elected Francis H. Pierpont as governor. They also elected a legislature and a congressional delegation. The Washington administration recognized the Restored Government and Congress seated the delegation after a brief debate.

But Lincoln was doubtful about the constitutionality of making western Virginia a state. The Constitution says that when a state is formed from the territory of another state, the original state must approve. Lincoln was not sure the legislature of the Restored Government had the power to approve formation of another state although it had formally done so. Some two-thirds of the state of Virginia was not represented in the Restored Government legislature.

Expediency Doubted

The President also doubted the expediency of forming the new state. He felt it might set a pattern for reconstruction of the Union after the war, a pattern which might complicate the problem.

"The division of a state is dreaded as a precedent," Lincoln wrote. "But a measure made expedient by a war, is no precedent for times of peace. It is said the admission of West Virginia is secession, and tolerated only because it is our secession. Well, if we can call it by that name, there is still difference enough for Secession against the Constitution, and Secession in favor of the Constitution."

The President and the western Virginia congressmen talked three hours that night,

going over the arguments. The cabinet was divided. Secretary of State William H. Seward, Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton favoring admission and Attorney General Edward Bates, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair and Secretary of Navy Gideon Welles opposing.

Seventh Opinion

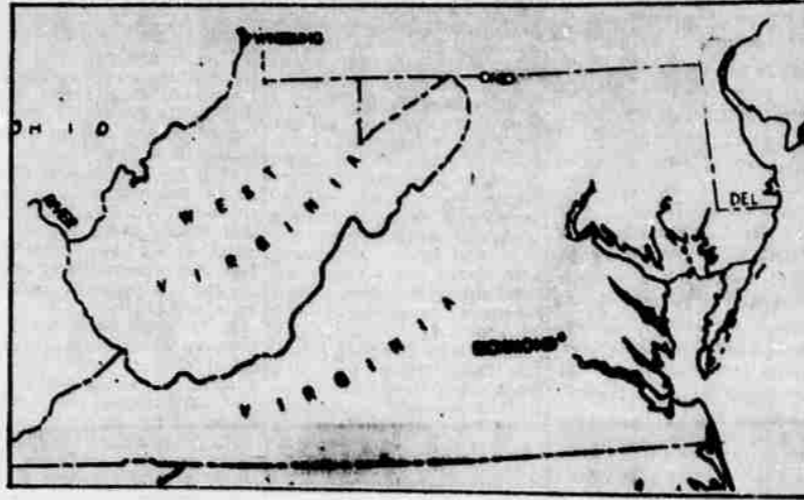
At the end of the conference Lincoln told the congressmen that he had a seventh opinion that strongly influenced him but he did not tell the delegation whose opinion it was and whether it was for or against admission. The delegation left at 10 p.m. no wiser than it had been at 7 p.m. But Blair did obtain permission from the President to see him early the next morning and learn the verdict.

How Blair got into the White House at dawn the next morning is not clear yet. One version is that he went in through a window and into the President's bedroom where Lincoln was just arising and still in his long red flannel nightshirt.

The version which seems nearest to the truth was written by Mrs. Anna Pierpont Sliviter, daughter of Governor Pierpont, in her book called "Recollections of War and Peace." She wrote:

"The messenger (Mr. Blair) scarcely slept that night, he was up at daybreak, and waiting outside the White House doors long before they were opened. When an obliging housemaid happened to throw wide a long window the visitor quietly slipped in and made his way to the President's office. Again the adventurous Virginian had to wait; but although it was New Year's Day, and no business was to be transacted, the

THIS WAS THE CIVIL WAR



STATE PROCLAIMED — On April 20, 1863, President Lincoln proclaimed that 60 days later West Virginia would become a state. Virginia had seceded from the Union in 1861 and its congressional delegation withdrawn. The western counties of the western part of the state had refused to go along. They claimed

that the eastern counties discriminated against them in taxation and representation matters, and the majority of people in the western counties were against slavery. This map shows the location of the western counties which became a state. (UPI)

President soon came in. He greeted Mr. Blair cheerily, read, "Approved — A. Lincoln and then going to his desk took out a document. Here is your bill," he said. "Do you see the signature? Mr. Blair later Lincoln revealed the mysterious 'seventh opinion' to Governor Pierpont. "During the conversation," Pierpont wrote, "The Pres-

dent remarked that he believed he had never told me of the turning point with him in considering the West Virginia bill."

A last minute telegram from Pierpont saying all was lost in West Virginia if the bill failed convinced the President.

"That," Lincoln said, "was the turning point in my mind in signing the bill. I said to myself, here, this is not a constitutional question, it is a political question. I will not trouble myself further about the constitutional part, so I determined to sign the bill. And I'm satisfied with the conclusion."

Some details remained to be settled before the state could come into being. One was the question of emancipation of the relatively few slaves.

Eventually a constitutional convention decided on gradual emancipation and the issue was put to a vote of the people on March 26. The tally was 28,321 for emancipation and 572 against.

State Elected

On April 20 Lincoln proclaimed that 60 days later West Virginia would become a state.

A bipartisan slate of officers was elected without opposition, although no returns were received from 15 southeastern counties.

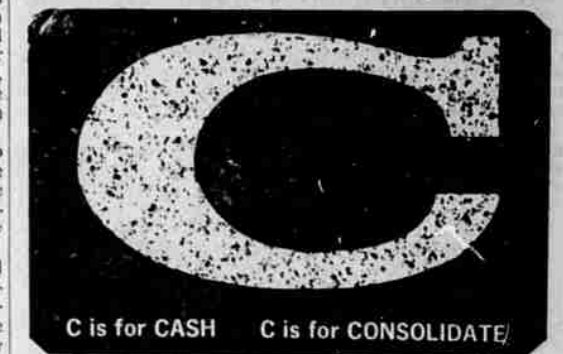
Inauguration of the new officers was held June 20 at Linsly Institute in Wheeling, the temporary capital.

Arthur I. Boreman, the new governor spoke.

"And now, today," he said, "after many long and weary years of insult and injustice, culminating, on the part of the East (eastern Virginia) in an attempt to destroy the government, we have the proud satisfaction of proclaiming to those around us that we are a separate state in the Union."

"Our state is the child of the rebellion . . ." So was added the 35th star in the American flag.

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