

A SESQUICENTENNIAL MOMENT

JANUARY
25-31, 1863

The Restored Government of Virginia agreed on Jan. 31, 1863, to ask voters to decide whether Berkeley County should become part of the new state of West Virginia.

Lawmakers directed that on May 28, 1863, the names of voters in favor of joining West Virginia would be added to the “aye” column and the names of those in favor of remaining part of Virginia would be listed under the “nay” column.

The legislation also gave the governor the power to postpone the election if he felt the polls could not be “safely and properly opened.”

Berkeley County was strategically important to both sides of the war because the main line of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad ran through Martinsburg.



While most of Berkeley County’s residents were loyal to the South, the measure passed because many eligible voters were away from home fighting for the Confederacy and could not cast ballots. The Virginia General Assembly in Richmond filed a lawsuit that sought to reclaim Berkeley and Jefferson counties, but lost in a U.S. Supreme Court decision handed down in 1871.

This sesquicentennial moment is brought to you by the West Virginia Sesquicentennial Commission and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History, Archives and History Section.

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