

A SESQUICENTENNIAL ☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆☆ MOMENT

MARCH 30 - APRIL 5, 1862

On April 3, 1862, voters in western Virginia approved a constitution for the new state of West Virginia by a vote of 18,862 to 514.

In about 20 counties, an informal poll was opened on the same day on the question of gradual emancipation, with the vote being 6,052 to 616.

This poll was held in reaction to the failure of convention delegates to address slavery in the constitution. The finished document simply stated, "No slave shall be brought, or free person of color be permitted to come into this State for permanent residence."

Delegate Granville Parker of Cabell County proposed a separate poll on the matter and distributed the text upon which voters would cast their informal ballots. These instructions to delegates requested that they

insert in the constitution the text: "All children born of slave mothers in this State, after the Constitution goes into operation, shall be free, males at the age of twenty-eight years, and females at the age of eighteen years, and the children of such females to be free at birth."

In spite of the vote, the constitution would go to the federal government unchanged, leaving Parker and others of like mind to appeal to Congress, President Lincoln, and his cabinet for statehood with gradual emancipation.

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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