

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

AMENDED CONSTITUTION OF WEST VIRGINIA.

Adopted by the Convention February 18th, 1863.

FEBRUARY 15-21, 1863

The emancipation proposal tied to West Virginia's quest for statehood prompted lawmakers to consider fair compensation for slave owners who would be deprived of their "property."

On Feb. 16, 1863, lawmakers attending West Virginia's First Constitutional Convention proposed asking the federal government for \$2 million to compensate slave owners.

Delegate Henry Dering of Monongalia County said that without compensation, support for statehood could wane. "Our enemies are on the alert everywhere and forming secret

organizations to defeat the prospects of this new State," Dering said. "Let us give them no chance."

Delegate Benjamin H. Smith of Nicholas County argued that the government could not take private property. "Say I buy a negro for a year; I buy him for ten years; or I buy him for his own life. ... and here comes the legislature ... and declares that I shall not have that property for the balance of his life. ... You cannot do it."

Though lawmakers passed a resolution on Feb. 20, 1863, asking Congress for money, no slaveholder was ever compensated.

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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