

# Memorial Swinging Bridge Project

Lighting Our Legacy

## Pulaski County, Indiana Military History [Civil War]: Part 2

*From Counties of White and Pulaski, Indiana: Historical and biographical By Weston Arthur Goodspeed, F.A. Battey & Co., 1883.*

### The Rebellion

During the latter part of 1860 and the early part of 1861, the warmest interest of the citizens of the county was centered upon the important political changes that were overshadowing the country. Some felt the coming storm, and accurately predicted the prolonged and dreadful results. Others had no



feared that the American people would have the courage and hardihood to spring upon the country a gigantic civil war in the support of any principle likely to be involved.

*Photo from Images of America, Pulaski County, Karen Clem Fritz, Arcadia Publishing, 2009. This is of the C.L. Guild Post, Grand Army of the Republic of Medaryville, Memorial Day 1911.*

As State after State in the South passed ordinances of secession, all the better citizens of each party were united upon the question of supporting the administration of Mr. Lincoln and upholding the constitution and the laws. As yet the all-important question of slavery had not been seriously considered as to its

partial suppression or total obliteration ; and all those bitter sentiments and controversies which were to array one section of the North against the other, almost to the extent of open war, were yet unknown, and the country, as a whole, was united and hopefully tranquil.

## **The Fall Of Sumter**

When the news of the fall of Fort Sumter swept over the country like a flame of fire, the most intense excitement in all places prevailed. The suspense in Pulaski County was bewildering. The first reports depopulated the rural districts, suspended all agricultural and other pursuits, and flooded the towns, telegraph offices and news stations with vast crowds of excited, indignant and determined citizens.

All former political antagonisms were speedily relinquished. Men everywhere forgot their daily employment, and gathered at crossroads and villages to discuss the political situation, denounce the rebellion and encourage one another with hopeful and loyal words.

Every heart was disturbed with direful misgivings. Old men who had passed through the political storms of half a century, who had learned to put their faith in the nobility of the American character, who had seen the Government rise like Neptune from the sea, serene and sublime, until its broad dome shed its protection upon the lowest of God's creatures, turned away in tears, sick at heart, from the dark, desperate and forbidding aspect.

Many were palsied with sickening fear at the vision of the horrors of civil war, and, regardless of the safety of the Government, turned first to the protection of their loved ones. Still others flew to the doubtful consolation that no sacrifice of life and property could be too great to quell the rebellion at all hazard and maintain intact the Union of the States.

But public sentiment soon recovered from the shock. Men by the thousand, with Spartan hardihood, signified their anxiety to go out to their country's battles. Mothers tendered their sons; wives their husbands; maidens their lovers; children

their parents; parents their children; sisters their brothers—all were intensely eager to show their devotion to their beloved country. And the opportunity was not wanting.

## **Excitement At Winamac**

Within a week after the news was received that Sumter had been surrendered to the rebels, a notice was circulated in Winamac and vicinity that a public meeting would be held at the court house, to consider the state of the country, and to take some action in response to the call of the President for 75,000 militia. Some 400 persons assembled, quite a bevy of ladies being among the number, and the meeting was addressed, first by the Chairman, who, in a brief speech, announced that the object of the call was to arrange matters so that any volunteers asked for could be quickly and easily secured and dispatched with promptness to the field.

Dr. F. B. Thomas was then called out. He spoke at length upon the political issues of the day, declaring that while he had not cast his ballot for the Republican ticket, still he was heartily in favor of supporting the administration of Mr. Lincoln in the “vigorous prosecution” of the war and the immediate crushing of the rebellion. He was loudly cheered at the conclusion of his remarks, and then other speakers followed in rapid succession, amid great excitement and intense loyalty.

Almost all the leading citizens of Winamac were called out, and all were greeted with tumultuous applause. James W. Eldridge delivered an eloquent speech. He was followed by Byron T. Lane, W. C. Barnett, H. P. Rowan, A. I. Gould, W. S. Huddleston, Stephen Bruce and others. The burden of every speech was, that it was the duty of all loyal citizens of any party to cast aside political prejudice, and rally as one man to the support of the Constitution and the Union.

It is stated, however, that there were men present, and quite a number throughout the county, who were conscientious in the belief that the Southern States had the right to leave the Union if they saw proper to do so, and that the constituted authorities had no right to coerce them to remain. They were champions of the doctrine of State Rights—a doctrine that has done more to embitter the North and

the South against each other during the preceding half a century than any other cause except slavery.

They believed that the administration was violating the Constitution in levying war to prevent States from leaving the Union. The effect of former Congressional legislation on this question was felt not only in the South, but in all the North. Men who had been bred as far north as the Canada line, believed not only in the sovereignty of the States, but in the “divine institution” of slavery as well. This was the inevitable result of Congressional teaching, where the knee had constantly been bent in abject servility to both doctrines on the floor of the highest law-making power. It was then no wonder that humble citizens in Pulaski County had been so impressed with the horrid heresy that they sincerely believed as John C. Calhoun and Jefferson Davis believed.

At the outset of the war, when it was yet thought that the question of slavery would not be seriously considered, several citizens of the county, believing that the Southern States had the right to leave the Union, quietly opposed a continuation of the struggle. Later, when it was seen that slavery, as well as secession, was doomed, they were outspoken and bitterly energetic in opposing the course of Mr. Lincoln.

At this first meeting above mentioned, no sentiment save loyalty was publicly expressed, but here and there could be seen an ominous shake of the head, and a prophetic warning quietly uttered. J. W. Eldridge, W. J. Gridley and G. T. Wickersham were appointed a committee to prepare resolutions expressive of the sense of the meeting. The resolutions, about ten in number, were adopted after some comment. They embodied, in substance, the burden of the speeches that had been delivered that afternoon, and were thoroughly loyal and determined.

