

No ORDINARY TASK

By Bryan Ward Jr.
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Virginia State Archives

The Stout Hearts That Founded West Virginia



Arthur I. Boreman



Waitman T. Willey



John S. Carlisle

West Virginia

CIVIL WAR
STATEHOOD

150



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Achieving statehood for West Virginia was, in the words of the state's first governor, Arthur I. Boreman, "an ordinary task." In spite of the myriad challenges, a group of men risked their reputations, their riches, and their very lives to attain that goal. In honor of their efforts—and in celebration of West Virginia's 150th anniversary—this article and a subsequent one will examine the contributions of six individuals who played principal roles in the creation of our great state. In this first installment, we will look at the efforts and actions of three statesmen.

In the 1860s, many western Virginians believed that they had been getting a raw deal. Even as the population in the western part of the state expanded, representation in Richmond favored eastern planters. Calls for internal improvements and free public education—two subjects of great interest in the west—fell on deaf ears in the General Assembly. While reforms in the 1850s had addressed some issues of concern, three decades of frustration still simmered under the surface. From this frustration a new generation of political leaders emerged in the west. When faced with a choice of Confederacy or Union, they went Union. Waitman T. Willey, John S. Carlile, and Arthur I. Boreman were three of the leaders who chose the Union and who, in turn, made West Virginia statehood possible.

In 1860, as the desire for secession gripped the deep South after the election of Abraham Lincoln, Virginia's first stance was one of moderation. Delegates were selected and called to Richmond to discuss what Virginia's position on secession should be. Two of the delegates who attended that meeting would be essential to the creation West Virginia. Ironically, one was described by the pro-Union and Republican *Wheeling Intelligencer* as not having "the backbone for times like these." The other ultimately destroyed his political career and was forever seen as a traitor to the statehood cause.

When Harrison County delegate John S. Carlile arrived in Richmond for the Secession Convention, he had one goal in mind: that Virginia remain firmly in the Union. While Southern firebrands like former governor Henry Wise shouted for the cause of secession, Carlile called the breakaway "self-murder" and "an insult to all living humanity and a crime against God." Carlile's style won him few friends among secessionists in Richmond. He was accosted on the street, and one evening he heard shouts from the lawn of his boarding house. A rowdy crowd had gathered there and thrown a noose over the branch of a tree to demonstrate their displeasure. Stubborn and undeterred, Carlile stuck to his convictions.

Joining Carlile in Richmond was Monongalia County delegate Waitman T. Willey. Willey was firmly pro-Union, but his style differed from the verbose Carlile's. Willey warned the delegates at Richmond that if Virginia chose secession, the

result would be a division of the state.

Fort Sumter a Turning Point

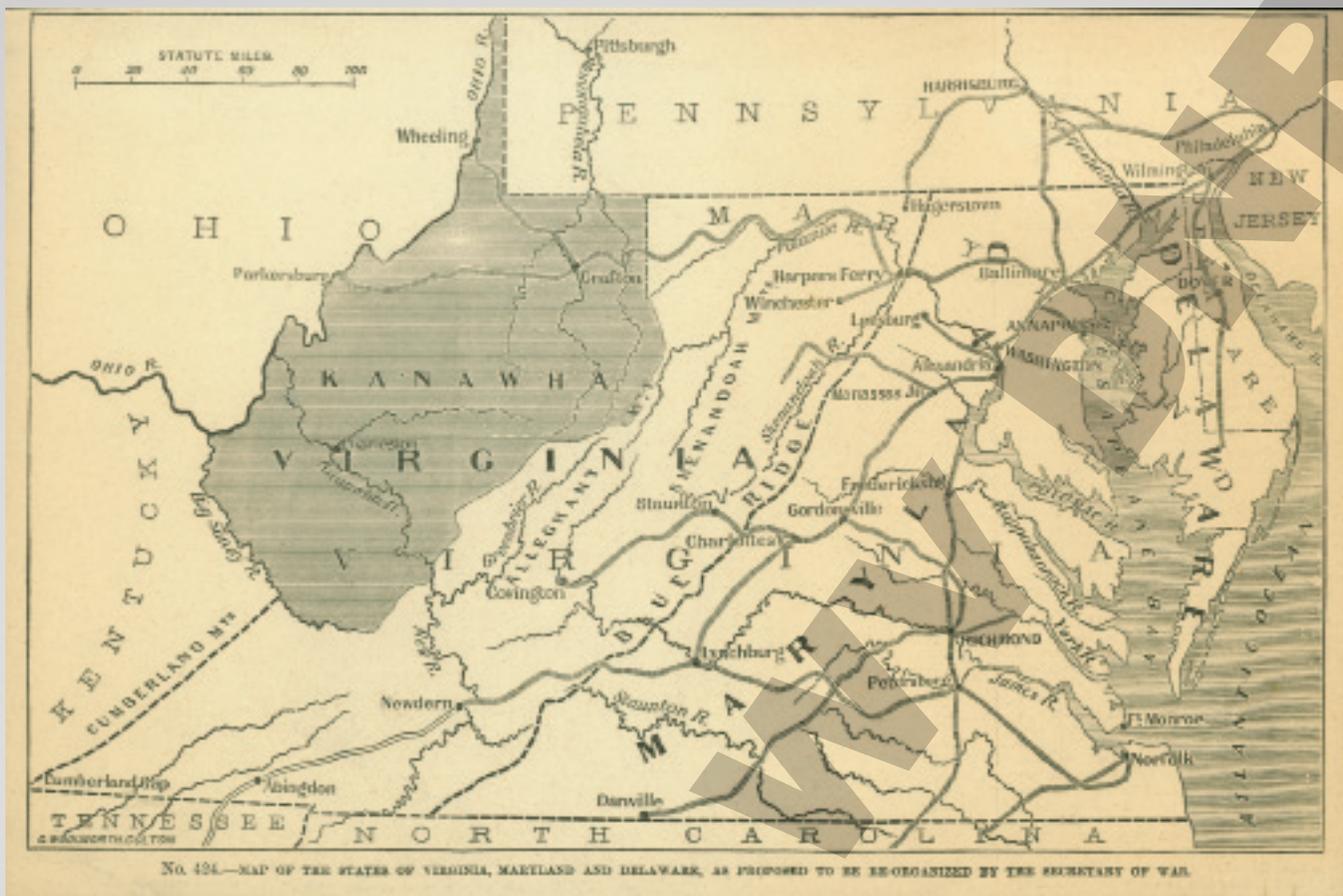
On April 12, 1861, with the Confederates' bombardment of Fort Sumter and the subsequent evacuation of federal troops there, the mood of the convention was transformed. In response to the Confederate action, President Lincoln made a call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion. When word reached Richmond that Virginia would have a quota of troops to supply for the effort, any hope of Virginia remaining in the Union was lost.

On April 17, the delegates passed an Ordinance of Secession by a vote of 88 to 55. However, to take effect, the ordinance had to be ratified by a statewide vote, scheduled for May 23. Following the ordinance vote, Carlile, Willey, and others who voted against secession quickly left Richmond and returned home; their only hope lay in defeating secession at the ballot box.

Once he returned to Clarksburg, Carlile quickly organized a very large pro-Union rally. On April 22, approximately 1,200 people gathered at the Harrison County Courthouse to voice their opposition to secession. In their resolutions they called for the election of delegates who would meet in Wheeling on May 13 to determine the actions of the people of northwestern Virginia. Carlile was the first person named to Harrison County's delegation. After the meeting, he attended other pro-Union rallies to protest secession and to share with the crowds his plan of a new state.

Waitman T. Willey and other delegates from 27 Virginia counties were present with Carlile for the convention in Wheeling on May 13. Although Carlile and Willey had been united by their cause in Richmond, a rift between them quickly developed. Willey, Gen. John Jay Jackson of Wood County, and most of the delegates believed that the best course of action was to wait for the results of the statewide vote on secession, which was 10 days away. Carlile and others believed that the time for action was at hand. Carlile offered a resolution that called for the creation of the state of New Virginia. After vigorous debate and much political wrangling, Carlile accepted defeat. In an uncharacteristically conciliatory act, he joined the others to approve a resolution that condemned secession and called for another meeting in Wheeling on June 11, if the Ordinance of Secession was approved by voters.

When the Ordinance of Secession prevailed, pro-Union delegates returned to Wheeling with a more deliberate purpose. Arthur I. Boreman of Parkersburg was selected to be the president of the new convention. When he spoke to the delegates, he said that the task that faced them required "stout hearts" and "men of courage." At this meeting Carlile did not call for a new state but instead submitted a declaration that called for the reorganization of the Government of Virginia with a new slate of government officials. This action created two Virginias: one



This 1862 map from Frank Leslie's *Pictorial History of the American Civil War* shows the boundaries of the proposed state of Kanawha.

Confederate, with its capital in Richmond, and one Union, with its capital in Wheeling. After the passage of the proposal, Francis Pierpont of Marion County was elected governor.

In the weeks that followed, the pro-Union Restored Government of Virginia in Wheeling met and John Carlile and Waitman T. Willey were named its U.S. Senators. While Carlile was an obvious choice, Willey's election drew the ire of Archibald Campbell of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, who lambasted the choice in his paper. Campbell questioned Willey's leadership and fortitude. As far as Campbell was concerned, Willey's willingness to compromise endangered the Union and statehood.

A New and Independent State

On August 6, 1861, delegates returned to Wheeling after a recess. When convention president Arthur I. Boreman called the convention to order, the plan for many of the delegates was to create a new and independent state. After a week of debate on the issue, the convention passed an ordinance for the creation of the new state of "Kanawha," which would consist of 39 counties, plus Berkeley, Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hardy, Jefferson, Morgan, and Pocahontas Counties, if a majority of voters in those counties approved. On October 24, voters approved the division.

In November, delegates returned to Wheeling, this time to write a constitution. Though voters had approved the name

"Kanawha," many of them disliked the name and urged their delegates to change it. Chapman Stuart of Doddridge County told delegates that there was "not a citizen—not one solitary man living within the boundaries of my county" who was not in favor of changing the name. Waitman T. Willey brought laughter to the convention when he said that one of his constituents thought the name was difficult to spell, and offered that "the rose would smell sweeter by some other name." When the final votes were tallied, "West Virginia" was chosen by a 30 to 14 margin.

Now the new state had been established and named, but its boundaries were still a major problem, and the issue of slavery truly divided the convention. After considerable discussion, the final result was a compromise that stated that "no slave shall be brought, or free person of color be permitted to come into this State for permanent residence." Basically, delegates had agreed to ban African American settlement. The final constitution was approved unanimously by the delegates and later approved, by a large measure, by the voters.

On May 29, 1862, Waitman T. Willey presented West Virginia's formal petition for statehood to the U.S. Senate. The petition was forwarded to the Senate's Committee on Territories, where John S. Carlile was tasked with writing the statehood bill. When the bill emerged from committee, Willey and other statehood proponents were stunned. Carlile had added 15 counties, provided for gradual emancipation of slaves,

and called for a new constitutional convention—all of which threatened passage of the bill in the Senate. Had it been successful, the bill would have required leaders to start the statehood process over again.

Yet Willey responded with an amendment that rescued the bill. During the negotiations, Willey managed to have Carlile's additions removed. The final West Virginia Bill with the Willey Amendment called for the creation of the State of West Virginia after the state's constitutional convention delegates added a provision for the gradual emancipation of slaves, and after voters approved the provision. With the amendment, the bill passed the Senate by a vote of 23 to 17. Carlile aggressively argued against the bill and the Willey Amendment and, in the end, actually voted *against* statehood. After a fierce debate in the House of Representatives, the bill passed by a vote of 96 to 55.

When Lincoln finally received the West Virginia Bill, he agonized over it. In an effort to get a broader opinion, he had his cabinet review the matter to provide him with other perspectives. His cabinet was split evenly on the questions of constitutionality and expediency of the bill. But after some lobbying from Willey and Congressmen William G. Brown and Jacob Blair, Lincoln ultimately supported the creation of West Virginia.

After receiving presidential approval, the constitutional convention returned to Wheeling and delegates added the Willey Amendment's gradual emancipation clause to the state's constitution. John Carlile and other former statehood supporters continued to fight the West Virginia Bill and especially the Willey Amendment. After voter approval, Lincoln designated June 20, 1863, as the date West Virginia would join the Union.

Following statehood, Arthur I. Boreman became West Virginia's first governor and guided the state during its most precarious period. After being elected governor for three terms, he served West Virginia in the U.S. Senate. Waitman T. Willey no longer served the Restored Government of Virginia but instead became one of West Virginia's U.S. Senators. John Carlile's political career was ruined in West Virginia. Carlile supported Republican Ulysses S. Grant for president and was awarded with a nomination to be a minister to Sweden. However, the nomination was blocked by Republicans in the Senate after numerous West Virginians objected to it. On October 24, 1878, Carlile died and was later buried in the Odd Fellows Cemetery in Clarksburg. Even after his death bitterness remained. It took two days for the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, which once championed Carlile, to write his obituary and announce his death.



This illustration from the July 6, 1861, issue of *Harper's Weekly* depicts the first session of the Second Wheeling Convention, where delegates created the Restored Government of Virginia and replaced government officials who supported secession.

Look for "No Ordinary Task, Part II," featuring the roles of Francis Pierpont, Rev. Gordon Battelle, and Wheeling Intelligencer editor Archibald Campbell in the February issue.

For more on West Virginia statehood, visit West Virginia State Archives and History's online exhibit "A State of Convenience" at www.wvculture.org/history/statehood/statehood.html. 📌

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