

Looking back

Feelings mixed on Civil War

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While the troops of the Union and Confederate armies were fighting in the south and east some minor skirmishes were happening the Monroe County.

THE REAL BATTLES at such places as Gettysburg and Vicksburg resulted in death and bloodshed. The battles here fortunately caused only heated words, a bloody nose or two, and a lump on the head.

Monroe Countians were already concerned about the fate of the Union when news of the firing on Ft. Sumter arrived in April 1861. Over a year before that on Feb. 2, 1860 some prominent citizens called a meeting to discuss their feelings. Notice was sent out to all parts of the county so that anyone wanting to have a say about the possibility of war could do so at the courthouse.

To keep the meeting orderly the crowd elected Judge G.A. Buskirk as chairman. C.P. Puley and J.B. Mulky were given the jobs as secretaries. M.C. Hunter, Benjamin Wolfe, Dr. W.C. Foster, F.T. Butler, and Elias Abel were to sift and sort the opinions of the crowd and come up with some resolutions.

AFTER HEARING from all sides, the committee retired to work out a written copy of the consensus. The crowd hung around waiting and the debate went on. The arguments crossed party lines, but centered mainly on whether the government in Washington should try to work out their differences with the southern states or get tough with them.

Gov. Paris Dunning, a Bloomington resident, apparently got tired of the pressure on him to take a stand and walked out on the meeting. His parting shot was that he wasn't taking sides with either party until the North and South had had a real chance to settle the matter peacefully.

WHEN THE COMMITTEE came back with their resolutions they turned out to be a hodge-podge with something to suit almost everybody. One section recommended that there be no interference with slavery in the states where it then existed or interference in inter-state slave trade. On the other hand, the resolution also stated that the African slave trade should be absolutely forbidden in the future.

The debate went on and at times developed into a shouting match. Among the loudest there were a minority called the "jingoes." They said, in effect, that if the southern states wouldn't do what Washington told them to do, they should be literally shot at to force them.

THE SURRENDER of Ft. Sumter in April set off another meeting in the courthouse with the "Jingoes" in the majority. A lot of patriotic oratory was heard and some planning for a volunteer army company to represent the county.

Almost overlooked among Monroe Countians were some hard-core southern sympathizers. Most of them had migrated from Virginia, the Carolinas and other states where slavery was an acceptable way of life. Some still had relatives living there and were concerned about them.

By January 1863, when the local casualty lists were coming