

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

OCT. 20-26, 1861

On Oct. 24, 1861, the citizens of western Virginia approved an ordinance for the state of Kanawha by a vote of 18,408 in favor to 781 opposed, but those numbers probably don't accurately reflect voter sentiment.

Only 34 percent of eligible voters actually voted, and in many counties the percentage of voters was much lower. Even in Ohio County, home to the capital of Virginia's Union government, voter turnout was only 27 percent. Across the region, no returns were reported for six of the 41 counties included in the election.

Many who could have voted against a new state had already left their homes to fight in the Confederate

army. Moreover, some counties with strong Confederate sympathies, including Greenbrier, Jefferson and Monroe, among others, were not even part of the election.

Since voting was conducted orally, with one announcing one's opinions for all to hear rather than secret ballots, many potential opposition voters were likely intimidated. It also didn't help that Union soldiers guarded all polling places.

Most of the opposition votes came from the Northern Panhandle, which was protected well enough to allow voters to feel safe in announcing their opposition.

This sesquicentennial moment is brought to you by the West Virginia Sesquicentennial Commission and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

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