

MICHIGAN'S WAR

Contents

List of Illustrations	xiii
Series Editors' Preface	xv
Preface	xvii
Acknowledgments	xix
Introduction	i

One

Michigan, Slavery, and the Coming of the Civil War 5

Henry Bibb Writes from Detroit to His Former Owner in Kentucky	7
Northerners Are Slaves to the Slaveholders	10
Lewis Cass Favors Nonintervention in the Territories	10
A Democrat Opposes Lewis Cass on Slavery	12
Michigan Republican Platform, 1854	14
Michigan's Personal Liberty Laws	16
Abraham Lincoln Campaigns in Kalamazoo	18
John Brown and Frederick Douglass Debate Slave Insurrection in Detroit	19
A Nonpartisan Newspaper Bolts for the Republicans	21
Stephen A. Douglas, "The Conflict and the Cause"	22
Stephen A. Douglas Responds to Hecklers in Dowagiac	24

Two

The Secession Crisis 26

Governor Austin Blair Declares "Secession Is Revolution"	27
Secession Resulted from Republicans' Agitation on Slavery	30
"The Blood of Southern Men Enriched the Soil of Michigan"	31
An Anti-abolition Riot during the Secession Crisis	32
The Michigan Legislature Opposes Compromise with Secessionists	34
Zachariah Chandler's "Blood-Letting" Letter	34
A Democrat's Pessimistic Response to Lincoln's Inaugural: "We Shall Have War"	36
Northern Michigan Learns of the War	36

*Three*Shifting Michigan to a War Footing 38

Michigan's Deceptive Silence While War Fever Escalates	40
A Mother Tries to Curb Her Son's Desire to Enlist	42
The South May Be Crimsoned with Traitors' Blood, but Freedom Shall Be Maintained	43
A Volunteer Meeting	44
Recruiting a Cavalry Troop	45
Leaving Michigan for the Front	47
Orlando Bolivar Willcox Speaks in Detroit after His Release as a Prisoner of War	48
One Year: Reflections on the War in December 1861	50

*Four*The Soldier's Life 52

The Routine of Camp Life	56
Soldiers' Deteriorating Morals	57
Paroling Prisoners of War	58
Notifying a Soldier's Family Regarding Death	59
A Self-Inflicted Wound?	60
Execution of a Deserter	60
A Soldier's Thoughts Regarding Reenlistment	61
A Soldier Discourages His Brother from Enlisting	63
Two Michigan Soldiers on Opposing Sides of the Battlefield	64
A Hospital Steward Describes the Battle of Shiloh	64
A Soldier's Reflections on Combat and Military Life	66
The 24th Michigan Infantry at Gettysburg	68
Under Confederate and Union Fire	70
Custer and the Michigan Cavalry Brigade at Yellow Tavern	72
Environmental Devastation on the Virginia Front	73
The 2nd Infantry's Address to the People of Michigan	74
How the Soldiers Feel about the War	76
Tensions in the Ranks	77
A Woman and a Soldier	77
Michigan Annie: A Regimental Daughter	79
The Michigan Colored Regiment	80
Indigenous People from Northern Michigan Form a Company of Sharpshooters	82

*Five*Conscription, Commutation, and Dissent 84

Hoping to Escape the Draft	86
Detroit's Antiblack Riot, 1863	87
Prevent Conscription by Increasing Bounties	88
A Soldier's Reaction to Commutation Fees	89
Avoiding the Draft by Pooling Resources	90
The Challenges of Hiring Substitutes	91
Draft Resistance in Huron County	92
A Political Prank Succeeds beyond Its Creators' Wildest Dreams	94
A Political Prisoner Writes to Abraham Lincoln	95

*Six*Civilians Confront the War 97

Reflections on Defeat following the First Battle of Bull Run	99
A Mining Engineer Responds to the Federal Defeat at Bull Run	100
The Civil War Comes to Copper Country	101
"Let us have no more Robbery at the Expense of our Volunteers and Taxpayers"	102
A Democrat Questions War Contracts	103
An African American Gives Up on the United States	104
Black Detroiters Denounce White Racism	105
A Woman's Anxiety and Loneliness	106
The Michigan Soldiers' Aid Society Issues an Appeal	107
A Michigan Journalist Describes a Civil War Hospital	108
A Nurse's Work at a Convalescent Hospital	109
A Civil War Nurse Writes to Her Husband in Michigan	111
A Prospective Army Nurse Inquires about Serving	112
War Accelerates the Push toward Labor-Saving Machinery	114
A Soldier Complains about Inadequate Support for Military Families	115
Labor Disputes in the Upper Peninsula's Iron Mines	116
The Failed Attempt to Rescue Confederate Prisoners	117
Detroit Responds to Another Attack from Canada	120

*Seven*Michigan's Wartime Politics 122

A Democrat's Growing Fears Regarding Abolitionists	123
Democrats as Unwitting Traitors	125

A Soldier Complains of Abolitionists' Failure to Support McClellan and the Troops	126
"This War Should Never End Until the Rebellion is Completely Crushed"	126
A Democrat Questions Emancipation	127
A Republican Responds to Democrats' Opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation	128
A Democrat Embraces Emancipation	129
A Republican Editor Assesses Lincoln in 1863	130
Michigan's Lone Democratic Representative Addresses the US Congress	133
A Good Cause Ruined by Bad Management	134
Democrats Have Been Supportive of the War	135
A One-Time Supporter of Lincoln Renounces the President	136
A Democratic Appeal for the Soldier Vote	137
Kalamazoo Republicans' Appeal on the Eve of the 1864 Election	139
Detroit Blacks Appeal to Michigan Legislature for Full Citizenship	140

Eight

The Civil War Changes Michiganians' Relationship to Slavery 143

Increased Hostility to Slavery Yet Questioning Emancipation	145
Democratic Reaction to "Abolition Fanaticism"	146
A Michigan Soldier Opposes Prospective Emancipation	148
Heralding Lincoln's Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation	149
Democratic Objections to the Emancipation Proclamation	149
A Michigan Soldier Opposes the Enlistment of African Americans	150
Michigan Whites Respond to African American Soldiers	152
War Will Continue So Long as Slavery Exists	153
The South Understood through the Lens of Slavery	154
Freedom's Underside: A Civil War Refugee Camp	154
We Are No Admirer of Slavery	157
Michigan Ratifies the Thirteenth Amendment Ending Slavery	157

Nine

The Civil War's End and Reconstruction 160

The Feeling in the Army: Soldiers' Reactions to Lincoln's Assassination	165
Jefferson Davis's Capture	166
The War Is Over and Soldiers Want to Go Home	168
Jacob Howard on Reconstruction	169
Michigan Democrats Embrace Andrew Johnson	170

“Is the Union Restored?”	172
A Lynching in Mason, 1866	173
William L. Stoughton Denounces the Ku Klux Klan	174
Zachariah Chandler’s Last Speech	176
The Michigan Civil Rights Act of 1885	179
War Looks Much Different in Retrospect	180
The Painful Lives of Disabled Veterans	181
Jane Hinsdale’s Successful Application for a Civil War Pension	183
A Veteran Reflects on the Civil War in 1917	185
Timeline	187
Discussion Questions	213
Notes	217
Selected Bibliography	231
Index	239

Introduction

WHEN THE CIVIL WAR began in 1861, Michigan had been a state for less than a quarter century. The frontier was still either a recent memory or a current reality for much of the state's white, black, and native population. The preceding year's census enumerated 749,113 residents, ranking Michigan sixteenth among the Union's thirty-four states. Nine-tenths of the state's population lay within the southern four tiers of counties. Detroit, with 45,619 residents, ranked only nineteenth among American cities. Michigan's next-largest cities in 1860—Grand Rapids, Adrian, Kalamazoo, and Ann Arbor—had only between 5,000 and 8,000 residents apiece, marking them more as towns than cities by modern standards. The region north of Saginaw remained largely isolated (particularly during the winter after the Great Lakes froze), unsettled, and defined by forests, lakes, and the Upper Peninsula's copper and iron mines. The 1860 federal census reported eleven of the state's seventy-three counties as being unpopulated (though in many cases populated by indigenous peoples) and another thirteen counties as having fewer than one thousand residents (see map). Given the frontier conditions throughout much of the state, it should come as no surprise that American Indians constituted almost 2 percent of the state's population, the highest proportion of any state east of the Mississippi River.¹

Completion of the Erie Canal in 1825 connected Michigan to the Northeastern United States and broader Atlantic world and fueled Michigan's settlement, bringing statehood in 1837. During the thirty years following 1820, Michigan's population grew almost forty-five-fold, and it nearly doubled again in the decade following 1850. Even with this growth, in 1860 Michigan had the smallest population of any state contained entirely within the Northwest Territory, including Wisconsin, which became a state in 1848, eleven years after Michigan. Michigan's small urban population underlined the state's dominant rural character. In 1860, 84.2 percent of Michigan's population lived in the countryside or in towns with fewer than 2,500 residents, making Michigan's population more rural than both the national and the free-state figures.² And although railroad mileage more than doubled in Michigan during the 1850s, it grew at a slower rate than in any other state in the Old Northwest and at half the national rate. Railroad mileage in Michigan also grew at a slower rate during the 1850s than in all but two states of the future Confederacy—and six future Confederate states had more railroad mileage in 1860 than did Michigan.³ Michigan's concentration of population and economic

activity in its four southern tiers of counties made the state smaller, in many ways, than its geographic size might have suggested.

As in most of the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, agriculture defined Michigan's economy, and those employed in agriculture constituted the majority of the state's workforce. While some Michiganders farmed at the subsistence level, many farmers specialized their production and sold their crops—chiefly wheat, corn, and oats—or their animal products, primarily butter, cheese, and wool. The cash value of Michigan's farmland, farm equipment, and livestock exceeded the capital invested in manufacturing by a factor of eight. The state's modest manufacturing sector was largely extractive or connected to agriculture, with half of the state's manufactured products' value coming from flour or lumber mills and another eighth drawn from iron and copper mining.

Michigan's initial white settlers overwhelmingly came from the northeastern United States, being either New Englanders or New Yorkers—with most of the New Yorkers being a generation removed from New England.⁴ Not many white southerners settled as far north as Michigan, and consequently few of the state's white residents had observed slavery or had family or financial ties to the peculiar institution. Nonetheless, slavery loomed large in the early years of the territory and state, even though there were few slaves in Michigan. In 1787 the Confederation Congress passed the Northwest Ordinance—a law that claimed federal authority over those lands then held by the United States that lay west of Pennsylvania and north of the Ohio River. Article VI of the Ordinance provided, "There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted."

Despite this language's clarity, small numbers of slaves resided in Michigan and throughout the Old Northwest for several decades thereafter, as courts and legislatures bestowed exceptions for slaves who lived in the region when the law was passed, permitted the migration of African American "indentured servants" into their states or territories, or granted temporary residence to enslaved visitors. When the British finally vacated their forts in the Old Northwest following the Jay Treaty of 1796, British citizens who remained in Michigan continued to hold slaves.⁵ The 1810 US census listed twenty-four slaves in a territorial population of 4,762; by 1830, only one slave still lived within the boundaries of what became the state of Michigan in 1837. Michigan's 1835 Constitution unconditionally ended slavery when Article XI incorporated language taken from the Northwest Ordinance's slavery prohibition.⁶

Only 6,799 African Americans lived in Michigan in 1860—less than 1 percent of the state's population. As in other states across the antebellum North, however, blacks in Michigan confronted widespread racial discrimination and inequality. Generally, black men could neither serve on juries nor vote; in a statewide

referendum in 1850, only 28.5 percent of Michigan voters supported black-male suffrage. And whenever activists demanded that blacks' suffrage rights be recognized, opponents of black suffrage, who were generally Democrats, heaped racially charged ridicule on the idea.⁷ Besides being denied the full rights of citizenship, Michigan's African Americans generally held low-skill jobs and were disproportionately poor.⁸

Within the larger Atlantic world, organized opposition to slavery emerged in the eighteenth century, propelled by ideals from the European Enlightenment and the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. African Americans had long mobilized against slavery, but the growth of antebellum revivalism increasingly led some white Northerners to embrace immediatist abolitionism. Abolitionists hoped to end slavery by launching a moral revolution. They placed the ending of slavery at the top of their moral and political agenda, joined abolitionist societies, formed churches that deemed slavery a sin, and voted for abolitionist political parties. Abolitionists differed from those who thought slavery to be wrong but believed that Northerners should nonetheless respect the property rights of Southern slaveholders.

Abolitionist activity in Michigan commenced among Lenawee County Hick-site Quakers, led by Elizabeth Chandler, in 1832, and in 1836 abolitionists convened in Ann Arbor to form the Michigan State Anti-Slavery Society. Throughout the 1830s Michigan abolitionists generally aligned with the American Anti-Slavery Society. After 1840, most Michigan abolitionists, male and female, embraced electoral politics and eventually sided with the Liberty Party and its female auxiliaries. The Liberty Party captured almost 8 percent of statewide ballots in 1845, a figure that made Michigan the state with the strongest Liberty Party—and abolitionist—support outside of New England.⁹ And beyond the Liberty Party, whose members regarded the ending of slavery as their primary political and moral objective, many of Michigan's Whigs and Democrats held a deeper antipathy to slavery than did their counterparts in other Northern states. Yet whatever misgivings white Michiganians felt toward slavery before the Civil War, most placed a higher value on maintaining a strong federal union. Nonetheless, slavery's shadow grew during the increasingly sectionalized politics that preceded the war, and further increased during the war itself.