

Wheeling West Virginia Civil War TOUR

Discover the unique and important role
Wheeling played during the war.



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Wheeling played an important role during the Civil War, even though no battles were fought here.

Representatives of the western counties of Virginia met in Wheeling beginning in the spring of 1861 in opposition to the secession of the state. Then Wheeling served as the capital of the "Restored Government of Virginia" for two years prior to the granting of West Virginia statehood on June 20, 1863. It became the first capital of the new state.

In addition to being a hotbed of political activity, Wheeling was also the location of a training ground for Union soldiers, a prison for traitors, and a hospital for the sick and wounded. It was a primary transportation hub for Ohio River traffic and the B&O Railroad. Its industrial and manufacturing base provided nails for barracks and ships, and wagons that served as battlefield ambulances. Its men joined infantry and artillery companies in droves – most in Union units but a good many on the Confederate side.

This tour touches on just a few Wheeling sites that had significance during the war period. Many of the structures remain to this day and serve as a reminder of the city's rich heritage.



1 Athenaem Market and 16th Streets

The Athenaem was built in 1854 to serve the needs of the B&O railroad. On the third floor was a theater, called the best between the Allegheny Mountains and Chicago. Tickets cost 25 and 50 cents; a crowd favorite show was "Ingomar, the Barbarian."

During the Civil War the building became the location of a federal prison. Prisoners included locals who refused to take the loyalty oath, Confederates, and Union soldiers who were sentenced by court martial. The policy was to keep prisoners for only a short time, then march them through Wheeling and across the Suspension Bridge and send them by train to Camp Chase in Columbus.

The prison closed at the end of the war, and the building was used as a malt storage business. It burned to the ground in 1868. The site is now a plaza.

The right side of the Civil War era sketch shows the corner of the Athenaem. No other pictures are known.



2 Camp Carlile Wheeling Island

The U.S. Army organized the camp in May 1861 as a military training and staging camp. The "Rough and Ready Rifles" became the first unit to be mustered in on May 15, 1861. The First Virginia Infantry (Union) under Colonel Benjamin F. Kelley left the camp on

May 28, 1861, on its way to Philippi – the first land battle of the war.

Because of its location near the Suspension Bridge, the camp was readily available to Wheeling, and it quickly became crowded, not only with incoming troops but with curious citizens as well. Troops were continually moved into the camp for training and mustering into service and then marched off to the B&O railroad or to steamboats that took them down the Ohio River. Use declined as the war moved further south, and the camp closed in mid 1865.

Civil War troops assembling near the camp in 1862. Photo from the Herb Bierkotte Collection



3 North Centre Market House Market at 22nd, 23rd Streets

Built in 1853, the north section of the Centre Market pair is believed to be the oldest cast iron market still in existence in the United States.

Residents of the Centre Market area were strongly supportive of the Union during the Civil War. On May 6, 1861, an area man was almost hanged for saying, "Hurrah for Jeff Davis," and on May 23 only 5 of 517 votes from the area were for secession from the Union. Even after the war, feelings ran high, with residents passing a resolution to remove returning residents who were rebels. Slaves were never sold at this market house.

The market house was an open-air structure until the 1890s, when it was enclosed with wood clapboard. The market house continues to serve the needs of the community, with antique and restaurant options replacing produce vendors.



4 Civil War Memorial Top of Hill in Wheeling Park

This memorial is dedicated "to the defenders of the Union 1861-1865." The monument specifically lists several battles – Rich Mountain, Antietam, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Cloyd Mountain, Opequan, and Appomattox – all of which could be claimed as Union victories.

Both Union and Confederate sympathies were common in Wheeling during the Civil War, but no comparable memorial to the South exists in the area. Neighbors and even families had split loyalties, and men served with distinction on both sides of the conflict. The state itself was born during the war, when the interests of those in western counties of Virginia ran counter to those in the east. Although slavery existed in Wheeling at the time, the county's population in the 1860 census showed only 100 slaves, representing 0.4% of the population.



5 First Presbyterian Church 1307 Chapline Street

The First Presbyterian Church building, the oldest structure in downtown Wheeling, has stood since 1825 on land donated by Noah Zane. The Greek revival, stucco façade with its massive columns welcomed slaveholders and abolitionists alike during the Civil War years. (The 1836 tower, shown in the picture, was dismantled in 1906.)

One of the members of the congregation during the war years was Dr. John Cox Hupp, like-minded friend of Dr. Julius LeMoyné, the noted abolitionist of Washington, Pennsylvania. He shared the sanctuary with Miss Adeline Caldwell, who kept a family of slaves. At the end of the war, Miss Caldwell bought a pew for the slave family who had previously sat in the gallery.

The divisive force of the slavery issue actually split the Presbyterian church into northern and southern branches, as it did with other denominations.



6 First State Capitol 1413 Eoff Street

The building today known as the First State Capitol was originally the home of Linsly Military Institute. The building was constructed in 1858 and served as the first capitol of West Virginia from June 20, 1863 to April 1, 1870. Two legislative sessions of the Restored Government of Virginia were held here, though their official offices were located in the Custom House, three blocks away on the corner of 16th and Market Streets.

The Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (1865, calling for the abolishment of slavery), the Fourteenth Amendment (1868, prohibiting states from depriving any person of life, liberty or property without "due process"), and the Fifteenth Amendment (1870, prohibiting the abridgement of the right to vote on the basis of race, color, or previous condition of servitude) were ratified in this building.

! Site numbers correspond to locations indicated on map printed on back page.



7 Frissell House 54 14th Street

One of the oldest residences in the downtown area, Dr. John Frissell's house was built in 1835. His office was in the adjoining two-story wing. A Massachusetts native, Frissell came to Wheeling in 1836. Soon after the Civil War began he was appointed by Governor Pierpont to be the medical supervisor of Civil War prisoners and soldiers in

Wheeling. He continued as acting assistant surgeon until the close of the war.

His medical experience prior to that time was extensive, with innovative surgeries including operations for harelip with deformed upper jaw (1838), for clubfoot by the division of tendons (1839), and for strabismus (1841). In November 1853 he introduced in Wheeling the use of chloroform in capital operations.

Frissell was also influential in the building of Wheeling Hospital, and he was the first president of the West Virginia Medical Society.



8 Hazlett House 921 Main Street

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Dr. Robert W. Hazlett entered the service as a surgeon of the 2nd Regiment, Virginia Volunteer Infantry. He later served as surgeon of Latham's independent brigade and as one of the surgeons of the U.S. general hospital in Grafton. He participated in many military engagements including Cedar Mountain and Second Bull Run.

At the close of the war, Dr. Hazlett returned to Wheeling to practice medicine. He was instrumental in getting Wheeling's water pumping station moved from downstream of sewer outlets for North Wheeling and Wheeling Hospital to a new location north of the city. Since typhoid was carried in water and was rampant at times in the city, Dr. Hazlett was rightfully concerned.

He retired in 1880 and died in 1899 in his retirement home, now the offices of Friends of Wheeling.



9 LaBelle Nail 31st and Wood Streets

When it began operating in 1852, Bailey, Woodward and Company – the predecessor of LaBelle – quickly became one of the leading cut nail manufacturers in the booming Wheeling district. When the Civil War began, the mill was prepared to meet the avalanche of urgent demands for iron products, including nails for new factories, warehouses, ships, and barracks. The photo shows original nail machines that are still in working order.

Many LaBelle ironworkers joined the First West Virginia Volunteer Infantry of Wheeling. It is said that Andrew Glass, one of the LaBelle founders, traveled to Massachusetts to obtain arms donated by that state to help protect Wheeling from Confederates. Workers from the factory presented Glass's brother-in-law and fellow nailer, Thomas Harris, with a hand-made sword to carry into battle. And the company's ceremonial cannon was fired when peace was eventually declared.



10 McLure Hotel 1200 Market Street

Built in 1852, the appearance of the McLure Hotel has changed dramatically over the years. The registration desk was originally on the second floor to avoid the muddy mess from unpaved streets. The 12th Street entrance was double wide to accommodate the hoop skirts in fashion during that era.

At one time, the McLure was the largest hotel in the state at one time with 315 rooms. It served as the headquarters of Union General William Rosecrans and was a welcome respite for delegates to the statehood conventions. Its restaurant offered a menu of venison, hams, oysters, calves feet, and a fine selection of wines and cognacs.

The hotel was also visited by Generals William Sherman and John C. Fremont and was where Col. Benjamin Kelly was taken after having been wounded in the first land battle of the Civil War at Philippi.



11 Old St. Matthew's Episcopal Church 12th and Byron Streets

This Grecian Doric building was consecrated in 1837 as the third home of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. The Civil War brought conflicts of divided loyalties within the church, and in 1861 the rector suddenly fled, leaving even his household goods, to take his family to the security

of Richmond. Later, he agreed to return to Wheeling if the Vestry would permit him to omit prayers for the President of the United States. The Vestry declined and engaged another minister who believed that the President did, indeed, need the prayers of the church.

Despite the controversies of the Civil War, St. Matthew's parish continued to grow and moved to another location in 1866. A Baptist congregation worshiped in the building until 1960, when it became home to the House of Prayer and later the Church of God and Saints of Christ.



12 Paxton-Zinn Building 1001 Main Street

William Paxton built this building around 1855, a few years after the construction of the 1849 Suspension Bridge. Paxton's son, James W. Paxton, was a member of the convention that re-organized the state government of

Virginia and was one of the Council of Five appointed to aid and advise Francis H. Pierpont, Governor of Virginia under the re-organized government.

Confectioner Peter Zinn first leased and then, in 1865, purchased the building. Local newspapers of the time relate stories of Civil War soldiers billeted across the river at Camp Carlile who walked across the bridge to buy ice cream and candy at the confectionary.

The building later housed a variety of businesses on the first floor, with upper floors used as a rooming house and apartments for the spinster Zinn sisters. The c.1920 photo predates the construction of the Capitol Theatre.



13 Phillips House 653 Main Street

Built in 1831, the Arthur and Hannah Phillips House declares its age with a lintel above a 2nd story window. Phillips was a blacksmith by trade and first began building riverboat steam engines in Steubenville. He moved to

Wheeling around 1831 and installed a foundry along the river behind the house. A number of the finest steamers on the river were being built in Wheeling at the time, including the A.M. Phillips, built in 1836.

By 1859 Phillips was appointed Inspector of Boilers and Hulls by President James Buchanan. Two years later, Phillips and two sons voted for Virginia's secession as the Civil War began, and President Abraham Lincoln removed him from his Inspector position.

The house suffered a disastrous fire in 1998. Although the façade was saved, the interior was entirely destroyed. The home was rebuilt beginning in 2004.



14 Phillips-McLure House 203 South Front Street

Daniel Zane built this house beginning in 1853 for his daughter Anne Phillips, wife of steamboat builder and Southern sympathizer Hanson Phillips. It was purchased in 1864 by John McLure, Jr., a noted riverboat captain and steamboat builder and a delegate to the first Wheeling statehood convention.

The day Virginia seceded from the Union, Captain McLure was in command of the riverboat Eunice, headed from Louisville to Wheeling. Upon reaching Cincinnati, McLure is said to have purchased numerous American flags, hoisting them from stern to stern. Despite threats from secessionists along the route, he vowed that he was a Union man and would die by that flag. Loudly ringing the ship's bell, he made it back to Wheeling unscathed. McLure then took the Eunice south again where it became the flagship of twelve troop- and supply-carrying steamers on the Kanawha River.

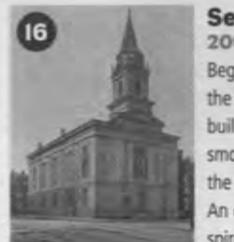


15 Charles Wells Russell House 75 12th Street

The Russell home was constructed in 1848 as a dwelling and attorney's office for Charles Wells Russell, one of the most important men in Wheeling before the Civil War. Russell argued several prominent cases - one involving the Wheeling Suspension Bridge when the state of

Pennsylvania attempted to halt construction. He also led efforts to bring the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to Wheeling.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Russell retained strong loyalty to Virginia and left Wheeling in 1861. His home was taken over as army headquarters for Generals William Rosecrans and John C. Fremont of the Army of Western Virginia. A telegraph line was run from Water Street to the house so all the orders to the field could be issued. After the war, the building was used as offices for doctors, an architect, and other businesses.



16 Second Presbyterian Church 20th and Market Streets

Begun in 1848 by former members of First Presbyterian Church, the Second Presbyterian community had 164 members when this building formally opened in 1850. It was originally coated in smooth, off-white stucco in the Greek Revival fashion popular at the time. In 1872 a south addition to the building was constructed.

An early tragedy occurred during construction in 1849. The first spire of the church had been raised by ropes and tackling when a line gave way and the spire crashed to the street below, killing a man who had just begun working at the site.

The famous American writer Rebecca Harding Davis grew up in a Centre Wheeling house that stood near the church. She noted in one of her stories that the sounds of a church bell could be heard from her window – the bell of Second Presbyterian!



17 Slave Market 10th Street (between Main and Market)

At the north end of the Market Plaza where the Second Ward market house once stood, a slave auction block operated for years before the Civil War. Coffles of shackled slaves were brought to Wheeling over the National Road, and hundreds of black men, women, and children were

"sold down the river." Held in pens nearby, slaves sometimes escaped with the assistance of conductors, often Quakers, on the Underground Railroad based in Martins Ferry, Ohio.

The deep South had a great need for slave labor for the large cotton plantations, and slave trading was a big business. Virginia, America's largest slaveholding state, exported half a million slaves to points south and west. Although western Virginia owned fewer slaves than the eastern portion, Wheeling was part of the social and political fabric of slaveholding Virginia and so was part of that network.



18 Wheeling Suspension Bridge A National Historic Landmark 10th and Main Streets

When Charles Ellet, Jr. built this bridge in 1849, it was the world's longest, single-span suspension bridge. The distance from tower to tower is 1010 feet.

Civil War soldiers used the bridge, crossing from Camp Carlile on Wheeling Island to the downtown for ice cream, liquor, and other favorite treats and pastimes. The bridge was also the route taken by prisoners held temporarily in the Athenaeum Prison as they were transferred west to Camp Chase in Columbus, Ohio.

Charles Ellet served the Union in the Civil War, building ram boats on the Mississippi River. He was wounded on one of those boats during the Battle of Memphis and died some weeks later from his wounds.

In 1871 Washington Roebling, who later achieved fame with his father for building the Brooklyn Bridge, designed stabilizing wires to prevent the deck from lifting.



19 Washington Hall Market & 12th Streets

Washington Hall was the site of the First Wheeling Convention, held May 13 through May 15, 1861, and the beginning of the Second Wheeling Convention, which convened on June 11. These conventions reorganized the government of Virginia and provided for the founding of the new state of West Virginia.

Delegates representing western counties of Virginia selected Arthur I. Boreman to serve as president of the convention. Boreman acknowledged that, "in this Convention we have no ordinary political gathering. We have no ordinary task before us. We come here to carry out and execute, and it may be, to institute a government for ourselves. We are determined to live under a State Government in the United States of America and under the Constitution of the United States."

The building opened in 1853. It was totally destroyed by fire in 1876.



20 Waterfront 12th and Water Streets

During the Civil War, the waterfront in Wheeling was a busy place with scores of steamboats and packets arriving and leaving daily. At that time, the river was only navigable for part of the year, prior to the building of the current system of dams.

Merchants brought their goods to the area where a wharf boat stored them until they could be loaded onto the appropriate steamboat. Two of Wheeling's biggest export products at the time were flour and nails. One packet could carry as many as 6,000 kegs of nails. The war also saw the transport of cannonballs from Wheeling. Legend has it that some were destined for use by the Confederacy.

The drawing, sketched by artist J.A. Faris, depicts the embarkation of the German Rifles and clearly shows the waterfront and Wheeling Suspension Bridge.



21 Wheeling Hospital North Main Street

Wheeling Hospital stood in North Wheeling from 1856 until 1975. The hospital buildings were demolished in 1997.

Founded in 1850 by Catholic Bishop Richard Whelan and Dr. Simon Hullahen, Wheeling Hospital is the oldest continuously operating hospital in West Virginia. In the

spring of 1864, Civil War casualties greatly strained the medical system, and beds were needed in locations farther from the battlefields. In April of that year Wheeling Hospital was designated a Post Hospital with acting surgeon Dr. John Kirker in charge. A local physician, Dr. John Frissell, served as assistant surgeon. On July 6, 1864, two hundred wounded soldiers arrived unexpectedly, and the Sisters of St. Joseph, who were nurses there, gave up their beds and slept on the floor of the Chapel to make room for the overflow. Union and Confederate wounded lay side-by-side and received equal treatment.



22 West Virginia Independence Hall Birthplace of West Virginia-

A National Historic Landmark 16th and Market Streets

Nearly six years before President Lincoln signed the proclamation making West Virginia the 35th State in the

Union, construction began on the Wheeling Custom House, headquarters for federal offices for the Western District of Virginia. Its completion, coinciding with the beginning of the Civil War, provided a facility for heated political discussions and constitutional conventions that led to eventual statehood for West Virginia in 1863. Here, issues dividing many Virginians, including slavery, were debated, compromised, and shaped into the skeleton of statehood. Serving as the Restored Government of Virginia (aligned with the Union) from 1861-1863, it is appropriately known today as West Virginia Independence Hall.

The grand architecture of the building's interiors has been authentically restored. Features include the "West Virginia: Born of the Civil War" exhibit and "Waving for Liberty," a display of West Virginia's Civil War battle flags.