

Edward J. Lewis (1828-1907)

Edward Lewis was a journalist. He used his skills to help build a newspaper here in Bloomington. He influenced opinions in McLean County for the end of slavery. He wrote of the daily boredom and adventures of "The Teachers' Regiment" in the Civil War. Finally, he helped record the county's history at the same time he was helping to make it.

Lewis was born on September 25, 1828 in Philadelphia to a Quaker family. His first experience in journalism was working as an exchange editor for a Philadelphia paper. In 1855, Jesse Fell, a local lawyer and friend of Abraham Lincoln, invited Lewis to come to Bloomington. Although his first job for Fell was at the lumber mills Fell owned in Southern Illinois, by June of the next year, Lewis became *The Pantagraph's* newest editor. Fell had started *The Pantagraph*, one of the four newspapers in Bloomington, just three years earlier. At that time it was published weekly.

Under Lewis's guidance, the paper began to devote more space to local news and political issues, particularly ones concerning the newly-formed Republican Party. Less than a year after taking over as editor, Lewis published the first edition of *The Daily Pantagraph*.

During the 1850s, the issue of slavery which had been dividing the country for years, exploded with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This act repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1850 by allowing states formed in the Western Territories to decide for themselves to be slave or free. In the presidential election year of 1856, slavery was the main issue. *The Pantagraph* opposed slavery on constitutional grounds. But other local papers were pro-slavery. The Democratic *National Flag*, another paper, constantly debated *The Pantagraph*. This led to hot arguments among local residents. In November, 1856, Lewis and Charles Barker, recently retired editor of *The Flag*, came to blows in the streets of Bloomington. The fight was broken up, but not before Barker had struck Lewis with his cane.

Lewis again in 1858 fought the issue of slavery with words during his coverage of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. But adventure called. In 1860, Lewis quit the paper and joined Thomas Fell, Jesse's younger brother, and William O. Davis, Fell's future son-in-law, on a gold prospecting trip to Colorado. Lewis sent regular correspondence back to *The Pantagraph* about his travels and experiences. His articles were excitedly consumed by Bloomington residents. Unfortunately, no gold was found, and after seven months, the men returned home poorer than when they left. Lewis always treasured the experience.

As the presidential election of 1860 neared, Republicans in Illinois began to promote their candidate, Abraham Lincoln. Few people in the East knew about Lincoln. So Jesse Fell sent Lincoln's autobiography to Edward Lewis's brother, Joseph, a journalist back in Philadelphia. This article along with other writings and speeches by Joseph helped Lincoln's fame in the East to grow.

On April 3, 1861, back in Bloomington after his gold prospecting adventure, Edward Lewis again became editor of the *Pantagraph*. He announced the beginning of the Civil War with the fighting at Fort Sumter in South Carolina, but by August, resigned his job again in order to join the Union Army. He served in Company C of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Illinois Volunteer Regiment, which was often called the “Normal” or “Teacher’s Regiment.”

Lewis kept detailed diaries of his war service and wrote frequent articles to the *Pantagraph*, providing Bloomington with news from the front lines. He also published a regiment newspaper called *The Normal Picket* which he hoped would give the young men from McLean County some news to “vary the monotony of daily drill and fatigue duty.”

After his discharge in late 1865, Lewis returned to Central Illinois. In 1871, he became editor of *The Pantagraph* for the third time, a position he held nearly eight years. In 1884, he became the postmaster of Normal, IL. He also served for a time as deputy sheriff and a clerk for the Wabash Railroad. Always, he continued to write; editorials, diaries, histories of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Regiment and articles for *The Pantagraph*.

Lewis was a member of the Charles E. Hovey post of the Grand Army of the Republic (the GAR). This was an organization of Union Army veterans. In his later years, Lewis helped countless Union Civil War veterans obtain disability pensions from the Federal Government. He never charged a fee for these services. One of those helped was Simon Malone of Normal. Malone, a former slave, had joined the Union Army and was injured in an ambush.

On November 3, 1907, Edward Lewis died of a sudden illness of the stomach at his home at 304 Kelsey Street. He is buried at Evergreen Cemetery.

**Discussion Question: How did newspaper articles and editorials help cause the Civil War? How did they affect the local population?**