Honorable Mention: Nonfiction

"Fighting Secession from Little Steuben"

By Lauren Banks

On September 13, 1917, the citizens of Angola, Indiana gathered in the center of town for a celebration. After years of proposals and petitions, all of their hard work had finally paid off. The Soldiers Monument had not only been approved, but construction had been completed, and the townspeople were elated. Everyone enjoyed a day of festivities to commemorate this momentous occasion. Local bands and singers took turns performing as the people danced in the public square. Speeches were spaced throughout the afternoon, commemorating the new structure in the center of town. Finally, those who had served in the Civil War - those brave, patriotic men who had selflessly volunteered themselves to push back against the treason of the South - would be publicly honored.

The Carnegie Public Library of Steuben County has quite a rich collection of local history. Several binders sit nestled on the shelves of the resource room, filled with yellowed newspaper clippings and black and white photographs. When I perused the shelves, looking for interesting information about the county, a binder simply labeled *Angola History* seemed like a good place to start. The pieces within seemed to be organized by the order they were donated to the library; in other words, not at all. Newspaper articles from the 1800s intermixed with touristy flyers from the 1960s. Firsthand accounts of the town's founding rested beside colored photographs of the Mound with phrases like "Angola Indiana: easy to find, hard to leave." As I skimmed through the pages, one record caught my eye. It seemed to be notes from a meeting regarding the approval of a Civil War monument. The next page of the binder featured a newspaper article about local contribution

to the Civil War. This led me on an exploration into Steuben County's involvement in the war effort, of which the local people seemed to be particularly invested.

Of the 1,480 local men who were eligible to serve, Steuben County sent 1,278. A newspaper at the time claimed that the county would do whatever it took to "kill secession;" the War History of Steuben County Indiana stated "no part of the country exhibited a stronger feeling to crush the hydra seeds of treason than little Steuben." The town lived up to its claims, sending more men per capita than any other county in the state.

I spoke with Michael Sutton, a history professor at Trine University, a Civil War antique collector and a relative of quite a few Civil War veterans from the area. According to Sutton, slavery wasn't the reasoning most local men had for fighting in the war. Indiana had been a free state since its conception, in large part because the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 outlawed slavery in any new territories. Even so, most northern Indiana residents had little knowledge on the realities of slavery in other parts of the country. In the 1800s, people didn't travel much, and when they did, it was much shorter distances than we are used to today. "If you were a farmer from Steuben County, you *might* make it to Fort Wayne once a year," Sutton said. The realities of slavery were a mystery to those who lacked firsthand experience. Books like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* often provided the only knowledge most people had on the subject.

Even if the locals had known about the harsh realities of slavery at the time, many may not have cared. It is true that some moved to Indiana because it was a free state; however, a fairly large number of Indiana settlers had moved from south to north, coming from places like Kentucky and Tennessee, where slavery was not just legal, but widely supported. "You never had slavery here," Sutton said, "but you did have fairly significant. . . Copperhead sympathies, especially in Indiana. . . What they would do is, they would take a large cent. . . and they would clip the liberty head off

of a large cent, making a copper head, and then they would wear that on their lapel to show that they were of southern sympathy. . . and there was a fairly strong Copperhead sympathy in Steuben County."

So why did we fight? Why were the men in the area so determined to join the war if they didn't care about slavery? Well, while the Civil War can attribute slavery as a cause, there was another issue that instigated Lincoln's war declaration. Slavery had divided our country to such an extent that the southern states decided to secede, and it was this decision that drove Union men to war *en masse*. "They weren't going off to fight a war to eliminate slavery, they were going off to fight a war to preserve the Union because the American flag had been fired upon, and you know, the Confederacy was considered to be a nest of traitors, and of vipers, snakes! That's why the average guy in this area would've marched off to war," Sutton said.

So Steuben County sent men in droves to enlist. Some enlisted in Indiana, but it was common to enlist in nearby states as well. The federal government would provide each state with a list of the companies that state needed to fill. In turn, the state would tell each county how many men were needed and for what type of regiment. "Now, a Civil War regiment is 10 companies of 100 men apiece. There [were] about 1,000 men in a Civil War infantry regiment, about the same in a cavalry regiment. The only difference is one is foot and one goes by a horse. . . They would come to Steuben County, and they would say, 'We need you to raise two companies,' or 'five companies,' or 'the whole regiment,' just depending. And then they would try to recruit, you know, they would send out recruiters to try to recruit for those regiments. And people would, you know, sign up. . . A lot of it was just dependent on when did you want to enlist? Who was recruiting at that time? What kind of a unit did you want to join? Were there other people of your neighbors

and your friends that were gonna also wanna join at the same time? So all those factors were all kinda combined together," Sutton said.

Sometimes, entire regiments would be raised in a single county, which boosted enlistment numbers as people signed up for the same regiment as their friends and family. The 44th and 129th regiments in Indiana primarily consisted of Steuben County men. Nonetheless, many from the county enlisted in Ohio, Michigan or Illinois, often going in groups to enlist in the same regiment. As a newspaper article from the library highlighted, thirty Steuben County men joined the 4th Michigan infantry regiment, and "over thirty more enlisted in Chicago in the 42nd Infantry Regiment." Sometimes, areas would be enlisting for special regiments that had more specific roles. "Another ancestor that was from Steuben County. . . he took the train to Cleveland because he enlisted in a special regiment, which was the 9th company of Ohio Independent Sharpshooters," Sutton said. "They were issued Spencer rifles, which a Spencer rifle is the most advanced technology that they had during the war. . . and they would serve as sharpshooters for the 9th Corps of the Army of the Potomac."

By 1865, the fighting had ended, and all but 240 of the local veterans returned home, but the war was far from forgotten. According to the Steuben County History website, the people of the area wanted a monument. They campaigned for one throughout the 1880s and 1890s; however, no action was taken. Instead, a grassy area in the center of town was dedicated to "the memory of those who served." Veterans placed crosses, and children planted flowers to decorate the space. As the years passed, Civil War veterans were getting too old to maintain the area. Once again, the townspeople asked for a monument. It took until 1916 to form a monument association with members from each township. The association circulated petitions throughout the county, reaching a total of 1,300 signatures.

The meeting notes I originally found in the library binder mention the "popularly signed petition" that was presented to the county commissioners. This time, it was approved and turned over to the Town Council to determine funding. The council set aside $15,000 for the construction of a Civil War monument made of Barre granite and bronze statues, which would be located in the grassy area already dedicated to the veterans of the war. The City of Angola donated another $1,000 for the foundation of the structure. The cost of the monument totaled $16,000, an equivalent of roughly $372,000 in today's money. Each statue was life-size and represented one of the four branches of service: infantry, artillery, cavalry and navy. Atop the monument stood a bronze depiction of Columbia, holding out a hero's wreath in one hand and an American flag in the other. The Soldiers Monument on the Mound was dedicated September 13, 1917, amidst a celebration in the town square.

Throughout the years, the Soldiers Monument has continued to be a highlight of Steuben County. It remains the focal point of Angola's historic district and appears in most promotional tourism material for the city, often photographed from an angle that allows a view of the Steuben County Courthouse in the background. As the years went on, according to a KPC article written by Mike Marturello, the monument had begun to show signs of wear, falling into disrepair by the 1980s. The granite began to crack, and the statues had "weathered, their pressed copper oxidizing in the elements." In 1993, the damage was repaired, restoring the monument to its former glory. In 2015, the site underwent more improvements. "Angola refurbished the mound itself, adding new electric, sound and irrigation infrastructure, as well as a new walk around the perimeter."

As someone who grew up in Steuben County, my memories of the Soldiers Monument include rolling down the windows in December to hear the Christmas music serenading the statues from hidden speakers and laughing as my dad drove the car around and around and around the

roundabout, pretending to be lost. I drive past the monument nearly every day on my commute, yet I had never paused to consider the depth of the massive structure before me and the significance it held in my small town.