

The Civil War Governors' Kentucky



"Artillery in the march to Bowling Green," 1862, by Henry Mosler. KHS.

1861-1865

The state of the Commonwealth: More divided than ever

The Civil War started in April 1861 and ended in May 1865. During those four years, the war ripped Kentucky apart and touched nearly every aspect of people's lives.

The conflict forced the government and citizens to decide whether to support the Union or the Confederacy. While the government sided with the United States and approximately 100,000 Kentucky men fought for the North, about 35,000 Kentuckians joined the Confederacy.

During the Civil War, troops fought dozens of battles and skirmishes on Kentucky soil. Confederate guerrillas targeted both military units and citizens. Women, children and the elderly had to fend for themselves in a society not geared for their self-support.

There was homelessness, starvation, disease and crime. Sometimes the very people charged with maintaining law and order were the worst offenders.

Local governments failed to function properly—or at all. In their absence, people often turned to the governor for help.

Kentucky's wartime governors were Beriah Magoffin (1859-1862), James F. Robinson (1862-1863) and Thomas E. Bramlette (1863-1867). Some of the issues they faced remain with us today.