

Montgomery County in the 1860s

As the Civil War enveloped our nation in the 1860s, the residents of Montgomery County lived in a war zone. Strategically located next to the City of Washington (Washington DC), Montgomery County and the State of Maryland were of vital importance to the security of our nation's capital. For the first time since the War of 1812, people felt the touch of war.

Residents of the county were impacted in many ways. Union and Confederate soldiers regularly passed through the area, small bands of troops conducted raids, and young men went off to fight on both sides of the conflict. Spies and smugglers made trusting your neighbor difficult, staple goods became more and more scarce, and cannon fire heard from across the river created a tension felt by all. In the midst of this, martial law was imposed throughout Maryland. This military rule meant checkpoints, curfews, passes for travel to certain places, seemingly random citizen arrests, and the seizure of property.

Maryland was a slave-holding state until emancipation on November 1, 1864, when the Maryland Constitution outlawed slavery. Of the county's approximately 18,000 residents in 1860, over 5,400 were enslaved and 1,550+ were free blacks. The county had 760 slave owners, 674 with holdings of fewer than 15. Sentiment in the northwestern part of the county was mostly pro-South and pro-slavery. On the other hand, the Quaker residents of Sandy Spring had freed their slaves by the early 1800s. The State and county debated secession throughout 1861 but never reached consensus on the issue.

As part of the Civil War Sesquicentennial, Heritage Montgomery produced the documentary film, *Life in a War Zone: Montgomery County during the Civil War*, a 32-page brochure *Guide to the Civil War in Montgomery County, Maryland*, and, in partnership with Washington Revels, the musical CD, "Hard Times Come Again No More: American Music of the Civil War Era."