

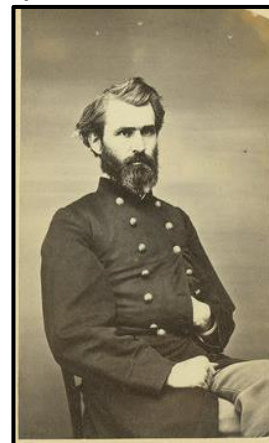
*Pieces of Iowa's Past*, published by the Iowa State Capitol Tour Guides monthly, features historical facts about Iowa, the Capitol, and the early workings of state government. All italicized text/block quotes in this document are taken directly from historical publications with the actual spelling, punctuation, and grammar retained.

## **Examining the Firsts: Ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment**

This year marked the beginning of the 91st Iowa General Assembly. Some of this year's Pieces of Iowa's Past articles will briefly examine the work of the First, Eleventh, Twenty-first, Thirty-first, Forty-first, Fifty-first, Sixty-first, Seventy-first and Eighty-first General Assemblies or observe interesting events that happened during those years.

February is Black History Month, a time to honor the struggles and achievements of Black Americans throughout history. It's fitting, then, that this edition of Pieces of Iowa's Past highlights a pivotal moment in both state and national history—the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. During Iowa's 11th General Assembly in 1866, lawmakers took significant steps toward civil rights, reinforcing the state's commitment to equality.

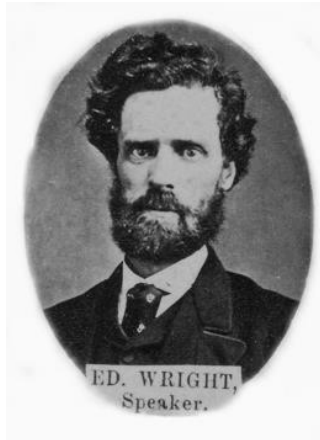
The Eleventh General Assembly convened Jan. 8, 1866, and adjourned April 3, 1866, an 86-day session. The Eleventh General Assembly had a total of 146 members. The Governor was William M. Stone. The House of Representatives was made up of 83 Republicans and 15 Democrats. Ed Wright, a Republican from Cedar County, presided as the Speaker of the House. The Senate was made up of 43 Republicans and 5 Democrats. Benjamin F. Gue, a republican from Webster County, presided as the President of the Senate<sup>1</sup>.



Governor [William M. Stone](#)

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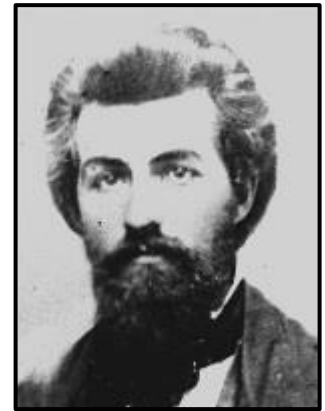
<sup>1</sup> From September 3, 1857, to January 14, 1991, the Lieutenant Governor served as President of the Senate as mandated by Article IV, section 18, of the Iowa Constitution. A 1988 amendment redefined the role, and since 1991, the Lieutenant Governor no longer presides over the state Senate.



Speaker of the House  
[Ed Wright](#)

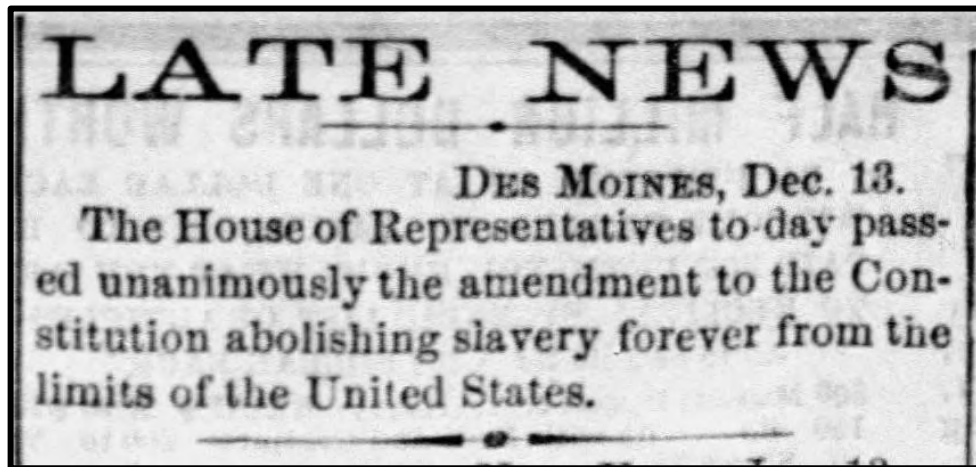
The Eleventh General Assembly was the first convening of Iowa legislators following the Civil War. Even though Iowa entered the Union as a free state, its citizens were concerned with slavery-related issues, such as western expansion and the political rights of free Black Americans. According to Dorothy Schwieder's "Iowa: The Middle Land," Iowans, like most Northerners, often had contradictory attitudes toward Black Americans and their status within society. In 1851, the Iowa General Assembly passed an "exclusionary law" that prohibited Black Americans from coming into Iowa, the first Northern state to do

so. When the question of Black suffrage went before the people of Iowa in 1857, specifically striking the word "white" from the Constitution, it was defeated by a large majority of the voters. It wasn't until 1868 that "white" was stricken, allowing Black men to vote and serve in the state militia.



Lieutenant Governor  
[Benjamin F. Gue](#)

During Iowa's Eleventh General Assembly, the state ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, officially abolishing slavery in the United States. This pivotal decision marked a significant steppingstone in Iowa's civil rights and Black history, reinforcing the state's efforts toward equality. While this was a legislative victory, it was shaped by the efforts of key Iowa leaders, such as Governor Stone and Congressman John Kasson delivering powerful oral arguments in support of ratification.



The Morning Democrat, January 15, 1866

### **Congressman John Kasson**

In January 1865, Congressman John A. Kasson delivered a speech to the U.S. House of Representatives regarding the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. During this time, Kasson was representing Iowa's new Fifth Congressional District and was serving as chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Coinage, Weights, and Measures. Kasson's speech addressed the issue of slavery, arguing against the Democratic Party's stance and highlighting the need for a constitutional change.



Congressman  
[John A. Kasson](#)

One of the significant concerns of the Thirteenth Amendment was that it was an overreach of federal power that would interfere with states' rights. Kasson disputes this concern by arguing that the amendment does not improperly interfere with states' rights, but actually supports them by ensuring that states cannot impinge on the rights of citizens.

In his concluding remarks, Kasson emphasized the recognition of three fundamental human rights – the rights of a husband to his wife, a parent to their children, and personal liberty – as crucial and inalienable. Denying these rights inevitably leads to conflict and requires suppression of dissent. So as long as slavery persists, it will perpetuate a cycle of moral and

physical conflict. Kasson believed that not addressing slavery would result in endless bloodshed and disunion.

Not only that, but that great and increasing party which believes in progressive civilization, and which has moved over the world the mighty tide of which I speak, supported by the mightier power of religion, is beginning to clearly recognize that there are three great fundamental natural rights of human society which you cannot take away without striking a vital blow at the rights of white men as well as black. They are the rights of a husband to his wife—the marital relation; the right of a father to his child—the parental relation; and the right of a man to the personal liberty with which he was endowed by nature and by God, and which the best judicial authorities of England have for a hundred years declared he could not alienate even by his own consent. Take away these three great fundamental rights from any large class of human beings, then do you cry “peace,” “peace?” and do you expect no assault upon a system which deprives men of such a class of rights! Sir, you must palsy the tongue which would speak; you must do more, you must palsy the hand and the arm which would strike, or you will never, never, never have ~~the~~ peace in this country while that institution exists, the perpetual occasion of moral, intellectual, and physical warfare. I put it then to gentlemen of that side of the House, having avoided every element of partisan debate in this discussion, whether pure reason, and sound patriotism, and just policy, do not require of them to support this amendment, and allow its submission to the people of this country. If you desire peace and harmony, you will give the people of the North and of the South an opportunity to establish harmonious relations by the expression of legitimate majorities upon this question. If you desire perpetual discord and war, then you will refuse them the opportunity, and compel the perpetuation of this institution, with bloodshed without end in the future, and disunion without end in the present.

Kasson's concluding remarks in his 1865  
speech to the U.S. House of Representatives

## Governor William Stone

In his 1866 inaugural address, Governor William Stone dedicated a significant portion to the topic of slavery, its abolishment, and the implications of the Thirteenth Amendment. A Civil War hero himself, Stone enlisted as a private in the Union Army and rose to the rank of colonel, leading the 22nd Iowa Volunteer Infantry through the Vicksburg Campaign. Wounded twice and imprisoned in a Confederate camp, he emerged from the war not only as a distinguished soldier but also as a steadfast advocate for Black American voting rights in Iowa.

The magnanimous conduct of this immense population of bondmen, has contradicted the observation and experience of other Nations, and must excite in their behalf the admiration of posterity. Under no perceivable obligation to assist in the maintenance of a government from which they have never received either justice or mercy, and whose arm for generations had only sustained their oppressors, they nevertheless became, both in spirit and conduct, not merely the truest friends of the Union in the South, but the only friends from whose co-operation the National cause derived material aid in the entire region of the rebel States. Nor was their alliance to our cause by any means an inconsiderable accession to the disposable power of the Union. In various ways their physical efforts, always cheerfully rendered, and their knowledge of the country and its inhabitants, assisted in a large degree in overcoming the serious difficulties which so often interposed themselves to the advance of our armies through the insurgent States. While on many a field of conflict for the Union, their dusky battalions have displayed a steadiness, a devotion and courage excelled only by the tried veterans of the Northern armies.

Excerpt taken from Governor Stone's 1866 inaugural address

In his address, Stone advocated for the enfranchisement of Black Americans in Iowa, arguing that their loyalty and service during the Civil War necessitated equal political rights, specifically highlighting Iowa's 700 Black soldiers who served in Iowa's First Colored Infantry Regiment, eventually becoming the Sixtieth U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment. Stone connects emancipation with enfranchisement, viewing them as inseparable components of justice and national unity, and so urges the Iowa Legislature to amend the state constitution to grant Black citizens the right to vote. He concludes his address with the adoption of a resolution supporting the principles of freedom, justice, and political equality for all.

These resolutions having been adopted by Congress since the last General Assembly was in session, their ratification by this State has necessarily been delayed until now. To make this triumph of freedom more emphatic and glorious, let us hasten to place Iowa in the column of ratifying States. Though late at the altar, our offering will help to swell the funeral pyre of slavery.

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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These measures—Emancipation and Enfranchisement—radiant with the hopes of millions, and dictated alike by wisdom and justice, should together receive our cordial sanction. They are intimately related as concurrent rights, and we cannot consistently grant the one and withhold the other.

Governor Stone's call to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment  
to the U.S. Constitution

## Conclusion

The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution received the required support (three-fourths of the states voting in favor) for its ratification in December 1865, abolishing slavery in the United States. The Iowa General Assembly convened Monday, January 8, 1866, and ratified the amendment the following Monday, January 15, 1866, and became the thirty-first state to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.

Although the Thirteenth Amendment secured the required number of states to become an amendment to the Constitution, Iowa's support still mattered for a few reasons. It reinforced the national commitment to abolishing slavery, helped prevent future challenges to the amendment's legitimacy,

