

Edward J. Lewis (1828-1907)

Edward J. Lewis was born to Enoch and Lydia Jackson Lewis in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on September 25, 1828. He was born into a Quaker family. His father taught mathematics at a Quaker school in Westtown, PA. Edward was educated at home and later studied law with his brother, Joseph. Two of his sisters ran a boarding school and edited Quaker publications.

Lewis got his first experience in the field of journalism in the 1850s. For a brief time he served as an exchange editor for a Philadelphia newspaper. That experience whetted his appetite for a long career in journalism.¹ In 1855 he moved to Bloomington, Illinois at the invitation of Jesse W. Fell, a local lawyer.² That first winter, Lewis worked for Fell at the lumber mills he owned in southern Illinois.³

Fell had helped produce Bloomington's first newspaper, *The Bloomington Observer and McLean County Advocate* in 1836.⁴ Unfortunately, the paper did not last more than a few years. In 1846 Charles P. Merriman took up Fell's mantle with the *McLean County Register*, then *The Western Whig*, followed by *The Bloomington Intelligencer*, and finally, in 1853 *The Pantagraph*.⁵ In June, 1856 Lewis became *The Pantagraph*'s newest editor.⁶ Over time he altered the nature of the publication to include more space for local coverage and political issues particularly ones concerning the newly-formed Republican Party.⁷ Moreover, he removed "the junk" on page one and added articles with "more point than most of the former miscellany that had appeared" there.⁸ The first daily issue of *The Pantagraph* appeared during Lewis's tenure on February 23, 1857. With the *Weekly* and now the *Daily* in circulation, Lewis's work dramatically increased. At times, he produced over 3,000 words per day.⁹

In the 1850s, the national debate over slavery exploded. Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 by allowing a territory's population to determine whether it was slave or free, created controversy across the nation and incited violence in the West. Furthermore, the topic of slavery dominated the election of 1856. During Lewis's first term as editor, he would write about these issues in addition to the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates.¹⁰

The Pantagraph opposed slavery on constitutional grounds not moral ones, and was never an abolitionist paper.¹¹ Other local papers favored slavery however. The Democratic *National Flag* for one, sparred constantly with the Republican *Pantagraph*. By November, 1856 the debate became personal and violent when Lewis and recently-

¹ "Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead," *The Daily Pantagraph*, November 4, 1907.

² Edward J. Lewis, "A History of the Pantagraph," (Bloomington: McLean County Historical Society, 1901), 11; "Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead."

³ Harold Sinclair, *The Daily Pantagraph, 1846-1946*, (Bloomington: Evergreen Communications, Inc., 1976), 65.

⁴ "Jesse W. Fell."

⁵ "Pantagraph" means "to write all things"; Sinclair, vii

⁶ Lewis, "A History of the Pantagraph," 5.

⁷ Sinclair, 65 & 71

⁸ Sinclair, 71

⁹ Sinclair, 72-73

¹⁰ Lewis, "Good Bye," *The Daily Pantagraph*, March 15, 1879.

¹¹ Sinclair, 65

retired *Flag* editor, Charles I. Barker, came to blows in the streets of Bloomington.¹² The quarrel stemmed from a *Pantagraph* editorial which Barker found insulting. The fight was broken up but not before Barker struck Lewis with his cane. In a later article, Lewis stated that if the fight had not been broken up, “Barker would have had good cause to remember the day.”¹³ Even with such strong pro-slavery opinions working against him, it can safely be said that Lewis personally influenced the growth of anti-slavery sentiment in McLean County.

Lewis retired from the paper for the first time on January 28, 1860.¹⁴ Western adventure and fortune called to him. Gold and quartz had been discovered in the Colorado region in 1858 and 1859 respectively. So in March, 1860 he journeyed west with Henry C. Fell, Jesse Fell’s oldest son; Thomas Fell, Jesse’s brother; and William O. Davis, Jesse’s future son-in-law. Lewis sent regular correspondence back to *The Pantagraph* about his travels to and experiences in Colorado. His articles were excitedly consumed by Bloomington residents.¹⁵ Unfortunately, wealth eluded him and his companions. Seven months later, the men returned to Bloomington poorer than when they had left. Despite his failure, Lewis cherished the experience and claimed that it helped him prepare for his time in the Army.¹⁶

Edward’s brother, Joseph J. Lewis of Westchester, Pennsylvania was instrumental in the nomination of Abraham Lincoln for the Presidency. Joseph helped publish Lincoln’s autobiography which Fell had forwarded to him. The article first appeared in the *Chester County Times*, which Joseph edited, on February 11, 1860 and was widely copied in the region.¹⁷ The article, along with work and speeches by Joseph, helped curious easterners acquaint themselves with the career and character of Abraham Lincoln. Pennsylvania was a bastion of the Republican Party and became a valuable ally for Lincoln at the Republican National Convention in Chicago. Joseph Lewis also served as a delegate to the Convention and helped steer his state toward supporting Lincoln.¹⁸ After the election, Lincoln appointed Joseph as Commissioner of Internal Revenue.¹⁹

Once again, Edward Lewis became *The Pantagraph*’s editor on April 3, 1861. He worked for only four months before retiring again but he *was* there to announce the beginning of hostilities at Fort Sumter, the start of the Civil War. On August 8, 1861, Lewis left the paper for the second time to join the Union Army.²⁰ Lewis served in Company C of the 33rd Illinois Volunteer Regiment from August 15, 1861 until December 7, 1865.²¹ His regiment, often called the “Normal Regiment” or “Teacher’s

¹² Charles I. Barker, “An Editor Badly Whipped,” *National Flag*, November 14, 1856; “The ‘Flag’ Editor—Once More,” *The Weekly Pantagraph*, November 19, 1856.

¹³ Lewis, “The ‘Flag’ Editor—Once More,” *Weekly Pantagraph*, November 18, 1856.

¹⁴ Lewis, “Good Bye.”

¹⁵ Sinclair, 90

¹⁶ Lewis, “Across the Plains to the Rocky Mountains in 1860,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, August 2, 1902.

¹⁷ Harold K. Sage, “Jesse W. Fell and the Lincoln Autobiography,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1981).

¹⁸ Frances Milton I. Morehouse, *The Life of Jesse W. Fell*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1916), 58-60 & 62.

¹⁹ “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

²⁰ Lewis, “A History of the Pantagraph,” 7. *The Weekly Pantagraph* had changed to *The Daily Pantagraph* in early 1857.

²¹ Lewis, “A History of the Pantagraph,” 7 & 11; “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

Brigade,” served throughout the Southwest from Missouri to Louisiana to Texas.²² The 33rd took part in numerous altercations in Arkansas in 1862.²³

Lewis maintained detailed diaries of his war service and wrote frequent articles to *The Pantagraph* essentially serving as the group’s historian.²⁴ His articles provided Bloomington residents with news from the front lines. Lewis also produced a newspaper called the *Normal Picket*, “devoted to the Union, the Normal regiment, and to supplying the want of something to vary the monotony of daily drill and fatigue duty.”²⁵ In the summer of 1863, Lewis’s regiment destroyed the railways near Jackson, Mississippi and then marched to Vicksburg, MS. where it helped prepare for the now-famous siege of that city.²⁶ Lewis became captain of Company C when 1st Lieutenant Henry M. Kellogg died at Vicksburg.²⁷ By the beginning of December, Lewis’s regiment had defeated Confederate forces at Fort Esperanza, Texas on the Gulf coast.²⁸ On January 1, 1864 the 33rd Regiment re-enlisted and was sent to New Orleans, Louisiana.

After the surrender of the Confederate Army the next year, the Federal Government kept many Union soldiers active. A disgruntled Lewis wrote to *The Pantagraph* on June 23, 1865,

It does seem to me that the Government ought to feel in honor bound to release the volunteer forces with all the speed which is at all consistent with the general safety. The volunteer soldiers took up arm for a special purpose, the crushing of the rebellion; and under the strongest kind of implied pledge, that they should be released from military service as soon as that work was done. It seems to me very like a breach of contract to hold them for the full time of their enlistment, to do police duty in the subjugated States, or to use them as a weapon to threaten or to actually prosecute a foreign war, for which they never volunteered.... Understand this, that the one reward which we ask, the one we can most highly appreciate as something [sic] substantial and practical, and the one without which all others are held of little account by us, is a speedy discharge from the service.²⁹

This opinion was repeated in a subsequent article two months later.³⁰ A devoted soldier during wartime, Lewis grew impatient with the government’s decision to retain a standing army after the defeat of the rebellion. Eventually Lewis’s regiment was mustered out of service on December 7, 1865.³¹

After his discharge, Lewis returned to Central Illinois. He even lived on a farm in Livingston County for a few years.³² In October, 1871 Lewis became *The Pantagraph*’s chief editor for the third time after serving a two-month stint as the assistant to the

²² Kent P. Slack, “... With Pen or With Sword....: The Civil War Diary Accounts of Edward J. Lewis,” 1.

²³ “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

²⁴ Slack, “... With Pen or With Sword....,” 4; Sinclair, *The Daily Pantagraph*, 98.

²⁵ “Normal Picket,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 1, 1862.

²⁶ “The Conduct of the War,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, August 12, 1863; “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

²⁷ LaBaron, *History of McLean County*, (1879), 271.

²⁸ Lewis, “Letter From the 33rd Illinois,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, December 22, 1863.

²⁹ Lewis, “A Letter From a Veteran,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, July 13, 1865.

³⁰ Lewis, “The Thirty Third.—A Plea for Discharge,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, September 27, 1865.

³¹ “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

³² “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

editor.³³ Less than a year after assuming this position, he married Elizabeth A. Shores—a Civil War widow—on March 7, 1872. The couple had no children.³⁴ Finally, on March 15, 1879 Lewis retired from the paper for the last time.³⁵

In his later years, Lewis helped countless Union Civil War veterans obtain disability pensions from the Federal Government and never charged a fee for his services. One such instance occurred on September 21, 1880 when he wrote a successful letter on behalf of Simon Malone of Normal. Malone, a former slave, had escaped to the North in 1863, joined the Union Army, and sustained injuries in an ambush.³⁶ In 1884, Lewis became the postmaster of Normal, Illinois. He later served as the assistant to his successor.³⁷ By his death, Lewis had written numerous editorials, 50 diaries, and histories of both the 33rd Regiment and *The Pantagraph*. At one time, Lewis also served as deputy sheriff and a clerk for the Wabash Railroad.

Edward Lewis died on November 3, 1907 at his home at 304 East Kelsey Street. He had been ill, suffering from a “sudden illness of the stomach.” The condition worsened to include faintness and an “aberration of mental faculties.” He entered a deep sleep from which he never awoke. Lewis was a member of the Charles E. Hovey post of the Grand Army of the Republic, a fraternal organization of Union Army veterans. According to Lewis’s wishes, the GAR handled his funeral arrangements.³⁸ He was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

By: Anthony Bowman, 2009

³³ Lewis, “Good Bye.”

³⁴ “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

³⁵ Lewis, “A History of the Pantagraph,” 11.

³⁶ Letter from Edward J. Lewis to Captain William H. Hopkins, September 21, 1880; See Simon Malone biography.

³⁷ Lewis, “A History of the Pantagraph,” 11; “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”

³⁸ “Capt. Edward J. Lewis is Dead.”