

Grand Triumph Of Freedom

by Lynne Belluscio

The headlines in the February 8, 1865, *LeRoy Gazette* proclaimed: "GRAND TRIUMPH OF FREEDOM - The passage of the Constitutional Amendment - Excitement and Enthusiasm in the House of Representatives."

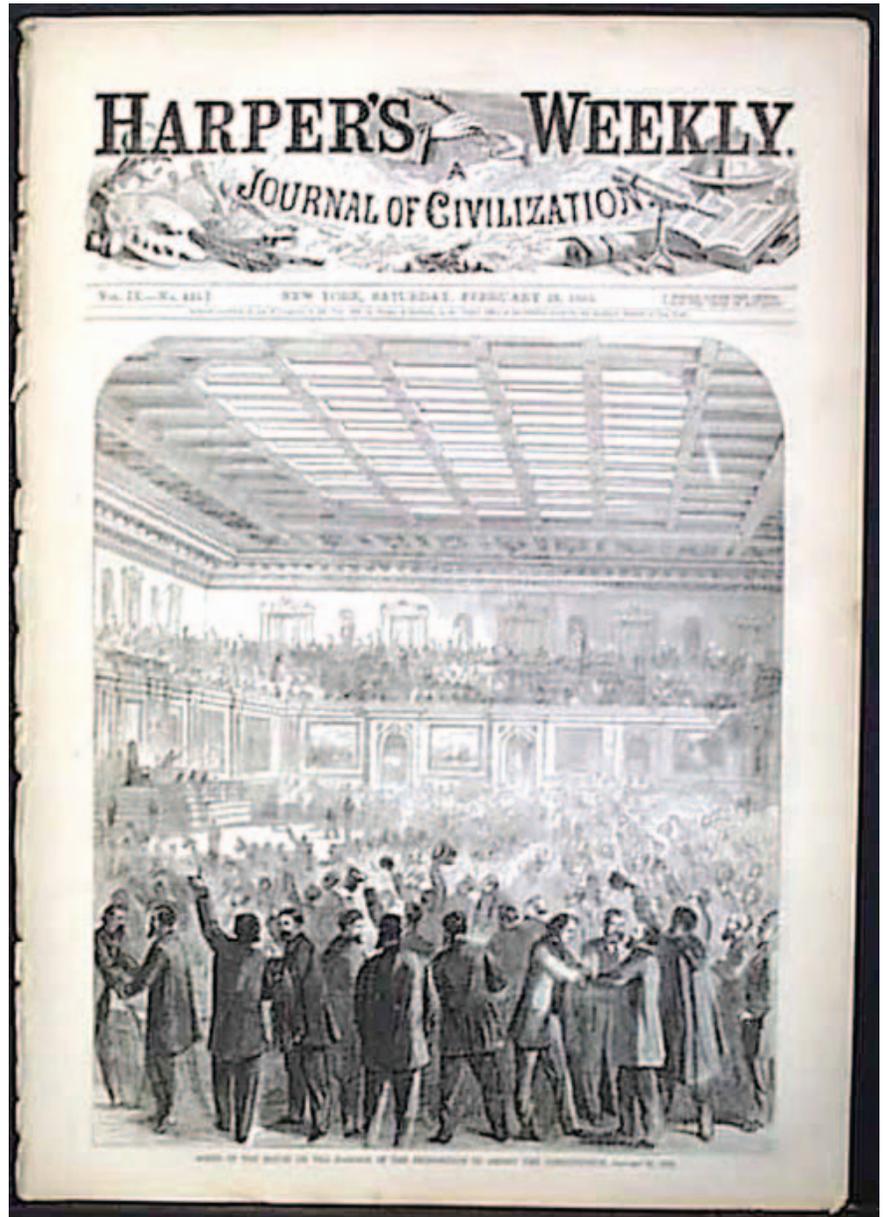
Congress had just passed the 13th Amendment* which abolished slavery. The recent movie "Lincoln" - which takes some liberties with the actual sequence of events - illustrates the volatility in Washington at that time.

Although President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, liberating all the slaves held in the south, this presidential proclamation was possible only in war. Lincoln knew that it would require a Constitutional Amendment to abolish slavery throughout the nation.

The Senate passed the 13th Amendment in April 1864, but it took persuasion, bribery, and political maneuvering to secure the majority necessary to pass the House. The Republicans - the inheritors of the old Whig Party - were for the most part, supportive of the abolition of slavery and the war. But they needed to enlist the votes from the "War" Democrats". One of those Democrats was the Representative from Genesee County, John Ganson.

Born in LeRoy in 1818, he was the son of one of the earliest settlers of LeRoy. He attended school at the Canandaigua Academy and then went to Harvard Law School, graduating in 1839. He was president of the Hasty Pudding Club at Harvard. He practiced law for a short time in Canandaigua, and then moved to Buffalo in 1849. He served in the State Senate, and then was elected to Congress in 1863. Ganson was described as totally bald, with no hair on his head or face. I discovered a story about Ganson and Lincoln. Treasury Department official Chauncey Depew related that the President evaded issues he did not want to discuss: "John Ganson of Buffalo, was the leader of

the bar in western New York. Though elected to the House of Representatives as a Democrat, he supported the war measures of the administration. He was a gentleman of the old school, of great dignity, and always immaculately dressed. He was totally bald and his face also devoid of hair. It was a gloomy period of the war and the reports from the front very discouraging. Congressman Ganson felt it his duty to see the president about the state of the country. He made a formal call and said to Mr. Lincoln: 'Though I am a Democrat, I imperil my political future by supporting your war measures. I can understand that secrecy may be necessary in military operations, but I think I am entitled to know the exact conditions, good or bad, at the front.' Mr. Lincoln looked at him earnestly for a minute and then said: Ganson, how clean you shave! That ended the interview." John Ganson's obituary stated that "He was a War Democrat, supporting the administration of President Lincoln vigorously and heartily. ... He supported the complete and final abolition of slavery as heartily as any man in Congress." After the amendment passed Congress, it had to be ratified by 27 states. New York ratified the 13th Amendment on February 3, a few days after being passed by Congress. Ironic as it seems, the 27th state to ratify the amendment abolishing slavery was the State of Georgia. Under the conditions of surrender, all



the southern states had to agree to accept the Constitution - including the 13th Amendment. *Doing a little research about the 13th Amendment, I discovered that in March 1861, both the Senate and the House, with support from President Lincoln, passed a 13th Constitutional Amendment that preserved slavery in the states where it

already existed. A few states ratified the amendment, but the Civil War erupted, the southern states seceded and the amendment was not approved. Nevertheless, this 13th Amendment was published in several states. It later was known as the Corwin Amendment.

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