



## Worthington Abolitionism and the Civil War

### Historical Context and Overview

At the time of the Civil War, Columbus, Ohio was often considered the northern-most Southern city and the southern-most Northern city in the United States. Settlers in Franklinton and Downtown Columbus had largely Southern roots (Kentucky/Virginia), while those who lived north in Worthington and Clintonville had a New England heritage.

Worthington's residents brought their antislavery and abolitionist sentiments with them from New England in the early 1800s. In 1821, Worthington residents helped a runaway slave named Isham escape from a slave catcher passing through town.

The Worthington Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1836. Its founders included Ansel Mattoon and Ozem Gardner. Their homes were two of several houses in Worthington that served as stations on the Underground Railroad.

In helping escaped slaves reach freedom, Worthington's abolitionists defied the federal fugitive slave law. They also apparently had little regard for Ohio's black laws, which prohibited African-American children from attending white schools in the state.

Not everyone from Worthington was antislavery or even pro-Union when the Civil War began. In fact, one of the most famous Confederate generals, Roswell Ripley, was originally from Worthington. His father, Christopher Ripley, came to Worthington in 1823 to work for James Kilbourne at the Worthington Manufacturing Company. The family moved back to New York in the late 1830s. After graduating from the United States Military Academy, Roswell served in the army during the Mexican-American War. He later married into a wealthy slave-owning family in South Carolina. During the Civil War, it was Ripley's defenses at Ft. Wagner that defeated the all African American 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment.

### Standards Alignment

#### Ohio's New Learning Standards: Social Studies

##### Grade 4

Content Statement 7. Sectional issues divided the United States after the War of 1812. Ohio played a key role in these issues, particularly with the anti-slavery movement and the Underground Railroad.

##### Grade 8

Content Statement 11. Disputes over the nature of federalism, complicated by economic developments in the United States, resulted in sectional issues, including slavery, which led to the American Civil War.

Content Statement 16. Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole.

Content Statement 18. Participation in social and civic groups can lead to the attainment of individual and public goals.

## Learning Objectives

- Discuss the attitudes and actions of Worthington residents toward slavery and race in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.
- Explain the role of Worthington in the larger abolitionist movement.
- Describe the role of Worthington in the training of Civil War soldiers.

## Discussion Questions

1. What was the general attitude of Worthington residents towards slavery and African Americans?
2. How did the incident with the slave catcher in 1821 reflect Worthington's attitude toward slavery?
3. How did Worthington residents demonstrate their opposition to slavery? In what larger historical movement were some residents participating?
4. Why would it be unusual to see African-American students among their white peers in schools in early 19<sup>th</sup> century Ohio? What does the inclusion of African-American students in schools in Worthington tell us about the type of community it was?
5. What role did Worthington play in training soldiers for the Civil War? What happened to the soldiers who fought at the Battle of Shiloh? How did this threaten the Union effort in the war?
6. What was General Roswell Ripley's significance in the Civil War? Why would it be surprising that Ripley was from Worthington?
7. How did a change in field weaponry help turn the tide in the Civil War?

## Extension Activities

- Have students research Underground Railroad stations in Columbus, Worthington, and Westerville. Students should plot some of these houses on a map, and draw lines to show the paths that escaped slaves would have taken to move north toward Canada.
- Should General Roswell Ripley be memorialized in Worthington? If so, what should be said about him? Do his achievements outweigh the fact that he fought for a cause that was unpopular in Worthington? Have students discuss and debate these questions.

## Additional Resources

- Worthington Antislavery Society Meeting Minutes: <http://www.ohiomemory.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/siebert/id/3288/rec/1>
- Ohioana Travels the Underground Railroad: <http://www.ohioana.org/features/ur/>
- River-to-Lake Freedom Trail: [https://www.dot.state.oh.us/maps/Documents/RTLFT\\_brochure\\_web.pdf](https://www.dot.state.oh.us/maps/Documents/RTLFT_brochure_web.pdf)
- Worthington Memory: <http://www.worthingtonmemory.org/Search.cfm> Keyword: Ripley