

Toledo congressman was instrumental in the abolishment of slavery

Toledo is well known for its pioneering contributions to the auto industry, glass manufacturing, railroads, and entertainment. All well documented. But did you know, it was the congressman from Toledo who played, perhaps, one of the most significant roles in the abolishment of slavery?

James Mitchell Ashley represented the Toledo area from 1859 to 1869.

Witnessing the horrors of slavery deeply influenced his political career. His conviction against slavery inspired him to play a crucial role in the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Ashley began his political journey as a member of the Republican Party. During his tenure in the House of Representatives, he aligned himself with the Radical Republicans, a faction within the party that advocated for the complete abolition of slavery and for equal rights for freed slaves. Ashley's personal commitment to ending slavery was evident in his actions and speeches, which often emphasized the moral and ethical necessity of abolishing the institution.



In 1863, Ashley introduced the first proposal for a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery in the United States. His motion was modeled after the wording of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and laid the foundation for what would become the Thirteenth Amendment. Ashley's proposal was eventually passed by Congress on January 31, 1865, and ratified by the required number of states on December 6, 1865.

Ashley's involvement with the Thirteenth Amendment was not limited to introducing the proposal. He actively campaigned for its passage, rallying support among his colleagues and the public. His efforts were instrumental in securing the necessary votes for the amendment's approval.

Ashley's dedication to the cause of civil rights and equality continued throughout his career, even after the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. Ashley was a vocal critic of President Andrew Johnson during the Reconstruction Era. He supported the Radical Republicans' Reconstruction plans and voted to impeach Johnson, although the impeachment effort ultimately failed.

James Mitchell Ashley's legacy is a testament to an unwavering commitment to ending slavery and promoting equality. His leadership and advocacy played a crucial role in the amendment's passage, marking a significant step forward in the fight for civil rights in the United States.

Congressman Thomas Ludlow Ashley, the great-grandson of James Ashley, served Ohio's 9th District from 1955 to 1981