

McLean County Museum of History

Convention Debates & Proceedings 1869-1870 Collection

Processed
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Collection Information

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	1 Box
COLLECTION DATES:	1869-1870
RESTRICTIONS:	None
PROVENANCE:	
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the McLean County Museum of History
ALTERNATIVE FORMATS:	None
OTHER FINDING AIDS:	None
LOCATION:	Archives
NOTES:	

Brief History

The Illinois Constitutional Convention of 1870 was held in Springfield and resulted in a new state constitution – the third - ratified by voters on July 2, 1870, and in effect on August 8, 1870. It addressed concerns about public education, transportation, revenue, business regulation (especially railroads). It also affirmed the property tax as the chief form of revenue for the state. The document increased the authority of the governor and curbed the power of the legislature. It also addressed problems with the state's court system. In its most unique feature, the 1870 Constitution created a system of electing members to the Illinois House, known as cumulative voting. Each legislative district elected three members and voters had three votes to cast for the office. They could cast all three votes for one candidate, cast one and a half votes for two candidates or one vote for all three candidates. The goal of the system was to allow a political party to elect at least one representative in a district where they were a hopeless minority, by allowing that party's partisans to cast three votes for one candidate. The final draft of the Constitution gave full voting rights to African-American males but attempts to give women the right to vote failed.

Delegates were chosen in November 1869 and the convention began meeting in December. The convention was evenly split between Democrats and Republicans, although Cook County elected a bipartisan delegation that campaigned as the "People's Party." That delegation held the balance of power at the convention.

The 1870 Illinois Constitution was in effect until it was replaced by the fourth state Constitution in 1970.

-Adapted from Illinois Secretary of State website, accessed Jun 2025.

Lawyer (and later Judge) Ruben Moore Benjamin represented McLean County in the Convention. He was most remembered for drafting the Bill of Rights and prompting provisions granting the legislature power to establish maximum freight and passenger rates on Illinois railroads.

Scope

The collection includes the official published edition of the convention debates and proceedings from Dec 13, 1869, through March 8, 1870 (1076 pages total). Pages for later proceedings through the closing of the convention on May 13, 1870, are **not** in this collection.

Proceedings contain the parliamentary record of the actions (e.g., resolutions, orders, motions, roll call vote tallies, transcriptions of committee reports). Also included are numerous detailed reports submitted by state and local officers.