

2013

Morton, Oliver Hazard Perry Throck

Bert Chapman

Purdue University, chapmanb@purdue.edu

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Recommended Citation

Chapman, Bert, "Morton, Oliver Hazard Perry Throck" (2013). *Libraries Faculty and Staff Scholarship and Research*. Paper 117.
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Morton, Oliver Hazard Perry Throck

Birth Date: August 4, 1823

Death Date: November 1, 1877

Governor of Indiana (1861-1867). Oliver Hazard Perry Throck Morton (he went by Oliver Perry Morton) was born in Salisbury, Indiana, on August 4, 1823. Growing up in eastern Indiana and southwestern Ohio, he attended local schools, enrolled at Miami University (Ohio), and pursued various occupations before deciding to study law. Morton eventually practiced law in Centerville, Indiana, specializing in railroad-related issues.

Morton became interested in politics with the rise of national sectional tensions, beginning as a Democrat before migrating to the embryonic Republican Party in the 1850s. Although he initially warned his political compatriots against placing excessive emphasis on abolition, he eventually did so himself as the Republican candidate for lieutenant governor of Indiana in 1860 on a victorious ticket headed by former Whig Henry S. Lane.

Lane was subsequently appointed to the U.S. Senate by the Republican-controlled Indiana legislature, and Morton became governor in 1861. During his tenure as governor he made major efforts to assist the Union cause, including assembling 6,000 soldiers within a week of President Abraham Lincoln's first call for troops, working overtime to ensure that the men were well fed and well

clothed and received high-quality medical treatment, and establishing a state-run arsenal to manufacture ammunition.

Struggling Union war efforts in 1862, saw Democrats gain control of the Indiana legislature in the midterm elections and denounce the war. Morton, encouraged his Republican allies, responded by running the state on his own. Refusing to call the legislature into session, he relied on War Department loans, private banks, businesses, and local Republican officials to fund governmental operations. These efforts produced revenues of more than \$1 million and expenditures in excess of \$900,000.

Morton branded his Democratic adversaries subversives and repeatedly warned federal officials of Copperhead threats to Indiana and the entire nation. A wave of highly publicized Indiana treason arrests and more favorable war news for the Union side in late 1864 aided Morton's reelection and a return to Republican control of Indiana's legislature.

Morton served in the U.S. Senate beginning in 1867 until his death in 1877. There he strongly supported both Reconstruction and federal interstate railroad regulation. He was also an unsuccessful 1876 presidential candidate, and he

served as a member of the Electoral Commission investigating the controversial 1876 presidential election.

Morton died in Indianapolis on November 1, 1877. His legacy consists of providing strong and decisive Civil War leadership for the Union cause, which must be balanced with criticism of the constitutionally questionable means he used to govern Indiana during the conflict.

BERT CHAPMAN

See also

Abolitionism and the Civil War; Copperheads; Indiana;

Further Reading

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