150 Years Ago in the Civil War, March 1863

Mar 3 Abraham Lincoln signs first Conscription Act. The U.S. Congress passed a conscription act that produced the first wartime draft of U.S. citizens in American history. The act called for **registration** of all males between the ages of 20 and 45, including aliens with the intention of becoming citizens, by April 1. Exemptions from the draft could be bought for $300 or by finding a substitute draftee. This clause led to bloody draft riots in New York City, where protesters were outraged that exemptions were effectively granted only to the wealthiest U.S. citizens.

Mar 11 Confederates block Union attempt to bypass Fort Pemberton near present day Greenwood, MS along the Mississippi River. Part of the Union **Vicksburg campaign.**

Mar 14 Confederate batteries at Port Hudson fire on Union squadron sinking USS Mississippi. The Siege of Port Hudson occurred from May 22 to July 9, 1863, when Union Army troops assaulted and then surrounded the Mississippi River town of Port Hudson, Louisiana, during the American Civil War. In cooperation with Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's offensive against Vicksburg, Mississippi, Union Maj. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks's army moved against the Confederate stronghold at Port Hudson. On May 27, 1863, after their frontal assaults were repulsed, the Federals settled into a siege that lasted for 48 days. Banks renewed his assaults on June 14 but the defenders successfully repelled them. On July 9, 1863, after hearing of the fall of Vicksburg, the Confederate garrison of Port Hudson surrendered, opening the Mississippi River to Union navigation from its source to the Gulf of Mexico.

This is the side-wheel steamship *Mississippi*, an older ship which had carried Commodore Mathew Perry to Japan in 1854. The ship ran aground during the attempt to run past Port Hudson, and was set ablaze and abandoned by her crew. Later in the night, the ship drifted down river and exploded with a spectacular display which was seen from many miles away. The *Mississippi*, which mounted 17 guns, had previously survived the passage of the forts below New Orleans. *(Photo from LSU Library-Suydam Collection.)*

Mar 17 The Battle of Kelly's Ford, also known as the Battle of Kellysville, took place on March 17, 1863, in Culpeper County, Virginia, as part of the cavalry operations along the Rappahannock River during the American Civil War. It set the stage for Brandy Station and other cavalry actions of the **Gettysburg Campaign** that summer. Twenty-one hundred troopers of Brig. Gen. William W. Averell's Union cavalry division crossed the Rappahannock to attack the Confederate cavalry that had been harassing them that winter. Brig. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee counterattacked with a brigade of about 800 men. After achieving a localized success, Union forces withdrew under pressure in late afternoon, without destroying Lee's cavalry.

Mar 24 Union amphibious expedition skirmishes with Confederates, Steele's Bayou, Mississippi. The Steele's Bayou Expedition was a joint operation of Major General Ulysses S. Grant's Army of the Tennessee and Rear Admiral David D. Porter's Mississippi River Squadron, conducted as a part of the **Vicksburg Campaign** of the American Civil War. Its aim was to move Union forces from the Mississippi River to a point on the Yazoo River upstream of Confederate Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton's defenses of Vicksburg. To avoid enemy artillery in place on the bluffs to the east of the city,[1] the expedition would leave the Yazoo and proceed indirectly on a route through a series of waterways in the flood plain to the east of the Mississippi.

Mar 26 West Virginia votes for gradual emancipation in the State.