

OPPOSITION TO SECESSION IN VIRGINIA AND
NORTH CAROLINA 1860-1861

BY

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Table of Contents

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Acknowledgments | |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| I The Old Dominion: Prologue to Convention..... | 5 |
| II The Virginia Convention of 1861..... | 41 |
| III The Old North State: Watching and Waiting..... | 73 |
| IV The February Convention Attempt and the May Convention.... | 92 |
| Conclusion..... | 119 |
| Appendix..... | 123 |
| Bibliography..... | 125 |

Introduction

When the returns of the election of 1860 left no doubt that Abraham Lincoln had been elected President of the United States, political leaders in many areas of the South immediately proceeded to carry out their threats of secession. The legislature of South Carolina unanimously passed a resolution providing for the popular election of a "sovereignty" convention. By December 20, 1860, the convention had met, a declaration had been passed that the union between South Carolina and the United States was at an end, and an appeal was made to the other southern states to unite and form a "Confederacy of Slaveholding States."¹ During this period the Gulf States were moving in the same direction. Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, writing on November 10, 1860, emphasized that the planting states had "a common interest of such magnitude that their union, sooner or later for the protection of that interest," was certain.² The future President of the Confederate States of America was to be proven correct in his prediction. By February 1, 1861, seven southern states had passed

¹Address of the People of South Carolina Assembled in Convention to the People of the Slaveholding States of the United States (Charleston, 1860), 15-16.

²Jefferson Davis to R. B. Rhett Jr., November 10, 1860 in Dunbar Rowland, ed., Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist: His Letters, Papers and Speeches (10 vols., Jackson, 1923), IV, 542.

ordinances dissolving their bonds with the federal union, and by the middle of that month a Confederate government was formally established.³

Throughout this entire period, the people in the region from Virginia and North Carolina to Missouri and Arkansas were in serious disagreement over the course their respective states should pursue. The idea that this vast area might soon be catapulted into war by the impulsive actions of the lower South, while pleasing some, filled the hearts and minds of a considerable number of border state southerners with the deepest anxiety. Many in this latter group were opposed to secession and were to wage a valiant struggle against the dissolution of the Union. At first, these "unionists" or "conservatives"⁴ in the upper South concentrated their attention on the ways and means of preventing the Gulf States from seceding. After their secession, the unionist sympathizers supported a number of compromise measures in an attempt to restore the cotton states to the Union. Events moved at a rapid pace and by the end of January 1861, the secessionist elements in the border South brought tremendous pressure to bear on their state officials to take measures which would finally bring about disunion.

³James F. Rhodes, History of the United States 1850-1877 (8 vols., New York, 1910), III, 272, 294. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas was the order in which the states passed ordinances of secession. The dates were respectively January 9, 10, 11, 19, 26, and February 1. Texas did not formally secede until its secession ordinance was ratified by the people on February 23.

⁴The terms "unionist" or "conservative" are somewhat confusing, since there were many gradations of opinion between those opposed to disunion in the upper South. For the purpose of this study, the terms "unionist" or "conservative" will be used to include all factions who remained loyal, or who opposed secession, at least up to the middle of April, 1861, at which time the bombardment of Fort Sumter had occurred. A more technical definition will be presented later.

These measures were: first, the calling of the legislatures in special sessions, and secondly, the provision by the legislature for the calling of special conventions for the purpose of considering the problem of secession. As a result of these developments, the conservatives in the upper South shifted their attention to the more pressing problem of holding their own states to their allegiance.

The possibility that the Union might be permanently broken into two separate nations between which the people of the upper South would have to choose, opened the way for an extensive discussion of secession in all the border slave states. The nucleus of these debates was to take place either in the specially called sessions of the legislatures or in the popularly elected conventions. The conservatives marshalled their forces and fervently worked against secession. Each phase of this explosive problem was fully explored by the unionists, both within the specially constituted assemblages, and throughout each of the individual states. Economic factors, constitutional issues, nationalist sympathies, international complications, and the strong possibility of war were just several areas that were widely debated by the conservatives in their struggle to oppose the secession of their respective states.

Eventually four of the states of the upper South, Virginia, North Carolina, Arkansas, and Tennessee were to secede by the summer of 1861, and two others, Missouri and Kentucky were to fight vicious intra-state civil wars. The major objective of this study will be to determine the identity and the motives of the conservative groups in two of these border states, Virginia and North Carolina. Although a focus will be placed

primarily upon the period from November 1860 to June 1861, reference inevitably will be made to the decade of the 1850's. The two states and their unionist factions will be individually analyzed, beginning with the "Old Dominion" and then moving due south to the "Old North State."

Chapter I

The Old Dominion: Prologue to Convention

In the secession crisis of 1860-1861, Virginia's course of action was of momentous importance to both the North and South. In addition to being the wealthiest and most heavily populated of all the slave states, the Old Dominion's geographical location was strategically significant in case of a possible armed conflict between the two sections. The state extended from the Atlantic to the Ohio River, touching upon the free states of Pennsylvania and Ohio in the northwest and upon the nation's capital in the north. As a member of the Southern Confederacy, Virginia would be able to offer the South a route of invasion into the North, or a possible defensive front against a Union attack. If she remained loyal, Virginia would be a formidable obstacle to any southern attempt to attack the capital as well as provide a channel of invasion into the Confederacy. Most important of all was the Old Dominion's prestige and influence within the Union, and especially with the states of the upper South. It was generally conceded that if Virginia did not secede, North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Missouri would probably remain in the Union, and as a result confine the movement for a southern Confederacy to the cotton states of the lower South.

Although Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860 had received only a little more than one percent of the vote of the entire state of

Virginia,¹ the majority of the people in the commonwealth felt that the election of the Republican candidate was not a necessary cause for secession. A special dispatch received by the New York Times from its correspondent in Richmond indicated that the election returns had caused very little consternation among the people in that city, and that the vast majority saw no prospect of secession or disunion.² A similar report was received by the New York Herald from their special correspondent in Petersburg. He telegraphed that the feeling in that city on Lincoln's election had been far less excited than was anticipated before the election. "Virginia will join any secession or disunion scheme with great reluctance," he added, "now that the terrible issue is brought nearly down to the point of action."³ A brief review of the opinions expressed by the press, county meetings, and political leaders will indicate how strongly attached to the Union most Virginians actually were at this time.

With the exception of the Richmond Enquirer which considered Lincoln's election as a "declaration of war,"⁴ the majority of leading newspapers in Richmond and throughout the state did not consider the election a sufficient cause for separation. Most of these newspapers

¹In the election Bell carried the state with 74,681 votes, and Breckinridge ran an extremely close second, receiving 74,323 votes. Douglas received 16,290 votes, and Lincoln, 1,929 votes. Ollinger Crenshaw, The Slave States in the Presidential Election of 1860 (Baltimore, 1945), 197.

²New York Times, November 12, 1860.

³New York Herald, November 9, 1860.

⁴Richmond Enquirer, November 19, 1860.

had supported Bell and Douglas in the campaign and were generally opposed to secession--at least until Lincoln violated in some way the constitution. The Portsmouth Transcript emphasized that Virginia should remain in the Union for the present time since the Republicans would not be able to repeal the fugitive slave law or adopt any other hostile legislation, since both branches of the next Congress were inimical to the administration.⁵ A strong unionist paper, the Charlottesville Review, was decidedly opposed to a dissolution of the Union, and condemned South Carolina's proposed action on the grounds that the Palmetto State was pushing matters as rapidly as possible, and not providing any time for deliberation and compromise.⁶ The influential Richmond Times Dispatch advised their readers to wait and try to preserve the Union, "and hope that in four years by calmly awaiting events a great revolution may take place in public sentiment in the North, and we should again have national parties predominating there which shall be in correspondence and sympathy with the same parties in the South, and that the harmony and fraternal regard of the two divisions of the Union will be happily restored...."⁷

A more accurate insight into the sentiment of the people of Virginia at the time of the election can be obtained from an analysis of the

⁵Portsmouth Transcript, November 10, 1860, in Richmond Times Dispatch, November 12, 1860.

⁶Charlottesville Review, November 23, 1860, in Dwight L. Dumond, Southern Editorials on Secession (New York, 1931), 263.

⁷Richmond Times Dispatch, November 9, 1860.

resolutions drawn up in the county meetings. These gatherings were, to a large degree, non-partisan and took place in most sections of the state. Some resolves deplored the election of Lincoln as a terrible misfortune. Nevertheless, most of them held that the election itself was not a sufficient cause for separation. The counties in the western portion of the state, and especially in the northwest, generally expressed extreme hostility to secession, while those east of the Blue Ridge Mountains were less hostile to disunion as a possible course of action, although they remained opposed to it at this time. Although they were opposed to him in principle, the citizens of Preston County in the northwest were willing to give Lincoln a fair trial, and adopted resolutions opposing disunion. The secessionist-oriented Richmond Enquirer denounced them as submissionists.⁸ The citizens of Page County in the north central part of the state, adopted a series of conservative resolutions deprecating the present condition of the country, and counselling moderation and prudence.⁹ Alexander H. H. Stuart--a former Whig Congressman, Secretary of the Interior during Fillmore's Administration, and a fiery unionist--presided over a meeting in Augusta County, located in the central portion of the Old Dominion, at which resolutions were adopted condemning secession as a remedy for the existing conditions of the country.¹⁰ A meeting was held, "without distinction of party," in neighboring Bath County, at which time a petition was signed declaring

⁸New York Times, November 21, 1860. See Map I in Appendix A for the geographical location of the Virginia counties in 1860.

⁹Richmond Times Dispatch, December 3, 1860.

¹⁰Ibid., November 29, 1860.

the simple fact of Lincoln's election not sufficient cause for a dissolution of the Union.¹¹ The county meetings east of the Blue Ridge, while not so intensely hostile to the idea of secession, generally did not consider it the right time for that course of action. Many county assemblies in the east favored cooperation with the other border states as the proper means for gaining guarantees from the North.¹²

In addition to the press and county meetings, the majority of individual public leaders expressed the belief that the election of the Republican candidate was not a cause for the separation of the Union. John Minor Botts, an old line Whig of the Henry Clay School, a congressional representative from Virginia in the 1840's, and a unionist who remained loyal, stressed that the election was no possible cause for secession, and that disunion would result in economic dislocation since non-intercourse with the North and West would follow to a large extent. Powerful in build, aggressive, and often violent in speech,¹³ Botts insisted that the system of canals and railroads constructed for commerce with the West would be useless, and that a heavy tax would have to be levied to pay off the tremendous internal improvements debt.¹⁴ The economic disadvantages of secession were to emerge again and again in

¹¹New York Daily Tribune, November 22, 1860.

¹²James C. McGregor, The Disruption of Virginia (New York, 1922), 102.

¹³Dictionary of American Biography (22 vols., New York, 1929-1958), II, 472.

¹⁴Clyde C. Webster, "John Minor Botts, Anti-Secessionist," Richmond College Historical Papers, I (June, 1915), 27.

the conservatives' arguments opposing secession. An influential Presbyterian Minister residing in Richmond, Robert L. Dabney, considered Lincoln's election "no proper casus belli, least of all for immediate separate secession, which could never be the right way under any circumstances."¹⁵ William C. Rives, a former Senator from Virginia, writing on December 8, 1860, condemned those who thought that the election was a signal to proceed with secession:

Shall we rush at once to a dissolution of our compact of Union; tear down the pillars of the temple which contains the precious deposits of our rights and liberties, and bury ourselves, for a time at least, in one common ruin with our deluded or offending confederates? This would seem to be the course of desperation and blindness, not of reason and deliberation.¹⁶

In reply to the people of Essex County for his views on the election of Lincoln, United States Senator Robert M. T. Hunter counselled delay and moderation in the course of action for Virginia. Although he shared the aggressive attitude of Jefferson Davis and Robert Toombs regarding the property rights of slaveholders in the territories, Hunter nevertheless, at this time stated that he would not desire to break up the Union and would make any personal sacrifice to preserve it. The future Confederate Secretary of State and Senator advocated a conference among the southern states "to agree upon such guarantees

¹⁵Robert L. Dabney to Moses D. Hoge, January 4, 1861 in Thomas Cary Johnson, The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney (Richmond, 1903), 222.

¹⁶William C. Rives to Alexander R. Boteler, December 8, 1860, in New York Herald, December 19, 1860.

as in their opinion will secure their equality and their rights within the Union."¹⁷

As a result of this survey of the sentiments expressed by the press, county meetings, and public leaders, it is safe to conclude that a considerable majority of the people in Virginia at the time of Lincoln's election were conservative in their thinking, and were definitely opposed to secession as a possible course of action. Along with this prevailing sentiment for delay and moderation, the conservatives of Virginia offered various plans for obtaining redress.

Although the proposal for an assembly of representatives from all the southern states was not granted much consideration, the idea of a border states conference was suggested quite frequently. In western Virginia the feeling seemed to prevail that the safety of Virginia lay in an agreement of some kind with the states of the upper South. It did not necessarily have to be a formal alliance, "but some kind of understanding that they should all stand together to resist alike the usurpations of the Northern Union and the importunities of the Southern Confederacy."¹⁸ Former President John Tyler, writing to Caleb Cushing, thought "that a consultation between the Border States, free and slaveholding, might lead to adjustment. It would embrace six on each side....When all things

¹⁷Robert M. T. Hunter to James R. Micou, Thomas Croxton, and others, December 10, 1860, in Charles Ambler, ed., The Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter 1826-1876, in American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1916 (Washington, 1918), 344-345. Henry H. Simms, Life of Robert M. T. Hunter; A Study in Sectionalism and Secession (Richmond, 1935), 166-170.

¹⁸McGregor, The Disruption of Virginia, 101.

else have failed, this might be tried. It would be a dernier resort."¹⁹ Many conservative groups also proposed a "National Peace Convention." Large unionist meetings throughout the state, such as the one in Norfolk, passed resolutions recommending the holding of such a convention.²⁰ The national convention was eventually to be held in February 1861, and the border states conference was practically agreed to when the firing on Fort Sumter had occurred.

The conservatives in Virginia also appealed directly to the people of the North to impose some kind of curb on the actions of their section, and to provide some assistance in helping to stem the tide toward secession. In a public letter to a Pennsylvanian, Virginia's conservative governor, John Letcher, urged the repeal of their personal liberty laws. According to Letcher, this action would illustrate to the South that the North really desired the preservation of the Union. He emphasized that it was the duty for every conservative northerner to "allay the excitement now existing, to restore concord and fraternal feeling, and to retrieve lost confidence between the sections...."²¹

The only positive action taken during this period within the state, was the calling of the legislature into special session by Governor Letcher. Although there was some opposition by conservative groups to

¹⁹John Tyler to Caleb Cushing, December 14, 1860, in Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (2 vols., Richmond, 1885), II, 577.

²⁰New York Times, December 22, 1860.

²¹New York Daily Tribune, November 22, December 1, 1860.

the governor's proclamation,²² the majority of the people, both secessionists and unionists, tended to approve or at least did not demonstrate disapproval of his action. With January 7 set as the date for the convening of the special session of the state legislature, conservative attention at the beginning of December shifted to Washington where Congress had just convened. Since there were many conservatives in Congress, unionists in Virginia hoped that the troubles confronting the country could be settled by a compromise similar to that of 1850.

On December 5, Senator Powell of Kentucky introduced a resolution providing for the establishment of a special Committee of Thirteen, and granting to that body the power to offer any recommendations on the disturbed condition of the country that it might think necessary for federal legislation or constitutional amendments.²³ The resolution was passed on December 18, and two days later the members of the select committee were announced.²⁴ The committee included such prominent senators as Davis, Toombs, Hunter, Crittenden, Douglas, and Seward. Essentially, the committee concerned itself with the proposal of Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky, which in capsule form provided for the extension of the Missouri compromise line to the Pacific.

²²P. Gerald Ham, ed., "The Mind of a Copperhead: Letters of John J. Davis on the Secession Crisis and Statehood Politics in Western Virginia, 1860-1862," West Virginia History, XXIV (January, 1963), 95.

²³The Congressional Globe: Containing the Debates and Proceedings of the Second Session of the Thirty-Sixth Congress (Washington, 1861), 19.

²⁴Ibid., 158.

Using the Crittenden Compromise as its basis for negotiation, the Committee proposed a number of amendments. With the exception of two, all the proposed amendments were defeated by the adverse vote of the Republicans.²⁵ The two which passed and secured their approval were the last two resolutions dealing with the fees of commissioners, and the effectiveness of the suppression of the African slave trade.²⁶ After a careful study of the Committee of Thirteen, one historian has concluded that the Republican action in the committee was undoubtedly the cause of its failure.²⁷

On December 4, Alexander Boteler, a Princeton graduate and Whig Representative from Virginia,²⁸ introduced a resolution into the House calling for the formation of a special committee of one from each state, to consider the "present perilous condition of the country."²⁹ The proposal was passed by a vote of 145 to 38, and two days later the Committee of Thirty-Three was announced.³⁰ The committee was no more successful than the Senate Committee of Thirteen. Thomas Corwin was appointed as chairman, and wherever possible members of the Republican party were appointed to the committee. It was also quite evident that

²⁵Clinton Everett Knox, "The Possibilities of Compromise in the Senate Committee of Thirteen and the Responsibility for Failure," The Journal of Negro History, XVII (October, 1932), 452.

²⁶Ibid., 453

²⁷Ibid., 465.

²⁸Dictionary of American Biography, II, 467.

²⁹Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 6.

³⁰Ibid., 22.

in the selection of southern members, the followers of Douglas were given preference over the supporters of Breckinridge.³¹ Consequently, as Dwight Dumond has concluded, the Republicans were "in complete control of the committee, and converted it into a graveyard for every proposal of compromise and conciliation introduced into the House of Representatives."³²

The obstinance of the Republicans in Congress and the impending failure of the select committees had a very significant effect upon the secession crisis in Virginia. It certainly provided the Virginia secessionists with ammunition in order to illustrate to the people the reluctance of the "Black Republicans" to compromise. As a result, the failure to compromise in Washington greatly weakened the unionist position in the Old Dominion.³³

The course of events in the lower South was also quite discouraging to the Virginia conservatives. On December 20, the South Carolina convention had passed an ordinance of secession. Most unionists in Virginia had from the first condemned the attitude and actions of the Palmetto State. Dabney regarded South Carolina as a "little impudent vixion," and "as great a pest as the Abolitionists." If he was to have his way, he was willing to let the North "whip" South Carolina, if "they would only do it by sea, and not pester us."³⁴ Botts believed

³¹Dwight L. Dumond, The Secession Movement, 1860-1861 (New York, 1931), 156.

³²Ibid., 157.

³³Henry T. Shanks, The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861 (Richmond, 1934), 134.

³⁴Johnson, Life of Dabney, 215.

that South Carolina was responsible for disturbing the peace for the past three decades, and was not worth bringing back into the Union.³⁵

The Charlottesville Review was of the opinion that the Palmetto State had "precipitately thrown down the bulwarks of the Union, and inaugurated on her own responsibility, revolution and anarchy."³⁶

Admitting the right of South Carolina to secede from the Union, the Petersburg Express, nevertheless maintained that the state had "acted with a precipitancy, a levity, and an indiscretion wholly irreconcilable with the responsibilities and obligations involved in the case."³⁷

In the West, leading newspapers were threatening a division of the state if Virginia should follow South Carolina's course of action. While emphasizing western Virginia's determination to remain loyal under all circumstances, the editor of the Wheeling Daily Intelligencer discussed several differences between the eastern and western sections of the state:

The capitol of the State, Richmond, is a far off place where there is little that is common to us of Western Virginia. How could a country, possessing geographical features so wholly different from this, and in which are nearly half a million slaves, be very sympathetic with us? Manifestly, it is impossible....If secession is pleasing and profitable for Eastern Virginia, and she is persuaded that her future lies in a Cotton Confederacy, let her go--but let her understand that she goes without the West.³⁸

³⁵John Minor Botts, The Great Rebellion: Its Secret History, Rise, Progress, and Disastrous Failure (New York, 1866), 234.

³⁶Charlottesville Review, January 4, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials on Secession, 389.

³⁷Petersburg Express, December 22, 1860, in Richmond Times Dispatch, December 24, 1860.

³⁸Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, December 28, 1860, in Howard C. Perkins, Northern Editorials on Secession (2 vols., New York, 1942), II, 898-899.

On January 4, 1861, the "National Fast Day" urged by President Buchanan was observed in many of the major counties and towns of Virginia. In Richmond all business was suspended, and most of the churches were opened. In Petersburg, a special correspondent for the New York Times wrote that it was the most solemn day ever witnessed in the history of that city.³⁹ Three days later, the special session of the state legislature convened in Richmond.

The circumstances under which the legislature assembled were decidedly unfavorable to the cause of the Union. The failure of the congressional committees, the secession of South Carolina, and the disunionist activities in the Gulf States definitely strengthened the secessionist position. In addition Richmond, unlike the great southern commercial centers of Louisville, St. Louis, and New Orleans, was generally a city with secessionist leanings.⁴⁰ The legislature itself did not offer much consolation to those opposed to disunion. The Virginia Assembly was composed of members elected in the spring of 1859, and consequently could not be regarded as qualified to represent the sentiment of the people on the existing crisis. Its radicalism was quite evident, since sixty-two percent of its members were Democrats, and most of these were supporters of Breckinridge.⁴¹ A newspaper correspondent regarded the legislature as "a pestilent body--

³⁹New York Times, January 5, 1861.

⁴⁰Edward Smith, The Borderland in the Civil War (New York, 1927), 166.

⁴¹Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 142.

elected two years ago--not representing the conservative sentiment of the State at all, but loving secession for its own sake and wickedly agitating for its accomplishment."⁴²

When the legislature met on January 7, Governor John Letcher, a supporter of Douglas in the presidential election and a strong conservative, delivered his message to the assembled body. He declared that the wealth of Virginia had increased far beyond all expectation, and that it was melancholy to think that all was "now to be sacrificed upon the altar of passion."⁴³ Bitterly rebuking the governors of Mississippi and South Carolina for their disunionist proposals, and sternly condemning the North for its intolerant legislation, he proposed a summoning of all the states so "that a free and full conference may be had between the representatives of the people,...If such a convention shall assemble, and after free and full consultation and comparison of opinions they shall find that the differences between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding states are irreconcilable, let them consider the question of peaceable separation..."⁴⁴ In reference to the calling of a state convention, Letcher declared his opposition and stated that he could not see any good practical result that could be accomplished.⁴⁵ Some indication of the legislature's reaction to Letcher's message can be seen by their refusal to accept more than one of his major recommendations, which was the calling of a "National Peace Convention."

⁴²New York Times, April 10, 1861.

⁴³Message of the Governor of Virginia and Accompanying Documents (Richmond, 1861), v.

⁴⁴Ibid., vi.

⁴⁵Ibid., xviii-xix.

The special session of the Virginia Assembly concerned itself essentially with four major issues: (1) the defense of the state; (2) the issue of "coercion"; (3) the summoning of a state convention; and (4) the calling of a national convention. Both conservatives and secessionists favored increasing the military strength of Virginia. As a result, an overwhelming majority immediately agreed to the appropriating of one million dollars for the purchase of arms and munitions, and for the establishment of arsenals in different parts of the state.⁴⁶

In considering the issue of coercion, the views of a majority of the members of the Assembly were definitely in conflict with those of Governor Letcher and other conservatives. On the second day of the session, the House adopted a resolution which proclaimed that they were unalterably opposed to any attempt on the part of the federal government to coerce a seceded state into reunion or submission, and that they would resist such an action by all the means in their power.⁴⁷ A similar resolution was adopted in the Senate.⁴⁸ After the passage of

⁴⁶Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1861, in the Eighty-Fifty Year of the Commonwealth (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, 1861), p. 28. Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Extra Session, 1861 (Richmond, 1861), 92.

⁴⁷Journal of the Virginia House of Delegates, 1861, 9-10.

⁴⁸Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia: Begun and Held at the Capitol in the City of Richmond, on Monday, The Seventh Day of January, in the Year One Thousand and Sixty-One, Beginning the Eighty-Fifth Year of the Commonwealth (Richmond, 1861), 49-50.

these resolutions, one of the delegates feared that the Union was "irretrievably gone."⁴⁹

More important than these military and "coercion" measures, was the convention bill, the major reason why many had originally urged the calling of the legislature into special session. Although there was some opposition to a special convention,⁵⁰ most Virginians, secessionists as well as a considerable number of conservatives, favored the calling of such a body. Secessionists in Shenandoah, Amelia, and Frederick Counties, as well as the cities of Petersburg, Williamsburg,⁵¹ and Richmond⁵² had demanded the summoning of a special state convention. Many conservatives also applied external pressure for the calling of a state convention.⁵³ Those in the northwestern section generally advocated its being held, so that it might give them a means of gaining tax reform.⁵⁴ In response to this demand, a motion was adopted to appoint a committee of fifteen to report a bill providing for a

⁴⁹James E. Walmsley, ed., "The Change of Secession Sentiment in Virginia in 1861," American Historical Review, XXXI, (October, 1925), p. 83.

⁵⁰In addition to Governor Letcher, John Minor Botts was also fervently opposed to the calling of a state convention. New York Times, December 11, 1860. The only county which appeared to express any hostility toward the summoning of a convention was Harrison County in the northwest. Ham, "The Mind of a Copperhead," 93.

⁵¹Richmond Times Dispatch, November 16, 29, December 20, 3, 22, 1860.

⁵²New York Times, December 29, 1860.

⁵³New York Herald, December 22, 1860.

⁵⁴Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 148. The delegates to the convention from the northwest did eventually introduce tax reform measures. See Journal of the Acts and Proceedings of a General Convention of the State of Virginia Assembled at Richmond, on Wednesday, the Thirteenth Day of February, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-One (Richmond, 1861), 150.

convention of the people.⁵⁵ On January 14, the committee recommended that an election for delegates to a convention should be held on February 4, and that the state convention should convene on February 13.⁵⁶ The only important controversy in connection with the passage of this bill was the question of referring the decision of the convention to the people before its ordinances became binding. The conservatives and especially those in the northwest were firmly in favor of the "reference" clause, while the most radical secessionists were opposed. The Richmond Enquirer insisted that the clause would mean a delay of action.⁵⁷ In spite of the opposition of the secessionists, the clause was finally adopted by the Senate. After heated debate it was also approved in the House by a vote of seventy-seven to sixty-two.⁵⁸

The only other major victory for the conservatives in the legislature was the adoption of their resolution providing for a "National Peace Convention." Receiving encouragement from Seward and other northern politicians, in addition to Governor Letcher, the conservatives were able to push the measure through both the Senate and the House. The resolution provided for the assembling of representatives from both slave and non-slaveholding states to meet at Washington on February 4,

⁵⁵Journal of the Virginia House of Delegates, 1861, 4.

⁵⁶Ibid., 24-25. The Senate passed the bill as proposed by the House on the same day. Journal of the Virginia Seante, 1861, 70.

⁵⁷Richmond Enquirer, January 10, 1861.

⁵⁸Journal of the Virginia House of Delegates, 1861, 21.

to consider and if possible, to agree upon some suitable adjustment.⁵⁹ It proposed that the convention would start with a consideration of the Crittenden Compromise. The joint resolution also provided for the appointment of five commissioners.⁶⁰ Ex-President John Tyler, Judge John W. Brockenbrough, and James A. Seddon, were generally recognized as the commissioners having secessionist sympathies, while William C. Rives and George W. Summers were regarded as the representatives of the unionists. Most conservatives in the Old Dominion believed that the proposed convention offered real hope, and even the more pessimistic observers were of the opinion that the "National Peace Convention" might be fruitful.⁶¹ On January 21, the last major resolution was passed by the legislature. In the event of the dissolution of the Union, the Virginia Assembly resolved that the state would "unite her destiny with the slaveholding states of the South."⁶² The secessionist nature of the legislature was apparent to all. Edward C. Burks, a member of the House of Delegates representing Bedford County, illustrated the prevailing conservative sentiment when he wrote that he did "not really look for much good from the Legislature.

⁵⁹Ibid., 65. Journal of the Virginia Senate, 1861, 85-86.

⁶⁰War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (128 vols., Washington, 1880-1901), Series IV, Volume I, 90.

⁶¹Edward Burks to Rowland Buford, January 20, 1861, in Walmsley, "Change of Secession Sentiment in Virginia," 86.

⁶²Official Records, Series IV, Volume I, 77. Virgil Lewis, How West Virginia Was Made (Charleston, W. Va., 1909), 9.

The people must look to the [state] Convention. Everything depends upon it."⁶³

The actions of the Old Dominion's congressional representatives also weakened the conservative cause in the state. In a public letter to the people of Virginia, they proclaimed that it would be vain to hope for any measure of conciliation or adjustment from Congress which could be accepted.⁶⁴ They were also of the opinion "that the Republican party designs by civil war alone, to coerce the Southern States, under the pretext of enforcing the laws, unless it should become speedily apparent that the seceding States were so numerous, determined, and united as to make such an attempt hopeless."⁶⁵ The resolve was signed by Senators Hunter and Mason, as well as eight of Virginia's thirteen representatives.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, there were several congressmen representing Virginia who struggled against the rising tide of secessionist feeling in the South. Representative Alexander Boteler was frequently presenting petitions from unionist factions in Virginia demanding a settlement of the troubles confronting the nation, preferably on the basis of the Crittenden resolutions.⁶⁷ Sherrad Clemens, a

⁶³Edward Burks to Rowland Buford, January 7, 1861, in Walmsley, "Change of Secession Sentiment in Virginia," 86.

⁶⁴Virginia Mason, The Public Life and Diplomatic Correspondence of James M. Mason (Roanoke, 1903), 176-177.

⁶⁵Ibid., 178.

⁶⁶The eight representatives were D. C. DeJarnette, M. R. H. Garnett, Shelton F. Leake, E. S. Martin, H. A. Edmundson, Roger A. Pryor, Thomas S. Boccock, and A. G. Jenkins.

⁶⁷Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 599.

unionist congressman from the northwest, in a stirring speech in the House of Representatives emphasized the weak position that the slave states of the upper South would command in the proposed Southern Confederacy. He insisted that "the cotton states...will have, under the fixed ratio of representation, the legislative power over the border slave States, and they will be bound by a policy which may be, as to their great material and mechanical interests, as oppressive as it will be ruinous. If these causes should exist," he continued, "we shall have an antagonism in that union quite as great; fifty-fold intensified, it may be, beyond anything we have ever had in this."⁶⁸

The first major struggle between the unionist and secessionist factions in Virginia came in the election of delegates to the state convention. As soon as the convention bill was passed a heated and exciting campaign took place between the opposing groups. By this time, the states of the lower South had passed or were in the process of passing ordinances of secession and the radicals in the Old Dominion urged that their state should join them. The Richmond Enquirer maintained that the state should "unite to secure the election of the delegates...pledged to the policy of prompt resistance to abolition rule,"⁶⁹ while Edmund Ruffin, the popular public figure and agricultural reformer, threatened to leave the state if it did not attach itself to

⁶⁸Speech of Hon. Sherrard Clemens, of Virginia, in the House of Representatives, January 22, 1861 (Washington, 1861), 7.

⁶⁹Richmond Enquirer, January 29, 1861.

the Southern Confederacy.⁷⁰ Most conservative Virginians were quite concerned about the impending election, and the possibility of secession. Robert E. Lee, writing to his son in the latter part of January, informed him that he was unable to anticipate any "greater calamity for the country than a dissolution of the Union. It would be an accumulation of all the evils we complain of, and I am willing to sacrifice every thing but honour for its preservation. I hope therefore that all Constitutional means will be exhausted before there is a resort to force." Secession, according to the future Commander-in-Chief of the Confederate Army, was "nothing but revolution."⁷¹ Mary Berkley Minor Blackford, who was to see her five sons accept commissions in the Confederate Army and who kept a copy of Uncle Tom's Cabin hidden under her bed throughout the war, wrote to her cousin in January, 1861:

To see my sons arrayed against one part of their country, our own "Star Spangled banner," and in such a cause, is a sorrow that makes me feel that the grave is the only place for me. You did not know, my dear John, the pains I took to train my five sons in sentiments of patriotism.⁷²

⁷⁰Avery O. Craven, Edmund Ruffin, Southerner; A Study in Secession (New York, 1932), 204. Richmond Times Dispatch, November 14, 1860.

⁷¹Robert E. Lee to Rooney Lee, January 31, 1861, in William M. E. Rachal, ed., "Secession is Nothing but Revolution: A Letter of R. E. Lee to his Son Rooney," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXXIX (January 1961), 5-6. For similar sentiments on secession expressed by Lee, see Avery O. Craven, ed., "To Markie;" The Letters of Robert E. Lee to Martha Custis Williams (Cambridge, 1933), 58.

⁷²Mary Berkley Minor Blackford to John B. Minor, January 1861, in L. Minor Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Story of a Virginia Lady, Mary Berkeley Minor Blackford, 1802-1896, Who Taught her Sons to Hate Slavery and to Love the Union (Cambridge, 1954), 148.

The unionists in Virginia marshalled their forces, and conducted a vigorous campaign against the election of delegates who had secessionist sentiments. The aspect of secession was dissected and attacked in every possible way by the conservatives. The economic consequences, the constitutional issues, the possibility of war, and the ultimate failure of a confederacy of slaveholding states were all fervently discussed by the unionists throughout the state.

One of the most popular conservative arguments concerned the economic consequences which would ensue if disunion was accepted by Virginia. During the decade of the 1850's Virginia was slowly being oriented toward a closer economic union with the North. As a result of agricultural reform, farming conditions in Virginia became similar to those in the North and settlers from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey migrated to find homes in Fairfax, Dinwiddie, Norfolk, Surry, and other counties in the Old Dominion.⁷³ More than a million acres of Virginia land, according to the New York Daily Tribune, had been purchased and settled by Yankee farmers during the decade of the fifties.⁷⁴ The Tidewater was carrying on a lucrative fish and oyster trade with northern cities, and truck farmers were sending fresh vegetables to such metropolitan centers as Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston.⁷⁵

⁷³Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860 (University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, XIII, Urbana, 1925), 160-161. Clement Eaton, "The Resistance of the South to Northern Radicalism," New England Quarterly, VIII (June, 1935), 227-228.

⁷⁴New York Daily Tribune, February 7, 1861.

⁷⁵Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860, 155.

The Virginia cities were developing industrially, especially in the manufacture of plug tobacco, while industrialists were expanding the iron industry of the state, threatening to convert the Old Dominion into the "New England of the South."⁷⁶ A war between the two sections, the inevitable result of secession, would decidedly put a stop to Virginia's prosperous economic ties with the North. It is not surprising that as late as April 17, 1861, when Virginia passed its ordinance of secession, convention delegates from such eastern counties as Norfolk and Henrico were still divided in their course of action. Rives, writing in a public letter, recognized the relatively new economic connections with the North, both agriculturally and industrially, and asked how "the system of absolute free trade, patronized by the Cotton States, and its necessary concomitant, enormous direct taxes, accorded with the condition of things in Virginia?"⁷⁷

Economically, secession was violently attacked in the western part of the state. Two days before the election of delegates to the state convention, the editor of the Wheeling Daily Intelligencer wrote:

Here in the extreme northwest, where we have no slaves, no cotton, no rice, no southern affiliations, but where we are the same kind of people and have identical interests with those on either side of us, it is the baldest and emptiest stuff and nonsense in the world to talk about secession. It would kill us off as a city more completely than a big fire. What little enterprise and capital we have got now would leave us at once, as indeed much of it is talking of doing any how....This is

⁷⁶Clement Eaton, "Henry A. Wise: A Study in Virginia Leadership, 1850-1861," West Virginia History, III (April, 1942), 188.

⁷⁷Letter From the Hon. William C. Rives to a Friend, On the Important Questions of the Day (Richmond, 1860), 15.

what is in store for us in case we get secession. If we are ready for a condition of things like this let us all turn in and vote for the secessionist!⁷⁸

There was also a diversity of sentiment over the question of free trade, a policy which was being proclaimed by the seceding states. A non-restrictive trade policy, while no doubt beneficial to the cotton planter, would be injurious to the infant industries of Virginia. In addition, it would necessitate the raising of revenue by direct taxation, which in some sections would increase the taxes as much as an estimated five hundred percent. The Charlottesville Review argued that the tariff, if it benefited Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, did not injure South Carolina and Georgia. The editorial further stated that when the Palmetto State "establishes a revenue system of its own, it will find that it will have to levy at least three dollars of taxation on her people to one that it paid as a member of the Union."⁷⁹ Botts, in a public letter, placed a vital emphasis on the payment of Virginia's debt which was estimated at \$45,000,000. The debt, which had mounted as a result of a vast program of internal improvements in the state, would be extremely difficult to repay if Virginia seceded. In addition, secession would necessitate the maintenance of a large army and navy, resulting in an enormous direct taxation program within the state.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, February 2, 1861, in Perkins, Northern Editorials on Secession, II, 902.

⁷⁹Charlottesville Review, January 4, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials on Secession, 388.

⁸⁰New York Times, January 11, 1861.

The sentiment and intellectual attachment to the constitution even until the very verge of the Civil War, as Daniel Boorstin has noted, was at least as strong in the South as it was in New England.⁸¹ This was especially true in the case of Virginia, the "Mother of Commonwealths." In the campaign for the election of delegates to the state convention, and even well before this time, most conservatives tried to convince the people that the act of secession was in direct violation of the supreme law of the land. The Richmond Whig informed its readers that the constitution was a "solemn bond, beyond all revocation..." and that "no provision exists for its dissolution, except by the dissolution of the government itself."⁸² The Charlottesville Review regarded the constitution as a fundamental law, and any resistance to the constitution or federal authority was judged as rebellion. Joseph Segar, an independent in politics and a representative in the Virginia Assembly from the eastern part of the state, wrote that in a conflict between the constitution and laws of the United States and those of a state, one must give up the latter and stand by the former.⁸³ Segar, who was to remain loyal after Virginia's secession, further stated that when three-fourths of the states assented to the constitution, "they renounced forever all right of separate secession and in every form, whether of convention,

⁸¹Daniel J. Boorstin, The Genius of American Politics (Chicago, 1953), 102.

⁸²Richmond Whig, November 8, 1860, in New York Herald, November 11, 1860.

⁸³Letter of Hon. Joseph E. Segar to a Friend in Virginia, in Vindication of his Course in Declining to Follow his State into Secession (Washington, 1862), 4.

or of ordinary legislation, or of direct vote of the people. The renunciation was absolute and unconditional, without any limitation, qualification, or reservation."⁸⁴

Many conservatives favored the more pragmatic approach rather than abstract constitutional reasoning, in order to convince the voters in Virginia that secession was ruinous to their public welfare. They frequently emphasized that the interests of the South, especially those concerning slavery, were best protected by remaining in the Union rather than attaching themselves to the Southern Confederacy. The folly of secession, as Segar insisted, was nothing less than "resorting to the cartridge box instead of the ballot box for redress."⁸⁵ On January 21, Congressman John Millson of Richmond, speaking in the United States House of Representatives, illustrated that the Republicans had only captured control of the executive branch of the government, while the South and its northern supporters would be able to maintain the existing laws and block any hostile move against their interests.⁸⁶ The major focus of attention along this line of reasoning was slavery. Many conservatives maintained that the "peculiar institution" was safest within the Union. Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia had constantly emphasized this conservative position. Writing to a newspaper correspondent in Washington D. C., Stephens informed him that he was convinced that slavery was much more

⁸⁴Ibid., 7.

⁸⁵Ibid., 7-8.

⁸⁶Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 80.

secure in the Union than out of it. The future Vice-President of the Confederacy maintained that the institution was based on conservatism, and everything that weakened this had a tendency to weaken the institution.⁸⁷ John T. Harris, one of Virginia's unionist congressman held similar views. He reminded the people of the state that once the Union was dissolved the Fugitive Slave Act would be dissolved with it. The North, he predicted, would do as England was doing with regard to their slaves escaping into Canada; refuse to give them up.⁸⁸ In eloquent fashion, so characteristic of the age, Representative Sherrard Clemens of western Virginia, in the House on January 22, 1861 stated:

Before God, and in my inmost conscience, I believe that slavery will be crucified, if this unhappy controversy ends in a dismemberment of the Union. Sir, if not crucified, it will carry the death rattle in its throat.⁸⁹

With the election of delegates to the convention drawing closer, the conservatives in Virginia appealed more to the emotional aspect of secession. Former Senator William C. Rives, who had studied law and politics under Thomas Jefferson,⁹⁰ believed that the vigor and strength of the Union made "the name of an American as proud a title of respect as was that of a Roman Citizen in the highest renown of the ancient

⁸⁷Alexander H. Stephens to J. Henley Smith, July 10, 1860, in Ulrich B. Philips, ed., The Correspondence of Robert Toombs, Alexander H. Stephens, and Howell Cobb, in American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1911, II (Washington, 1913), 487.

⁸⁸Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 152.

⁸⁹Speech of Hon. Sherrard Clemens, of Virginia, in the House of Representatives, January 22, 1861, 1.

⁹⁰Dictionary of American Biography, XV, 635-637.

mistress of the world." This existing and continually growing position on the international scene, he believed, would be irreparably damaged by secession and internal conflict.⁹¹ Calling forth the nationalist sympathies of the people, the Charlottesville Review on January 25, stressed that secession would not only result in the "mere destruction of our material prosperity. With the dismemberment of this Confederacy, which has, in the brief space of eighty years, become already the asylum of all oppressed nations, perishes the brightest beacon to struggling freedom that the world has ever seen." The editorial concluded with a plea to the citizens of Virginia to pause before they "dash all their hopes to the ground."⁹²

The question of possible war with the North was quite alarming to most people in the Old Dominion. In case the incoming administration refused to acknowledge the independence of those states which might withdraw from the Union and attempted to assert its authority over them, armed conflict was an absolute certainty. The states of the upper South would certainly suffer most from a civil war, and the unionists were quick to capitalize on this fact in the state convention campaign. The Charlottesville Review argued that dissolution would necessitate a division of the public domain, and that the North would be reluctant to yield any of the property possessed by the federal government. "The

⁹¹Letter From the Hon. William C. Rives to a Friend on the Important Questions of the Day, 9.

⁹²Charlottesville Review, January 25, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials on Secession, 419.

result will be," the Review maintained, "that they will make no war on us, but we will be forced to make war on them; or else ignominiously resign all our just and equitable claims."⁹³ On January 21, Congressman Millson made it perfectly clear to the people of Virginia that there was no doubt in his mind that secession would result in armed conflict between the two sections.⁹⁴ Conservative Representative Harris urged all Virginians to remain loyal insisting that in the event of separation the Old Dominion would not only suffer the greatest loss of slave property, but also bear the brunt and burden of the consequent war. He further maintained that the cotton states would make common cause with them, but from their geographical position and sparseness of white population, they would be of little use. Harris concluded by stressing that the states of the upper South must be the battlefields, and that Virginia's border would be the scenes of blood and carnage.⁹⁵ A professor of law at the University of Virginia, John B. Minor, held similar views. He violently condemned the "stupidity and recklessness of the Belials of South Carolina and Molochs of Mississippi," and regarded secession as wicked madness which would inevitably plunge Virginia and the other border states into the vortex of civil war.⁹⁶ Botts, in a letter to the Richmond Whig, on January 25, emphasized Virginia's poor military position. In addition to being in a position

⁹³ Ibid., 418.

⁹⁴ Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 80.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 152.

⁹⁶ Blackford, Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory, 140.

which would result in bearing the major thrust of the northern land attack, the Old Dominion's naval position was also critical. Botts argued that a single ship of war stationed at the Capes of Virginia would be able to effectually block up and destroy the entire commerce of Virginia and Maryland, as if the states were surrounded by icebergs in the Arctic Ocean.⁹⁷ Rives believed that war, the ultimate consequence of secession, would drastically weaken the international position of the country, and provide an avenue by which foreign powers might exert a dangerous influence on the American continent.⁹⁸ In a paper entitled "A Pacific Appeal to Christians," the influential Richmond minister, Robert Dabney, emphasized that all southern Christians should deplore an unnecessary rupture of the Union, since it would plunge the country into "the inevitable evils of financial distress, and but too probably into the horrors of war...."⁹⁹

The candidates in the campaign were essentially divided into three groups. The first group, the secessionists, believed that Virginia should take immediate steps to break its allegiance to the federal government. The second group, the moderates or conditional unionists, were composed largely of the states rights Whigs, the supporters of Douglas, and a few followers of Breckinridge. In effect, this group accepted the doctrine of secession, and admitted that the South had

⁹⁷Botts, The Great Rebellion, 251-252.

⁹⁸Letter from the Hon. William C. Rives to a Friend, On the Important Questions of the Day, 9.

⁹⁹Johnson, Life of Dabney, 215.

just cause for secession, but favored using every means of gaining concessions before applying this ultimate right. The third group, the unconditional unionists, were recruited from the old national Whigs and from a few followers of Douglas. Most of this faction denied the right of secession, and were willing to cooperate with the moderates in order to gain a compromise with the North. If these efforts proved unsuccessful they would still oppose dissolution.

In the northwestern counties where the sentiment was overwhelmingly against secession, the candidate who endeavored to straddle had little chance of being elected. Extreme care was taken to make sure of the genuineness of the loyal expressions of the candidates. It was felt that no mistakes could be made in this critical election--that no states' rights politicians avowing a conditional allegiance to the Union should be elected. The candidates were required to stand on a platform of principles that excluded all but the most thoroughgoing union men. The resolutions adopted by the nominating convention in Hancock County were representative of the sentiments of the people throughout most of northwestern Virginia. The citizens of the county pledged to support no man who would not "clearly and unequivocally pledge himself if elected to support the laws of the United States as they now stand or until altered or amended as therein prescribed, and oppose secession in every shape and form."¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the majority of candidates in the northwest were those who pledged themselves

¹⁰⁰Granville D. Hall, The Rending of Virginia (Chicago, 1902), 130.

against disunion under any circumstances.¹⁰¹ Foremost among the union men elected to the convention from this section were John S. Carlile, Waitman T. Willey, George W. Summers, and Sherrard Clemens.

The conditional unionist or moderate group was quite evenly distributed between the central and eastern sectors of the state, with the commercial centers of Norfolk, Henrico, Princess Ann, and Lancaster Counties providing much of the conservative sentiment in the latter sector. John Janney, John B. Baldwin, William Ballard Preston, and Samuel McDowell Moore were the most prominent conditional unionists elected from these areas of the state. Alexander H. H. Stuart, a staunch conservative and elected as one of the members of the convention to represent Augusta County, was recognized as their leader.¹⁰² In the south central part of the state, the only prominent conditional unionist to be elected was Jubal A. Early of Franklin County, who was later to gain fame as a lieutenant general in the Confederate Army.¹⁰³

The results of the election were extremely favorable to the unionist cause. Of the one hundred fifty-two delegates only around thirty were classified as outright secessionists.¹⁰⁴ Approximately eighty-five convention delegates were regarded as moderates or conditional unionists,

¹⁰¹Ibid., 129-132.

¹⁰²Alexander F. Robertson, Alexander Hugh Holmes Stuart 1807-1891: A Biography (Richmond, 1925), 181.

¹⁰³Millard Bushong, Old Jube (Boyce, Va., 1955), 28.

¹⁰⁴For a list of the members of the convention and their respective counties, see Journal of the Acts and Proceedings of a General Convention of the State of Virginia Assembled at Richmond, on Wednesday, the Thirteenth Day of February, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-One, 3-7.

while the remaining thirty-five held unconditional unionist loyalties. The "reference" clause was approved by an overwhelming vote of 100,536 to 45,161.¹⁰⁵ As suspected, unconditional unionism was particularly strong in the western counties of the state, with thirty-three of the fifty counties that were later to constitute the state of West Virginia electing unconditional unionist delegates. The strength of the moderate or conditional unionist element was greatest in the Tidewater area of the state with fifteen of the thirty-six counties voting with the moderate faction in the convention. The outright secessionists came from the "black belt" or Piedmont area. Eighteen of the thirty-two counties in this section were represented by secessionists in the convention.¹⁰⁶ Out and out union men such as William Rives, John M. Botts, and J. H. Gilmer were invariably defeated in this cotton producing region.

The most recent analysis of data from the manuscript census returns of 1860 in conjunction with the election results of the state convention, has revealed some other interesting insights into the unionists of the Old Dominion. Politically speaking, the old Whig counties in Virginia were more prone to be unconditional unionists than otherwise, with eighteen of the forty counties that had voted Whig in late ante-bellum elections being represented by unconditional unionists in the

¹⁰⁵Beverly B. Munford, Virginia's Attitude Toward Slavery and Secession (Richmond, 1909), 256.

¹⁰⁶Ralph A. Wooster, The Secession Conventions of the South (Princeton, 1962), 151.

convention.¹⁰⁷ An examination of the election of 1860 has indicated that the counties that supported Constitutional Union candidate John Bell tended to be unconditionally conservative or moderate in the state election, with twenty-six Bell counties represented by unconditional unionists and twenty-two by conditional unionists in the convention. Sixteen Bell counties were secessionist and five were represented by divided delegations.¹⁰⁸ With regard to the "peculiar institution," the counties with small slave populations tended to be sympathetic to the unconditional unionist candidates. Over one half of the counties with less than $12\frac{1}{2}$ percent slave population were represented by unconditional conservatives in the convention.¹⁰⁹ However, a study of the characteristics of individual delegates has shown that the conditional unionists, in respect to slaveholding, had a higher median than did the other factions. The median holding for the moderates was fourteen slaves, compared to a nine slave median for the secessionists and a four slave median for the unconditional unionists.¹¹⁰ Recent investigation has also revealed that although the moderates were the wealthiest faction in the convention, the outright secessionists came from the wealthiest counties. The unconditional unionists, both as an individual faction in the convention and the counties which they

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 151-152.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 152-153.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 153.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 151.

represented possessed the least wealth of the three groups.¹¹¹ With regard to age and occupation, a study of the individual delegates has indicated that the unconditional unionist faction was slightly younger, and had the largest proportion of small-scale farmers.¹¹² As a result, it would be safe to conclude that the wealthiest and most heavily slave populated counties in Virginia tended to support secession, while the secessionist faction within the convention was less wealthy and held fewer slaves than the moderate faction. The unconditional unionists, not only had the smallest amount of slaves and individual wealth, but were generally younger, oriented toward small-scale farming, and came from the less wealthy counties, with a majority of those in the north-western part of the state.

On the face of the returns it was an overwhelming victory for the cause of the unionists. Certainly the secessionists and their policies favoring immediate disunion and a defeat of the "reference" clause were rejected. Contemporary observers, however, offered the opinion that there was no real difference between the moderates and the secessionists. Two days after the election, a correspondent for the New York Herald wrote:

There is no doubt that the straight secessionists have been largely defeated in the State, but there is just as little doubt that a class of men has been chosen of a far more dangerous character to the existence of the Union unless prompt concessions are made. Nine-tenths of those elected ran on the ultimatum of the Crittenden proposition, to be adopted by Congress before the 4th of March. If that is rejected by

¹¹¹Ibid., 150-151.

¹¹²Ibid., 150.

Congress they are pledged to secession, immediate and unconditional, so that all the Virginia election means is simply wresting from the hands of the present reckless managers the destiny of the state, and putting it under the control of calm, firm men, who enjoy the confidence of the people.¹¹³

Events would later substantiate the opinion of this correspondent and illustrate that although the conservatives had won, their victory was not so sweeping and that many moderates in February would become secessionists in April after the firing upon Fort Sumter.

¹¹³New York Herald, February 6, 1861.

Chapter II

The Virginia Convention of 1861

On February 13, the Virginia convention assembled at Richmond. It held its first session in the hall of the House of Delegates, but the next day it was transferred to Mechanics Institute where it continued to hold its meetings until its work was completed. The convention was composed of 152 delegates proportioned according to population. Among its members were ex-President John Tyler, former cabinet-members A. H. H. Stuart and William B. Preston, former Governor Henry A. Wise, and twelve former United States Congressmen. Included also were state legislators, judges, local officials, and leaders of both Whig and Democratic parties.¹ A telegraphic dispatch to the New York Herald sent by their correspondent, stated that it was doubted whether any assembly had ever convened in Virginia combining more talent than the convention which was about to meet. It further stated that not only would every man of note in the state be a member of the convention, but that it would also offer a source of future elevation to power and distinction for many "ambitious youths who have been fortunate enough to secure seats in that body."²

Many of those from the neighboring counties, as well as hundreds in Richmond, tried to gain entrance into the galleries of Mechanics Institute

¹For an analysis of the ages, occupations, and wealth of the delegates, see Wooster, Secession Conventions, 142-145.

²New York Herald, February 14, 1861.

in order to observe the proceedings of the celebrated assemblage. Edward Burks, as a member of the House of Delegates, was entitled to a privilege seat but found "on application that it was impossible, or next thing to it, to get in." Writing to a friend in Bedford County, Burks stated that he had never seen such an immense throng in his life, and that hundreds failed to get in at all.³

On the first day of the convention, John Janney of Loudon County, an old-line Whig of the Henry Clay school, was elected president of the body, defeating W. V. Southall of Albemarle by a 70 to 54 vote. The election of Janney was a clear indication that the conservatives, at least at the beginning of the session, were the dominating faction. On assuming his position, Janney presented a brief address. He appealed to the nationalist sympathies of the delegates, and hoped that the "flag which for nearly a century has been borne in triumph through the battle and the breeze and which now floats over this Capitol...may remain there forever...."⁴ Following Janney's address and the election of minor officials of the convention, Robert Y. Conrad of Frederick County submitted a resolution which was unanimously adopted. It provided that a committee consisting of twenty-one delegates, selected from different sections of the state, be appointed by the president.

³Edward Burks to Rowland Buford, February 18, 1861, in Walmsley, "Change of Secession Sentiment in Virginia," 90.

⁴Journal of the Acts and Proceedings of a General Convention of the State of Virginia Assembled at Richmond, on Wednesday, the Thirteenth Day of February, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-One, Together with an Appendix which includes the Journal of the Proceedings of the Committee of the Whole, a Portion of the Journal of the Secret Session of the Convention, the Ordinances and Report of the Committee on Federal Relations, and the Adjourned Convention (Richmond, 1861), 8-10.

All resolutions touching upon federal relations which might be offered in the convention were to be referred to this "Committee on Federal Relations."⁵ Of the twenty-one on this committee, four were regarded as secessionists, ten were moderates, and seven were unconditional unionists.⁶ As soon as this committee had been organized, it proceeded to consider the numerous resolutions from delegates, towns, and counties pertaining to the main purposes of the convention. It delayed its report until March 9, partly due to the nature of its task and partly to await the results of the Washington Peace Conference and Lincoln's inaugural address.

During the month while the committee worked out a report the convention heard lengthy addresses from both visitors and members. Orations concerning the Old Dominion's contributions to the Union, coercion, and secession were all fervently presented by the delegates of the different factions. The convention had been meeting only a week when William M. Treadway of the southeastern part of the state, offered a resolution providing that a select committee of five be appointed to investigate a report that the United States Government was moving arms and men to forts bordering on or in Virginia.⁷ Jubal A. Early did not lose any time in demonstrating to the convention how he felt about secession. Having been elected by Franklin County to help keep Virginia in the Union, he was determined to do so. His strong convictions as

⁵Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, 42.

⁶Ibid., 43.

⁷Ibid., 51.

well as his stubbornness, which he displayed in the resulting debates caused his opponents to refer to him as "The Terrapin from Franklin."⁸ With regard to the Treadway resolution, Early pointed out that it was giving too much importance to the constitutional right of the President of the United States to protect public property. He stated that he was satisfied that the President had no intention of intimidating the citizens of Virginia, and that they were in no danger from these guns unless they might foolishly run their heads into the mouth of one of them. After this blistering attack, the delegates voted to table the resolution.⁹

On February 15, representatives from South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi appeared with their credentials. Out of courtesy they were asked to address the convention. Fulton Anderson of Mississippi and H. L. Benning of Georgia spoke on that same day, while J. S. Preston of South Carolina followed on February 19. Anderson emphasized that there decidedly was an "irrepressible conflict" confronting all the slave states, and that Virginia should unite herself to her sisters of the South who were already in the field.¹⁰ According to Anderson, only if the Old Dominion follows this course of action would "grim-visaged war smooth his wrinkled front, peace and prosperity again smile upon the country," and no threats of coercion would be heard against the

⁸Bushong, Old Jube, 30.

⁹Ibid., 30-31.

¹⁰Addresses Delivered Before the Virginia State Convention by Hon. Fulton Anderson, Commissioner from Mississippi, Hon. Henry L. Benning, Commissioner From Georgia, and Hon. John S. Preston, Commissioner From South Carolina (Richmond, 1861), 15.

seceding states of the South.¹¹ Benning of Georgia also presented his reasons why Virginia should join the Confederacy, using as his central theme the assumption that slavery can only be preserved by seceding from the Union and joining the Southern Confederacy. The South offers Virginia "riches, peace, brotherhood, glory, and length of days," he continued, while "the North has nothing to offer but poverty and war, and hatred, and ignominy and speedy dissolution."¹² Essentially Anderson and Benning emphasized the reasons why Virginia should attach itself to the Confederacy. Preston of South Carolina, in his address, appealed to the underlying but potentially explosive southern nationalistic spirit. In fiery oratory, Preston presented his address on the following day. Appeals to the Old Dominion's history and tradition, as well as to the memory of Patrick Henry and George Washington ran rampant throughout the speech. The representative from the Palmetto State urged that Virginia should take her place in the front ranks of the Confederacy, "as she has been for one hundred years, the foremost of the world in the cause of liberty."¹³ Although the speeches had excited the crowds in the galleries, a correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune was of the opinion that they had little value in altering any of the conservative sentiments among the delegates. He informed the paper that there was "no event that could induce this Convention to secede, unless it were some foolish effort of Congress to

¹¹Ibid., 18.

¹²Ibid., 40.

¹³Ibid., 57-58.

abolish slavery, which nobody expects."¹⁴

A few days later, Samuel McDowell Moore, a strong unionist from Rockbridge County in the central part of the state, introduced a resolution which declared that Virginia could never consent to become a member of any confederacy which favored the reopening of the African slave trade, and was supported, except under extraordinary circumstances, by direct taxation. It further stated that the convention should approve of an amendment to the Constitution of the United States based upon the Crittenden resolutions, and if not adopted, Virginia should enter into a compact with those states which would agree to adopt those amendments.¹⁵ In addition to creating heated debate on the floor of the convention, the introduction of Moore's resolutions created hostile excitement among the secessionist elements in the galleries, and as a result they were cleared by the order of President Janney. In his address following the resolutions, Moore maintained that the lower South was not concerned over fugitive slaves or other real grievances, but over free trade, and direct taxes. If Virginia joined their Confederacy, her slave trade would be ruined and her tax burden would be excessive. He declared the doctrine of secession to be "the most absurd and ridiculous motion that was ever presented..." and that it would result in making the "government nothing but a rope of sand...."¹⁶

¹⁴New York Daily Tribune, February 23, 1861.

¹⁵Actually Moore was suggesting a border states confederacy. Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, 67.

¹⁶Richmond Enquirer, February 26, 1861.

One of the most forceful unionist speeches presented to the convention was by Waitman T. Willey, a delegate representing Monongalia County located in the extreme northwest on the Pennsylvania border. Willey first attacked the "irrepressible conflict" argument, and refuted the assertion that secession would silence the northern press, schools, and pulpits which had consistently and bitterly assailed southern institutions. Actually it would merely aggravate the evil. In addition, it would not stop the operation of the underground railroad but would make matters worse by bringing Canada to the very threshold of the slave states. Speaking as a citizen of the northwest, Willey was extremely concerned about the possibility of war. In the event of an armed conflict, his section would be absolutely helpless. Bordered by the States of Ohio and Pennsylvania, a hostile army could be thrown into western Virginia within twenty-four hours and in less than twice that time the entire section could be overrun. No help could be expected from eastern Virginia, stated the future senator from West Virginia, for the people there would have their own homes to defend. Secession would bring a "train of woes" upon the state such as it had never known before.¹⁷ Willey concluded by asking the delegates if they were willing to make "North-West Virginia the Flanders of America, and convert our smiling valleys into the slaughter-pens of as brave and loyal a people as dwell in the Old Dominion? I hope not. I think there

¹⁷Ibid., March 4.

exists sufficient fidelity to us to justify me in saying, no you never will."¹⁸

A shattering blow to the unionist cause in Virginia came on March 4 as a result of Lincoln's inaugural address to the nation. The address was interpreted by many in the Old Dominion to mean a declaration of war, and the greatest indignation was expressed that the President dared even to hint at coercion under any circumstances. The Richmond Dispatch regarded the inaugural message of Lincoln as an inauguration of civil war.¹⁹ Capitalizing on the resentment toward the address, the pro-secessionist Richmond Enquirer stated:

Mr. Lincoln's Inaugural address is before our readers-- couched in the cool, unimpassioned, deliberate language of the fanatic, with the purpose of pursuing the promptings of fanaticism even to the dismembering of the Government with the horrors of civil war. Civil War must now come. Sectional war, declared by Mr. Lincoln, awaits only the signal gun from the insulted Southern Confederacy, to light its horrid fires all along the borders of Virginia. No action of our convention can now maintain the peace. She must fight!²⁰

Some of the moderates did go over to the radical camp as a result of the presidential address. However, in spite of their protests and disapprovals, very few of the moderates advocated immediate secession. Most of them favored defensive measures for the state and the calling of a conference of the border states.²¹ The inaugural address had

¹⁸Robert J. Largent, "Virginia Takes the Road to Secession," West Virginia History, III (January, 1942), 136.

¹⁹Richmond Dispatch, March 5, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials on Secession, 475.

²⁰Richmond Enquirer, March 5.

²¹Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 176.

little effect on the unconditional unionist faction, with the vast majority of them remaining firm in their convictions. John S. Carlile of Harrison County in the northwest, condemned those who regarded the delivery of the address as the occasion "as the election of the man was made the occasion by the Cotton States, to dissever their connexion...from the United States."²²

Following close on the heels of the inaugural address was the report of Virginia's representatives to the National Peace Convention which had been negotiating during the preceding month. The peace conference had been called with the avowed purpose of employing every reasonable means to avert a permanent dissolution. All the states including the seceded ones had been invited to send delegates. The six cotton states and Texas, Arkansas, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, California, and Oregon had not been represented. This left only twenty-one of the thirty-four states in the Union to send representatives, and of these only fourteen had delegations present on the opening day. Many delegates from the border states had gone into the conference with an earnest desire to bring about an acceptable settlement. On the other hand, radicals such as James A. Sheddon of Virginia, L. M. Morrill of Maine, and David Wilmot of Pennsylvania had refused to consider the positions of their opponents. The first session of the conference had been held on February 4, at which time, ex-President Tyler was elected president. After he had delivered his address, a

²²Speech of John S. Carlile of Harrison, in the Virginia State Convention, Delivered Thursday, March 7, 1861 (Richmond, 1861), 5.

resolutions committee had been established and on February 15, presented their amendment proposals to the members of the convention.²³ Essentially based on the Crittenden compromise, they were slightly modified and less advantageous to the South, than the original resolutions introduced by the Senator from Kentucky.²⁴ As a result, the representative from Virginia, James Seddon, in a minority report had supported the "original" Crittenden Compromise as the substitute proposal.²⁵ A heated debate had followed in which William C. Rives and George W. Summers, two of the delegates from Virginia, had made fervent appeals for the preservation of the Union.²⁶ Eventually the modified Crittenden Compromise proposed by the majority of the resolutions committee was adopted and the National Peace Conference had adjourned on February 28.²⁷ Neither the northern nor the southern delegates were satisfied with the results, and most of them had agreed that the convention had been a complete failure. Although there were southern extremists blocking moves for compromise, the large part of the blame for the failure of the conference must be attributed to the radical Republicans, who believed that they could not and actually had nothing to compromise.²⁸

²³L. E. Chittenden, A Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the Secret Sessions of the Conference Convention, for Proposing Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, Held at Washington, D. C., in February, A.D., 1861 (New York, 1864), 43.

²⁴Ibid., 44-45.

²⁵Ibid., 47-48.

²⁶Ibid., 134-147, 150-156.

²⁷Ibid., 421-425, 441-447.

²⁸Robert G. Gunderson, "The Old Gentleman's Convention: The Peace Conference of 1861," Civil War History, VII (March, 1961), 10-12. Avery O. Craven, The Growth of Southern Nationalism (Baton Rouge, 1953), 386. Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 171.

The reluctance on the part of the radical Republicans to compromise can be seen, to some extent, by an excerpt from the address of L. M. Morrill of Maine:

Our principles cannot be interfered with; we carry them with us always. Our consciences approve them. We can negotiate with you, and treat with you upon subjects which do not involve their sacrifice. If it is your purpose to attack them, you may abandon all other purposes so far as this body is concerned. The people of the North will never sacrifice their principles. It is useless for you to ask them to do so.²⁹

The proposed amendments formulated by the peace convention were conveyed to the United States Senate and the House. The Senate set up a special committee and by a vote of seven to twenty-eight, the proposals were voted down. Both Senators from Virginia, Hunter and Mason, opposed them.³⁰ In the House of Representatives, Speaker Pennington delayed the consideration of the proposals until March 1, at which time the majority of representatives refused to suspend the rules in order to consider them.³¹ On March 6, the Virginia delegates to the National Peace Conference informed the state convention that the resolutions proposed in Washington were defeated in Congress.

Undoubtedly the failure of the Washington Convention strengthened the secessionists and consequently weakened the conservatives in the Old Dominion.³² Edward Burks wrote on March 6 that the argument for the Union was exhausted and that "the Old Dominion should speak with one

²⁹Chittenden, Report on the Washington Peace Conference, 145.

³⁰Ibid., 571. Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 1254.

³¹Ibid., 580-583. Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 1331.

³²Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 172.

voice from the Ohio to the Chesapeake in tones of defiance to Lincoln and all his cohorts...."³³ Ex-President Tyler held similar views. Upon returning to Richmond from the capitol, he urged his fellow Virginians to "act promptly and boldly in the exercise of the State sovereignty."³⁴

With secessionism gaining in intensity as a result of Lincoln's Inaugural Address and the failure of the National Peace Conference, John S. Carlile, an able unionist from the northwest, presented an address to the convention denouncing the recent excitement for disunion. Appealing to the slaveholding element, this "bold and forceful speaker"³⁵ stressed that no act had ever been put upon the statue book interfering with the institution of slavery in any shape, manner, or form, that was not put there by and with the consent of the slaveholding states.³⁶ He predicted that slavery would not exist in Virginia five years after separation, and nowhere in the southern states, twenty years after. "How could it maintain itself," he asked, "with the whole civilized world, backed up by what they call their international law, arrayed for its ultimate distinction--with this North, that is now bound to stand by us, and to protect slavery, opposed to us, and united

³³Edward Burks to Rowland Buford, March 6, 1861, in Walmsley, "Change of Secession Sentiment in Virginia," 92.

³⁴Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers, II, 616-618.

³⁵Dictionary of American Biography, III, 493.

³⁶Speech of John S. Carlile of Harrison, in the Virginia State Convention, Delivered Thursday, March 1, 1861, 11-12.

with England, France, and Spain...."³⁷ The delegate from the northwest also elaborated upon the vast amount of money that would be required to protect an extended frontier and a defenseless sea coast, in case of armed conflict.³⁸ Carlile concluded with the prediction that secession would cause Virginia to lose its power and influence, and reduce the Old Dominion to an outpost for a southern confederacy, "to stand guard and play patrol for King Cotton...."³⁹

On March 9, the Committee on Federal Relations made its preliminary report, followed ten days later by a supplemental report. Presented by committee chairman Robert Y. Conrad, the first report contained an explanation of the nature of the Union, and listed the southern grievances.⁴⁰ The supplemental one recommended that a series of guarantees similar to those in the Crittenden Compromise be incorporated into the thirteenth amendment.⁴¹ Minority reports were entered by various committee members, including Henry A. Wise, Lewis Harvie, and John Baldwin. Former Governor Wise, pro-secessionist in sentiment, demanded several proposals more drastic than the majority report which were to be presented to the several states with the request that they

³⁷Ibid., 19.

³⁸Ibid., 24.

³⁹Ibid., 25.

⁴⁰Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, Appendix, Partial Report from the Committee on Federal Relations, Presented March 9, 1861, 1-9.

⁴¹Ibid., Appendix, Report of the Committee on Federal Relations, Proposing Amendments to the Constitution of the United States, March 19, 1861, 1-5.

be approved by October 1. While awaiting their approvals, he would strengthen the defenses of the state, and request the federal government to withdraw from the forts of the seceded states. If these proposals were not accepted by the North, he would join the South.⁴² Lewis Harvie, a fiery disunionist from the East, in his report simply demanded that an ordinance of secession be passed and presented to the people for their approval or rejection.⁴³ The moderate John Baldwin, suggested a "Border State Conference" to be held in Frankfort, Kentucky.⁴⁴

After the convention voted to send a formal letter of thanks to Senator John Crittenden for his efforts to bring about an adjustment of the national difficulties,⁴⁵ the majority recommendations of the Committee on Federal Relations and the substitutes were referred to the committee on the whole. A protracted debate followed in which the act of secession was discussed in all its details with the greatest ability. Conservative leaders abandoned their policy of delay and now pressed for the full adoption of the Conrad report. In order to illustrate that there was wide sentiment in opposition to secession, several unionist supporters read resolutions adopted by their respective counties. J. C. Halladay of Norfolk County presented a memorial, enveloped in the flag of the

⁴²Ibid., Appendix, Substitute for the Report of the Committee on Federal Relations, Presented by Mr. Wise, March 9, 1861, 1-11.

⁴³Ibid., Appendix, Substitute for the Report of the Committee on Federal Relations, Presented by Mr. Harvie, March 9, 1861, 1.

⁴⁴Ibid., Appendix, Substitute for the Report of the Committee on Federal Relations, Presented by Mr. Baldwin, March 11, 1861, 1-5.

⁴⁵Albert D. Kirwan, John J. Crittenden; The Struggle for the Union (Frankfort, 1962), 423.

United States, from his constituency affirming their "devotion to the Constitution and Union of States," and "requesting their delegates to the Convention to stand by the same."⁴⁶ A mass meeting at Wellsburg in Brooke County adopted a resolution which they had conveyed to their convention delegates. The citizens of that county were opposed to secession on the grounds that their section, the northern panhandle, would be most adversely affected, occupying as it did the most northern point of southern territory and bounded by Ohio and Pennsylvania "with whom we are so closely connected in social, political, and commercial interests."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the secessionist faction easily counter-attacked this conservative maneuver, and illustrated how many towns and counties were changing their positions and were voting to instruct their delegates in the convention to support a secession ordinance. In an address by George Richardson of Hanover County in the eastern part of the State, the secessionist cause was further strengthened. Never a strong disunionist, Richardson on April 4 urged immediate separation. He was of the opinion that the time when the South could have been accused of imprudence and rashness for such a course had passed.⁴⁸ Attempt after attempt at compromise had resulted in failure, he maintained,

⁴⁶Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, 103.

⁴⁷McGregor, The Disruption of Virginia, 72.

⁴⁸Speech of George W. Richardson, of Hanover, in Committee of the Whole, on the Report of the Committee on Federal Relations, in the Convention of Virginia, April 4, 1861 (Richmond, 1862), 11.

and that the next time Virginia should speak for the rights of the South, "it should be from the head of a Southern column."⁴⁹

In the early part of April, Lincoln, feeling that the Richmond convention was a strong menace to the country because of the position of Virginia among the border states, made an effort to have it adjourned. He was well aware that great numbers of Virginians would enlist in the southern army in case of a civil war, but the effect of this would be less vital than the passage of a formal act of secession. As a result he sent for George W. Summers, a unionist delegate from the Shenandoah Valley, to come to Washington.⁵⁰ Unable to accept the invitation due to personal business affairs, Summers sent on April 4, John B. Baldwin to represent the conservatives of the convention.⁵¹ From this point there are two widely divergent accounts of what took place at the conference between Lincoln and Baldwin. John Baldwin stated that Lincoln made no promise nor offering of any sort, and that the President had said to him more than once that he came too late.⁵² Baldwin maintained that he was watchful for any basis of compromise, and while he would not have considered practicable the adjournment, sine die, of the Virginia convention in return for the evacuation of Sumter, he would

⁴⁹Ibid., 12.

⁵⁰Largent, "Virginia Takes the Road to Secession," 139.

⁵¹Ibid., 140.

⁵²Wilmer L. Hall, "Lincoln's Interview with John Baldwin," South Atlantic Quarterly, XIII (July, 1914), 268. Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 194.

have seized upon this as a basis for negotiation.⁵³ In the presence of a Congressional Reconstruction Committee in 1866, the unionist Botts insisted that he had spoken to Lincoln on April 7, and that the President informed him that he had proposed an offer to Baldwin. According to Botts, Lincoln had said that he was so anxious to maintain peace and to save the border states to the Union, that if the unionists would have adjourned the convention, he would have taken the responsibility for the evacuation of Fort Sumter. Baldwin would not consider this proposition to adjourn the convention sine die. Botts had said that he had asked permission to present the same proposition to the unionists of the convention, but Lincoln had stated that it was too late, since the fleet had sailed two days before.⁵⁴ On analyzing these two statements, most historians have agreed that there were several discrepancies and inaccuracies in Botts' account.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, it was probable as Wilmer Hall concluded, that "Lincoln stated to Baldwin, partially and guardedly, and to Botts more freely, the proposition which was to have been made."⁵⁶ With compromises failing and disappointments mounting it was very probable that even if Lincoln's offer was presented to the

⁵³Ibid., 267. Some details of Baldwin's version are substantiated by Allen B. Magruder, who served as Lincoln's messenger to Richmond. Allen B. Magruder, "A Piece of Secret History; President Lincoln and the Virginia Convention of 1861," Atlantic Monthly, XXXV (April, 1875), 438-445.

⁵⁴Botts, The Great Rebellion, 194-202.

⁵⁵Wilmer Hall, "Lincoln's Interview with Baldwin," 268. Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 194.

⁵⁶Ibid., 269.

convention, it would not have been accepted by the majority of the members, for they were demanding at this time guarantees that would restore the cotton states to the Union.⁵⁷

Secessionism was gradually gaining a firm foothold in the Old Dominion. A correspondent for the New York Herald in Alexandria wrote that the very strong union feeling which had prevailed during the election of delegates to the Virginia convention had visibly subsided, as a result of the "feeble and uncertain policy of the government."⁵⁸ In the early part of April, resolutions were presented to the convention from Bedford, Amelia, Madison and Albemarle Counties, in favor of immediate secession.⁵⁹ "The people, conservatives and Radicals, Unionists and Secessionists, Border- Conference men and Southern Confederacy men--all the city and all the State--," according to one newspaper correspondent, had become utterly disgusted with the "masterly inactivity" of the members of the convention. "Everybody is tired of them," he wrote, "and everybody wants them gone, except hotel-keepers, faro-banks, and the managers of the theater."⁶⁰

On April 5, a vote was taken on the adoption of an ordinance of secession, introduced by Lewis Harvie.⁶¹ The resolution was defeated by

⁵⁷Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 195.

⁵⁸New York Herald, April 9, 1861.

⁵⁹New York Times, April 2, 1861.

⁶⁰New York Daily Tribune, April 11, 1861.

⁶¹Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, Appendix, Journal of the Committee of the Whole, pp. 31-32.

a vote of 45 to 88.⁶² However, the vote indicated that from ten to fifteen delegates regarded as moderates had shifted their support to the secessionist camp.⁶³

After the vote on Harvie's motion was taken, J. J. Jackson, of Wood County in the northwest, addressed the convention. He stated his willingness to join a confederacy of the Middle States but would not agree to a union with the Gulf States, since it would "break up our markets, impoverish our people, destroy our domestic interests, and drench our homes in blood."⁶⁴ He declared that if it were the purpose of the convention to take Virginia out of the Union on the pretext of coercion applied to seceding states, he was ready "to raise the banner of revolt and secede with his people, or as many as would join him, from the state of Virginia."⁶⁵

Following close behind Jackson was Jubal A. Early of Franklin County, who also attempted to stem the rising tide of secessionist sentiment. In presenting the views of the tobacco-growers and manufacturers of his section, he refuted the disunionist idea that all of Virginia's interest lay to the South, and declared that the State was dependent upon Northern capital to carry on the manufacture of tobacco.⁶⁶ Distinguished in appearance in spite of a stoop due to rheumatism acquired

⁶²Ibid., 33.

⁶³Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 190.

⁶⁴Richmond Enquirer, April 10, 1861.

⁶⁵New York Times, April 10, 1861.

⁶⁶Bushong, Old Jube, 32-33.

in the Mexican War,⁶⁷ Early stated that Franklin County was then suffering because its tobacco manufacturers were unable to draw upon the commission merchants in the North, and that both planters and manufacturers were in distress. "The Terrapin from Franklin" then estimated that the North and West consumed two-thirds of the manufactured tobacco of Virginia. If the Old Dominion seceded, the United States could be expected to encourage tobacco production in what remained of the Union, especially in the states of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. A protective tariff would then exclude Virginia tobacco and since the Southern Confederacy would be unable to take up the slack, financial ruin would be the fate of Virginia's tobacco growers and manufacturers.⁶⁸ Cold and unprepossessing in manner, Early concluded with the thought that the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, as an important connecting link with the Kentucky and Ohio regions, would bring Virginia a trade of tremendous proportions if it only remained in the Union.⁶⁹

The galleries of the convention hall were filled every day by enthusiastic secessionists who wildly applauded those speakers who assailed the North or censured the federal government for its treatment of the South, and just as plainly showed their disapproval of those who had the courage to defend their unionist position. A correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune wrote that every means were used to intimidate the

⁶⁷Dictionary of American Biography, V, 598-599.

⁶⁸Bushong, Old Jube, 32-33.

⁶⁹Ibid., 33.

conservative members.⁷⁰ Ephriam B. Hall, a conservative member of the convention from Marion County stated:

A tremendous outside pressure was brought to bear to drag us into the measures of the secessionists. We were hissed at and groaned at. The galleries were brought to bear on us whenever any man dared utter a sentiment for the Union. Some of us were spit upon. We were told we would be driven out at the point of the bayonet.⁷¹

A member of the convention from Taylor County, John S. Burdett, also testified to the mob fury which had assailed the conservative members of the convention. When he rose to speak, he was frequently greeted with derisive cries of "John Brown!"⁷² Writing some years after the convention, James C. McGregor, a delegate from Preston County, stated that "howling mobs paraded the streets at night, with drums and horns and cowbells...denouncing with opprobrious epithets the Unionists of the Convention, one of whom they burned in effigy in the street, others of whom they tried to intimidate by suspending ropes with nooses attached to limbs of trees or lamp-posts near their lodging at night, calling them from their beds and kindly informing them the halters were for them!"⁷³ By methods such as these, McGregor maintained, a number of conservative members were coerced into supporting the cause of secession, "while others were seduced into a shameful betrayal of their constituents, some by flattery and some by even more disreputable means."⁷⁴ Another

⁷⁰New York Daily Tribune, March 20, 1861.

⁷¹Granville Hall, The Rending of Virginia, 181.

⁷²Ibid., 182.

⁷³Ibid., 522-523.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 524.

method for intimidating the unionist members of the convention were the frequent attacks that they were not expressing the true sentiments of their constituency. Such a case involved Jubal Early who had rebuked John Goode Jr., a delegate from Bedford County, for telling the convention that his course was contrary to that desired by his Franklin County constituents. Goode claimed to have received letters from prominent residents of Franklin stating that the secession sentiment was increasing there and that if another election was held, Early would be defeated. Early defended his stand and revealed that one of the residents whom Goode referred to was the man whom Early had decisively beaten at the pools for a seat at the convention.⁷⁵ Preceding the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the more extreme and violent portion of the disunionists had sent out a secret circular to their friends throughout the entire state urging them all to assemble in Richmond on April 16, and to bring every disunionist of their respective and neighboring counties. The object of this appeal, according to Botts, was to exert an outside influence on the convention, and to illustrate to that body that there was "a great uprising of the people of the state from every part, demanding in their sovereign capacity, the immediate passage of an ordinance of secession."⁷⁶

On April 8, it was agreed that the convention should send a delegation of three men to Washington, for the purpose of getting from the President

⁷⁵Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, 90.

⁷⁶Botts, The Great Rebellion, 201-202.

a statement of what course he intended to pursue toward the seceded states. By a unanimous vote Alexander H. H. Stuart, George W. Randolph, and William B. Preston were chosen to constitute the committee.⁷⁷

Lincoln had received the delegation "courteously but rather coldly."

To guard against such mistakes as were likely to be made in a verbal reply, Lincoln wrote out his answer carefully and read it to the commissioners on the morning of April 13. He stated that it was too late for him to alter the program decided upon, and that even then Fort Sumter was under fire.⁷⁸ The committee returned to Richmond and made its report to the convention without comment. It was received by the members of all factions with a great deal of indifference, as the news about Fort Sumter was then the all-absorbing topic.

Since early April rumors that a relief expedition had been sent to Fort Sumter had increased each day, and caused great alarm among the conservatives. The unconditional unionist leaders had been able to hold the support of the moderates largely because of Seward's promise that Sumter would not be re-enforced. News of the firing upon the South Carolina fort had reached Virginia in the afternoon of April 12. Followed as it was by Lincoln's proclamation and call for troops, it was the last blow for the conservative coalition of moderates and unconditional unionists. Pressures outside the convention for action were mounting. Upon hearing the news about Fort Sumter, mobs in Richmond seized the artillery and ran howling through the streets. They broke through the

⁷⁷Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, 141-145.

⁷⁸Largent, "Virginia Takes the Road to Secession," 140-141.

doors of the State House and tore down the stars and stripes, hoisting in its place the flag of the Confederate States.⁷⁹ All stores and public places were closed and many Virginians from neighboring counties rushed to the state capitol.⁸⁰ One observer wrote that "a man may live fifty years and see no such period of excitement as has prevailed in Virginia since the guns opened on Fort Sumter."⁸¹ A correspondent for a leading New York newspaper telegraphed that the people "were clamorous for secession, and accounts from the interior of the State represent the feeling as thoroughly aroused."⁸² With Lincoln's call for seventy-thousand volunteers to coerce the lower South, all conservative hopes for compromise were destroyed. At last the event had occurred that enabled the secessionists to triumph over the majority of conservatives in the convention. Former Governor Henry Wise regarded the proclamation as a "bolt of war into our midst."⁸³ The Richmond Times Dispatch urged that the day for argument had past, and that the question was no longer one of Union, but "a question of the peace, safety, and purity of every fireside in Virginia."⁸⁴ Botts writing to Attorney General Edward Bates, several days after Lincoln's call, stated that he could not begin to give him a just description of the excitement created, not only in

⁷⁹Granville Hall, The Rending of Virginia, 179-180.

⁸⁰Ibid., 183.

⁸¹New York Times, April 18, 1861.

⁸²New York Herald, April 16, 1861.

⁸³Henry A. Wise, Seven Decades of the Union (Richmond, 1881), 277.

⁸⁴Richmond Times Dispatch, April 16, 1861.

Virginia, but throughout the entire South by the proclamation of April 15. He regarded it as the most unfortunate document that ever issued from the government. In the absence of that paper, he maintained, Virginia could not have been carried out of the Union. As a result of it, the Union party and the Union sentiment had been almost entirely swept out of existence.⁸⁵

Governor Letcher's actions during the crisis added further encouragement to the secessionist cause. In reply to the President's call, he wrote to Simon Cameron, the Secretary of War, that no men would be furnished by Virginia.⁸⁶ His actions met with the full approval of the Richmond Enquirer which, during the preceding months, had severely criticized him for his loyalty to the Union.⁸⁷

On April 16, Alexander H. H. Stuart, former cabinet officer and congressman, presented the final and one of the most forceful unionist addresses to the convention. The delegate from Augusta County, in the central part of the state, summarized in brilliant fashion almost every conservative argument since then presented to the delegates. Over six feet tall, handsome and dignified,⁸⁸ Stuart began his address with an appeal to the nationalist sympathies of the delegates, emphasizing the Old Dominion's traditional attachment to the Union.⁸⁹ He then proceeded

⁸⁵John M. Botts to Edward Bates, April 19, 1865 in Botts, The Great Rebellion, 257.

⁸⁶Official Records, Series III, Volume I, 76.

⁸⁷Richmond Enquirer, April 18, 1861.

⁸⁸Dictionary of American Biography, XVIII, 160-161.

⁸⁹Robertson, Life of Alexander H. H. Stuart, 194.

to discuss the "primary effects" of secession. The first immediate consequence of disunion "would be to transfer the seat of war from the Gulf of Mexico, and from the extreme southern part of our Atlantic coast, to the bosom of Virginia."⁹⁰ In addition to the fact that Virginia would bear the brunt of the war, this staunch conservative briefly and very effectively illustrated that secession would also result in economic dislocation and chaos for the state. The break down of commercial relations, inflation, and eventual bankruptcy were the economic consequences in case of secession.⁹¹ Stuart concluded his address by suggesting one other possible consequence of disunion:

It may result not only in a dissolution of the Union, but it may result in another dissolution which to me would be more painful even than the overthrow of the union itself. It may result in a dissolution of the bonds which bind together the different great slopes of this state.⁹²

With events moving to the advantage of the secessionist leaders, their next step was to have the convention go into secret secession--a policy which the unconditional union members had opposed from the beginning. As a result of the newly created coalition of secessionists and a majority of moderates, the motion was agreed to on April 16. President Janney accordingly directed the sergeant-at-arms to clear the galleries and the lobbies.⁹³ On the morning of April 17, Henry Wise

⁹⁰Ibid., 194-195.

⁹¹Ibid., 196.

⁹²Ibid., 197.

⁹³Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, 158.

secured the floor, and drawing a large horse pistol from his side and laying it on the desk before him, delivered a violent address denouncing the federal government.⁹⁴ At the close of his speech he took a watch from his pocket and declared that events were then occurring which caused a hush to come over his soul. At such an hour, he said, Harper's Ferry and its armory were in the possession of Virginia soldiers. At another period the federal navy yard and property at Norfolk had been seized by the troops of the state.⁹⁵ In the afternoon an ordinance was adopted providing for Virginia's secession from the Union, and submitting this action of the convention to the people for ratification or rejection at a special election to be held on May 23.⁹⁶ Ex-President Tyler writing to his wife, stated that the die was thus cast and Virginia's future was now "in the hands of the god of battle."⁹⁷

In the convention the tentative ordinance was passed by a vote of eighty-eight to fifty-five, and before the people a month later it was confirmed by a vote of 125,950 against 20,373.⁹⁸ After all changes were made, the final tabulation of the convention vote was 103 to forty-six. It is necessary to note that this vote did not represent the true sentiment of the convention. Some of the eighty-eight on the initial

⁹⁴Barton H. Wise, The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia 1806-1876 (New York, 1899), 272-274.

⁹⁵Ibid., 274-278.

⁹⁶Acts of the Virginia General Assembly, 1861, Appendix, 3.

⁹⁷John Tyler to Mrs. Tyler, April 17, 1861, in Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers, II, 641.

⁹⁸Journal of the Virginia Convention, 1861, Appendix, Portions of the Journal of Secret Session, 10-11.

ballot, supported secession in order to show the North that Virginia was a unit, and hoped that their action might force the free states to change their policy.⁹⁹ In addition, it has been shown that other delegates shifted their position as a result of the intimidating external pressure.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, even if one discounts those delegates who voted for the secession ordinance out of intimidation or in order to coerce the North to change its policy, events had reached a point where a secession ordinance would still have been passed, but probably by a much narrower margin.

Of the eighty-eight delegates who voted for the ordinance, fifty-five were from east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, ten were from the central part of the state, eighteen were from the southwest, and five were from the northwest.¹⁰¹ Of the fifty-five delegates who voted in the negative, ten were from east of the Blue Ridge, seventeen were from the central part of the state, three were from the southeast, and twenty-five were from the northwest. Those delegates representing counties from the area east of the Blue Ridge and from the southwest were largely responsible for the passage of the ordinance.¹⁰² On the other hand, the majority of representatives from the northwest and a considerable number of delegates representing the Valley or central part of the state voted to remain in the Union.¹⁰³

On May 23, the ordinance of secession was ratified by the people by a decisive majority. However, the vote cannot be considered as an

⁹⁹Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 205.

¹⁰⁰Granville Hall, The Rending of Virginia, 179-183, 522-524.

¹⁰¹Shanks, Secession in Virginia, 205.

¹⁰²Ibid., 206.

¹⁰³McGregor, The Disruption of Virginia, 176-171.

accurate index of the prevailing sentiment of the people of Virginia. In addition to the fact that the absence of a secret ballot made intimidation easy,¹⁰⁴ the existing conditions under which the vote was taken totally discounts it as an accurate indication of popular opinion. Virginia had already broken its bonds with the federal government, entered into the Confederacy, and was engaged in armed conflict with the North.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, the vote of May 23 was not a question of secession or union, but one of loyalty or disloyalty to Virginia.

The coming of the war, as Roy Nichols has noted, abruptly ended the temporizing, the conciliating, the avoiding, and all other futile efforts with which the Unionists had filled the preceding months.¹⁰⁶ There were unquestionably many reasons why Virginia seceded--some remote in origin, some underlying but potentially explosive, and other immediate to the hour. Nevertheless, it may be safely asserted that the crisis at Fort Sumter and Lincoln's proclamation for troops were the crucial and determining factors which impelled the Old Dominion to secede.

The conservatives in Virginia had waged a valiant struggle to maintain their states allegiance to the federal government. Most historians have either disregarded them in their studies of the coming of the Civil War, or have looked upon their role as well as their importance with a minimum of attention. Although some geographical areas had a preponderance of unionists, they nevertheless, could be found in every county, city, and town throughout the state. East of the Blue Ridge Mountains,

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 180.

¹⁰⁵Official Records, Series IV, Volume, I, 244.

¹⁰⁶Roy F. Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy (New York, 1948), 510.

the stronghold of secessionism, one could find thousands who opposed and fought against the separation of Virginia from the Union. The northern immigrant farmers who settled in the eastern counties during the preceding decade, were one vociferous faction opposed to secession. Their political, social, cultural, and economic ties with the North were all threatened in the event that Virginia should break its ties with the Union. The small-scale native farmer in the east, who was carrying on a lucrative trade with such northern states as New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, also tended to favor the unionist cause. Their truck gardening industry, with their shipments of vast quantities of fresh peas, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, potatoes, and cabbages would be immediately terminated as a result of secession, and consequent armed conflict. Those in the Tidewater, who were carrying on a lucrative fish oyster trade with the northern cities, were just as reluctant as their neighbors involved in truck gardening to see their markets and profits disintegrate as a result of Virginia's separation. It is not surprising that when the vote for the passage of the secession ordinance was taken on April 17, the delegates from Norfolk and Henrico Counties remained divided in their sentiments. Many of the urban and commercial interests of the east, who had formerly supplied the leadership of the southern Whig Party, were also opposed to disunion. The majority of forward-looking businessmen and industrialists residing in the urban centers of the eastern part of the state were quite unwilling to have their economic position endangered by secession. The eastern cities of Virginia had developed a valuable industry in the manufacturing of plug tobacco, while industrialists were looking toward the North for tariffs, capital, and technology to expand the iron industry of the state.

In addition to these economically oriented eastern groups, there were others who opposed secession on the grounds that it was illogical, unconstitutional, and in conflict with their nationalistic beliefs. The idea that the "peculiar institution" could best be preserved by remaining in the Union had been frequently expressed by eastern conservative slaveholders. On nationalist grounds, such varied individuals from eastern Virginia as Robert E. Lee, John Minor Botts, William C. Rives, Robert L. Dabney, Professor John B. Minor, and Mary Berkley Minor Blackford uttered some of the strongest sentiments against secession.

In the Valley or central part of the state, the opposition to disunion was much greater than in the area east of the Blue Ridge. The delegates representing the counties in the northern part of the Valley led by Alexander H. H. Stuart, on April 17, remained firm in their unionist sentiments and voted against secession. The major economic interests in this area were centered around tobacco planting and small-scale agriculture. With the exception of the tobacco plantations, the counties in this area were mountainous and without many slaves. The products of the Valley, such as tobacco, grain, hay, cattle, hogs, oil, and wool found their best markets in northern commercial centers. Many of their railroads, as well as their churches, were connected with those of Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh, and other centers in the North. The fear that the northeentral part of the state would bear the brunt of the war, loomed high in the list of reasons why the majority of the people in the northern Valley were opposed to secession. Unfortunately, this area was to suffer one of the most terrible ravages of the Civil War.

In the northwestern section of the state sentiment was predominantly unionist. The preponderant proportion of the people in this area were engaged in small-scale agricultural pursuits, very similar to their neighbors in the northern Valley. It lacked a significant slave population, and its geographic, economic, and social ties were with the states of the upper Ohio Valley. Its leading newspapers, municipal leaders, and businessmen were consistently opposed to any action which would break the bonds between Virginia and the federal government. The inhabitants of the section, as those in the northern Valley, had frequently opposed secession on the grounds that they were strategically helpless against an invading army in the event of war. They had no desire to see themselves isolated from the southern states and exposed to the mercies of a northern army. The counties bordering on the Ohio and those drained by the upper waters of the Monongahela were so close to Ohio and Pennsylvania that in the event of war, they could be overrun by federal troops in a few days. Wheeling, the largest city in the section, could easily be destroyed forty-eight hours after war was declared. Troops concentrating at Pittsburgh could penetrate into the very heart of western Virginia simply by going up the Monongahela River. It is not surprising that when the first muttering of secession and war were heard, such western grievances as unfair taxation, unequal representation, and the lack of adequate state financed internal improvements became more intense. With Virginia's passage of the secession ordinance, the sectional cleavage between the eastern and northwestern portion of the state approached the breaking point. Within two years West Virginia was to hold a convention and secede from the state, as the Old Dominion had seceded from the Union.

Chapter III

The Old North State: Watching and Waiting

In the session crisis of 1860-1861, North Carolina did not play a significant role like that of her neighboring states, Virginia and South Carolina. The Old North State was regarded as one of the most conservative of the southern states. Indeed it was the fashion among her more fiery sisters south of her to characterize the state as a "Rip Van Winkle," in order to illustrate her conservativeness or slowness of action. Furthermore, it was generally agreed that North Carolina's action in the impending crisis, like many of the other states in the upper South, would be determined largely by the course of action that Virginia intended to pursue. Nevertheless a study of the conditions within the borders of the Old North State on the eve of secession has a value far greater than this relative place in the movement might suggest. In fact, North Carolina illustrates some aspects of southern life too often lost sight of in studies concerned with the coming of the Civil War. Her gradually emerging middle-class overtones, her preponderance of small-scale agricultural pursuits, her relatively large Quaker element, and her budding industrialization all tended to inject a conservativeness into the thinking of a large number of North Carolinians. By 1860 this conservative attitude, in many cases, was transformed into strong unionist sentiment.

By November 8, 1860, it was definitely known in North Carolina that Abraham Lincoln had been elected President of the United States.

Although the Republican candidate had received less than one percent of the entire vote of the Old North State,¹ the vast majority of North Carolinians were of the opinion that the election of a "Black Republican," however distasteful, was not sufficient grounds for withdrawing from the Union. The general sentiment within the state seemed to be one of "Watch and Wait," a phrase coined by W. W. Holden, the ardent unionist editor of the North Carolina Standard.² Lincoln, it was thought should be given a reasonable length of time to show his course of action. The Raleigh correspondent for the New York Herald wrote that "however unanimous South Carolina may be in seceding, because Northern men have elected a free soil President, yet here there are a good many who do not think all is quite lost, and that secession is still distant at least another four years journey."³ The New York Times correspondent made similar observations and emphasized that throughout the state the old Whig feeling was still cherished by a large proportion of the most active business and producing classes. "They have the long time ideas of the value of the Union," he added, "and they will not readily give them up."⁴ A brief review of the various opinions expressed immediately following the election by the newspapers, county meetings, and public figures will give a further insight into the prevailing sentiment of the state.

¹Breckinridge carried the state with 48,539 votes, and Bell ran a close second, receiving 44,990 votes. Douglas received 2,701 votes. Crenshaw, Slave States in the Election of 1860, 197.

²Horace W. Raper, "William W. Holden and the Peace Movement in North Carolina," North Carolina Historical Review, XXXI (October, 1954), 493.

³New York Herald, November 17, 1860.

⁴New York Times, December 12, 1860.

At the time of Lincoln's election the vast majority of the press of the state condemned secession as a possible course of action, and only a very few newspapers were advocating a policy which favored disunion.⁵ The editor of the Newbern Progress wrote that the simple election of an objectionable man to the Presidency by a minority of the voters of the Republic, was not a cause for breaking up the government. He recommended to his readers that if Lincoln violated his oath then they should "dethrone" him, and call another man to preside over them who would observe his oath to support the constitution and to secure every citizen his rights under that document. Under all circumstances, he insisted that they adhere to the constitution and struggle for their rights within the Union and not outside of it.⁶ The Daily Herald, published in Wilmington, held similar views. In an editorial on November 9, it was stressed that peaceable secession was an impossibility. It was further stated that the consequences of secession was "not confined to the loss of some blood. The foundations of government are broken up, nationality is destroyed, trade is ruined, the industrial pursuits of the country are stopped, and universal distress, and bankruptcy follow. "Is there anything," asked the editor, "even in Lincoln's election to justify all this?"⁷ The most influential unionist newspaper in the state was the North Carolina Standard, published in Raleigh under the

⁵Joseph Carlyle Sitterson, The Secession Movement in North Carolina (The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, XXIII, Chapel Hill, 1939), 188.

⁶Newbern Progress, November 9, 1860, in New York Daily Tribune, November 14, 1860.

⁷Wilmington Daily Herald, November 9, 1860, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 227.

fiery editorship of W. W. Holden. By 1861 Holden had received five challenges to duels and had been shot at twice on the streets of Raleigh as a result of his outspoken views on politics and unionism.⁸ He firmly supported the federal government, and refused to regard Lincoln's election as a casue for the withdrawal from the Union. In an editorial on December 1, Holden vehemently attacked secession. He emphasized that disunion would result in a loss of constitutional liberty for the people of North Carolina, and all that would remain would be "discretionary powers, martial law, military rule, oppressive taxation, perpetual contentions, and civil and servile war....Of course as a result of all this," he further maintained, "industry would languish, trade would be obstructed, education would be neglected, internal improvements of all kinds would be arrested, and the morals of society would be injured."⁹

So far as public sentiment can be gauged by the resolutions adopted at the county meetings at this time, North Carolina was opposed to secession for existing causes. All shades of opinion were expressed and the predominant note was clearly one of denial of Lincoln's election as a reasonable cause for the dissolution of the Union. Comparatively few counties advocated immediate secession. The strongest county resolutions opposing secession, generally, came from those counties located in the extreme northeastern, central, and western parts of the state. The resolves passed by the people of Wilkes County in the northwest could be regarded as representative, to a large degree, of the sentiment in that

⁸Clarence Clifford Norton, "Democratic Newspapers and Campaign Literature in North Carolina, 1835-1861," North Carolina Historical Review, VI (October, 1929), 359.

⁹North Carolina Standard, December 1, 1860, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 285.

area. The meeting resolved that however much they deplored the election to the office of President and Vice-President of the United States, of two individuals upon purely sectional issues and by a strict sectional vote, they were unable to see in this election alone, sufficient cause for the dismemberment of "the best Government vouchsafed by God to man."¹⁰ On December 4, southcentral Cumberland County, one of the largest in the state, held a meeting at Fayetteville. Presided over by Bedford Brown, an influential state legislator and an ardent unionist, the Cumberland meeting adopted strong unionist resolves. In addition the formation of "Southern Rights Clubs" was denounced as the device of "renegade Whigs, disappointed know-Nothings and disorganizing Democrats."¹¹ Cumberland's southern neighbor, Robeson County, also resolved that the election of a President and Vice-President upon sectional grounds was not a just basis for immediate resistance, and the total overthrow of the present Union.¹²

Several of the important cities in the state also held unionist meetings. However, it is important to note that with its diverse interests, most of the leading cities had both unionist and secessionist resolves passed as representative of their sentiment. For instance, in the city of Wilmington, one group passed resolves emphasizing that it was "the imperative duty of the State of North Carolina to prepare for assuming her position as an independent sovereignty."¹³ Another group of Wilmington citizens, on December 11, passed resolutions opposing

¹⁰New York Times, January 18, 1861. See Map II in Appendix B for the county distribution of the presidential vote in the election of 1860 in North Carolina.

¹¹Ibid., January 19, 1861

¹²Wilmington Daily Journal, December 3, 1860.

¹³Ibid., November 20, 1860.

immediate separation, and calling for the use of all honorable efforts for the preservation of the Union.¹⁴ The cities of Raleigh and Salisbury had also held strong unionist meetings, but they too had their secessionist counterparts.¹⁵

The vast majority of influential and public figures in the state were equally opposed to considering the election of a Republican a cause for disunion. Zebulon B. Vance, a United States Representative from the western part of the state, wrote that a "fear of Lincoln when he comes into office is perfect humbuggery and those that urge it know it to be so. If we go out now," he continued, "we cant [sic] take the army and the navy with us, and Lincoln could as easily employ them to force us back as he could prevent our going out; and the Yankees would as readily fight to whip us back as they would to keep us in!"¹⁶ George E. Badger, a former United States Senator and cabinet officer, was of the opinion that the accession of the Republican party to power would require increased vigilance over the rights and interests of the South, "but that the majority in Congress was not lost to us, if the members from all the Southern States would remain and be faithful, and that the judiciary was open to any just complaint, even if the Executive should

¹⁴Fletcher M. Green, "George Davis, North Carolina Whig and Confederate Statesman, 1820-1896," North Carolina Historical Review, XXXII (October, 1946), 458-495.

¹⁵New York Herald, December 8, 1860. Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 194. Franklin Ray Shirley, Zubulon Vance, Tarheel Spokesman (Charlotte, N. C., 1962), 20-21.

¹⁶Zubulon B. Vance to William Dickinson, December 11, 1860, in Frontis W. Johnston, ed., The Papers of Zubulon Baird Vance (1 vol., Raleigh, 1963), I, 72.

attempt aggression"¹⁷ Kemp P. Battle, a prominent Raleigh lawyer and businessman, held similar ideas. Battle, who was to later become a professor of history and President of the University of North Carolina, thought that "although the triumph of Lincoln was a notable evil in theory, another election would come in four years and again in another four years, and so on, and in the mutation of politics the bidding for Southern votes would probably result in just legislation." There was no pressing necessity, he believed, for an immediate solution of the question.¹⁸ William S. Pettigrew, a wealthy Whig planter of Washington County in the eastern part of the state, wrote to his brother of his anxiety concerning the possibility of secession:

Indeed, I am not without apprehension, that if the South secedes, we will all be plunged into a vortex of ruin, particularly those who may owe money. It does appear to me to be anything but wise for one State to place herself in so despicable a position as South Carolina will....I cannot but think that the State is about committing herself to a position that the whole South will have reason to regret.¹⁹

Like the prevailing sentiment in Virginia at this time, the majority of North Carolinians did not regard Lincoln's election as a sufficient cause for secession. The unionist opinions expressed by a majority of the public leaders, the preponderant proportion of anti-secessionist newspaper editorials, and the considerable number of unionist resolves

¹⁷W. J. Peele, ed., Lives of Distinguished North Carolinians with Illustrations and Speeches (Raleigh, 1898), 200.

¹⁸Kemp P. Battle, Memories of an Old-Time Tar Heel, ed. by William James Battle (Chapel Hill, 1945), 168.

¹⁹William S. Pettigrew to James J. Pettigrew, November 2, 1860, Pettigrew Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library. (All manuscript material from the University of North Carolina Library used in this study was sent to this student, on request, by Dr. James Patton, Director of the Southern Historical Collection).

passed by county meetings all tend to suggest that the general sentiment of the state was that the South should not act hastily but should wait a reasonable length of time and give Lincoln a fair trial.

With the people of North Carolina generally disposed to accept the results of the election and to await further developments, the General Assembly, elected in August, met in Raleigh on November 19, 1860. The Senate was composed of thirty-two Democrats and eighteen Whigs, a gain by the Whigs of one over their number in the last Senate. In the House of Commons were sixty-five Democrats and fifty-five Whigs, a gain of eight for the latter.²⁰ The governor's message to this body was anxiously awaited throughout the state, since it was expected to outline the policy that North Carolina was to follow in this time of crisis.

Governor John Ellis' message was closely related to the policy of the southern radicals. He maintained that the entire social fabric of North Carolina was based upon and sustained by slave labor. The social and material prosperity of the people of the state and their means of living, he stressed, greatly depended upon this species of labor.²¹ Ellis proceeded to trace the anti-slavery movement and pointed out that the sentiment of the people of the North, had assumed the form of a bold and aggressive fanaticism, that sought the annihilation of slavery in the South at all hazards and regardless of consequences.²² He

²⁰Henry M. Wagstaff, States Rights and Political Parties in North Carolina 1776-1861 (Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, XXIV, Baltimore, 1906), 123.

²¹Executive and Legislative Documents. Session 1860-'61 (Raleigh, 1861), 25.

²²Ibid., 26-27.

suggested an invitation to the slaveholding states to hold a southern conference, the calling of a convention of the people, and a thorough reorganization of the militia.²³

The governor's message set off heated discussion within the legislature, and throughout December and early January debate raged as to what course the state should take. It was the general opinion among conservatives that the wisest course of action for them to pursue was to delay or to obstruct all positive measures. Z. B. Vance, wrote to William Dickinson, a member of the House of Commons from Caldwell County, that "we have everything to gain and nothing on earth to lose by delay, but by too hasty action we may take a fatal step that we never can retrace--may lose a heritage that we can never recover though we seek it earnestly and with tears."²⁴

After the organization of the two houses, the recommendations of Governor Ellis were referred to a joint committee on federal relations.²⁵ While awaiting the report of this committee, resolutions were introduced by both secessionists and unionists. In the House of Commons, John F. Hoke, of Lincoln County in the southwest, offered a strong secessionist resolution which outlined the right of North Carolina to withdraw from the Union.²⁶ The introduction of Hoke's resolutions was followed by the

²³Ibid., 29-32.

²⁴Vance to William Dickinson, December 11, 1860, in Johnston, Vance Papers, I, 71-72.

²⁵Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina Session of 1860-1861 (Raleigh, 1861), 51. Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its Session of 1860-'61 (Raleigh, 1861), 44, 55.

²⁶Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina Session of 1860-'61, 47-48.

introduction of numerous resolutions by unionists asserting that Lincoln's election did not constitute sufficient cause for a dissolution of the Union.²⁷ The most elaborate unionist resolve was introduced by Dennis D. Ferebee, a delegate from northeastern Camden County. Ferebee maintained that the Constitution of the United States was not a league, confederacy, or compact between the people of the several states in their sovereign capacities, but a government proper, founded on the adoption of the people, and creating direct relations between itself and individuals. Furthermore, he insisted that it was the duty of the state of North Carolina, under all circumstances and at all hazards, to protect, maintain and defend, in the Union, all the rights guaranteed to her citizens by the Constitution of the United States.²⁸

The North Carolina Senate was also witness to strong unionist pronouncements on the part of many of its members. Senator Josiah Turner, of northcentral Orange County, made a striking speech in which he stated that the people of North Carolina were not "ready to be chained to the car of South Carolina and be dragged out of the Union into discord and civil war." Turner further stressed that the "Union mind" of North Carolina would "take a firm, fixed immovable stand for the Union of the States, and the Constitutional rights of each of the States, and no power can drive them from it, short of the bayonet and sword."²⁹ Several days later, John M. Morehead, a former Governor of the state and

²⁷Ibid., 48-49, 55.

²⁸Ibid., 47.

²⁹Burton A. Kondle, John Motley Morehead and the Development of North Carolina 1796-1860 (Philadelphia, 1922), 371.

an influential railroad promoter, presented a stirring unionist address to the Senate. Later to be regarded as the "Architect and Builder of Public Works of North Carolina," Morehead was of the opinion that if South Carolina wished to leave the Union, her course of action should not be obstructed. Nevertheless, he believed that the act of secession was in direct conflict with the constitution. He was firmly convinced that the Union could yet be saved and that there was already a returning sense of justice in the Northern states.³⁰

On December 12, the committee on federal relations submitted its report. The majority report, declaring the existing crisis one of grave peril to the rights and equality of the states in the Union, and that only the sovereign people had the right to determine the mode, measure, and time of redress, recommended the call of a convention and submitted a bill for that purpose. It also recommended the reorganization of the militia, and the formation of a volunteer corps in accordance with Governor Ellis' suggestion³¹ The minority report signed by three members (David Outlaw, Nathan Newby and Giles Mebane) declared the call of a convention premature. The election of Lincoln, they declared, was an inadequate justification for secession. In addition, they emphasized the view that the proposed convention bill was not in accordance with the provisions of the state constitution. In conclusion they urged the call of a convention of all the states of the Union "with a view to

³⁰Ibid., 371-372.

³¹Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina Session of 1860-'61, 163-164. Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its Session of 1860-'61, 108.

final settlement of all subjects in controversy between the Northern and Southern States....³² The large part of the controversy concerning the majority and minority reports centered around the state convention proposal. As the Christmas holidays were drawing near the conservatives were able to have its consideration postponed until January 3, 1861.

On December 22, the legislature recessed for the Christmas holidays to reassemble early in January. The conservatives had performed their obstructionist tactics quite successfully. Not a single resolution or act was passed in the month prior to the Christmas recess.

Although the conservatives were maintaining a strong position within North Carolina, events outside of the state were steadily weakening the unionist majority and consequently strengthening the secessionist minority. On December 20, South Carolina withdrew from the Union. It was only among the radicals that South Carolina's action was received with any true expression of joy. Most conservative North Carolinians strongly condemned their neighbors for making this move and thereby rendering it more difficult for the other southern states to gain their rights. Unionist meetings were held throughout the state denouncing South Carolina's "arrogance and conceited self-importance." Some of the meetings, especially in the western and central parts of the state where unionist sentiment was very strong, expressed unalterable opposition to disunion under any circumstances.³³ Only in the city of Wilmington was there any noteworthy demonstration of joy at the Palmetto State's action.³⁴

³²Ibid., 164-166.

³³James H. Boykin, North Carolina in 1861 (New York, 1961), 141-144. New York Times, January 18, 1861.

³⁴Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 195.

Leading conservatives urged the people to wait until all hope of compromise was gone before supporting schemes of disunion. Bedford Brown, a state senator from the western County of Caldwell, violently condemned South Carolina for its precipitate actions. Tall, spare, smooth shaven, and with a protruding lower jaw and a habit of clinching his teeth which gave him an appearance of resoluteness,³⁵ Brown asked if North Carolina was "to be hurried on by the principal actors of this drama--are we to be pressed headlong with no time to think, and told in effect, that we are not free agents to act, and that circumstances and necessity, the latter the tyrant's plea, leave no alternative than to follow blindly the lead of one or more states?"³⁶ The Raleigh Register maintained that in her secession move South Carolina had taken counsel only of what she deemed her interests, and had not paid the slightest attention to the interests of the other states. "Why then," asked the editor of the Register, "should North Carolina tuck herself to the tail of the great (!) nation of South Carolina and share the fate which her enormous follies will bring on her?"³⁷ So far as one North Carolina planter was concerned, he "would be glad if she [South Carolina] could be severed from us and drifted to mid-ocean, where she could form such a Government as she pleased and trouble us no more."³⁸

³⁵Dictionary of American Biography, III, 104-105.

³⁶Houston G. Jones, "Bedford Brown: State Rights Unionist, Part II; The Conciliator," North Carolina Historical Review, XXII (October, 1955), 499-500.

³⁷Raleigh Register, November 20, 1860, in New York Times, November 23, 1860.

³⁸New York Times, January 28, 1861.

With the secession of South Carolina an accomplished fact and the withdrawal of the Gulf States imminent, many conservative North Carolinians were of the opinion that the formation of a "Central Confederacy" offered the most feasible means for the reconstruction of the Union. The New York Herald correspondent in Raleigh, observed that there were many who, in view of the dissolution of the Union, were looking anxiously to the formation of a central confederacy, to be composed of that states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri, and perhaps Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa.³⁹ Such leading conservatives as W. W. Holden⁴⁰ and Bedford Brown⁴¹ were firmly convinced that a confederacy of middle states could act as a mediator between the extreme sections of North and South, and thus prevent the final dissolution of the Union. W. W. Lenoir, a distinguished and wealthy planter from Caldwell County in western North Carolina, also believed that the salvation of the Constitution of the United States and the Union of states could no longer be hoped for except by the formation of a central government.⁴² Vance was also of the opinion that the only way that the Union could be reconstructed and the cotton states be brought to treat them with proper respect, was through the establishment of a "great

³⁹New York Herald, January 12, 1861.

⁴⁰William K. Boyd, "William W. Holden," Trinity College Historical Papers, III (1899), 64.

⁴¹Jones, "Bedford Brown," 500.

⁴²W. W. Lenoir to Vance, January 7, 1861, in Johnston, Vance Papers, I, 79.

Central Confederation." According to Vance, it would be able to dictate terms of compromise which Georgia would be compelled to accept, and the withdrawal of Georgia would break the back bone of the whole seceding kingdom.⁴³ Nevertheless, Vance did not publicly disclose this view because he feared that every admission of the improbability of compromise would increase the trend toward secession.

Developments in Washington were also not too encouraging for the conservative cause in the Old North State. The failure of the special Committees of Thirteen in the Senate and Thirty-Three in the House certainly dealt a weakening blow to the unionist position in the state. The Raleigh correspondent for the New York Daily Tribune telegraphed that the opposition to Crittenden's propositions in Washington weakened the unionist sentiment daily throughout North Carolina.⁴⁴ Although the majority of the members of Congress from North Carolina were strongly conservative and were using every effort to obtain an adjustment,⁴⁵ their unproductive results made it clear that there was little chance of Congress agreeing upon any substantial plan of adjustment. Many of the congressional representatives were beginning to advocate the calling of a state convention, in order to allow the people to have full power to

⁴³Vance to W. W. Lenoir, December 26, 1860, Lenoir Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

⁴⁴New York Daily Tribune, January 19, 1861.

⁴⁵Several of the speeches of Whig congressional members from North Carolina were printed in pamphlet form and were widely distributed throughout the state, in order to aid and bolster the Union cause. Speech of Hon. John A. Gilmer, of North Carolina, Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 26, 1861 (Washington, n. d.), 1-8. Speech of Hon. J. M. Leach of North Carolina, Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 7, 1861 (Washington, n. d.), 1-10.

decide the course of action for their state. Warren Winslow, a conservative United States Representative from eastern North Carolina, in a speech to his constituents, maintained that all efforts to compromise in Congress had been exhausted. In his judgment, the only remedy was the "prompt, honest, and independent action" of the people, either by their state legislature, or by a specially constituted state convention.⁴⁶ Less than two weeks after Winslow's speech, both of North Carolina's senators and three other congressional representatives officially advocated the calling of a state convention.⁴⁷

Another event added to the excitement and uneasiness of the people at this time. A group of citizens in Wilmington, fearful that the caretaker ordnance sergeants at neighboring Forts Caswell and Johnston would soon be replaced by large detachments of federal troops, seized the two forts on January 9.⁴⁸ When the news of this action reached Governor Ellis in Raleigh, he immediately sent Colonel John L. Cantwell of the Thirtieth North Carolina Militia to Wilmington, with orders for the immediate restoration of the forts to the federal government. As a result, they were returned in good order.⁴⁹ Before the evacuation of the forts, however, Governor Ellis did send a telegraph to President Buchanan wishing to secure information as to the chief executive's

⁴⁶Wilmington Daily Journal, January 2, 1861.

⁴⁷The two senators were Thomas Bragg and T. R. Clingman. In addition to Winslow, the other three representatives were Burton Craige, Thomas Ruffin, and L. O'Bryan Branch. Z. B. Vance and W. N. H. Smith, were unofficially known to favor the calling of a convention. Wilmington Daily Journal, January 14, 1861.

⁴⁸Official Records, Series I, Volume I, 474.

⁴⁹Ibid., 475-476.

intentions with regard to garrisoning the North Carolina forts.⁵⁰ The President's reply came through Joseph Holt, his Secretary of War, who assured Ellis that the President did not contemplate garrisoning the forts of the State.⁵¹ The incidents at Forts Caswell and Johnston, in themselves, were not of great significance. Nevertheless, happening in the midst of South Carolina's secession and the failures in Washington, the temporary seizures tended to intensify the secessionist position, and consequently reduce the effectiveness of the unionist cause in the state.

By the time the legislature reassembled on January 7, the entire state was aroused to the threatening aspect of national affairs. Heated debate soon began on the convention bill. When a convention was first proposed it seemed very doubtful if one could be called. However, with the secession of the Palmetto State, the failures in Washington, and the occupation and subsequent evacuation of Forts Johnston and Caswell, a great deal of excitement was aroused favoring the calling of a state convention. Such unionist counties as Halifax, Pitt, Rowan, Orange, Bladen, and Caldwell all proposed resolutions urging the state legislature to pass a convention bill.⁵² To these conservative counties, a convention seemed the best way to check the ever active and aggressive secessionist minority. They felt, too, that if it were called at once it would undoubtedly have a substantial unionist majority. It was also generally believed that better terms could be gained if the state was in

⁵⁰Ibid., 475-476.

⁵¹Ibid., 485.

⁵²Wilmington Daily Journal, November 27, December 4, 10, 1860, January 8, 1861.

convention. Although several leading conservatives were opposed to the convention proposal,⁵³ the vast majority of unionist leaders either favored it or did not express any active hostility towards the proposition. In a letter to George N. Folk, a member of the North Carolina House of Commons from the western County of Watauga, Z. B. Vance expressed the general attitude of the conservative faction with regard to the convention proposal:

I do not regard the call of a Convention as a disunion movement....Firm temperate and decided action may save our rights and the Union too; non-action will precipitate us into disunion. We want a Convention for other purposes than secession alone, though others I know, desire it for no other object. We want it for the purpose of demanding terms of the Northern people; if they are refused, then for making our voice heard with the Southern States, which are rapidly inoculating the people with many dogmas, of which North Carolina does not approve....⁵⁴

These attitudes and pressures all had their effect, and on January 29 both houses of the General Assembly agreed upon a convention bill. The bill provided for an election on February 28, 1861, at which time the people would vote for or against a convention, and for delegates to this convention. Should the voters favor the convention it would be

⁵³Jonathan Worth, a leading conservative member of the North Carolina Senate representing Guilford County in the central part of the state, maintained that he could not vote for the convention bill, "because the [state] Constitution authorizes the General Assembly to call no such Convention. Such conventions have been nowhere called except for the purpose of carrying out secession....I can therefore vote for no bill which in any way squints toward a recognition of this doctrine." "Remarks of Jonathan Worth on the Proposition to Call a Convention in the Senate Jan. 1861," in J. G. deRoulhac Hamilton, The Correspondence of Jonathan Worth (2 vols., Raleigh, 1909), I, 128.

⁵⁴Vance to George N. Folk, January 9, 1861, in Johnston, Vance Papers, I, 82.

called by Governor Ellis not earlier than March 11.⁵⁵ In response to the invitation of Virginia, the legislature also elected Thomas Ruffin, D. M. Barringer, David S. Reid, John M. Morehead, and George Davis as commissioners to the National Peace Conference. Former Governor David L. Swain, M. W. Ransom, and John L. Bridges were at the same time chosen as commissioners to visit Montgomery at the time of the meeting of the delegates of the seceded states.⁵⁶ After the passage of several additional state military measures, the General Assembly adjourned on February 25.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Journal of the House of Commons of North Carolina Session of 1860-'61, 441 Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina Passed by the General Assembly, at its Session of 1860-'61: Together with the Comptrollers Statement Public Revenue and Expenditure, (Raleigh, 1861), 27-30.

⁵⁶Ibid., 396. Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its Session of 1860-'61, 210-211. Public Laws of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly, at its Session of 1860-'61, 78.

⁵⁷Public Laws of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at its session of 1860-'61, Chapters 24-26.

Chapter IV

The February Convention Attempt and the May Convention

With the passage of the convention bill both secessionists and unionists waged a spirited and exciting campaign, contesting both for approval or defeat of the convention itself, and the election of delegates to the convention. In spite of the fact that the conservatives were divided as to tactics, some opposing the convention itself and others favoring a convention controlled by unionists, the overriding issue was made quite definitely "Union or Disunion." Like the Virginia conservatives in their preconvention campaign, the North Carolina unionists brought to the fore every major disadvantage that would ensue if the Old North State withdrew from the Union. The economic, social, constitutional, and international consequences of secession were just several areas that were thoroughly exhausted by the unionist candidates in the campaign. A review of some of the major areas of conservative thought during this exciting month, will provide a valuable insight into the many reasons why the conservatives in North Carolina were opposed to the withdrawal of their state from the Union.

Economically, the doctrine of secession was vehemently attacked by the unionists. Leading conservative businessmen and political figures joined in condemning the doctrine as a stepping stone to free trade, direct taxation, and a reopening of the African slave trade. United States Representative Zebulon B. Vance expressed these ideas, in a printed speech, for his constituents in the western counties of North

Carolina. A large, powerful man, with a bushy moustache, and wearing his hair down on his neck,¹ Vance maintained that secession would mean "heavier taxation to support a separate government....High tariffs might be escaped by separation, but import duties would only be replaced by export duties and direct taxes more objectionalbe than tariff duties."² W. W. Lenoir wrote that he was definitely opposed to joining the Old North State with the schemes and politics of the Gulf States. He had no faith in the economic dogmas which he believed the states of the lower South would engraft in their constitution; mainly direct taxation and a reopening of the African slave trade. In addition, he had no desire to engage in the rumored Confederate project of trying to carry slavery into Mexico and Central America, "two old long, inhabited countries, which have rejected slavery once and wont [sic] receive it again even if the north remain quiet."³ Thomas Devereux, a prominent Raleigh businessman, was of the opinion that the act of secession was destructive of all public credit. "Will capitalists take stocks of the United States if the market value of those stocks can be depreciated," he added, "at the mere will of the weakest member of the unproductive expressed upon the whim of the people or of partisan and demagogue managers...."⁴

¹Frontis W. Johnston, "Zebulon Baird Vance: A Personality Sketch," North Carolina Historical Review, XXX (April, 1953), 185.

²Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 212-213.

³W. W. Lenoir to Z. B. Vance, January 7, 1861, in Johnston, Vance Papers, I, 80-81.

⁴Thomas Devereux to Thomas Ruffin, February 4, 1861, in Joseph G. deRoulhac Hamilton, The Papers of Thomas Ruffin (4 vols., Raleigh, 1920) III, 118.

There were many groups in the state that were directly effected by the economic disadvantages of secession. A view into several of the more significant interest groups, will further illustrate the important role that the economic motive played in the secession crisis in North Carolina.

In 1861, the small-scale farmer was the chief factor in individual life in the Old North State. With the advances made in agricultural reform in the preceding decade,⁵ his position was not only solidified, but also strengthened. With a decrease in the size of the average farm from 369 acres in 1850 to 316 acres in 1860, the number of farms increased from 56,963 to 75,203 in the same decade.⁶ This large number of small-scale agricultural units was largely responsible for placing North Carolina second in the production of peas, beans, and sweet potatoes, and third in the production of corn, with regard to the other states in the Union.⁷ As a result of unfavorable geographical circumstances and an inadequacy of transportation facilities, however, most of these and similar products were consumed at home.⁸ Nevertheless, some of the corn produced in the state did find its way to markets elsewhere in the form of whisky, corn meal, and fattened pork. Many farmers, in the Roanoke

⁵Cornelius Oliver Cathey, Agricultural Developments in North Carolina 1783-1860 (The James Sprunt Studies in History and Political Science, XXXVI, Chapel Hill, 1956), 194-205.

⁶Rosser Howard Taylor, Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View (The James Sprunt Historical Publications, XVIII, Chapel Hill, 1926), 202.

⁷Joseph G. deRoulhac Hamilton, Party Politics in North Carolina 1835-1860 (The James Sprunt Historical Publications, XV, Chapel Hill, 1916), 202.

⁸Cathey, Agricultural Developments in North Carolina, 193.

River Valley, particularly , devoted themselves almost exclusively to its culture and sold their product by the ship-load in Norfolk, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York City, and Providence.⁹ With the large-scale railroad program being instituted in the state,¹⁰ many of the more remote truck farmers were also hoping to reap the benefits of trading with northern centers in the near future. Secession, undoubtedly, would destroy all possibilities of lucrative trade with these northern markets. What was even more important was the general attitude which this populous element held toward the institution of slavery. The non-slaveholders from the mountain districts of the west and the swamp region of the northeast, and a considerable proportion of small-scale farming elements in the central part of the state, saw no reason to become virtually concerned with the preservation of a slave system in which they had little part. One secessionist observer, who was travelling in the northeastern counties of Hertford, Bertie, Gates, and Chowan, was horrified to find the people "in favor of the Union at any and all hazards...and swearing that they would not lift a finger to protect rich men's negroes."¹¹ Vance illustrated the general attitude of this group when he stated that "seven-tenths of our people owned no slaves at all, and to say the least of it, felt no great and enduring enthusiasm for its preservation, especially when it seemed to them

⁹Ibid., 126.

¹⁰Charles L. Price, "North Carolina Railroads During the Civil War," Civil War History, VII (September, 1961), 298.

¹¹Kenneth Rayner to Thomas Ruffin, December 25, 1860, in Hamilton, Ruffin Papers III, 109.

that it was in no danger."¹² When the results of the convention election were tabulated, it was found that the small-scale farming and non-slaveholding interests formed the hard core of resistance to any attempt to break with the Union.¹³

In addition to the yeomanry of North Carolina, there were other groups that regarded the act of secession as economically destructive to their interests. For instance, no railroad investor or promoter in the state even dreamed that a war between the North and the South, the ultimate consequence of secession, would bring prosperity to the railroads. On the contrary, it was common belief among railroad men that if war broke out "the troubles of the country would prostrate and destroy" all of their business. This pessimistic view was a result of the fact that the vast majority of the traffic of North Carolina moved seaward, with most of the freight going by water either to Europe or to the northern section of the country. A war between the North and South would largely destroy this traffic, and consequently the investment of these promoters.¹⁴

The textile interest was another economic group that was decidedly against the withdrawal of North Carolina from the Union. By 1861 there were approximately fifty large cotton mills in operation in the state. Most of their machinery, technological assistance, and support for a

¹²William K. Boyd, "North Carolina on the Eve of Secession," *American Historical Association, Annual Report*, 1910 (Washington, 1912), 168.

¹³Wooster, *Secession Conventions*, 193-194.

¹⁴Price, "North Carolina Railroads" 298-299.

high tariff came from the northern states.¹⁵ It is not surprising, therefore, that of the seven counties which had the most textile mills located within their borders, five elected unconditional unionist delegations to the convention, one had a divided delegation, and one elected a secessionist delegation.¹⁶

Although not economically oriented with regard to the unionist cause, the Quakers also deserve mention as a group who were strongly opposed to the dissolution of the federal government. Long active in southern abolitionism and manumission societies, they constantly remained a nucleus for anti-slavery sentiment.¹⁷ In the campaign for delegates to the convention, they enthusiastically supported the unionist cause. The three counties in which the Quakers had their greatest numbers all voted for unconditional unionist candidates.¹⁸

Those groups that generally favored the unionist cause, either for economic motives, or in the case of the Quakers, on moral grounds, were the hard core conservative nucleus in the state. On the other hand, there were many North Carolinians that were in doubt as to the

¹⁵Richard W. Griffin and Diffie W. Standard, "The Cotton Textile Industry in Ante-Bellum North Carolina; Part II, An era of Boom and Consolidation," North Carolina Historical Review, XXXIV (April, 1957), 139-146.

¹⁶The five unconditional unionist Counties were Orange, Iredell, Randolph, Forsyth and Montgomery; all of these counties were generally located in the central part of the state. The County of Cumberland, in the south-central part of the state, elected the divided delegation, and Lincoln County in the southwest, elected a secessionist delegation.

¹⁷P. M. Sherrill, "The Quakers and the North Carolina Manumission Society," Trinity College Historical Papers, X (1914), 30, 51.

¹⁸The three "Quaker Counties" were Randolph, Guilford, and Chatham, all located in the central part of the state.

course their state should pursue. Leading conservatives realized that a host of other reasons had to be advanced, in order to insure full unionist control of the convention.

Constitutionally, the act of secession was violently attacked by several prominent unionists. In an address to the people of Randolph and Alamance Counties, Jonathan Worth regarded the doctrine of secession, as a peaceful and constitutional mode of withdrawing a state from the Union, an absurdity.¹⁹ A small, slight man with keen eyes and an alert expression,²⁰ Worth stated that whether the present Union be preserved or a Southern Confederacy be formed, the act of secession was "the seed of death in any Confederation. A new Republic founded on it would be based on Disintegration."²¹ One of North Carolina's United States Representatives, J. M. Leach, held similar views. In his judgment, there could be found no warrant for the act of secession in the Constitution, and no foundation for it, as derived in any way from that instrument. "If a state has a constitutional right to secede," he maintained, "then the Constitution of the United States would be subject to the will and control of every State in the Union. It would be the mere creature, not only of all the States, but also of any one of them; for it could be destroyed at any time by any State."²²

¹⁹"Worth's Address to the People of Randolph and Alamance Counties," in Hamilton, Worth Papers, I, 128.

²⁰Dictionary of American Biography, XX, 536.

²¹"Remarks of Worth in the Senate of North Carolina, January, 1861," in Hamilton, Worth Papers, I, 128.

²²Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 197.

Like Joseph Segar, John Millson, and Sherrard Clemens in Virginia, many leading North Carolina conservatives also were of the opinion that the institutions of the South could best be preserved by remaining in the Union. Former Whig Governor of North Carolina, William A. Graham, condemned secession not only as political heresy, but as essentially suicidal to the best interests of the South. In a campaign speech as a candidate for the state convention, Graham pointed out that Lincoln failed by five hundred thousand votes of having a majority of the people vote for him, and was elected because his opponents were divided. This would not occur again, he insisted, and in the meantime, the South had a majority of the votes in each House of Congress, and a unanimous Supreme Court on their side. Graham emphasized that as long as they were able to retain the senators of two northern states, the South would be able to control the Senate and it would be impossible for Lincoln to appoint to office objectionable men.²³ In a speech in the House of Representatives on February 7, Whig Congressman Leach violently condemned the "precipitate, unjustifiable, and unwise" action of the cotton states. If the states of the lower South had not withdrawn from the Union, Leach was of the opinion that "there would have been a decided majority in both Houses of Congress against the incoming Administration--with the power, therefore, to have controlled the

²³"William A. Graham's Notes on Speech; when a candidate for the Convention, Feb., 1861" Typed copies of papers of William A. Graham compiled by Joseph G. deRoulhac Hamilton, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

legislation of the country."²⁴ Pettigrew was firmly convinced that the Republican Party would be shattered into pieces in the course of the next four years. Furthermore, this wealthy planter believed that it only remained for the South to be united to accomplish its security in the Union. Until united they were ruined whether in or out of the Union; and if they were unable to be united in it, there was but little probability of their being united out of it.²⁵

The idea that southern institutions could best be preserved by remaining in the Union was carried one step further by several leading unionist spokesmen. Ironically, they argued and illustrated that the institution of slavery was safest within the Union, and a withdrawal would result in its complete destruction. Graham stated that secession was not advisable because if the attempt proved unsuccessful it would mean the abolition of slavery. If they succeeded a line would be placed between Virginia and Pennsylvania. The former chief executive of the state maintained that a Negro escaping from Virginia to Pennsylvania would be free and could not be recovered. Slavery, therefore, would become too precarious to be continued and Virginia would become a free state and necessarily go to the North. Then the line would be between Virginia and North Carolina, and the same thing repeated until the whole South became free.²⁶ W. W. Holden, in an editorial in the North Carolina

²⁴Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 197-198.

²⁵William Pettigrew to James J. Pettigrew, November 2, 1860, Pettigrew Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

²⁶"William A. Graham's Notes on Speech; when a candidate for the Convention, Feb., 1861," Graham Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

Standard, pointed out that the whole world outside of the slaveholding states, with slight exceptions, was opposed to slavery; and the whole world, with slave labor thus rendered insecure and comparatively valueless, would take sides with the North against them. The end, he maintained, would be "Abolition!"²⁷ Worth effectively expressed his feelings on this subject, when he stated:

Slavery is doomed if the South sets up a Southern Confederacy. With Canada in effect for her Northern border from the Atlantic to the Pacific--all hating us, it is madness to think of anything else only to cut the throats of the Negroes or have our own throats cut.²⁸

Many leading conservatives were also deeply concerned with the international consequences that would ensue, if North Carolina and the other Border states broke their allegiance to the federal government. The North Carolina Standard informed its readers that the act of secession would expose the southern Confederacy to the hazards of war not only with the northern states but with European powers. These foreign powers stimulated by the hope of gain, and disliking them for their popular forms of government, would insinuate themselves into the very heart of their system and foment jealousies between the North and South. The end would be foreign influence in all their councils, foreign manners in all their social walks, and foreign gold in the hands of unscrupulous

²⁷North Carolina Standard, February 5, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 447.

²⁸Worth to J. J. Jackson, December 17, 1860, in Hamilton, Worth Papers, I, 127.

demagogues as the price of some portion of their country's liberties.²⁹ Worth was of the same opinion. Even on the plan of a peaceful separation, he insisted, North America would soon become "Mexicanized."³⁰ In an address to the clergy and laity of the Christian Churches of the country-- which was signed by various Presbyterian, Baptist, Lutheran, and Catholic clergy of the city of Wilmington--it was emphasized that the act of secession would inaugurate "on this hitherto peaceful continent, the jealous political system of Europe, with its balance of power, its enormous standing armies, its crushing taxation, and ultimately, its despotic governments...."³¹

As the pre-convention campaign was drawing to a close, the conservatives began to emphasize, to a greater extent, the possibility of war as a result of secession. In a printed speech to his constituents, Vance maintained that civil war with all its direful consequences, was likely to be the result of a dissolution of the Union.³² George E. Badger, an old-line Whig and a former United States Senator, was of the opinion that there could be no peaceable separation of the Union. "From the very nature of the case, from the character of our institutions, from the character of our country, from the nature of the government itself," it was his judgment that separation would only result in armed conflict.³³

²⁹North Carolina Standard, December 1, 1860, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 284-285.

³⁰Worth to D. G. Worth, May 15, 1861, in Hamilton, Worth Papers, I, 144.

³¹Wilmington Daily Journal, January 22, 1861.

³²Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 212.

³³Peele, ed., Lives of Distinguished North Carolinians, 213.

The prominent Raleigh lawyer and businessman, Kemp Battle, felt sure that secession would lead to war, and that war would certainly bring to the South a host of new troubles.³⁴ In a speech in the United States House of Representatives, Unionist Congressman John Gilmer was certain that if secession occurred peace could not long continue. "A civil war will follow," he added, "that will end only in the destruction of all the great interests of all sections of the country."³⁵ Many of the secessionists maintained that a peaceful separation was possible, since the people of the North would not fight. Graham regarded this idea as totally absurd. "The North Western men are bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," he insisted, and "their ancestors in many cases having gone from the old Southern States and in all our wars have proved themselves worthy soldiers."³⁶ W. W. Lenoir, a distinguished and wealthy planter from Caldwell County in western North Carolina, asked why they should take upon themselves a war waged in defiance of their wishes, their counsels, their policy, and their interests, to forward the interests and selfish ambitions of the states which wage it, and which in doing so treat them not as equals, but as dependents.³⁷ W. W. Holden expressed the feelings of a great many conservative North Carolinians when he wrote:

³⁴Battle, Memories of a Tar Heel, 168.

³⁵Congressional Globe, 36 Cong., 2 Sess., 583.

³⁶"William A. Graham's Notes on Speech; when a candidate for the Convention, Feb., 1861," Graham Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

³⁷W. W. Lenoir to Vance, February 5, 1861, in Johnston, Vance Papers, I, 97-98.

The disunionist per se is either a mad man or a bad man. He who prefers disunion to Union, and who labors to provoke and aggravate the two sections against each other, is an enemy to his race. He who is for discord instead of concord, for war instead of peace, for disunion for disunions sake, is guilty of a crime more stupendous than any which has been committed since Cain slew his brother.³⁸

Most unionists were quite optimistic about the results of the convention election.³⁹ Wake, which ranked second among the leading slaveholding counties in North Carolina, expected to elect the Union ticket by the largest majority ever given any candidate in the county. Unionist candidates, W. W. Holden, George E. Badger, and Quentin Busbee were "working together like beavers" to gain the votes of the people.⁴⁰

Jonathan Worth, Alfred Dockery, and Nathaniel Boyden effectively worked for the unionist cause in the middle counties of Alamance, Randolph, Rowan, and Richmond. Worth advised the people of Randolph and Alamance to "Believe not those who may tell you this convention is called to save the Union. It is called to destroy it. If you desire to preserve the Union vote "No Convention," and at the same time, be careful for whom you vote as delegates."⁴¹

It was generally agreed by the conservatives that their least support would be in the middle eastern slaveholding counties, from Warren,

³⁸North Carolina Standard, February 5, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 447.

³⁹B. F. Moore, a prominent lawyer from the northeastern county of Halifax, wrote that he could look yet for good things for his country. One report that he received had prophesied a 50,000 vote majority for the unionists. B. F. Moore to James W. Bryan, February 12, 1881, Bryan Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

⁴⁰William K. Boyd, ed., Memoirs of W. W. Holden, (Durham, 1911), 14.

⁴¹"Worth's Address to the People of Randolph and Alamance County," in Hamilton, Worth Papers, I, 133.

Halifax, and North Hampton on the north to Columbus, Brunswick, and New Hanover on the South. The secessionists were also especially strong in the cotton and rice counties of the southwest. The northeastern area and the piedmont or central part of the state were the strongest unionist sections. Although the question of a convention had split the Whigs and Democrats of the western counties "all into h--l," the area still remained an enthusiastic Union stronghold.⁴²

The election resulted in a sweeping victory for the unionist cause. Of the one hundred and twenty delegates chosen, forty-two were secessionists, twenty-eight conditional unionists, and fifty unconditional unionists. The voters were so suspicious and so afraid that a convention might lead to secession that they surprised many people in the state and in the South by voting against the convention, 47,323 to 46,672.⁴³ As a result the proposed convention never met. Nevertheless, delegates to the convention were elected. Since the election results can be regarded, to a large degree, as an indication of the secessionist and unionist sentiment in the state, a brief analysis of the sections and groups who elected the unionist delegates will provide a valuable insight into the identity of the conservatives in the Old North State.

As suspected the extreme eastern counties, those in the central or piedmont area, and the western (especially the northwestern) counties were staunchly unionist. In the extreme eastern counties, the unionists carried everything before them, especially in the northeastern section.

⁴²Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 217-220.

⁴³Ibid., 223-224.

The middle counties, bounded on the east by the coastal counties and extending through Cleveland, Catawba, Alexander, Yadkin, and Surry, were strongly conservative, seventeen of the twenty-nine electing unconditional unionist and four choosing conditional unionist delegations. Of the forty-six western counties, twenty-five were unconditional unionist, eight were conditional unionist, and thirteen were secessionist. The middle eastern and the southwestern counties were the areas where the secessionists drew their greatest support.⁴⁴ On the basis of these regional election results, it is possible to assert that the small-scale agricultural element in North Carolina, as a group, generally favored the unionist position, while the larger rice and cotton planters of the middle eastern and southwestern counties, as a group, generally tended to support the secessionist cause.

A comparison of the vote with the percentage of slaves in the counties tends to support this conclusion, and reveal some other interesting facts. Of the fifty-four counties in which slaves composed more than twenty-five percent of the population, twenty-two were secessionist, eleven conditional unionist, seventeen unconditional unionist, and four divided. Of the thirty-two counties in which slaves formed less than twenty-five percent of the total population, eighteen were unconditional unionist, six conditional unionist, and eight secessionist. In other words, twenty-two of the thirty secessionist counties, six of the seventeen conditional unionist counties, and seventeen of the thirty-five unconditional unionist counties had a slave population of over twenty-five percent. Although the majority of the secessionist sentiment was

⁴⁴Wooster, Secession Conventions, 193-194.

in the slaveholding area, the slavery region, however, was almost equally divided on the question. As J. Carlyle Sitterson has noted, "a secession county was likely to be a slaveholding county, but a slaveholding county might not necessarily be a secession county."⁴⁵

Politically, on the basis of the convention election, Whig influence tended to be directly related to unionist sentiment, and also related to the pockets of unionism in several of the slaveholding areas. Of the thirty secessionist counties, twenty-five were carried by Breckinridge in 1860, and only five by Bell. Of the fifty-two unconditional and conditional unionist counties, thirty-seven were carried by Bell and twelve by Breckinridge.⁴⁶ Indeed, during the secession crisis not all southern Whigs adopted the same attitudes. Nevertheless, as Thomas Alexander has concluded, before Lincoln's call for troops they were so preponderantly unionist in sentiment that southern Whiggery and unionism became almost synonymous.⁴⁷

In spite of the returns, neither the conservative nor the radical elements accepted the issue as settled. It was merely a temporary success for those who advocated a policy of "Watch and Wait." Most conservative North Carolinians still relied on compromise, and still hoped that

⁴⁵Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 224-225.

⁴⁶Ibid., 223-224. Arthur Cole's study of the Whigs in North Carolina revealed that the small-scale agricultural interests formed a major part of the party in that state. Arthur Cole, The Whig Party in the South (Washington, 1913), 68, 104.

⁴⁷Thomas B. Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877," Journal of Southern History, XXVII (August, 1961), 306.

the National Peace Conference would result in some arrangement for peace and reunion with the seceded states. Their hope was of course a vain one, since the day of compromise was over. The failure of the Peace Conference in Washington came as a stunning blow to the conservatives, and consequently provided a renewal of hope for the secessionists, which events at Fort Sumter eventually justified. On their return to North Carolina, four of the five peace commissioners announced that all hope of peace was gone.⁴⁸ Although one of the delegates, John M. Morehead, thought that the Union might still be preserved,⁴⁹ the majority of the peace delegation were firmly convinced that all hope was lost. Judge Thomas Ruffin, who had gone to the conference an ardent unionist, made a speech in Hillsboro consisting of only three words, "Fight! Fight! Fight!"⁵⁰ George Davis--an old-line Whig and a prominent attorney--presented similar views to the people of Wilmington upon his return from the Peace Conference. Short, heavy-set, dark, and with an effective style of speaking,⁵¹ Davis declared that "No arrangement had been made--none would be made. The decision must be made on the line of slavery. The South must go with the South...or as the tail-end and victim of a Free Soil North." Furthermore, he pointed out that

⁴⁸Hamilton, Ruffin Papers, III, 134.

⁴⁹Konkle, John M. Morehead, 382-384.

⁵⁰Joseph G. deRoulhac Hamilton, Reconstruction in North Carolina (Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, LVIII, New York, 1914), 19.

⁵¹Dictionary of American Biography, IV, 114-115.

the Republicans were contemplating the passage of the "most oppressive tariff that had ever been heard of. They would tax us to death to protect and build up themselves, and at the same time pay the agents of the Underground railroad for running off our Negroes."⁵² Throughout the Old North State many conservatives were altering their sentiments as a result of the failure of the Peace Conference. W. F. Leake, a planter from the central part of the state, in a public letter to W. W. Holden stated that he was a unionist until he saw the "miserable abortion" in Washington. The ineffectual effort on the part of the southern commissioners to obtain any, even the smallest recognition of their rights in slave property, convinced him to favor the cause of the secessionists.⁵³ Certainly the failure of the Washington Peace Conference had a marked effect in strengthening the disunionist position in North Carolina. Hundreds who had looked to the Peace Conference for an adjustment of the difficulties now lost all hope of compromise, and were gradually moving into the ranks of the disunionists.

Lincoln's inaugural address, reaching North Carolina shortly after the report of the Peace Conference, also did not satisfy the people as a whole. Most secessionists, and many conservatives interpreted the message as a menace rather than a promise of future security. However, there were several conservatives who were of the opinion that Lincoln's message did not intend coercion, and that his intentions to enforce the

⁵²A memorial of the Hon. George Davis (Wilmington, 1896), 19. Green "George Davis," 461.

⁵³Wilmington Daily Journal, April 2, 1861.

laws, collect the revenues, and deliver the mails in those states which had seceded was in direct accord with his constitutional obligations. W. W. Holden, in an editorial in the North Carolina Standard on March 9, 1861, emphasized that "the man [Lincoln] had just taken an oath to support the Constitution and to enforce the laws. What was he to do? Was he to say to the seven cotton States, you are out of the Union? Who gave him that authority? Has Congress said it? No. Have the American people said it? No." In addition the fiery editor insisted that the inaugural address was not a war message, and that Lincoln deliberately refrained from pressing the main principle in his platform—the exclusion of the South from all territories of the Union. It was not unfriendly to the South. It deprecated war, and bloodshed, and it pleaded for the Union.⁵⁴ Worth writing to his brother was firmly of the opinion that Lincoln's inaugural "breathes peace to any candid mind."⁵⁵ Badger was also of the opinion that Lincoln intended no act of coercion.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, these conservative opinions were exceptional. The vast majority of unionist supporters in North Carolina were quite disturbed about Lincoln's message. Like the failure of the National Peace Convention, the inaugural address added to the weakening of the unionist position, and subsequently increased the sentiment in the Old North State for a separation from the federal government.⁵⁷

⁵⁴North Carolina Standard, March 9, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 477-479.

⁵⁵Worth to B. G. Worth, March 16, 1861, in Hamilton, Worth Papers, I, 137.

⁵⁶George E. Badger to James W. Bryan, March 8, 1861, Bryan Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library.

⁵⁷Sitterson, Secession in North Carolina, 232-233.

In the weeks following the failure of the Peace Conference and the unpopular reception of the inaugural address, the secessionists of the state worked feverishly to present their views before the people. One North Carolina radical wrote to Howell Cobb, requesting information as to the best method "of promoting the Southern feeling and reconciling the majority here to the Southern Republic."⁵⁸ In the east, beginning in Wilmington, a strong and united movement now began. "States Rights" meetings were held in various places and delegates were chosen to a state meeting to be held in Goldsboro at the end of March. This movement spread to other parts of the state, and when the meeting was held on March 22 about a thousand persons were present, representing twenty-five counties. A formal party was organized and plans were made for a campaign extending all over the state.⁵⁹ J. Moses, of South Carolina, who had been appointed by his state as a commissioner to the defeated convention, was present and addressed the meeting. Edmund Ruffin of Virginia came over from Charleston to attend, and made a vigorous secessionist speech.⁶⁰

Added to this excitement, were reports that the United States forts in North Carolina would immediately be garrisoned by federal troops. In a speech in Congress on March 19, North Carolina's secessionist Senator, Thomas L. Clingman, increased the anxiety of the people in his state by disclosing that he had received information which caused him to

⁵⁸William Babham Jr. to Howell Cobb, March 6, 1861, in Phillips, Toombs, Cobb, Stephens Papers, 547-548.

⁵⁹Wilmington Daily Journal, March 26, 1861.

⁶⁰New York Times, March 23, 1861.

believe that troops and heavy guns were to be sent south to take possession of the forts in North Carolina, Virginia, and elsewhere.⁶¹

The conservatives attempted to stem the secessionist tide, but with little success. W. W. Holden consistently maintained that Lincoln was powerless and that his party was already demoralized, and in addition to this, the great body of northern people would never consent to an aggressive war on the South. The fiery editor condemned the seven cotton states who "abandoned the Union--abandoned it selfishly and for no sufficient cause, and left us at the mercy as they say, of a dominant sectional party. Shall we go out simply because they did? We trust not. Have we of the middle states no self-respect--no will of our own? We think we have some will of our own, for we are still in the Union."⁶² John A. Gilmer, an ardent unionist who had long represented the Greensboro District in Congress, carried on a correspondence with Lincoln's Secretary of State, William H. Seward, throughout this critical period. He earnestly urged Seward that "the very best thing that the administration can do will be to frame some excuse to withdraw the troops from all the southern fortifications in the seceding states. There must be no fighting," Gilmer emphasized, "or the conservative Union men in the border slave states of N. C., Tenn., Mo., Ky., Va., Md., and Del. who

⁶¹Thomas L. Clingman, Selections from the Speeches and Writings of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, of North Carolina, with Additions and Explanatory Notes (Raleigh, 1877), 558-559.

⁶²North Carolina Standard, March 9, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 478.

are at this time largely in the majority, will be swept away in a torrent of madness."⁶³

The final blow to the unionist cause in the Old North State, as in the Old Dominion, was the firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, followed by Lincoln's call for 75,000 men three days later. Both of these crucial events welded the state as nothing else had, into a social unit favoring separation. With Virginia's secession on April 17, all doubts as to the course of the state were resolved. Former unionists now admitted that disunion was inevitable. When the news reached Z. B. Vance, he was speaking before an armed group of angry citizens in his native Buncombe County. With his hand extended, he was pleading for the preservation of the Union. In describing this speech, he said that his hand which was raised in gesture "fell slowly and sadly by a secessionist." With altered voice and manner, Vance then called upon his audience to volunteer not to fight against but for South Carolina.⁶⁴ On April 20, the unionist editor, W. W. Holden maintained that the unionist men were, at least, guiltless of their country's blood. They had labored long and faithfully, under opprobrium and insults, to save the government and the Union, and at the same time their own native land. But revolution and war were now upon them. The time for "watching and waiting" had gone by, he insisted, and they must now unite and act.⁶⁵ The

⁶³John A. Gilmer to William H. Seward, March 7, 1861, in Frederic Bancroft, The Life of William H. Seward (2 vols., New York, 1900), II, 545.

⁶⁴Dowd, Life of Vance, 441-442.

⁶⁵North Carolina Standard, April 20, 1861, in Dumond, Southern Editorials, 505.

prominent Raleigh attorney, Kemp Battle, was of the opinion that it was "better to go out together, even if we are whipped back together. If we do not go out with the South we shall certainly have civil war at home. That will be much worse than fighting the North."⁶⁶ Gilmer writing to Seward after Lincoln's proclamation, informed the Secretary of State that all hope was now extinguished. According to Gilmer, the administration, "but doubtless inadvertently," had done the very thing which the disunionists most desired.⁶⁷ In a public address at Hillsboro, William A. Graham summarized the general conservative sentiment in the state when he pointed out that it was not a question of Union or disunion, but a question of fighting for or against North Carolina. Blood, he emphasized, was thicker than water. However widely they had differed from, and freely criticized the course taken by the cotton states, they were much more closely united with them, "by the ties of kindred, affection, and a peculiar interest, which is denounced and warred upon at the North...."⁶⁸

Meanwhile, the pro-secessionist Governor of North Carolina, John Ellis, had issued a proclamation notifying the General Assembly to meet in special session on May 1.⁶⁹ Certain that withdrawal from the Union was only a matter of time and the drafting of proper documents, Ellis

⁶⁶Battle, Memories of a Tar Heel, 168.

⁶⁷John A. Gilmer to Seward, April 21, 1861, in Bandroft, Seward, II, 549.

⁶⁸Montford McGehee, Life and Character of the Hon. William A. Graham (Raleigh, 1877), 26-27.

⁶⁹Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, at its First Extra Session, 1861 (Raleigh, 1861), 6.

began the task of putting the state on a war time footing. All federal forts and the United States Mint at Fayetteville were ordered seized by executive proclamation, which was accomplished at once.⁷⁰ Promising to send a regiment to Virginia within a few days, the governor called for thirty thousand volunteers and established a camp of instruction at Raleigh.⁷¹ As a result of these indications of North Carolina's intentions, President Lincoln on April 27 declared its ports blockaded. The Old North State was well on the road to secession and war.

The legislature met in special session on May 1. Governor Ellis' message, after dealing at some length with the constitutional aspects of coercion, requested the calling of a special convention by which separation could be accomplished.⁷² A convention bill was speedily passed by a unanimous vote of the House and with only three dissenting votes in the Senate.⁷³ The bill provided for the election of delegates on May 13 to the convention that would meet in Raleigh on May 30.⁷⁴

The brief campaign between the call of the convention and the election of delegates was waged without any excitement or enthusiasm. The issue was no longer Union or disunion. Most were agreed upon

⁷⁰Official Records, Series I, Volume I, 476-478.

⁷¹Ibid., 486-486.

⁷²Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, at its First Extra Session, 1861, 6-14.

⁷³Ibid., 14-15, 18-20. Journal of the House of Commons of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its First Extra Session, 1861 (Raleigh, 1861), 15-16, 18.

⁷⁴Public Laws of the State of North Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly, at its First Extra Session of 1861 (Raleigh, 1861), 100.

separation and all were conscious that separation meant war. The only underlying question was how technically separation should be accomplished. Should it be by secession or should it be by revolution? The original disunionists still maintained the legality of secession and were now joined by several former conservatives. On the whole, however, most of the conservatives who ran for election to the convention were of the opinion that the withdrawal of North Carolina from the Union could only be accomplished by a formal declaration of revolution. As a result, this group, which contained most of the former conservatives, was regarded as the "revolutionists."

When the convention assembled in Raleigh on May 20, it was apparent to all that the coalition of secessionists and several former conservatives was numerically superior to that of the revolutionists. In the contest between these two groups for the election of a president of the convention, Weldon N. Edwards, a wealthy planter from the central part of the state, supported by the secessionist coalition, was elected over William A. Graham who received the support of the revolutionists.⁷⁵ The most significant division between these two groups emerged as a result of an ordinance introduced by George E. Badger. The Badger ordinance based secession on the right of revolution, and denied by implication the right of secession. The ordinance was defeated by a vote of seventy-two to forty.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Journal of the Convention of the People of North Carolina Held on the 20th day of May, A. D., 1861 (Raleigh, 1862), 5-6.

⁷⁶Ibid., 13-14.

Ralph Wooster's analysis of the vote on the Badger ordinance, in conjunction with the manuscript census returns of 1860, tends to substantiate Sitterson's analysis of the February convention vote. The forty conservatives or revolutionists who voted for the Badger ordinance largely tended to represent the predominantly yeoman counties in the northeastern, central, and western parts of the state. Furthermore, the percentage of slaves and the per-capita wealth of those areas that elected revolutionists, was significantly less than those counties which elected secessionists.⁷⁷ Politically, Wooster found that the revolutionist delegations came primarily from the old Whig counties, twenty-two of the twenty-four revolutionist delegations in the convention coming from counties that had voted for the Whigs in a majority of presidential elections, from 1848 to 1860.⁷⁸

The Badger ordinance represented the major attempt by the conservatives to halt separation by secession. Burton Craige of Rowan County offered a substitute resolution which repealed and abrogated the ordinance of 1789, by which the Old North State had ratified the constitution, and declared that the Union between North Carolina and the United States dissolved. The resolution was unanimously adopted.⁷⁹ W. W. Holden recalled that "when the act of secession was consummated, the body looked

⁷⁷Wooster, Secession Conventions, 201.

⁷⁸Ibid., 201-202.

⁷⁹Journal of the Convention of the People of North Carolina, 1861, 12-13, 15-16.

like a sea partly in storm, partly calm, the Secessionists shouting and throwing up their hats and rejoicing, the Conservatives sitting quietly, calm, and depressed.⁸⁰ North Carolina had left the Union; the lower and upper South were now united to face the turbulent future.

⁸⁰Boyd, Memoirs of Holden, 17.

Conclusion

The major objective of this study has been to determine the identity of the nationalists in Virginia and North Carolina, and the reasons why they were opposed to the secession of their respective states during the crisis of 1860-1861. Although unionist sympathizers could be found in every interest group, social class, and geographical section of both of these states, significant divisions nevertheless existed on whether the Union should be maintained or dissolved. On the basis of county resolves, editorials of leading newspapers, private and public utterances of the most prominent leaders, and voting behavior in the crucial convention elections, unionism tended to be directly related to the nonslaveholding small-scale agricultural interests. Indeed there were notable exceptions. Nevertheless, the fact still remains that the yeoman farmer in the Old Dominion as well as in the Old North State was the dominant unionist element during this period. In contrast to their counterparts in the lower South, who had visions of becoming large-scale slaveholding planters, the border state yeomanry tended to be more concerned with agricultural reform and northern markets. In addition, the likelihood of armed conflict was an important motivational feature of this group. Although a fear of war was more intense in Virginia (largely because of her proximity to the northern states) than in North Carolina, its importance in motivating unionist sympathy cannot be overemphasized. The strong possibility of bearing the brunt of a war to preserve a slave system in which they had little

part, loomed high in the list of reasons why the yeomanry of the central and western parts of Virginia and North Carolina consistently remained the hard core of resistance to any attempt to break with the Union.

Although the yeomanry were an extremely significant unionist faction in these two border states, there were still a considerable number of wealthy slaveholding planters who were equally opposed to a disintegration of the Union. They were mainly conservative men of property who feared the consequence of a secession movement that would likely result in war and endanger their privileged status. They preferred to "Watch and Wait," in order to see whether Lincoln's administration actually threatened the loss of their property. Such wealthy slaveholding planters as W. W. Lenoir, John Janney, and William Pettigrew, were firmly convinced that the institutions of the South (especially the "peculiar institution") could best be preserved by remaining in the Union. On the whole, however, the unionist sentiment displayed by the landed gentry of the border South was neither comparable in numerical strength nor in intensity with the ante-bellum nationalistic sentiment among the yeomanry of the southern uplands.

Many of the urban and commercial interests in Virginia and North Carolina, who had formerly supplied the leadership of the southern Whig party, were another significant faction strongly opposed to disunion. The eastern cities of Virginia had developed a valuable industry in the manufacturing of plug tobacco, while industrialists were looking toward the North for tariffs, capital, and technology to

expand the iron industry of the state. A similar situation prevailed in North Carolina. Neither the textile nor the railroad interests in the state ever dreamed that a war between the North and South, the ultimate consequence of secession, would bring prosperity to their respective industries. The majority of these forward looking southern businessmen were quite unwilling to have their economic position endangered by secession, and consequently remained in firm opposition to a dissolution of the Union.

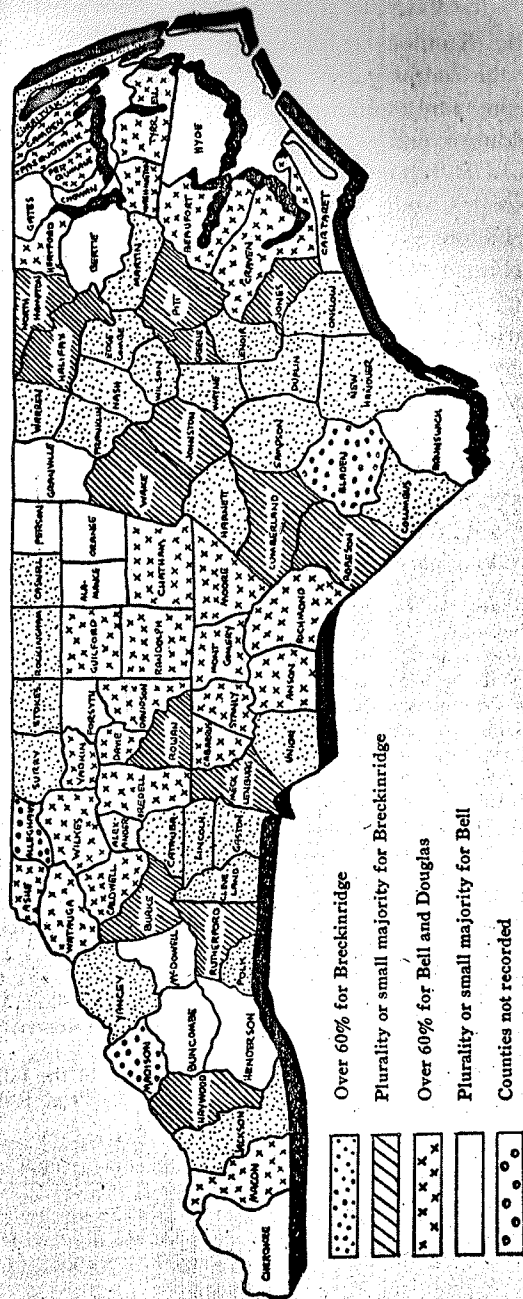
In addition to these economically oriented interest groups, there were others who opposed secession on the grounds that it was unconstitutional, irrational, immoral, and disadvantageous to the international position of the United States. Such varied individuals as Robert E. Lee, John Minor Botts, Robert L. Dabney, Mary Berkley Minor Blackford, William A. Graham, Zebulon B. Vance, and W. W. Holden uttered some of the strongest sentiments against secession in 1861. Although many of these individuals cannot be accurately classified by interest group or social class, their importance to the unionist cause should not be minimized. They displayed an independent spirit and moral courage too often lost sight of in studies concerned with the coming of the Civil War. Unionism, at least in Virginia and North Carolina, transcended all social classes, interest groups, and political views.

There were unquestionably many reasons why the conservatives in Virginia and North Carolina were unsuccessful in maintaining their states allegiance to the federal government during the secession crisis of 1860-1861. Some of these reasons were remote in origin, some

underlying but potentially explosive, and other immediate to the hour. Nevertheless, it may be safely asserted that the crisis at Fort Sumter and Lincoln's call for troops abruptly ended the conciliating, the avoiding, the pacifying, and other similar efforts with which the American politician had filled the preceding half-century. With the coming of war, the Old Dominion and the Old North State were compelled to choose on which side they would fight when they could no longer refuse to fight.

Map II

MAP II. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1860



From J. Carlyle Sitterson, The Session Movement in North Carolina

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