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"Just before a mighty earthquake:" Three southwest Georgia counties during the Secession Crisis, November 1860-January 1861

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“Just before a mighty earthquake.”

Three Southwest Georgia Counties during the Secession Crisis

November 1860-January 1861

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This work discusses three counties in Georgia during the secession crisis from Abraham Lincoln's election in November 1860 until Georgia seceded from the Union in January 1861. The focus of this paper originally began with Thomas County, Georgia, the only county in southwest Georgia not to vote for secession. Research began with the simple idea of finding out why Thomas County's citizens opposed secession. Dougherty and Muscogee counties were included to add a broader scope to the research and make the paper more useful for comparison to other counties in Georgia. By using methodology consistent with historical research, the conclusion of this paper is that the secession debate in Georgia was simply a continuation of the political fighting between Democrats and Whigs that had occurred in the state since the 1830s. Thus, political allegiance played a vital role in determining support for, or opposition to, secession in these three counties.

Introduction

Not long after Abraham Lincoln's election as President in November 1860, a group of men convened a meeting in the southern part of Dougherty County, located in southwest Georgia. Described as a group of mostly planters, that is, owners of twenty or more slaves, the purpose of the meeting was to decide what the people of the county should tell their state's leaders concerning the crisis. These Dougherty County citizens made it obvious what they wanted: "the most speedy and certain redress for all past and present political grievances, and the most sure guarantee against further aggressions...IMMEDIATE AND INDEPENDENT SECESSION." The fact that these men capitalized these last three words not only emphasizes their wants and desires but also emphasizes the internal debate in this and every Georgia county. While they "would be glad to have Georgia unite with any one or more" of their fellow southern states in "a Southern Confederacy," these men wanted action now. They further felt that those who favored cooperation or outright Unionism were cowards and conspirators. However, this language was not something new due to the crisis of the times. In fact, the debate in Georgia over secession was a continuation of the political in-fighting that had occurred in the state for years. Instead of being labeled Whigs and Democrats, the two warring factions were now called Cooperationists and Immediate Secessionists. While past works on the secession crisis in Georgia have attributed the intense debate in the state to geography, class conflict, and sectionalism, most authors have failed to see the obvious: when it came down to it, the internal debate regarding secession was simply another battle of political allegiance.

The debates concerning why the South seceded began almost immediately and continue to this day. Recent evidence has shown that there were divisions amongst southerners regarding secession.¹ Nowhere was this truer than in Georgia. While much of the South has been seen as having a one-party system, in Georgia a two-party system had emerged in the 1820s.² This two-party system would stay intact and would end up being integral to sentiment regarding secession after Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860. Many former Whigs were opposed to secession while most Democrats were in favor of immediate secession from the Union, regardless of geography, social status, or economic standing. This was most certainly the case in Dougherty, Muscogee, and Thomas counties, located in southwest Georgia. The vast majority of Thomas County voters were opposed to secession, including many of the large slaveholders, who, in other areas, have often been seen as the main supporters of secession. After examining numerous primary sources, but focusing on newspapers and memoirs, it becomes obvious that Thomas County citizens opposed secession primarily because of their political affiliation. Their past support of Whig politicians ended up trumping their role as citizens of a county with a majority black population. However, this same political affiliation provided the rationale for the large-scale support of secession in Dougherty and Muscogee counties, two Democratic strongholds. Thus, this paper argues that political affiliation played a key role in determining the level of support for secession in these three Georgia counties.

¹ For a fairly thorough discussion of the historiography of the debates on why the Lower South seceded as it did, see Ralph A. Wooster, "The Secession of the Lower South: An Examination of Changing Interpretations," *Civil War History* 7 (1961): 117-127.

² See Seymour Martin Lipset, "The Emergence of the One-Party South: The Election of 1860," in *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981). Some recent scholarship has disagreed with aspects of Lipset's thesis, but most scholars do not disagree with his overall conclusions. Most important for this work is Peyton McCrary and others, "Class and Party in the Secession Crisis: Voting Behavior in the Deep South, 1856-1861," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (Winter 1978), 429-457, which argues that Georgia and Alabama most certainly had two-party systems. Perhaps not coincidentally, those two states had close votes on secession.

The three counties were chosen for specific reasons. Thomas County was the original focus of the research for this study because Thomas County was literally the only county in southwest Georgia that voted for cooperationist candidates and opposed secession. However, in order to expand the study, it was felt that at least two other counties should be added to the scope of the research. When debating which counties to add to the study, several factors were considered including support of secession, geographic location, comparability to Thomas County in terms of population and economy, and the amount of sources available. Dougherty was chosen because of its proximity to Thomas County, its similarity in population and economic make-up, and its large-scale support of secession, which was in direct contrast with Thomas. Muscogee County was chosen because it was the largest southwest Georgia county in terms of population, economic strength, and sources available. Furthermore, while Muscogee eventually voted for secessionist candidates by a large majority, the county still had many prominent, vocal cooperationists and even outright Unionists. Thus, it was felt Muscogee represents a more middle-of-the-ground county than some other southwest Georgia counties that lacked sources. In addition, due to Columbus, it was felt that Muscogee was a good example of a Georgia county with a large city and, thus, could be comparable to Bibb (Macon), Fulton (Atlanta), Richmond (Augusta), and Chatham (Savannah) counties. This would make the study more useful as a comparison for future examinations of the secession debate in Georgia.

The counties were also chosen based upon their population statistics, in order to attempt to make the study more universal to expand to other parts of Georgia and the Lower South. Muscogee County was partially chosen because it had the highest

population of the southwest Georgia counties, but also because it had a population made up of less than 50 percent slaves. Thomas and Dougherty counties, however, did have a majority population of slaves, but to differing degrees. Thomas County had a population of roughly 56 percent slaves according to the 1860 Census while Dougherty County had a population of approximately 73 percent slaves on the eve of secession. This makes all three counties better suited for a comparative study because they were not all alike, thus making the conclusions herein more effective. Furthermore, Thomas County had a total population of just under 11,000 residents while Dougherty was smaller, with just over 8,200 residents. Muscogee was the third largest county (out of 132) in terms of population, Thomas was 26th and Dougherty was 55th. Thus, the counties are nicely interspersed in terms of total population, making them more useful for a comparison to other Georgia counties.³

Despite Georgia's importance in the South as a whole, and as the leading Lower South state, there has only been one book-length study of the secession debate, Michael P. Johnson's *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia*. Published in 1977, Johnson argues that slavery had risen to a priority even greater than that of preservation of the Union and that secession was a rational decision based upon the leadership of the planter elite. Johnson further argues that the planters were motivated to do this because they feared fellow slaveholders, and especially non-slaveholders, could be won over by Republican rhetoric, especially in the form of patronage enticements. Essentially, secessionist leaders led Georgia out of the Union to forestall this potential internal discord. While fitting many of Johnson's parameters, Thomas County did not fit

³ University of Virginia Historical Census Browser, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/>, accessed July 17, 2009.

within his thesis as many of the surviving records show the planter elite in that county most assuredly did not support secession. Johnson's work is insightful and engaging but does have some flaws in its interpretation. For example, Johnson plays up class conflict as a reason for Georgia's secession much more than the evidence supports. Furthermore, Johnson's assertion that immediate secessionists feared other white Georgians seems a drastic overstatement of the evidence Johnson has found, especially since the majority of the evidence contradicts Johnson. That aside, this is the standard work on the topic, if for nothing else than the fact that no one else has tackled it.⁴

Another study that deals with the time period in detail is a dissertation by Luke Fain Crutcher. Crutcher's "Disunity and Dissolution: The Georgia Parties and the Crisis of the Union, 1859-1861" makes a similar argument to this paper in that Crutcher asserts that party affiliation ended up playing a key role in an individual's feelings on secession. Crutcher's work is an interesting counterpoint to Johnson's because he points to several "planter elites" that did not support secession, even once it was obvious Georgia was going to secede. Crutcher's work is similar to this study, but on more of a macro level. Featuring excellent writing and research, Crutcher's work stands alongside Johnson's as the standard works on the subject.⁵

A number of other works on either Georgia or secession were consulted, but most provide background rather than direct light upon the secession debate in Southwest Georgia. Anthony Gene Carey's *Parties, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia* was published in 1997 and gives an excellent background to the politics of antebellum

⁴ Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977).

⁵ Luke F. Crutcher, "Disunity and Dissolution: The Georgia Parties and the Crisis of the Union, 1859-1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1974).

Georgia. Carey also devotes his final chapter and much of his conclusion to discussing secession in Georgia. His conclusions on secession are in direct contrast to Johnson in that Carey feels there was little internal discord amongst Georgians beyond typical party battles. In Carey's estimation, from the 1820s onward, Georgians battled for political office and that is what happened again in 1860-61. While this sounds similar to the argument being made in this paper, my conclusions differ from Carey's slightly in that he feels that past political allegiance held little sway in the choosing of delegates to the state convention in January 1861. William Freehling's *The Road to Disunion, Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* and David Potter's *The Impending Crisis* are both considered seminal works on secession and were consulted for background details, although neither focus heavily on Georgia. Potter and Freehling were two of the first historians to theorize that secession was not all that popular in the Lower South. While their interpretations are still debated, both are landmark studies. Freehling and Craig Simpson edited *Secession Debated: Georgia's Showdown in 1860*, which features speeches that encompass the thought of both secessionists and cooperationists. A speech by Muscogee County's Henry L. Benning is included. Published in 1953, T. Conn Bryan's *Confederate Georgia* has a useful opening chapter on secession, although it is very broad.⁶

As for the individual counties, there was a surprising wealth of information for all three. Muscogee County had easily the most primary and secondary sources, thanks

⁶ Anthony Gene Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union in Antebellum Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997); William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Vol. II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); David Potter, *The Impending Crisis* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1977); William Freehling and Craig Simpson, eds., *Secession Debated: Georgia's Showdown in 1860* (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 1992); T. Conn Bryan, *Confederate Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1953).

mainly to the presence of Columbus. Some of the better general studies are John S. Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1978*; Joseph B. Mahan, *Columbus: Georgia's Fall Line Trading Town*; Margaret L. Whitehead and Barbara Bogart, *City of Progress: A History of Columbus, Georgia*; John H. Martin, *Columbus, Geo., from Its Selection as a "Trading Town" in 1827, to its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raid in 1865*; Nancy Telfair, *A History of Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1928*; and Etta Blanchard Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee*. Of the group, Lupold's work is probably the best as he is the only trained historian of the group and the others all have some factual errors regarding the period studied. The best work on Columbus' role in the Confederacy is Stewart C. Edwards' "River City at War: Columbus, Georgia, in the Confederacy," a doctoral dissertation from 1998. Edwards devotes a substantial number of pages to the founding of Columbus and its attitudes toward secession from 1850 until Lincoln's election.⁷ In addition to these secondary sources, the newspapers of Columbus were vital. The *Columbus Sun*, *Times*, *Enquirer*, and *The Corner Stone* are all available on microfilm and are heavily quoted throughout this work. These papers were especially useful because they all espoused various opinions on secession and featured excellent letters to the editor.

⁷ John S. Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1978* (Columbus: Columbus Sesquicentennial, 1978); Joseph B. Mahan, *Columbus: Georgia's Fall Line Trading Town* (Northridge, CA: Windsor, 1976); Margaret L. Whitehead and Barbara Bogart, *City of Progress: A History of Columbus, Georgia* (Columbus: Columbus Office Supply Co., 1978); John H. Martin, *Columbus, Geo., from Its Selection as a "Trading Town" in 1827, to its Partial Destruction by Wilson's Raid in 1865* (Columbus: T. Gilbert, 1874-75); Nancy Telfair, *A History of Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1928* (Columbus: Historical Publication Co., 1929); and Etta Blanchard Worsley, *Columbus on the Chattahoochee* (Columbus: Columbus Office Supply Co., 1951). The two works on Columbus' role in the Confederacy are Diffie William Standard, *Columbus, Georgia, in the Confederacy* (New York: William-Frederick Press, 1954) and Stewart C. Edwards, "River City at War: Columbus, Georgia, in the Confederacy" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 1998).

The research on Thomas County owes a debt of gratitude to former Florida State University professor William Warren Rogers, who has produced four books on the county's history and another two on plantations located in the county. Two of these works, *Ante-Bellum Thomas County* and *Thomas County During the Civil War*, were relied upon heavily. Rogers also wrote an article, titled "The Way They Were: Thomas Countians in 1860," that gives excellent information on the county on the eve of secession. Although two newspapers were published in the county at the time, the *Thomasville Southern Enterprise* is the only paper extant. However, this paper was very useful because it represented the majority of the citizens of the county due to its backing of John Bell in the 1860 Presidential election and cooperationist candidates. Furthermore, the *Southern Enterprise* was the more popular newspaper in the county with a much larger circulation than its Democratic competitor.⁸

Perhaps thanks to the fact that Albany became the leading economic center of extreme southwest Georgia, there is a wealth of information on Dougherty County. There are two secondary sources that stand out. First, *The Historical Background of Dougherty County, 1836-1940*, was compiled by the Works Progress Administration and features excellent work on antebellum Dougherty County. Second, Susan O'Donovan's "Transforming Work: Slavery, Free Labor, and the Household in Southwest Georgia, 1850-1880" is a doctoral dissertation that does not focus on politics, but it features excellent primary source research and a good chapter on Dougherty County (which features a bit of information on Thomas) during the secession period. Much like Thomas

⁸ William Warren Rogers, *Ante-Bellum Thomas County, 1825-1861* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1963); Rogers, *Thomas County During the Civil War* (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1964); Rogers, "The Way They Were: Thomas Countians in 1860," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (Summer 1976, No. 2), 131-144.

County, only one newspaper survives from the time period, although the *Albany Patriot* was the only newspaper published in the county. Enjoying a wide circulation, the *Patriot* was certainly influential and was stridently secessionist. It offers an excellent counterpoint to the *Southern Enterprise*, which was probably the *Patriot*'s chief rival in terms of readership in the most southern parts of Georgia.⁹

This study is significant because Georgia was the most important state in the Lower South. Thus, understanding the issues involved in the secession debate in Georgia is vital to understanding why Georgia, and potentially other southern states, had such a fierce, close contest regarding secession. Looking at these three counties as a micro-history is helpful for several reasons. First, all three counties could be considered very typical of other parts of Georgia and the entire South. Second, despite these similarities, all three counties, and especially Muscogee due to its industrialization and the large city of Columbus and Dougherty due to its wealth, had features that make their individual experience relevant to counties with similar make-ups in other parts of the South. Finally, in order to understand the debate in Georgia at the macro level as Michael P. Johnson, Anthony Gene Carey and Luke Crutcher attempted, one must be able to understand the debate “on the ground” at the micro level. Through studying these three counties individually at the micro level, it becomes apparent that all three counties discussed similar issues, although they all came to differing conclusions based on those issues. Still, this shows the importance of this study because these counties’ thoughts on secession came from the discussion of the same issues. It also became apparent after

⁹ Works Progress Administration, *Historical Background of Dougherty County, 1836-1940* (Atlanta: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1981); Susan E. O’Donovan, “Transforming Work: Slavery, Free Labor, and the Household in Southwest Georgia, 1850-1880” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, San Diego, 1997).

studying these three counties in significant detail that party affiliation played a key role in county-wide support for or opposition to secession.

Chapter One-The Build-Up to Secession: Georgia in the 1850s

Georgia was a key state in the Lower South when the secession debate reached its crescendo due to its population, political leaders, and economy. However, the secession crisis of 1860-1861 was not the first time the “Empire State of the South” was to play a central role in the discussion of disunion. The prospect of secession had risen during the Nullification Crisis of the 1830s but the debate that eventually led to the Compromise of 1850 saw Georgia take a leadership role among the Lower South states on the issue of disunion. This leadership role would see Georgia help stave off secession in 1850, which would lead fire-eaters to question whether Georgia would make the leap out of the Union in 1861.

Soon after the Mexican War ended, debate raged between the North and South over whether the annexed Mexican territory would be allowed to permit slavery. Much of the acrimonious debate in Georgia, and throughout the South for that matter, revolved around John Calhoun’s idea of a regional, southern political party in the wake of northern agitation against slavery spreading to the territories. The crisis of the times led prominent Georgia Democrats such as Herschel Johnson, Henry Benning, and Wilson Lumpkin to advocate for such a political party to present ultimatums to northern states, force recognition of southern rights, and defeat the enemies of slavery. However, some Democrats, including Howell Cobb and John Lumpkin, refused to join this tide and kept faith in a national Democratic party. Cobb lamented that Calhoun’s followers wanted “the dissolution of the democratic party, whether the Union is preserved or not”; for his part, Lumpkin was sick of “Calhoun, Calhoun men, and Calhounism.” The Whigs,

meanwhile, simply waited, pinning their hopes on President Zachary Taylor's course of action with the annexed territory.¹⁰

Taylor ended up disappointing Southern Whigs by surrounding himself with potential supporters, no matter their party, and tended to slight old Whigs. Before 1850 even began, men such as Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens had left the Whig caucus after having a resolution declaring the party's opposition to the congressional prohibition of slavery in California and New Mexico tabled. Toombs went so far as to announce that he was for disunion if the Wilmot Proviso passed. With Taylor advocating immediate statehood for California and New Mexico, Georgia's Whigs were left with the decision of backing the President as their link to the national Whig Party or abandoning him for their own electoral survival. Some, like the editor of the *Columbus Enquirer*, advocated sticking with the national party since there was no chance of slavery being established in California anyway. Others thought they could oppose the policy while still claiming allegiance to Taylor while a final group considered abandoning Taylor and the national Whigs altogether.¹¹

With southern rights advocates calling for a convention at Nashville in June 1850 and the Georgia legislature passing resolutions that recommended a state convention to determine the state's response to the possibility of the Wilmot Proviso passing, the Whigs appeared to be in trouble. With the exception of Howell Cobb, most of Georgia's political leaders, both Whig and Democrat, were beginning to line up against the national parties and Taylor. With the real prospect of disunion on the horizon and Georgians from

¹⁰ Robert P. Brooks, ed., "Howell Cobb Papers," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (June 1921, No. 5), 39-52; Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 156-158.

¹¹ *Columbus Enquirer*, August 7, 1849; Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 157-159.

north to south outraged by the potential admission of California, Henry Clay offered an avenue of escape to the moderates.

On January 29, 1850, Clay presented proposals to admit California as a free state, organize New Mexico and Utah as territories without restrictions on the adoption of slavery, adjust Texas' boundary and pay its public debt, end the slave trade in the District of Columbia but not abolish slavery there, and pass a more effective fugitive slave law. Clay's proposal was debated for months, but it was important to Georgia's moderates because it gave them an alternative to being simply for or against Taylor's policy. Toombs, who had threatened disunion just a month earlier, now felt Congress could probably come to a compromise. Others, including Senator John Berrien, criticized Clay's proposals and drifted toward an anti-compromise camp. The Whigs were heartened by the fact that Democrats like Howell Cobb backed the forces in favor of the compromise measures. Public sentiment, and voting, in Georgia would show that the anti-compromise Democrats had either misread their constituents or just moved too fast.¹²

The public sentiment appeared to be one of weariness. After several years of debate and fighting in Congress over the spoils of the Mexican War, Georgia's public was tired of talking about it. If Clay's compromises could avert disunion, then it was worth it. Many average Georgians either did not think the admission of California as a free state threatened their interests or justified such radical discussion. This sentiment, which was not restricted to just Georgia, would end up stifling the southern rights men and the Nashville Convention. Nearly all Whigs wisely distanced themselves from the convention as Democrats attempted to claim the meeting was not about disunion, but about preserving the Union by flexing the South's muscles to resist aggression.

¹² Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 160-161.

However, the editor of the *Columbus Times* disputed this “Southern cowardice” and stated that if disunion occurred as a result of the Nashville meeting, “so be it.”¹³

The editor of the *Columbus* newspaper was decidedly in the minority and the farcical voting for delegates to the Nashville Convention proved it. When the April elections arrived, few delegates ran, leaving most candidates unopposed, and only 3,700 votes were cast in the fifty-four counties (out of the more than ninety at the time) that even had polls open on election day. James Gardner, who had stated that Georgians should not shrink from disunion, was forced to admit that the lack of interest shown by the voters was a “virtual repudiation by the people of Georgia” of the proposed convention. Eleven Georgians were chosen for the Nashville delegation, including Henry Benning, Martin J. Crawford, and James Ramsey of Muscogee County, but five of them were appointed by the governor, who had the ability to fill vacancies. Three Whigs were appointed, but they were all marginal figures. Benning, Crawford, and Ramsey all became some of the most ardent proponents of southern rights and secession at the gathering.¹⁴

On May 8, a compromise plan was presented based upon Clay’s original proposals. The Nashville Convention met a month later and repudiated this plan and formulated their own compromise plan. The Nashville proposal was to extend the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Ocean with an expectation to hold slaves anywhere south of that line. This was an interesting turn of events as Democrats in Georgia and throughout the South had rejected the Missouri Compromise and thought a geographical division of this kind was not possible due to northern opposition.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 161-162; *Columbus Times*, March 26, 1850.

¹⁴ Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 162; Edwards, “River City at War,” 42-44.

Furthermore, the extension of the line would require congressional legislation, which went directly against an 1848 Democratic platform espousing nonintervention on the part of Congress. This led critics to charge that the Nashville Convention was simply out for secession and had come up with this “compromise” knowing most northerners would not support it. Furthermore, moderate Democrats such as Howell Cobb were convinced that the Nashville Convention delegates and their supporters were attempting to either break up the Democratic Party or trying to use the Democratic Party as a vehicle for secession. Delegates to the convention proved Cobb right about their support of secession in public speeches.¹⁵

The Muscogee trio of delegates returned home to find intense debate regarding secession. Unionists and Southern Rights Democrats held barbecues and rallies to attempt to win over Muscogee’s citizens. On July 16, the states rights’ men held a rally that drew 3,000 people. Many speeches denouncing the North and the proposed compromise were delivered, including one by textile mill owner John H. Howard that was considered the most stridently pro-southern oration. Two days later, the Unionists held their own rally that drew a similar number of people. The speakers, including future Governor James Johnson, were adamant that the people of Georgia should support the compromise as it could stave off the disunion that men like Howard portrayed as inevitable.¹⁶

Walter Colquitt, one of the leading Georgia delegates to the convention, stated in a letter in a Macon newspaper that the admission of California was a prelude to abolition

¹⁵ Thelma Jennings, *The Nashville Convention: Southern Movement for Unity, 1848-1851* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1980), 146-154.

¹⁶ Richard H. Shryock, *Georgia and the Union in 1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1926), 276-277, 283-284.

and should be met with resistance. Supporters of men like Colquitt agreed, arguing that the North was out to not only dominate the South but also free their slaves and put the government in the freed slaves' hands. Benning advocated secession and continued to propose the John C. Calhoun idea of an all-southern political party. In Albany, thirty men proclaimed themselves willing to go to a proposed Southern Rights meeting in Macon and advocated immediate secession. The Columbus *Times* continued to be one of the most radical newspapers in the state, asking if southerners had fallen so low that they were willing to accept any compromise "our masters choose to give us?" The *Times* played their trump card when asking, "Are we *already* enslaved?"¹⁷

Whigs and moderate Democrats retorted by agreeing that the compromise measures were imperfect, but accepting them would forestall disunion and kill the Wilmot Proviso. The compromise supporters made two key points here. First, California was going to be a free state whether that was determined by the people or by Congress. Second, by accepting the compromise, the rest of the Southwest would be open to slavery and the South would get a better fugitive slave law. Both Whigs and Democrats in favor of the compromise advocated the nonintervention of Congress as a laudable alternative. Some, like Alexander Stephens, did not think the compromise much of a compromise at all, but thought it would "quiet the country" and, more importantly, "the *proviso* is not in it."¹⁸

The death of Zachary Taylor elevated Millard Fillmore to President and allowed men such as Cobb, Toombs, and Stephens to work together to pass the Compromise of

¹⁷ Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 163; James C. Cobb, "The Making of a Secessionist: Henry L. Benning and the Coming of the Civil War," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 60 (1976), 317; Columbus *Times*, June 18, 1850; Albany *Patriot*, August 9, 1850.

¹⁸ Thomas E. Schott, *Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia: A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 123.

1850. However, sectional antagonism may have actually been exacerbated, rather than alleviated, by the compromise. Most northerners still were opposed to the fugitive slave law and the lack of the inclusion of the Wilmot Proviso. Many southerners disliked the admission of California and the barring of the slave trade from Washington, D.C. The compromise did not unify and this led southern Whigs to rail at their northern counterparts for not supporting the compromise while southern Democrats were angered by their northern counterparts for supporting the compromise. This led some of the party ties in Georgia to collapse, although the old rivalries remained.

The struggle going forward would be between those who supported the compromise and those who did not, even if they did not label themselves Whigs and Democrats anymore. Former Whigs and Democrats did begin to form alliances and work together, but when the governor called for a state convention to discuss what Georgia should do in the wake of California's admission, the battle began anew. This time, the fight would be between Southern Rights men and Unionists. Some Southern Rights candidates and supporters, chief amongst them the always rabid *Columbus Times*, called for immediate secession as the remedy. The *Albany Patriot* reported that the county's citizens were wary of disunion but made clear that Congress needed to keep the South in mind when discussing territorial questions. However, most Southern Rights advocates had learned from the Nashville Convention and knew that the greater part of the populace did not support disunion. In light of this, the disunionists called for resistance, the meaning of which Southern Rights leaders never really clarified. However, one somewhat brilliant maneuver the Southern Rights men pulled off was claiming that bowing down to the North and opposing a regional, southern political party would lead to

secession. The rationale was that accepting the compromise would lead to aggression which would foster secession to stave off abolition.

The Southern Rights men were scattered, though, and their most vocal secessionist supporters often played into the hands of the Unionists. Unionists charged that any Southern Rights men who disavowed secession were being dishonest and the ones who called for disunion as the remedy for the South's ills were the ones representing the true nature of the Southern Rights party. Equal to the tactics of their opponents, the Unionists made a brilliant move of their own in not attempting to tell Georgians that everything about the Compromise of 1850 was good. In fact, they were willing to admit that parts were not all that favorable to the South. However, the Unionists relied on the average Georgians unwillingness to chance disunion over the territories and made the complex issues that had been debated in Congress for several years very simple: you either thought the federal government was a failure and should be abandoned or you thought that, although imperfect, being in the Union was better than being out of it.

Although this was a vast oversimplification of the issue, it was a wise move by the Unionists. It made it seem that if the Southern Rights party achieved success, it would mean fatal consequences for Georgia, the South, and the nation. The tactic worked. By late October the Southern Rights men had garnered little support, so little that even John Forsyth, Jr., the rabid editor of the *Columbus Times*, was willing to back Toombs and Stephens. Forsyth felt that the convention should definitely lay down the ground for what could lead to disunion in the future, but felt Georgia should remain in the Union at the present time. Despite the presence of men like Nelson Tift, the Albany

Patriot reported that “a very large majority” of citizens in Albany and what was then Baker County favored remaining in the Union and opposed calls for disunion.¹⁹

The November election results would prove how wise, or business savvy, Forsyth was to change gears. Unionists gained 243 of the 264 delegate seats and won 65 percent of the overall vote. Despite the best efforts of Henry Benning and John Howard, Muscogee County had voted for an entirely Unionist delegation to the convention. Even more important than the overall Unionist vote was what emerged from the five-day convention that met beginning December 10. The Georgia Platform came out of the meeting and would have tremendous effects throughout the South.²⁰

The Georgia Platform began with a preamble that praised the Compromise of 1850, although admitting parts of the compromise were flawed, and stated the admission of California did not injure Georgia’s honor or require secession as a response. The most interesting part of the Platform, though, was the fourth resolution. This resolution stated that Georgia would be willing to resist to the point of secession any act of Congress regarding slavery that was inconsistent with the safety of the slave states, any congressional prohibition of the intrastate slave trade, any refusal to admit a state because it recognized slavery, any exclusion of slavery from the territories of Utah and New Mexico, and any act repealing or altering the fugitive slave law. Nineteen convention delegates opposed the Platform, mainly the few Southern Rights members who felt the entire Compromise of 1850 had been unjust. The Southern Rights leaders anticipated

¹⁹ Columbus *Times*, October 22, 1850; Albany *Patriot*, October 10, 1850.

²⁰ For a greater breakdown of the 1850 vote, see Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 167-168.

continued discord with the North which would culminate in disunion. The supporters of the Georgia Platform thought it gave hope for peace between the sections.²¹

The Georgia Platform would have wide-reaching influence and repercussions. Southern Rights campaigns in Alabama and Mississippi began in 1851 as both states broke into similar Southern Rights and Unionist camps. The Unionists in both states trumpeted the Georgia Platform and won large majorities in similar convention elections. The Georgia Platform was utilized by moderates and Unionists throughout the South and became the cornerstone of southern policy for many years. The state elections of 1851 brought the point home further as Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi elected fourteen Unionists in the nineteen electoral races. Finally, South Carolina, still essentially a one-party state, continued to prattle on about another southern convention meeting in 1852. The Georgia Platform had proven so successful across the Deep South that even in South Carolina, interest in the convention was minimal and it would never meet.²²

The greatest failure of the Georgia Platform, however, was that it never led to a unified Union party. Georgia political leaders such as Toombs and Stephens wanted such a party to exist, but other Georgians like Howell Cobb felt like the Unionists should just be absorbed by the national Democratic Party. In fact, the Democrats would effectively add the Georgia Platform to their policy, thus making the Democrats look like the moderate, true defenders of slavery when a scant time earlier most southern Democrats were seen as secessionists. It was an odd turn of events and one that effectively killed the second party in most southern states for several years. By 1853, many Unionists in

²¹ Schott, *Alexander Stephens*, 129-130.

²² Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 128; William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 308-310; Avery Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 268.

Georgia had grudgingly merged with the Southern Rights men in a once-again unified Democratic party. The uneasy alliance would not last for long. While they may have all seemingly been Democrats, Georgians were not all united.²³

Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois had for several years been trying to organize the territory around Missouri in order to promote a transcontinental railroad originating in Chicago. In January 1854, Douglas renewed those efforts when he introduced a bill to create Kansas and Nebraska out of land lying north of the Missouri Compromise line. To secure southern support, Douglas added language to his bill that would make the Missouri Compromise null and void and would open Kansas and Nebraska to slavery under the auspice of popular sovereignty. At first, this pleased many Georgia politicians as they had been advocating for the right to take their slaves into the territories without congressional interference since 1846. However, the Kansas-Nebraska Act would go a long way toward propelling the nation toward disunion due to the furor that surrounded it. And not too inconsequentially, Douglas' act would directly lead to the creation of the Republican Party.

When Douglas first announced his proposal, the politicians and people of Georgia were happy at the prospect of the Missouri Compromise line being repealed, which they felt had unconstitutionally restricted their property rights. Stephens, Toombs, Cobb, and other Georgia politicians backed up Douglas' argument that the Kansas-Nebraska bill simply espoused the ideas of popular sovereignty and congressional nonintervention that had appeared in the 1850 compromise bill four years earlier. Some Southern Rights men also saw the parallel between Douglas' and Clay's proposals and found them objectionable. James Bethune founded *The Corner Stone* in Columbus at this time,

²³ Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery*, 313-317.

which was one of the first newspapers to advocate the immediate dissolution of the Union, partly in disgust over the Kansas-Nebraska fight. Congressman James Lindsay Seward, a Democrat from Thomas County, had been serving in state or national office since 1835 and was one of the few hard-line Southern Rights men to immediately speak out against Douglas' bill. Seward and Bethune were clearly in the minority, though, as in February 1854 the Georgia legislature unanimously resolved that opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska bill "is regarded by the people of Georgia as hostility to the rights of the South."²⁴

At least in the halls of the Senate, the popular sentiment backed the bill, as it was easily passed not long after the Georgia legislature made their feelings known. The House was another matter, but thanks to maneuvering by Alexander Stephens, the bill narrowly passed in late May 1854. The vote made it obvious that any chance of a national Whig Party was dead as all northern Whigs opposed the bill. On the other hand, half of the northern Democrats voted for the bill, making southern Democrats feel as if a national party could still work. This led Georgia Democrats to ask their opponents to abandon the Whig Party, which most already had, and unite with them under the Democratic banner. Alexander Stephens, who had allied with the Democrats to pass the bill, spoke for many southern Whigs when he said that the former Whigs would prefer a national organization that represented their interests, but he still was not sure the Democratic Party was it.²⁵

²⁴ Ulrich B. Phillips, *Georgia and States Rights* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1902), 193; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 145-150; *Journal of the Senate of the State of Georgia*, 1853, 832.

²⁵ Schott, *Alexander Stephens*, 166-173.

The importance of the Kansas-Nebraska Act passing for southerners was more in theory than in practice. Although some held hope that slavery could be extended to Kansas, climate and soil made most southerners believe slavery would never be taken to Nebraska. Because of this, Georgians and southerners were shocked when the reaction to the bill by northerners was one of outrage. Many southerners heartened themselves thinking the only northerners opposing the bill were anti-slavery fanatics who did not understand that the Act was no victory for slavery. However, this would prove to be naïve as the events led to a political revolution in the North. Out of the Kansas-Nebraska Act would come the Know-Nothing and anti-Nebraska fusion parties.²⁶

These new parties would have detrimental effects for southerners. The Know-Nothings were nativists and anti-Catholics and called for reforms to keep “foreigners” from voting. The anti-Nebraska groups mobilized a diverse group of people and interests behind their opposition to the Act and the “slave power.” The two groups would eventually join with Whigs to battle Democrats for electoral supremacy in the North. As early as late 1854, the Whigs and their new allies began to maul the Democrats in elections. Southern Democrats were shocked at this turn of events because it was leaving them short of allies in the North as northern Democrats began to distance themselves from their southern party comrades in an attempt to stave off the nativist, anti-southern ideals the new opposition often espoused.²⁷

Georgia Democrats had even bigger problems when the Know-Nothing Party began to spread southward. As early as June 1854, councils of the party began to sprout up in the state. Know-Nothing candidates in the state capital of Milledgeville and

²⁶ See Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 165-170 and Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 185-186.

²⁷ Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 118-130.

Augusta even won electoral victories in early 1855. Other areas did not have politicians run as Know-Nothings or actively promote the group, but many old Whig supporters and newspapers supported the group. This caused consternation for many Democrats, but the Know Nothing Party never achieved as much support in Georgia as it did further North. Still, the movement was important even in the South because former Whigs were willing to support the Know-Nothings, even tacitly, simply because they opposed the Democrats. With no real national rival to the Democratic Party, Georgians like Alexander Stephens hoped the Know-Nothings could defeat the Democrats. For their part, northern Know-Nothings were willing to try to find some common ground to form a national party.²⁸

In Philadelphia in June 1855, a group of delegates convened to attempt to form a national party, consisting mainly of northern Know-Nothings and former Whigs from the South. The American Party, as the Know-Nothings named themselves at the gathering, got off to a respectable start as many northern members were willing to find an issue that all could agree upon, despite their anti-slavery leanings. However, sectional differences would eventually cause problems as northerners balked at supporting a section of the platform that implied endorsement of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Southerners insisted upon this section being included and this caused many northerners to leave the convention. Georgian members of the party attempted to make the best of it by claiming those who had bolted were abolitionists anyway and pointed out that this allowed the section in question to be adopted into the platform. If nothing else, the American Party gave anti-Democrats an alternative to stay in the Union with slavery intact. Because of

²⁸ Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 186-188.

this, the American Party was able to make in-roads in Georgia as the only viable alternative to the Democrats.²⁹

The Democrats, and even some old Whigs, attacked the Know-Nothings due to their secretive nature almost immediately. Georgia Democrats called the Know-Nothings in the state nothing but Whigs with a new name. They further were upset by the secretive nature of the organization and, perhaps due to the lack of Catholics in Georgia outside of Savannah, the Democrats were also opposed to the Know-Nothings' attacks on religious freedom. Even Alexander Stephens, despite the fact he hoped they could be a viable alternative to Democrats, found the Know-Nothings to be dangerous because he thought their political secrecy was anti-republican. The greatest charge thrown at the Know-Nothings, though, was their bearing on slavery. Stephens, Toombs, and James Gardner all stated that they felt the incoming foreigners the Know-Nothings battled against were a northern problem. Furthermore, they all felt that the Know-Nothing proposal to force immigrants to go through a longer naturalization process left them in a state between slaves and citizens. This limbo status blurred the distinction between slaves and whites and Stephens, for one, felt there was no place for a degraded class of white people within American society.³⁰

Perhaps the larger majority of southerners, though, simply saw the Know-Nothings as a group of northern abolitionists who hid behind nativist speeches. Some Democratic newspapers went as far as to warn southerners who might be taken in by the Know-Nothings to be wary of the party because they could be planning to launch abolitionist attacks, through southern members of the American Party, in the South.

²⁹ Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 185-186.

³⁰ Schott, *Alexander Stephens*, 196-198.

Democrats stressed that the defense of southern liberty and honor could only occur in the open, something the American Party still refused to do. All of this led many Georgians and southerners to believe that any northerner who was not a Democrat was an abolitionist. The rationale was that any northerner not willing to express his views in public must be up to something.³¹

Despite the debate regarding this new political party, much of the focus in 1855 turned toward events in Kansas. Ever since the Kansas-Nebraska Act had passed, the race had been on to settle Kansas and make it either a free or slave state. In the North, emigrant aid societies paid for non-slaveholders to settle the territory. Meanwhile, proslavery Missourians rallied to repel what they viewed as an abolitionist invasion. On March 30, 1855, thousands of Missourians crossed the border to vote in Kansas' territorial election. The legislature chosen by this fraudulent vote was overwhelmingly proslavery and quickly passed laws protecting slavery in the territory. These political ploys would occur continuously for several years and, along with intermittent outbreaks of violence, hastened the development of the Republican Party.

With the possibility of Kansas equalizing the ratio of free and slave states in the Union, southerners suddenly stepped up their claims for the territory. Many Georgians wanted the territory to eventually become a slave state, but they were willing to concede its loss to the North only if Congress did not interfere in the settlement process. The June 1855 state Democratic convention argued that if Congress did not admit Kansas as a state under the current proslavery legislature, it could lead to a disruption "of all the ties that bind the State of Georgia to the Union." A newspaper editor in Albany agreed, stating that the South could leave the Union if "those Northern States" continued to exhibit a

³¹ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 199-204.

“disposition to withhold from us our Constitutional rights.” The American Party jumped on the issue too, as they argued they could succeed in admitting Kansas as a slave state where the Democrats had surely failed. The thinking was that the South needed allies in the North and the American Party was more likely to be that ally than the Northern Democrats. Both sides in Georgia were offering protection for slavery and southern rights as the 1855 election for governor ramped up.³²

With the American Party unable to provide concrete proof that they could provide national political strength for Georgia and the South, Democrat Herschel Johnson won the governor’s office with 52 percent of the vote. While the vote was not overwhelming, Johnson had gained on his 1853 victory in every region of the state while his opponents had lost nearly 4,000 votes.³³ The loss in Georgia was an example of the American Party’s results in the South, where the Democrats crushed the Americans in every state except Tennessee.

The year 1856 began with crises for the South as a Republican won a protracted battle in Congress for the Speaker of the House. Further west, Kansas had been divided into two hostile camps: proslavery men who backed the legislature in Lecompton and anti-slavery, “free-soilers” who had established a second government under the Topeka constitution. Intermittent bouts of violence continued, with the pinnacle being the murder of five proslavery men at the hands of John Brown, a self-proclaimed holy warrior against slavery, and his followers in May. This led many in Kansas on both sides to believe civil war was at hand and citizen armies were formed. Columbus newspapers

³² James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: “Bleeding Kansas” and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1969), 79-92; Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 194; O’Donovan, “Transforming Work,” 96.

³³ For a fuller account of the voting, see Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 194-196.

reported in April that a group of residents had left for Kansas to bolster the proslavery forces. Politically, southerners, including Alexander Stephens, argued that the Lecompton government was the legitimate one because it had won the election; he argued that the free-soilers were simply sore losers. Republicans and most northerners found this laughable and claimed that the Lecompton government had obviously been elected illegally. Toombs offered a moderate solution which proposed a constitutional convention in Kansas under conditions that anti-slavery leaders viewed as fair. This was the greatest concessions a pro-slavery senator would offer, but Toombs' and other moderate solutions were killed by sectional animosity.³⁴

The threat of a Republican Presidential victory in 1856 actually led Georgians apart rather than together. The American Party, both nationally and in Georgia, chose Millard Fillmore as their candidate. In an odd turn of events, the Georgian American Party had broken from the national group but had still chosen Fillmore. The Georgians wrote up a proslavery platform they said Fillmore backed. The Democrats chose James Buchanan as their candidate and although many Georgia Democrats hoped Franklin Pierce would be chosen for a second term, Buchanan was seen as a moderate with southern sympathies. The threat of John C. Frémont and the Republicans was not enough to bring Georgians together, though, as the Fillmore and Buchanan supporters painted the opposing candidate as soft on slavery and no better than Frémont. The American Party supporters further argued that their Democratic opponents had been duped by their northern "allies" who were just as anti-slavery as the Republicans. Many

³⁴ Telfair, *History of Columbus*, 92; Schott, *Alexander Stephens*, 192-194; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 205-214.

American Party members hoped this type of rhetoric would split the Democratic Party apart before the election.³⁵

Such a split did not occur, however. Although Democrats both North and South had differing interpretations of what popular sovereignty meant, they avoided fighting over this. Instead, southern Democrats rallied behind the fact that northern Democrats, at least some, had helped win the Kansas-Nebraska fight. The Democrats also shot back at the Americans, claiming their opponents were without solutions to the problems they raged about. Many Georgia Democrats made a simpler appeal: the only way to defeat the Republicans and avert the crisis that would occur afterwards was for southerners to back the Democrats and Buchanan. Many moderates and former Whigs took the bait and agreed, announcing their support for Buchanan and deriding the American Party.³⁶

What resulted in Georgia was an easy victory for James Buchanan. The Democrat took home 57 percent of the vote and won 89 out of 118 counties. More impressively, Buchanan was even able to win many black belt areas that the Whigs had formerly dominated. The reality, though, was that Buchanan's overall victory had been fueled largely by the slave states and southerners realized that the threat of the Republican Party was certainly not over. The victory was important in Georgia because Buchanan immediately tabbed moderate, and often new, Democrats to positions of importance, including naming Howell Cobb Secretary of the Treasury. Old Southern Rights leaders like Herschel Johnson were infuriated by this turn of events and felt that Cobb and the like would betray southern rights to promote their own agendas.³⁷

³⁵ For the American-Democrat debates in Georgia, see Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 198-204.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Schott, *Alexander Stephens*, 233-243.

The *Dred Scott* decision would have repercussions as well. Chief Justice Roger Taney's decision was decidedly proslavery as he denied that persons of African descent could be citizens, declared the Missouri Compromise line unconstitutional, and asserted that Congress, and hence territorial legislatures, were powerless to act for or against slavery. This undercut the Republican platform and was in total opposition to the Northern Democrat interpretation of popular sovereignty. It also created an opportunity for sectional issues. Georgians were happy, claiming the Supreme Court had confirmed all of their doctrines of the past decade or more. Most northerners, however, were appalled at Taney's conclusions and thought it another example of the "slave power" controlling the government.³⁸

At the same time, things in Kansas were coming to a head. Thousands of settlers had poured into Kansas in 1857, further bolstering the free-soil majority. This led the Lecompton backers to attempt to ratify the state constitution as quickly as possible and without these new settlers having a say. The Buchanan administration urged all settlers to vote and warned the Lecompton men that any constitution not ratified by all the people would be rejected. The new territorial governor, Robert J. Walker, managed to alienate southerners when he told free-soil followers that Kansas did not have the climate or soil suitable for slavery in an attempt to encourage them to vote. This made southerners mad, but it also did not have the effect Walker hoped for. When voting occurred to elect delegates to ratify the constitution, nearly all free-soilers boycotted the election.³⁹

³⁸ For more on the decision, see Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁹ Kenneth M. Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 144-165.

At a June 1857 state convention, Georgia's Democrats denounced Walker and asked for his removal, but they did not implicate Buchanan and were still willing to give the President time to turn things around in Kansas. Some Democrats, such as Cobb, found the resolutions against Walker needless, silly, and damaging for the administration. However, the larger issue was what was at stake. If Congress did not admit Kansas under the Lecompton constitution, the Georgia Platform told the Empire State, and other southern states for that matter, that the proper recourse was secession. Some Georgians were beginning to feel that secession was inevitable at this point. Robert Hardaway, a Muscogee County citizen who had honeymooned in the North in 1857, found northerners to be "overbearing" and "often insulting" when discussing sectional differences. Hardaway was sure a civil war was inevitable and felt all he could do was to return "to my own people and await quietly the result."⁴⁰

The internal debates between Unionist and Southern Rights Democrats would spill over into the campaign for governor in 1857. The battle for governor would become another fight between Democrats and Americans debating who could maintain and protect southern rights more effectively. The Democrats, running Joseph E. Brown, and the Americans, who chose Benjamin H. Hill, both used Kansas as a campaign tool, arguing that their party could best deal with Walker and the situation in the territory. Georgia's voters believed the Democrats more, handing Brown just over 55 percent of the popular vote. Howell Cobb, though, was busy in the background warning Democrats that Kansas might not turn out the way southerners wanted it to. Territorial elections had been held in October and December and they proved that the state was most certainly ruled by free-soilers despite the presence of the Lecompton government. Northern

⁴⁰ Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 206-209; Quote from Edwards, "River City at War," 45.

Democrats were incensed when Buchanan accepted the Lecompton constitution anyway. The December election had been boycotted by free-soilers and Buchanan accepted that vote even though the October election, which had full participation by both factions, gave a clear majority to the anti-slavery faction. Buchanan hoped his acceptance of the pro-slavery constitution would win him support in the South. It did to some extent, but it ended up not being worth the support he ended up losing from the North. In the end, Kansas was not even accepted into the Union before secession occurred, but the whole debacle exacerbated the schism that had already begun in the Democratic Party.⁴¹

Events in 1858 and 1859 in Georgia centered largely on the Democrats as the American Party dwindled away and anti-Democrats searched for a way to band together. Georgia's Democrats, in one way or another, were all looking to retaliate against Stephen A. Douglas for coming out against the Lecompton constitution. Cobb also wanted to ostracize Douglas because the Georgian wanted his own chance at the Presidency in 1860. Others, like Senator Alfred Iverson from Columbus, were willing to destroy Douglas and the national party and cared little about it. At a July 1859 speech in Griffin, Iverson railed that "Slavery must be maintained—in the Union, if possible—out of it if necessary—peaceably if we may—forcibly if we must." Iverson and his ilk planned to build a party platform that Douglas would never support, thus denying the Illinois Senator the chance at the Presidency that he so desired. The Southern Rights men also thought this would bring the northern Democrats in line.⁴²

The October 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry by John Brown and his followers only strengthened the cause of men like Iverson. Brown had hoped to incite a slave

⁴¹ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 300-319.

⁴² Columbus *Daily Times*, July 20, 1859.

insurrection in the South, but instead he was arrested and saw several of his followers killed. Brown was hung, but he had a lasting effect on the South. White southerners were terrified and horrified by Brown's plot they were even more appalled by the reaction of some in the North who trumpeted Brown as a hero or martyr. A.J. Macarthy, editor of the Albany *Patriot*, felt that anyone who supported Brown should be hung "from the highest limb on the first tree" that could be found. All throughout the South, other plots were uncovered and conspirators were only run out of town if they were lucky. At least four men were expelled from Columbus within two months of Brown's raid. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of these expulsions were mere witch hunts directed against northerners and travelers. The plot by Brown and the subsequent reaction by those in the North had convinced many southerners of all political persuasions that this was all part of the Republican, abolitionist plot against the South. The editor of the Columbus *Enquirer* was sure that the sympathy for Brown was proof of "the inauguration of a bolder and better organized system of warfare by the Northern abolitionists against the peace and property of the Southern States." In Albany, the Albany Guards, which had been formed in 1858 in response to events in Kansas, had begun drilling in case abolitionists decided to invade the county. The Albany Guard urged the citizens of Dougherty County to examine their neighborhoods to prevent an uprising. The foundation had been set for not only further sectional animosity, but for the disintegration of the Democratic Party over the 1860 Presidential election.⁴³

The decade was witness to changing attitudes in the state of Georgia as a whole and in Dougherty, Muscogee, and Thomas counties. At the beginning of the decade,

⁴³ Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 360-380; Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, December 2, 1859; Edwards, "River City at War," 46-48; Editorial, Albany *Patriot*, November 3, 1859; O'Donovan, "Transforming Work," 97.

there were certainly supporters of secession in the state, as evidenced by men like Benning attending the Nashville Convention. However, the majority of Georgians were not willing to take such a step as secession and the Georgia Platform only confirmed this. When Benning ran for Congress in 1851, he was easily defeated by his Unionist opponent. Events accelerated at such a rapid pace, though, that just a few years later newspapers in Albany and Columbus were advocating secession if southern rights were not upheld. Perhaps the key, though, was the breakdown of an opposing political party to the Democrats as the 1850s progressed. With the crumbling of the national Whig Party in the middle of the decade, Democrats began to control places like Thomas County that they had not won since the 1840s. The lack of opposition allowed the Democrats in the latter part of the decade to advocate for disunion as a viable option to maintain southern rights. It appeared that the advocates of secession had a much more sympathetic audience than they did in 1850.

Chapter Two: The Counties

Thomas County typified Georgia's role in the South. The county bordered the new cotton kingdom of north Florida and was close to the black belt of Alabama. The county's large plantation system and agricultural base provided significant wealth and linked them, quite literally through the railroad, with the Atlantic seaboard. The county was formed in 1825 and was immediately seen as an area where agriculture could boom. By 1840, the county was engaged in agricultural production to the exclusion of nearly all other activities. Cotton had become the most important crop in the county and had allowed the plantation economy and slavery to flourish. One historian of the area has gone so far as to say that cotton allowed not only the large slaveholders to prosper, but also permitted yeomen farmers, lawyers, doctors, and merchants to succeed. Thomas County farmers also proved themselves to be industrious by growing sugar cane, sugar, wheat, rice, and corn. They were so successful in these endeavors that the county ranked second in sugar production, third in molasses, and seventh in rice production in the state on the eve of the Civil War.⁴⁴

With the county becoming nearly strictly agricultural, this led to a growth of slaveholders, both large and small. In the 1840s, the Whig Party became the dominant political party in Thomas County. As has previously been discussed, in Georgia the party, whose supporters tended to be led by plantation owners and large slaveholders, were avowed believers in the Union. They had a fierce rivalry with local Democrats, who venerated Andrew Jackson and were often the party of the yeomen farmers and non-slaveholders. The Democrats included large slaveholders in their party, but they often

⁴⁴ Rogers, *Ante-Bellum Thomas County*, 50-55.

appealed primarily to the “common man.”⁴⁵ With the crumbling of the national Whig Party in the early 1850s, the Democrats began to control the county. The former Whigs attempted to oppose the Democrats, even dabbling with the nativist Know-Nothing party but were never able to form a cohesive movement, much like the rest of Georgia. When an alternative to the Democrats cropped up in 1860 with the Constitutional Unionists, many Thomas County residents flocked to their side.

By 1860, Thomas County had 10,766 residents. Of this total, 6,244 residents were slaves, making Thomas County one of forty-three Georgia counties that had more slaves than whites. While the population of whites in the county had dropped by nearly 500 from 1850 to 1860, the number of slaves had grown by over 1,000. The number of slaveholders grew by 21 in that same time, with 403 Thomas County residents owning slaves. This was a scant 9% of the county’s white population, but interestingly enough, nearly 25% of the county’s slaveholders owned twenty or more slaves, thus placing them in the planter class. The majority of the people who owned slaves in the county owned ten or less and this was typical of the South and state. To say that the residents of Thomas County relied on slavery, or were at least affected by it, would be an understatement. Much like many other Georgians and Southerners, the residents of

⁴⁵ Debates rage over whether the institution of slavery brought whites together or caused class conflict. Some scholars have argued that the majority of whites had a vested interest in slavery and most non-slaveholders strove to become slaveholders. These scholars argue that the ideology of liberty, the potential of social mobility, and personal relationships between classes kept class divisions at a minimum and most class division did not occur until after the Civil War had raged for several years. For this view, see J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta’s Hinterlands* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998). *Plain Folk in a Rich Man’s War: Class and Dissent in Confederate Georgia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992) by David Williams and others argues that class division existed before the Civil War and secession and the war only fueled the fire.

Thomas County had a vested interest in the maintenance of the peculiar institution, economically and socially.⁴⁶

On the eve of the Civil War, perhaps no part of Georgia had better prospects of continued prosperity than Dougherty County. The county seat, Albany, was a thriving city and arguably the principal market place of southwest Georgia. The growth of the county and city had been much more rapid and consistent than any other county or city in the area. The local newspaper thought this had led to economic growth for its citizens, arguing that Dougherty was the wealthiest county in the United States, with an average capital of \$22,747 per voter. Unlike nearby Thomas County, though, this economic growth had not led to the growth of the Whig party in Dougherty. In fact, the majority of the citizens of the county were Democrats.⁴⁷

Dougherty County has its roots in the settlement of the town of Albany. The town was founded in what was then Baker County. Albany did not grow up by mistake. The town was a deliberate commercial venture, largely the undertaking of Nelson Tift. Born in Connecticut, Tift worked in the mercantile business and in March 1836 went to Hawkinsville after receiving an offer for his services. Just a few months later, in September, Tift and a group of men entered into an agreement to found a town on the west bank of the Flint River in Baker County. According to Tift, the town “was commenced in October, 1836, in an unbroken pine forest by the construction of two log

⁴⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States*. Washington, D.C., National Archives Microfilm Publications.

⁴⁷ WPA, *Historical Background of Dougherty County*, 1-2.

houses.” By January 1837, the town had been laid out and a steamboat made its first trip up the Flint River from Apalachicola, Florida.⁴⁸

The venture was not an immediate success. Growth was slow and life was simple. South Carolina planter James Henry Hammond visited Albany in 1838 while looking for places to expand his empire and found the town to be “a primitive place.”⁴⁹ This benefited Tift, though, who bought up stock from holders who became discouraged by the slow rate of growth and frontier lifestyle. However, things began to head upward as settlers began to pour in from older parts of Georgia, and the rest of the South, where the lands had become worn from years of cultivation. As late as 1854 new settlers were still constantly arriving, many of whom were wealthy planters from other parts of Georgia and South Carolina, not unlike Hammond. The rapid growth of Albany would lead to the formation of a new county.

In less than a decade, Albany had grown to have more than 1,000 residents. This growth was much more rapid than in other parts of the county and naturally led to clamoring for the creation of a new county. However, it was not until 1853 that Dougherty County was created, carved out of Baker County. Albany quickly became a chief rival to Thomasville for the economic leadership of the southernmost Georgia counties. With river trade, railroads, retail stores, and a tiny bit of manufacturing, Dougherty County had a strong economic base thanks to its county seat. However, just like Thomas County, Dougherty relied heavily on agriculture and slavery for its economic development. In fact, nearly 75 percent of the population (6,079 of the 8,295

⁴⁸ WPA, *Historical Background of Dougherty County*, 1-4; Nelson Tift, “Dougherty County Historical Address,” *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* (Vol. IV, Fall 1986), 3.

⁴⁹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *James Henry Hammond and the Old South: A Design for Mastery* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1982), 110.

residents) in 1860 were slaves and their numbers had risen by about 50 percent from 1854 to 1859. As was typical with the rest of the South, (and southwest Georgia for that matter), more than half the adult white males in Dougherty County did not own slaves. Of the 322 slaveholders in the county, more than half owned fewer than ten slaves each. This is not to say that Dougherty County did not have a large group of planters. In fact, 32 percent of all slaveholders in Dougherty were in the planter class, which was a very high proportion. Thus, much like most other counties throughout the South, the planters, who wielded economic power, made up a large percentage of those who held political power in Albany and the county at large.⁵⁰

The first sustained newspaper in the area, the *Albany Patriot*, belied the importance of the planter class in the area. Tift, by now one of the area's largest slaveholders, started the newspaper in 1845. Democratic in politics, the *Patriot* became the most important newspaper in the region, both socially and politically, with a circulation of more than one thousand after just two years. This Democratic political base would end up being vital during the secession crisis. As with Thomas County, the political background of the county ended up playing a large role in determining the support for or against secession.

Dougherty County certainly fit the mold that many histories have presented of the Lower South. The county's economy was clearly built around agriculture. In 1859, Dougherty County produced nearly 20,000 bales of cotton and almost 370,000 bushels of corn. According to census records, there were 189 farms in the county and they were comparatively large, with only fifteen farms of 50 acres or smaller. The land of the

⁵⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States*. Washington, D.C., National Archives Microfilm Publications.

county was proving to be as rich as early promoters such as Tift had promised and this had led to great economic prosperity for many and the boom of slavery. Thus, the citizens of the county most certainly had a vested interest in the political rumblings of the time, for their economic and social concerns.⁵¹

Located on the Chattahoochee River, Muscogee County was established by the state legislature in 1825. The county is located along the fall line of the Chattahoochee and was tabbed for development because of this. By 1828, the county's seat, Columbus, had been established and settlers began to pour in. Columbus' position on the fall line made the town an ideal location for trading and the river's water power held great promise for industrial development.⁵²

In many ways, Muscogee County was typical of Georgia and the Lower South. The county featured many large plantations and in 1860, 45% of the county's total population were slaves (57% when not counting Columbus).⁵³ Despite the industrialization that rapidly occurred in Muscogee, the larger area was dependent upon slave labor and cotton. Still, that industrialization did set Columbus apart. Noted traveler Frederick Law Olmsted thought Columbus was the largest industrial center south of Richmond, Virginia.⁵⁴ In fact, Columbus was called the "Lowell of the South" due to the cotton and textile mills located in the city.⁵⁵ The planters of the county saw industrial expansion as a positive and a new way to earn more on their capital, as well as providing

⁵¹ WPA, *Historical Background of Dougherty County*, 25.

⁵² See Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1978*, 1-10.

⁵³ Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1978*, 27.

⁵⁴ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States, with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856), 547.

⁵⁵ Lowell, Massachusetts was perhaps America's most thriving industrial center in the 19th century and was heavily engaged in textile production.

a market for their food crops.⁵⁶ By 1860, Muscogee County helped Georgia lead all southern states in the production of cotton cloth. The county ranked third in the South in the value of cotton textiles produced and the cotton mills were becoming the linchpin of the county's economy.⁵⁷

Barely three decades old by 1860, Muscogee County was the fourth largest county in the state (out of 132) with a total population of 16,584 residents. Columbus had grown to be the third largest city in Georgia with 9,039 residents.⁵⁸ Despite its relative youth, Muscogee County and Columbus had taken their place amongst the leaders of the entire South. One visitor described the area as "in a fair state of improvement and prosperity, quite an important cotton market and cotton manufacturing point."⁵⁹ The citizens of the county had been able to devote nearly all their energies to local concerns and this had allowed the county to prosper. However, as the 1850s progressed, residents found it increasingly difficult to remain insulated from the great national politics and issues of the day. Columbus and Muscogee County became a hotbed of activity as the 1850s progressed. The county had men such as Henry Benning that were in the forefront of the secessionist camp while other leaders like Hines Holt were amongst influential moderates in the state.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Richard W. Griffin, "The Origins of the Industrial Revolution in Georgia: Cotton Textiles, 1810-1865," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 42 (1958): 371.

⁵⁷ Edwards, "River City at War," 48-51; Stephen J. Goldfarb, "A Note on Limits to the Growth of the Cotton-Textile Industry in the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 48 (November 1982): 556.

⁵⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States*. Washington, D.C., National Archives Microfilm Publications.

⁵⁹ Robert S. Davis, Jr., "Georgia on the Eve of the Civil War: The Insurance Reports of C.C. Hine," *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South* XXI (Spring-Summer 1987): 53.

⁶⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Eighth Census of the United States*. Washington, D.C., National Archives Microfilm Publications.

Dougherty, Muscogee, and Thomas counties were all poised to take leadership roles in southwest Georgia as the 1860 election ramped up. In all three counties, there were certainly people who felt there was something to be gained by the election. Many more were sure there was something that could be lost if the results did not go the right way.

Chapter 3: “The serpent to tempt the Eve of the South to peace and quiet:”

The Election of 1860 and its Aftermath

The election of 1860 appeared to be pivotal to the future of the Union. The Democratic Party had come close to fracturing in 1856 and with the ire on both sides that had sprung up in the years since, many felt there was a real possibility that the only national party remaining could dissolve. No matter their political persuasion, the people of Georgia feared the possibility of a Republican victory, especially if men like William Seward, who was viewed as especially dangerous after his “irrepressible conflict” speech of 1858, were chosen as the party’s candidate. However, just as in 1856, the threat that all Georgians saw in the Republicans was not enough to unify as one to attempt to stave off a Republican presidential victory. Instead, the political bickering that had been occurring throughout the 1850s would continue.

Before the national Democratic Party had a chance to split, the Democrats in Georgia once again were fighting among themselves. With campaigning from Howell Cobb’s supporters, the Democratic legislators called for a December 1859 party convention, instead of the previously agreed March 1860 convention. Not surprisingly, the December convention recommended Cobb for President and was met with ire from Cobb’s enemies. Old Southern Rights foes continued with plans for the March meeting and planned on ignoring the recommendations of the December delegates. Fearing that he may lose the nomination, Cobb agreed to the March convention. Cobb’s supporters urged county politicians to choose delegates who would back up the December decision. What emerged was another battle between the Unionist and Southern Rights wings of the party.

The in-fighting quickly led nowhere. Unable to agree on almost anything, the convention at first voted to reconvene at the national convention in Charleston. A day later, Cobb supporters attempted to get the convention to recognize the resolutions of the December convention. This was defeated and the Georgia delegates would go to Charleston with no instructions and no candidate for President. Cobb was so frustrated that he withdrew his name from consideration.

Upon arriving in Charleston in April 1860, the Georgia delegation was divided over what the Democratic platform should be and who should be the Democrat's choice for President. Henry Benning was the chairman of the delegation and was opposed to Stephen Douglas being the candidate. Benning also wanted the Democratic platform to include language that would endorse congressional protection of slavery in the territories. Unionist Hiram Warner disagreed with this, not wanting to drive off northern Democrats with the platform and risk splitting the party.

The Democrats tackled the platform issue first. The platform committee was controlled by southerners and offered a platform that endorsed congressional protection of slavery in the territories. Supporters of Douglas opposed this and asked that the Democrats go back to their 1856 platform which left the powers of Congress open to interpretation. After debating for a week, the convention adopted the platform Douglas' supporters advocated. Every Lower South delegation, with the exception of Georgia, withdrew from the convention. The Georgia delegation voted to leave the convention the next day, but Warner, James L. Seward, and two others stayed at the convention, although they could not vote. With the whole Lower South gone, a two-thirds majority

could not be had for any candidate and the Democrats chose to reconvene in June in Baltimore.

The reaction to the withdrawal was mixed in Georgia. In Columbus, Peyton Colquitt, the editor of the *Daily Times*, enthusiastically endorsed the withdrawal, but John H. Martin, the editor of the more moderate *Daily Enquirer*, thought the walkout meant dire consequences for the Union and had serious misgivings. For his part, Benning addressed a meeting of the Muscogee County Democratic Party and supported the action of the seceding delegates. Dougherty was the first county in Georgia to approve the action of the seceding delegates. That did not mean that the split did not cause concern. A grand jury in Albany noted that “the condition of our government and relations existing between the States of this Confederacy are of such a nature as to excite apprehensions and forebodings of the most disastrous consequences. “ That being said, this same jury recommended “our fellow-citizens to stand strictly upon principle and upon the law, but upon no promises or by no contract to the surrender of any of our just rights under the Constitution as decided by the Supreme Court of the United States.” Columbus attorney James Ramsey went a step further, advocating for immediate secession. Many Georgians, though, feared that the split of the Democrats would lead to a Republican victory in the Presidential election and were not as eager for secession as Ramsey.⁶¹

Most Democrats were not willing to advocate secession but opposed Douglas’ nomination. Howell Cobb thought Douglas’ candidacy was the main impediment to northern and southern Democrats coming together. Robert Toombs thought the southern delegates had erred in focusing so narrowly against Douglas that they left themselves no choice but to walk out and potentially ruin the party. However, Toombs thought at this

⁶¹ WPA, *Historical Background of Dougherty County*, 26; Edwards, “River City at War,” 48-49.

point there was no turning back: Douglas could not be the candidate and the platform had to protect slavery. Toombs, though, was willing to let the party dissolve if northern Democrats could not understand the southern position on slavery. This left newer converts to the party like Alexander Stephens aghast. Stephens felt Democrats should stand by congressional nonintervention, thus making the fight over the platform moot. In this thought, Stephens was backed up by Herschel Johnson and Joseph Brown, who both thought that nonintervention had been agreed upon by the South as the policy to follow.

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Stephens, though, was more concerned about what the dissolution of the national Democratic party could do. Even though Stephens had secretly hoped for such an event to occur when he quietly backed the American party, he now feared that the break-up of the party would hand the Presidential election to the Republicans. What further angered Stephens, Brown, and older Democratic members such as Eugenius Nisbet was that it appeared the southern Democrats were all arguing over policy. Nisbet felt arguing over abstractions could leave the party in ruin. Brown feared men like Toombs were destroying the party over personal ambitions. The critics of the Charleston walk-out did not disagree that southern rights should be maintained, but the expediency of demanding a specific platform or else seemed foolish.⁶³

In this atmosphere, the state convention met on June 4 to select delegates for the national convention at Baltimore. The majority of the delegates, led by Cobb, approved a platform that essentially asked for the same national platform the southerners advocated in Charleston. Men like Toombs rejoiced, thinking either the northerners would bow

⁶² Carey, *Parties, Slavery, and the Union...*, 221-222.

⁶³ Ibid.

down or the party was not worth saving. The dissenters did not go down without a fight, though. Around seventy men, proclaiming themselves national Democrats, organized their own convention and appointed their own delegation, including Hiram Warner, Herschel Johnson, James L. Seward, and James Gardner, to go to Baltimore and repudiate any platform that had anything to do with congressional interference.⁶⁴

In the end, neither Georgia delegation sat at the convention in Baltimore. The convention recommended seating delegates from both of Georgia's conventions. However, when the majority of the Democratic convention voted to seat national Democratic delegations from Alabama and Louisiana, most southern delegates withdrew to create a new convention. Nineteen states were represented at this new convention and chose Kentucky's John C. Breckinridge, the current Vice President, as their candidate. The delegates who had stayed at the national convention, mostly northerners, chose Douglas on a nonintervention platform. Georgia's Herschel Johnson was chosen as Douglas' running mate. The split of the national Democratic party was official.⁶⁵

In May, a national convention was held by the new Constitutional Union party, a coalition of former Whigs, Know-Nothings, and others that felt politicians had created the sectional controversy and the slavery issues could be resolved by not discussing them. The convention chose former Whig John Bell of Tennessee as their candidate for President. Bell would run on an ambiguous platform that essentially called for the preservation of the Union and devotion to the Constitution. While some of Georgia's non-Democrats balked at the idea of a party with no real platform, many others flocked to the Constitutional Unionists as the only alternative to the Democrats. Whatever their

⁶⁴ Crutcher, "Disunity and Dissolution," 87-90.

⁶⁵ Schott, *Alexander Stephens*, 301-304.

thoughts focused on the party or the platform, Georgia's backers of the Constitutional Unionists could rally against the Democrats, who they felt were the cause of the country's problems. The tension between the Democrats and their opponents had been evident throughout the 1850s but was at its height during the 1860 campaign.⁶⁶

With the fracture of the Democratic Party, many in Georgia felt the contest could only end in disunion. The Republicans may be able to win the election thanks to the divided nature of America's only national party. While Stephen A. Douglas had some support in the South, the contest in all three counties, and most of Georgia, was largely between Breckinridge and Bell. Supporters of Bell pointed out that the Constitutional Unionists were the only true national party and that the Southern Democrats were just as bad as Republicans because Breckinridge supporters were viewed as radicals. Bell supporters declared non-Douglas Democrats secessionists and "enemies of the country", linking them with radicals such as William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama. An "Old Whig" wrote that the reason the "country was in trouble" was "old...political parties have preyed on its vitals and brought it to the verge of dissolution." In this writer's estimation, the Constitutional Unionists were a breath of fresh air compared to the old parties. In Muscogee County, supporters of Bell pointed toward Henry Benning as evidence that the Democrats were simply hell bent on disunion. . Some supporters claimed the fire-eaters aligned with Breckinridge leaders to purposely split the Democratic Party along sectional lines to ensure a Lincoln victory, which would pave the way for secession. Constitutional Unionists in Georgia were highly confident that enough men were opposed to secession

⁶⁶ Crutcher, "Disunity and Dissolution," 87-90.

that playing the disunion card would work in their favor.⁶⁷ Ultimately, the Constitutional Unionists argued that slavery was best kept safe in the Union and a vote for Breckinridge would put the peculiar institution in peril.

Oddly enough, Breckinridge supporters sang the same tune. The Southern Democrats argued that they were the best equipped to defeat Lincoln because they were the only true national party, despite having severed ties with the northern wing of the party. Furthermore, most Democratic newspaper editors were quick to point out that they were not disunionists. In fact, they claimed they wanted to preserve the Union, but they were willing to threaten secession if need be. The threat of disunion to protect southern rights had to be kept visible but not to the point that a vote for Breckinridge was a vote for disunion.⁶⁸ The Albany *Patriot's* editor stated that the break-up of the Democrats was due to “the friends of Mr. Douglas” both North and South. With Breckinridge and Lane leading the way, the Union “might be saved.”⁶⁹ Despite some Democrats’ willingness to claim secession was the only option at this point, the party leadership realized that moderate voters were the ones who had to be won.

A large meeting at the courthouse in Albany endorsed the nomination of Breckinridge. In October, two thousand citizens of Dougherty County attended a great mass meeting and barbecue in support of the southern Democrat that featured speeches by Robert Toombs and Alfred Iverson. A man calling himself “Dougherty” wrote to the Albany newspaper to say he was backing Breckinridge because Bell and his supporters were attempting “to mislead the people” regarding their ability to protect southern rights.

⁶⁷ Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, 12-15; “Old Whig” to editor, *Savannah Republican*, July 20, 1860.

⁶⁸ For a thorough discussion, see Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, 11-17.

⁶⁹ Editorial, *Albany Patriot*, October 25, 1860.

The fiery editor of the *Patriot* was so confident the southern Democrat would win the election that he offered to bet \$10,000 that Breckinridge would be in the White House come 1861. Democratic leaders throughout the state were perhaps not willing to bet money on it, but were confident of a Breckinridge victory.⁷⁰

One thing that supporters of Bell, Breckinridge, and even Douglas had in common was to portray their candidate as the best protector of southern rights. Prominent Columbus attorney Absalom H. Chappell publicly spoke in defense of Douglas because he thought the Illinois Senator was a staunch defender of southern rights and the best hope of defeating Abraham Lincoln.⁷¹ Peyton Colquitt, editor of the *Columbus Daily Times*, told an audience in Dalton that the state's only hope was to choose Breckinridge because only he would guard their rights. John Martin, editor of the *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, heard of Colquitt's speech and retorted that only Bell truly represented the South because most southerners were moderates.⁷² Thomas County planter and lawyer J.R. Alexander delivered, according to one newspaper account, a "convincing, eloquent, patriotic, and conservative" speech that advised citizens of Thomas County to vote for the Bell ticket.⁷³ A.J. Macarthy, editor of the Albany *Patriot*, argued that Breckinridge was the only candidate that would allow "Southern rights" to triumph over "Northern fanaticism."⁷⁴

In the final weeks before election day, rumors circulated that the Douglas and Bell men would create a "fusion" party to prevent a Lincoln victory. Bell supporters, especially, wrote proposals to unite the three sides into one, thinking that would be the

⁷⁰ "Dougherty" to editor, Albany *Patriot*, November 1, 1861; O'Donovan, "Transforming Work," 99.

⁷¹ Columbus *Daily Enquirer*, June 15, 19, 1861.

⁷² Edwards, "River City," 52-53.

⁷³ Editor, "Instructions to our Legislators," *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 7, 1860.

⁷⁴ Editor, Albany *Patriot*, November 1, 1861.

best way to defeat Lincoln. Bell's campaign had not been as energetic or effective as Breckinridge's in Georgia and Bell's supporters hoped the formation of a fusion party would at least allow one candidate to beat the Republicans. The Breckinridge supporters scoffed at the idea and opposed it unequivocally. They were sure that this was just an attempt by their old foes of trying a new tactic to defeat their candidate.⁷⁵ Ultimately no such fusion party occurred in Dougherty, Muscogee, or Thomas counties or anywhere else in Georgia.

The high point of the campaign in Muscogee County occurred on November 1 when Douglas and Alexander Stephens visited Columbus. Douglas had embarked on a southern tour to strengthen the cause of Union and challenge the power of southern secessionists. Douglas sought to combat disunion as he realized he would probably trail both Breckinridge and Bell in many parts of the South. Though Douglas did not have many supporters in Muscogee County, a large crowd gathered to hear him speak, but most remained largely unenthusiastic. One local paper argued that most people "generally turned out to hear Mr. Stephens" the next night at Temperance Hall.⁷⁶ Reaction to Stephens' anti-secession speech was mixed. The *Daily Times* thought it was a betrayal of southern rights and deconstructed his speech point-by-point while the *Enquirer* thought it a "triumph of intellect and patriotism over mad, prejudiced and excited sectionalism."⁷⁷

After much discussion, debate, and rancor, election day arrived on November 6. Despite all the angry editorials and hot-tempered speeches of the previous weeks and

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, 16-17. For examples of the Democratic response to the proposed fusion, see Columbus *Daily Times*, November 1, 3, 1860.

⁷⁶ Editor, Columbus *Weekly Times*, November 5, 1860.

⁷⁷ Robert Walter Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 787; Editor, Columbus *Daily Times*, November 2, 1860; Edwards, "River City," 54.

months, voting went smoothly in Georgia. With their ballots fresh in the box, both sides called for all southerners to join together against “the Abolition party.” After all, while Southerners may have been divided over their support of Bell, Douglas, or Breckinridge, at least one Columbus editor thought they all “have been united in their opposition to this...unconstitutional organization [Republican party]” and past “minor differences should cease.” While “we fear that the vote yesterday has proclaimed our enemies the victors” the people of Georgia could still unify against this enemy and let bygones be bygones.⁷⁸ The fiery editor of the *Albany Patriot* agreed, arguing that all Georgians should discard “passion and prejudice” in favor of “patriotism.” Of course, by patriotism, the editor clearly meant to the state, not the Union.⁷⁹ *The Corner Stone* did not care who won the election. Editor James Bethune was “in favor of going out whether he [Lincoln] is elected or not.”⁸⁰ A convention in Thomas County certainly disagreed with Bethune. The convention enacted a resolution that clearly stated that while slavery should be saved and the North should not meddle with Southern institutions, secession was not the answer and slavery was safer in the Union.⁸¹

When the returns came in, Breckinridge had managed a slim victory over Bell. The Southern Democrat garnered 48.8 percent of the vote in the state while Bell tallied 40.3 percent. Douglas finished a distant third with 10.9 percent.⁸² Despite the overwhelming support of the local newspapers, Breckinridge managed an even slimmer victory in Muscogee County, with 769 votes to 767 votes for Bell. Douglas captured 160

⁷⁸ Editor, *Columbus Daily Times*, November 7, 1860.

⁷⁹ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, November 8, 1860.

⁸⁰ Donald E. Reynolds, *Editors Make War: Southern Editors in the Secession Crisis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), 123.

⁸¹ Rogers, *Ante-Bellum Thomas County*, 118.

⁸² Ollinger Crenshaw, *The Slave States in the Election of 1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), 298.

votes in Muscogee. Thomas County was nearly as close, with Bell holding a 37-vote advantage over Breckinridge. When votes for Douglas were added to the mix, the “conservative” candidates had beaten Breckinridge by 71 votes in Thomas County, a relatively huge margin for a county that had voted heavily Democratic in the late 1850’s. Lucius C. Bryan, editor of the decidedly pro-Bell *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, crowed that the Bell victory was one of “conservatism over disunionism” and showed that “the intelligence of the people triumphed.” What Bryan did not mention is that Thomas County’s voters had returned to their roots. With an actual alternative to the Democrats, Thomas County’s former Whigs and Americans had carried the day. Bryan was so confident that the Bell victory would end the threat of secession he pledged to stop all of the political news and pay more attention to literary endeavors. Breckinridge had won Dougherty County easily, with 372 votes to 277 for Bell and just 26 for Douglas. A.J. Macarthy was pleased with the “glorious triumph” of the Southern Democrat and was confident Breckinridge would win the state by 10,000 votes. Macarthy was probably wishing someone had taken that bet he had proposed a few months earlier.⁸³

An important facet of Georgia’s political situation was revealed by the election campaign. The disunity of the state was clear. All sides had argued that their opponents should forego divisiveness and back one candidate. However, attempts to unify against the Republicans were ineffective. This was certainly true in Muscogee, Dougherty, and Thomas counties, where Constitutional Unionists and Democrats were deeply suspicious not only of the intentions of the Republicans, but also of their local foes. Partisanship in

⁸³ Editor, “Election News,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 7, 1860; Editor, *Albany Patriot*, November 8, 1860.

Georgia was deeply ingrained and not even the threat, real or perceived, that the Republicans posed was enough to unite the political parties of Georgia against Lincoln.⁸⁴

Within a few days of the election, before the returns had been published or were known, it was still thought that Abraham Lincoln would be the next President. While this was not entirely unexpected, many residents of the three counties were still stunned by the result. Showing his disgust the victory of the Republicans, the editor of the *Albany Patriot* declared that anyone who circulated Northern newspapers or uttered pro-Lincoln statements should be hanged “to the highest limb on the first tree.”⁸⁵ Albany lawyer William E. Smith thought the outcome of the election left the South in “the hands of men hostile to the enjoyment of Southern Rights.”⁸⁶ While outrage like that of the editor of the *Patriot* occurred, most people of Georgia were left almost speechless the first days after Lincoln’s victory. This quickly gave way to intense debate about what the proper course of action should be for Georgia and the entire South. On average in the state, Breckinridge supporters favored immediate secession while Bell and Douglas supporters took a more cautious approach. Democrats felt Lincoln’s moderate image had been purposely designed to lull the South into complacency. Bell and Douglas supporters were quick to acknowledge the possible dangers of a Lincoln victory but argued a Republican administration could be tolerated.⁸⁷

For secessionists, there was little to discuss. Most of them had been advocating the disintegration of the Union prior to Lincoln’s victory and only stepped up their calls

⁸⁴ For a good overview of Georgia’s newspaper editors’ unwillingness to unite, see J. Ford Risley, “Georgia’s Civil War Newspapers: Partisan, Sanguine, Enterprising” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1996), 38-40.

⁸⁵ WPA, *Historical Background of Dougherty County*, 26.

⁸⁶ Draft of a speech [1864], William E. Smith Papers, Special Collections Library, Duke University.

⁸⁷ For a full discussion, see Crutcher, “Disunity and Dissolution,” 102-105.

for disunion. The editor of the *Daily Times* was sure that Lincoln would tell southerners of “his great love for us...but he is the serpent to tempt the Eve of the South to peace and quiet.” There was only one thing to do:

Let us not be deceived. Let us not be worshippers of a Union, whose spirit, whose life, whose vitality has departed! Let us act like men. Let us be equals. Let us erect, if necessary, a government for ourselves, where the light of liberty will forever shine, and where the demon of abolitionism will never raise his head.⁸⁸

In this spirit of resistance, militia companies were being raised in Columbus, including the Southern Guard, which was led by arch-secessionists Benning and F.W. Dillard. Dillard also chaired a public meeting on November 9 at Temperance Hall. The Hall was “filled to its utmost capacity” and the unanimous view was that Georgians should not submit to Republican rule.⁸⁹ The speakers urged “Southern men...to resist Black Republican domination.” The *Times* bragged that the “patriotic fire, which now burns so brightly in Columbus, could warm with its heat and cheer with its light every city, village and fireside in our noble state.”⁹⁰ As far as these men were concerned, party ties needed to be cut so that all southerners could unite against the threat of Republican rule.

Not long after Lincoln’s election, the debate quickly became one-sided in Dougherty County. At a meeting in the southern part of the county, a group of planters and other citizens resolved that due to the election of men “whose avowed purpose it is, and who are pledged to wage an ‘irrepressible conflict’ with Southern rights, and with that institution which is the foundation of Southern prosperity and Southern society,” it was in Georgia’s best interest to call a convention “to act in the defence [sic] of her

⁸⁸ Editor, Columbus *Daily Times*, November 8, 1860.

⁸⁹ Editor, Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 12, 1860.

⁹⁰ Editor, Columbus *Daily Times*, November 12, 1860.

interests and her outraged honor.” The fact that the men purposely quoted Republican leader William Seward surely hammered the point home for Dougherty secessionists. The editor of the Albany *Patriot* urged “resisting the administration of Lincoln” and promised that even if every other southern newspaper stood “up for submission,” he would stand “immovable” and continue to advocate “resistance.”⁹¹ A meeting held at the Albany courthouse declared that “the State of Georgia ought not to submit to the election of Lincoln and Hamlin, pledged as they are, to carry out the policy of the Black Republican party.”⁹² Planter Benjamin C. Yancey, the brother of William Lowndes Yancey, agreed, insisting that “immediate secession” was “the only proper mode” of response from Georgia.⁹³

Not everyone in southwest Georgia agreed with Benning, Dillard, Yancey and the like. The editor of the *Columbus Daily Sun* was not willing to make the leap for secession just yet. Surely, the election of the Black Republicans was “to be deprecated by every lover of the Union and good government.” However, since the Republicans did not have a majority in Congress, it was felt there was “hope for the future” because Lincoln was “powerless for evil” plans to come to fruition.⁹⁴ At a mass meeting in Thomasville on November 17, the majority of the citizens that attended felt a state convention should convene to decide Georgia’s fate, but advised such a convention to take a cautious approach. After all, “it requires many long years...to build up a nation; but a very *few days* to reduce it to anarchy, revolution and ruin.”⁹⁵ Even formerly radical

⁹¹ Editor, Albany *Patriot*, November 15, 1860.

⁹² WPA, *Historical Background of Dougherty County*, 26-27.

⁹³ James S. Hamilton to Sarah Yancey, November 29, 1860, in the Benjamin C. Yancey Papers #2594, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁹⁴ Editor, Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 8, 1860.

⁹⁵ “Thomas County Mass Meeting,” Thomasville *Southern Enterprise*, November 21, 1860.

Thomas County Congressman Peter E. Love decided to chart this course. Love had disrupted a “Friends of the Union” meeting in Thomasville, the county’s seat and largest town, in 1850. He disagreed with the South accepting the Compromise of 1850 and interjected his views upon the Unionist meeting.⁹⁶ Now, ten years later, he backed the resolutions of the citizens calling for moderation. Furthermore, Love was the only Democratic Congressman from Georgia who did not speak out in favor of immediate secession. Love believed the South should at least attempt to save the Union and would “cheerfully” accept constitutional guarantees of Southern rights instead of secession.⁹⁷

Despite Love’s willingness to go against party lines, this was certainly not the norm. The presidential election campaign had shown that Georgia had partisanship and divisiveness that could color post-election politics. Some disunionists feared that this partisanship could lead anti-secessionists to form a Southern Republican party.⁹⁸ They further felt that secession was the only way to unify the South. The impetus was on Georgia’s conservative leaders to prevent immediate secession.

This partisanship and divisiveness did not go away despite the somewhat hollow calls for unity. Democrats and former Whigs, or at least Bell and Douglas supporters, simply took on new labels: immediate secessionists and cooperationists. Immediate secessionists were in favor of their state seceding without waiting for other southern states to do likewise. Cooperationists were harder to define. Some wanted to simply

⁹⁶ Williams and others, *Plain Folk in a Rich Man’s War*, 186. For more information on Georgia’s role in the Compromise of 1850, see Shryock, *Georgia and the Union in 1850*.

⁹⁷ Peter E. Love to Editors, *Savannah Morning News*, December 24, 1860.

⁹⁸ This is the basic thesis of Johnson’s *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*. He argues that despite anti-secessionist feeling by the common man, Georgia’s state convention voted for secession because the elite men at the convention were afraid of the political and social divisions within the state that could lead to Republicans getting a foothold in the state. Some other studies, notably J. William Harris’ *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society* have argued against Johnson’s interpretation. Harris argues that both slaveholders and non-slaveholders had ties and these did not break down until after the war began. Hence, both sides supported disunion and it was not a vast conspiracy by slaveholders and elites.

delay secession until other Southern states could come together and unify to make an attempt at cooperation. Others were opposed to secession except as a last resort. Still others in the cooperationist camp were unconditional Unionists.⁹⁹ What united cooperationists, though, was their contempt for immediate secessionists. They may not agree on what course the South should take, but they certainly did not agree with immediate secessionists charting the course.

Immediate secessionists tended to be better organized based on their more unified position and came out firing against the cooperationists. In fact, they did not call their opponents cooperationists, but submissionists. A.J. Macarthy, editor of the *Albany Patriot*, urged southerners that would fall for “the sweet lullaby of the Union” that the election of Lincoln would leave the South to submit to the North. Southerners ran the risk of being slaves to the northerners and anyone who was willing to admit that submission to the North was “Treason to the soil of his nativity” should let their “motto be ‘Resistance!’” The “rallying cry” that should “be heard from the mountains to the seaboard...’Lincoln SHALL NOT BE PRESIDENT!’”¹⁰⁰

In Thomas County, cooperationists bristled at the label and Lucius Bryan was quick to point out that they simply opposed taking a “fatal leap into the abyss of disunion” and thought it “cowardly” to give up their rights in the Union without a fight. An editor in Macon argued the real submissionists were South Carolina’s Democratic senators, who had both vacated their seats, and had reduced the majority in Congress

⁹⁹ For a discussion of the viewpoints of cooperationists, see Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, 7-8 and 25-27.

¹⁰⁰ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, November 22, 1860.

opposed to the Republicans.¹⁰¹ Many cooperationists further argued that the South need not secede. After all, their best protection was in the Union since Lincoln and the Republicans could do nothing to affect the South for they would be protected by the Supreme Court, the majority in the Senate, and the majority in the House of Representatives. The Republicans did not have a majority in the Supreme Court or Congress and many cooperationists argued that would keep Lincoln and his followers from infringing upon southern institutions. They argued the South was best served by staying in the Union and preventing the Republicans from having their way.

By mid-November, Governor Joseph E. Brown was advocating a state convention to decide Georgia's course of action. Brown called for immediate action from the state legislature and the governor preferred secession. On November 21, the legislators ordered a convention to meet on January 16, 1861 to decide Georgia's fate in the Union. The legislature set January 2 as the date for the election of convention delegates and adopted a resolution urging the formation of a Southern Confederacy.¹⁰² The campaigning for delegates to the convention would bring the disagreement and debate back to Georgia.

Almost immediately, the factions that had fought over the election of 1860 were now fighting over the election of delegates to the convention. The names had changed from Democrats and Constitutional Unionists to immediate secessionists and cooperationists, but the game remained the same. The cooperationist editor of the *Columbus Enquirer* questioned whether a state had "any right to quietly secede from the

¹⁰¹ Editorial, "Secessionists or Submissionists," *Macon Citizen* as quoted in *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 21, 1860.

¹⁰² N.B. Beck, "The Secession Debate in Georgia, November, 1860-January, 1861," in *Antislavery and Disunion, 1858-1861*, ed. J. Jeffery Auer (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 335-336.

Union?”¹⁰³ One of the *Columbus Sun*’s two editors felt there were “remedies within the Union of sufficient strength to cure all the ills we complain of.”¹⁰⁴ Lucius Bryan of the *Southern Enterprise* in Thomasville suggested that the delegates from the county should be “compromise men” who would oppose “all rashness and haste.” These men needed to be “cautious and moderate” and having reasonable men from both parties would be ideal, but not necessary.¹⁰⁵ Peyton Colquitt, editor of the *Columbus Times*, spoke for many in arguing that secession was the remedy for the South, if nothing else than for self-preservation.¹⁰⁶ The divided nature of the citizens was further exemplified when R.J. Yarrington, the other co-editor of the *Columbus Sun*, wrote an editorial explaining that recent cooperationist editorials in the paper by his co-editor differed “widely and radically” from his own views of immediate secession and future editorials would be clearly labeled as to who the author was to avoid confusion.¹⁰⁷ A.J. Macarthy, of the *Albany Patriot*, thought Georgia had no choice but to choose secessionist delegates because the alternative was submission to the North. “Submission is slavery,” Macarthy wrote in an editorial, “and slavery is worse than death.”¹⁰⁸

Letters to the editor poured in to the county’s newspapers, describing differing points of view. “John Hancock” wrote to the *Sun* to express the cooperationist point of view. While stating that he was in favor of secession if necessary, Hancock disagreed with the notion of separate state action. Instead, Hancock thought the South’s only chance at success was if the Southern states cooperated. As such, Hancock thought the

¹⁰³ Editor, *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, November 14, 1860.

¹⁰⁴ Editor, *Columbus Sun*, November 24, 1860.

¹⁰⁵ Editor, “State Convention,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 28, 1860.

¹⁰⁶ Editor, *Columbus Daily Times*, November 16, 1860.

¹⁰⁷ Editor, *Columbus Daily Sun*, November 22, 1860;

¹⁰⁸ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, December 13, 1860.

state convention was a waste of time as Georgia would likely secede by herself and “without any regard to what other States may do.”¹⁰⁹ Still worse was the fact that immediate secessionists assumed that all of the Lower South states had enough support to secede individually. If this belief was wrong, it could lead to disaster in Hancock’s opinion. Hancock was simply asking for secessionists to “stop and deliberate.”¹¹⁰ For this writer, the only chance at success was through cooperation.

The vast majority of letter writers in Muscogee County disagreed with Hancock. One citizen felt that the South must secede for “her final independence, glory and freedom.”¹¹¹ Waiting for other states to join in would be folly because “each sovereign state alone has the right to [secede] for itself, but not for another.” While Georgia could counsel with other Southern states, she could only act for herself. The thing that bothered immediate secessionists was the notion of not only waiting on other states to act, but also perhaps refusing to act altogether because one of the “slave States” would “submit to Lincoln’s rule.”¹¹² One of the major rallying cries was that cooperation was “tantamount to...submission.” Several writers pointed out that Muscogee County had had three large meetings and all three had unanimously favored “*immediate, separate, State secession.*”¹¹³ Dr. John Slappey wrote to the Albany *Patriot* upset that the North had “disregarded” southern rights and urged Dougherty and nearby Baker County residents to “never submit” to Republican rule.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ “John Hancock,” Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 26, 1860.

¹¹⁰ “John Hancock,” Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 28, 1860.

¹¹¹ Columbus *Daily Times*, November 20, 1860.

¹¹² Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 27, 1860.

¹¹³ Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 27, 1860.

¹¹⁴ Dr. John G. Slappey, Albany *Patriot*, November 29, 1860.

A typical moderate approach was provided by an author who urged the people of Georgia to choose delegates without party ties to the convention and to trust these men to decide Georgia's fate "in the Union if they can, out of the Union if they must." Most importantly, the rights of Georgia and her sister southern states "*must* and *WILL* be secured."¹¹⁵ While claiming a spirit of harmony, it became obvious that party ties did matter to many with the fate of the state, and country, on the line. Indicative of this was a letter to the editor of the *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, written by someone calling themselves "Decision." The writer stated that "Breckinridge men were moving everywhere to have secession" and that Union men would have to show up and vote or else the convention would declare for secession "contrary to the wishes" of the people.¹¹⁶ This argument became popular with many cooperationists as they sought to rally what they thought were the vast majority of moderate Georgians.

On November 24, Columbus held a large pro-secession rally that featured artillery fire, 500 "minutemen," closed stores, and an atmosphere like that of a "holiday scene."¹¹⁷ The demonstration also featured spectators and participants wearing a blue cockade, the recognized symbol of secession.¹¹⁸ Many pro-secession speeches were given, including one by former Douglas supporter Absalom Chappell. However, the speaker that most enthralled everyone was Alabamian William L. Yancey, considered perhaps the foremost spokesman for Southern independence. Yancey told the crowd that "secession was right and peaceable" and the South should secede before Lincoln took office on March 4.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Columbus *Daily Sun*, November 21, 1860.

¹¹⁶ "Decision," "To the Union Party of Georgia," *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 28, 1860.

¹¹⁷ Columbus *Daily Times*, November 26, 1860.

¹¹⁸ A cockade is typically a hat, or a knot of ribbons attached to a hat, of distinctive colors to show the allegiance of the wearer to a particular cause, political party, and the like; Edwards, "River City," 56-57.

¹¹⁹ Columbus *Daily Times*, November 27, 1860.

Yancey had a friendly audience as the people of Muscogee County seemed to be favoring immediate secession. Cooperationists were also struggling for support in Dougherty County, but Thomas County moderates had reason to hope as November came to a close. All knew that the month ahead would be one of great importance.

Chapter 4: “Cooperative action is yet practicable:”

The Campaign to Elect Delegates

As December began, campaigning for the delegate spots at the state convention dominated discussion in all three counties. Secessionists like R.J. Yarrington felt that “disunion is a matter of time and preparation” and were unwilling to “accept compromise.” Again, the charge of submission to the North was thrown at cooperationists, who were allegedly willing to “sacrifice...the rights and peculiar institution of our section.”¹²⁰ Peyton Colquitt felt “the tide is moving up for secession...Georgia is too proud of her past honor and glory to submit—Her only hope, that of slavery in its dying struggle with abolitionism, is in secession.”¹²¹ James Bethune, editor of *The Corner Stone*, continued the line of reasoning that cooperationists were really just submitting to the Yankees, but took it one step further. Bethune argued there was “no doubt” that cooperationists “were willing to sacrifice the rights and interests of the *country* for the gratification of their personal ambition.”¹²² A.J. Macarthy of the *Albany Patriot* felt anyone who did not back secession had to admit the South’s “inferiority and submit.” Cooperationists were prattling on about “school boy nonsense” and had to realize that the South had to resist the Republicans.¹²³ The talk of all Georgians uniting regardless of political party or outlook was quickly taking a backseat in these heady times.

¹²⁰ R.J. Yarrington, *Columbus Daily Sun*, December 3, 1860.

¹²¹ Editor, *Columbus Daily Times*, December 1, 1860.

¹²² Editor, *The Corner Stone*, December 18, 1860.

¹²³ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, December 6, 1860.

After staying somewhat silent for much of November, the cooperationists throughout the state finally began to rally in December. Prominent Georgians such as Alexander Stephens and B.H. Hill spoke out in favor of cooperationism. In Columbus, State Senator Hines Holt “denied that the election of Lincoln...was any cause for resistance.” Holt admitted that the Southern states had suffered wrongs at the hands of the North, but Lincoln’s election did not “justify secession.”¹²⁴ Holt went so far as to introduce a series of resolutions in the state legislature aimed at staving off secession, but all such efforts were defeated. Fifteen cooperationist subscribers to the *Times* cancelled their subscriptions to the paper because of the “dishonorable...and dangerous” opinions the paper was espousing.¹²⁵

Advocating the cooperationist cause could be dangerous though. When bricklayer William Stewart admitted he had voted for Bell and now was in favor of cooperationist candidates for the convention, Dougherty County planter Thomas Moughan and his overseer J.L. Dozier ran Stewart out of the county. Perhaps Albany bookseller L.E. Welch, who had been born in the North, took notice. Welch burned every issue of *Harper’s Magazine* he had in the middle of Broad Street.¹²⁶ The audience that watched were elated and the editor of the *Patriot* thought this proved Welch was “with us.”¹²⁷

The cooperationists wanted to delay the state’s final decision to either give Lincoln time to redress grievances or to give southern states time to unite and cooperate.

¹²⁴ Speech of Hines Holt, Columbus *Daily Times*, December 1, 1860.

¹²⁵ Columbus *Daily Times*, December 3, 1860.

¹²⁶ *Harper’s Magazine* was published in New York and was founded in 1850. The magazine was extremely popular North and South and had a circulation of over 50,000 within its first six months of existence.

¹²⁷ Albany *Patriot*, December 13, 1860.

Many cooperationists were not uncritical defenders of the Union, but they were quick to point out that the South faced no immediate harm. Thus, in Lucius Bryan's opinion, the "Precipitators" were attempting "to *force* all who differ with them in opinion, to go for secession." While this was a time where southerners should unite as one, the cooperationists argued that these Democratic fire-eaters were leading the South down "such a course" that would be "most ineffectual." The "secession of the cotton States would be a *surrender* of their rights" and thus moderation was the right course.¹²⁸

The main problem that cooperationists were having was their contempt for secessionist leaders. Opponents thought secessionist leaders rash, demagogic Breckinridge supporters. According to cooperationists, the Southern Democrats were petulant men who were risking everything to be the leaders of a new nation since they no longer held power in the Union.¹²⁹ Lucius Bryan thought the secessionist leaders clearly sprang from "the old Democratic party" and were determined to "rule or ruin." One "strong Breckinridge man from Thomasville" stated that if the Southern Democrat came and made Unionist speeches "he would be *tarred and feathered*."¹³⁰ Before the election, Bryan railed, these Breckinridge supporters had claimed to be "the best Union men in the country," but now they were willing to disavow their own candidate for President simply because he *might* consider advocating staying in the Union.¹³¹ Cooperationists argued Breckinridge supporters were nothing but disunionists and Bell and Douglas men had their proof in their opponents' actions. In fact, the upcoming state convention was viewed as simply a way to settle old political scores. Lucius Bryan agreed with the editor of the

¹²⁸ Editor, "Secession or Submission," *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, December 5, 1860.

¹²⁹ For a discussion of this line of thought on the part of cooperationists, see Crutcher, "Disunity and Dissolution," 201-205.

¹³⁰ "Mr. Breckinridge in Danger," *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 21, 1860.

¹³¹ Article from *Griffin Union* as quoted in *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, November 21, 1860.

Vicksburg *Whig*, who thought that secessionists were attempting to scare the citizens of Georgia out of the Union, something that he viewed as “base cowardly, and unmanly.”¹³² Secession was considered rash because it posed economic problems and could jeopardize slavery, among other things, but one of the biggest problems was that Democrats were at the forefront of secessionist leadership.

Lucius C. Bryan, editor of the *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, laid out the case against secession in a lengthy editorial published December 12, 1860. Under the Constitution, the South, he contended, had grown to “be a great, prosperous and happy people” and was almost perfect, if not for “internal dissensions.” Even though nothing had been done by the Federal government that would necessitate secession, Breckinridge men, who were “not very smart,” were willing to advocate for secession for things that might occur. And even though slavery had been a divisive topic, Bryan argued the South’s peculiar institution was better off for the discussion because slavery was now defended by the Constitution and not regarded as evil. It was neither brave nor patriotic to invite civil war for something that might happen. Yet, these fire-eaters had “rejoiced at the split” of the Democratic Party because they believed it would end with the “dissolution of the Union.” People who would support such men should consider themselves “literally insane” if they thought these secessionists were leading them to some promised land. These men were not statesmen, as they refused to even attempt compromise and acted as if secession was inevitable. The people of Thomas County and the entire South needed to “be cautious.”¹³³ Bryan argued forcefully that Thomas Countians needed to vote for cooperationists come January 2.

¹³² “Disunionism is Cowardice,” *Vicksburg Whig* in *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, December 5, 1860.

¹³³ Editor, “Ad Cap Tandum,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, December 12, 1860.

With the two sides laying out their cases, it was time to choose their tickets for the convention that would meet in January. In Muscogee County, the secessionists met on December 11 and chose three of their familiar leaders in Henry Benning, James Ramsey, and A.S. Rutherford as their delegates. All three were prominent men who had espoused secession for several years, with Benning and Ramsey being avowed secessionists since 1850. Benning especially had been rallying the troops throughout Georgia. He had given a speech on November 19 to the state legislature in which he predicted the end of slavery by Republicans and that this would cause severe social and economic problems for the South. Benning stated that secession would be “a complete remedy” for Georgia “and if nothing else will save us but going out of the Union, we must go out of the Union.”¹³⁴ Benning’s speech had been met with great fanfare in Muscogee County and he had spent the weeks afterwards traveling around Muscogee and neighboring counties drumming up secessionist feeling.¹³⁵ The secession ticket was supported by a large contingent of citizens in Columbus as well as the *Times*. The small town of Mount Moriah in the county had a meeting to adopt the secessionist candidates as their own, further bolstering secessionist support.

On the same day the secessionists chose their delegates, the cooperationists in Muscogee County met and chose Hines Holt, N.L. Howard, and Porter Ingram as their representatives. The cooperationist editor of the *Sun* opined that due to the large numbers of men who turned up to choose delegates the cooperationist candidates “would be elected by an overwhelming majority.”¹³⁶ The cooperationists also had the backing of the

¹³⁴ Freehling and Simpson, eds., *Secession Debated*, 130.

¹³⁵ Columbus *Daily Times*, December 12, 1860; J. David Dameron, *General Henry Lewis Benning: “This Was a Man”* (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 2004), 102-3.

¹³⁶ Editor, Columbus *Daily Sun*, December 17, 1860.

Enquirer, but the *Times* scoffed at the ticket, derisively stating that “less than a hundred conservatives assembled” and were amazed the cooperationists would “venture to run a ticket.”¹³⁷ Holt, Howard, and Ingram all signed a letter to the people of the county stating that they believed “cooperative action is yet practicable.”¹³⁸

On Saturday, December 14, the citizens of Thomas County met to pick their candidates for the state convention. Unlike in Muscogee, the citizens of Thomas County held one mass meeting. The goal of the meeting was to provide three candidates that everyone could agree upon so that when voting occurred on January 2, the decision on who to vote for would be done already. According to newspaper accounts, citizens of all political persuasions attended the meeting, jockeying for their views to carry the day. A committee was formed to present candidates and the initial proposal was for Augustin H. Hansell, J.R. Alexander, and Samuel B. Spencer to be the candidates for the convention. Alexander declined and was replaced by William G. Ponder. On the very first motion, the three candidates were nominated and the meeting adjourned.

Thomas Countians were opposed to immediate and unconditional secession and this was evidenced by the choices of Hansell, Spencer, and Ponder. Hansell, Spencer, and Ponder had all been publicly opposed to immediate secession. The secessionists thought they had Spencer in their camp, but he stated he was “for secession ‘only as a last resort’” and had been a Bell elector.¹³⁹ Spencer and Hansell were both founding members of the Presbyterian Church in Thomasville and that could have affected their

¹³⁷ Editor, Columbus *Daily Times*, December 16, 1860.

¹³⁸ Editor, Columbus *Daily Sun*, December 20, 1860.

¹³⁹ Editor, “The Meeting Last Saturday,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, December 19, 1860.

stance on secession.¹⁴⁰ Spencer was a lawyer, militia officer, and owned fourteen slaves and had come out in favor of cooperationism with full force. Still, he was willing to support secession if the North would not guarantee southern rights and was probably the most “radical” of the three. Hansell was the Judge of the Superior Court of the Southern Circuit and had not held any political office. The highly esteemed lawyer was probably the most moderate of the three delegates chosen.¹⁴¹ Ponder was the only planter of the three, owning fourteen slaves in Thomas County and also maintaining an absentee plantation in neighboring Leon County, Florida which held nearly one hundred slaves.¹⁴² Ponder had been elected to the state Senate in 1855, but had held no political office since and had not been very active in politics. All three were opposed to immediate secession and cooperationists thought they were “on the side of prudence and deliberation.”¹⁴³ The secessionists claimed victory, but the fact that James L. Seward, the county’s leading secessionist Democrat, was unhappy with the results was telling. Subsequently, he decided to run for a spot at the convention.

Dougherty County residents met on December 11 to choose their delegates. The meeting was designed to be similar to Thomas County’s in that instead of having two sets of delegates opposing one another, one set would be chosen by the majority. However, the chairman of the meeting, D.A. Vason, stated that he would not chair the meeting unless immediate secessionist candidates were chosen. Nelson Tift, who read the call for the meeting, assured Vason that secessionists would be chosen and the meeting

¹⁴⁰ Southern Presbyterians, especially in Georgia, were opposed to secession after Lincoln’s election and only gradually accepted the Confederacy, if at all. For further reading, see James O. Farmer, Jr., “Southern Presbyterians and Southern Nationalism: A Study in Ambivalence,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75 (1991): 275-294.

¹⁴¹ See Martin Abbott, ed., “Memoirs of a Milledgeville Native, Augustin H. Hansell,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57 (1973): 430-438.

¹⁴² Wooster, “The Georgia Secession Convention,” 50; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860*.

¹⁴³ “The Meeting Last Saturday,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, December 19, 1860.

continued. Somewhat surprisingly, though, Tift followed this up by stating that he thought “secession...a last resort.” William J. Lawton thought someone from the Bell supporters should be chosen as one of the delegates and the meeting tabbed Charles E. Mallory as that man. This was an odd choice considering Mallory, a planter who owned thirty-eight slaves, had been published in the Albany newspaper advocating for Breckinridge and then secession. Judge Richard H. Clark was then chosen to represent Breckinridge supporters.¹⁴⁴ Clark later recalled that he supported immediate secession because of northern “anti-slavery agitation” and the Republicans’ attempts to “wrong and oppress the South.”¹⁴⁵ A.J. Macarthy was pleased with the choices, crowing that the duo would win the January 2 election by “such a majority as will make the submissionists tremble in their boots.”¹⁴⁶

Evidently the meeting did not satisfy cooperationists as two days after the mass meeting that led to the choice of Mallory and Clark as secessionist candidates, Lott Warren and Dr. S.L. Barbour were chosen as Dougherty’s cooperationist candidates. A.J. Macarthy was decidedly less pleased with these two men, arguing that Warren did not favor cooperation or secession but Georgia acting alone as a separate state government. Barbour, on the other hand, was even more deplorable as he “favors coercion by the government of any State that may secede.” Macarthy urged Dougherty County’s voters not to support these two men. Otherwise, the citizens of the county may have to “load your muskets to kill your Southern brethren!”¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ D.A. Vason, “Secession Meeting,” *Albany Patriot*, December 13, 1860.

¹⁴⁵ Lollie Belle Wylie, ed., *Memoirs of Judge Richard H. Clark* (Atlanta: Franklin Printing and Publishing Company, 1898), 289.

¹⁴⁶ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, December 13, 1860.

¹⁴⁷ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, December 20, 1860.

The cooperationists of Dougherty County surprisingly did not take too kindly to Macarthy's editorial. Nelson Tift, who was not a cooperationist exactly but not in favor of immediate disunion, was upset that men like Macarthy were attempting to choke off the debate. Tift was further upset that this was leading his neighbors to call him a submissionist. Tift was willing to back secession if Georgia could not maintain her rights in the Union, but thought Georgians should wait a bit longer to see what happened. He could not understand how this made him a submissionist.¹⁴⁸

Lott Warren and Dr. S.L. Barbour defended their position two weeks after Macarthy's editorial. In a joint letter, the two cooperationists argued that the election of Lincoln alone was not cause for secession, neither would vote for secession if elected to the state convention, and that even if several other southern states seceded, they would still oppose secession. Warren and Barbour argued they were not opposed to secession, but they felt that Georgia must seek and obtain "the co-operation of the Border States" rather than just their fellow Lower South brethren. They both felt that a convention of all southern and border states should meet, demand slaveholding rights in the Union, and if that was not possible, then secession could occur.¹⁴⁹ The editor of the *Patriot* was only too happy to print this letter. He felt it proved that Warren and Barbour were not the proper candidates "to represent a constituency who felt that they endure wrongs which require an efficient remedy." The cooperationists were offering no remedy but rather were "experimenting on the disease while the patient is dying."¹⁵⁰

The secession of South Carolina on December 20 only strengthened the cause of the immediate secessionists. Georgia's Congressional representatives, with the exception

¹⁴⁸ "Dougherty," Albany *Patriot*, December 20, 1860.

¹⁴⁹ Lott Warren and S.L. Barbour, Albany *Patriot*, December 27, 1860.

¹⁵⁰ Editor, Albany *Patriot*, December 27, 1860.

of Thomas County's Peter Love, were denouncing compromise and stated that sectional reconciliation was impossible, especially with news of South Carolina's secession. Several Congressmen had signed a letter stating compromise was impossible after the Crittenden Compromise had collapsed before the end of the year.¹⁵¹ Only four Georgia Congressmen did not sign the letter and of those only Love was a Democrat. This added more fuel to the fire that Democrats were disunionists hell bent on secession no matter what. One newspaper editor complained that these Democrats "aggravate instead of soften" and "let not an opportunity pass to throw obstacles in the way" of potential compromise.¹⁵² The idea of a vast conspiracy on the part of Democrats to force Southern states out of the Union was thus reinforced.

However, the secessionists did not appear to have to win the war of words with South Carolina's decision to secede. On December 21, Columbus held a celebration even larger than the one held in November when Yancey visited. The city was illuminated in honor of South Carolina, there were speeches at Temperance Hall by Benning and Ramsey, and the night was finished off with a torch-lit procession through the streets followed by fireworks.¹⁵³ The party lasted until the wee hours of the night, "the very air was ringing with cheers for South Carolina." It was reported that "the people seemed wild with joy at the glorious news from South Carolina" and it was sure that Georgia would "take her place in line among the seceding states." The secessionist editor of the *Sun* was also happy to report that his co-editor, who had heretofore been "dark and

¹⁵¹ The Crittenden Compromise had been proposed by Kentucky Senator John J. Crittenden. It was designed to resolve the secession crisis by addressing the concerns of the Lower South states through Constitutional amendments. The compromise failed and has often been seen as the last attempt to stave off war.

¹⁵² Editor, Athens *Southern Banner*, December 27, 1860.

¹⁵³ Martin, *Columbus, Geo., from Its Selection...*, 120.

obscured” on secession, was now in favor of joining South Carolina.¹⁵⁴ The political talk even made its way down to children. Harris Chappell wrote his brother that “I have not got mouch [sic] news to tell you as we never hear anything but politicks [sic]; I think nearly all the people of Columbus is for scecession [sic] as they [sic] are wearing the cockade.”¹⁵⁵

In Albany, the scene was much the same. On December 24 the people “celebrated the secession of South Carolina by illuminations, music, banners, and a torchlight procession,” according to the local newspaper. Richard H. Clark, Charles Mallory, and D.A. Vason all gave speeches championing South Carolina’s cause and stating Georgia would be next out of the Union.¹⁵⁶ A.J. Macarthy, the editor of the paper, was giddy with excitement as he thanked God that Dougherty County did not have submissionists who would keep Georgia in the Union “to seek further oppression and aggression.” The secession of South Carolina, he was sure, would awaken the “faithful and patriotic” southerners who yearned to resist “farther aggression and dishonor.”¹⁵⁷

The cooperationists were not ready to give up, but their cause seemed lost in many places, including Muscogee County. On December 22, Ingram spoke at a meeting in the county, followed by secessionist candidate Ramsey. Although less than one hundred people turned out, there appeared no doubt to one writer that the “great enthusiasm” was “almost unanimous for secession.”¹⁵⁸ The cooperationists were not only having trouble garnering support, but they were also having trouble organizing as well as the secessionists, something that held true in Georgia as a whole. There was hope that

¹⁵⁴ Editor, *Columbus Daily Sun*, December 24, 1860.

¹⁵⁵ Lupold, *Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1978*, 29.

¹⁵⁶ “Torchlights, etc.,” *Albany Patriot*, December 27, 1860.

¹⁵⁷ Editor, *Albany Patriot*, December 27, 1860.

¹⁵⁸ Editor, *Columbus Daily Sun*, December 24, 1860.

disunion could be averted with the upcoming election for convention delegates, but fear that reconciliation was impossible due to secessionist leaders.

With the year winding down and the January 2 election creeping ever closer, both sides made one last push to arouse support. The *Columbus Times*, which had heretofore treated the cooperationists in mocking language, toned down its rhetoric and admitted that Holt, Howard, and Ingram were not submissionists after all. However, the paper could not understand why the three men continued to run when the “people of Muscogee” were “against the...policy foreshadowed in the address of the candidates of ‘the friends of cooperative resistance.’” The paper promised that “the canvass shall neither be embittered or poisoned” but still called the candidates “honest but deluded.”¹⁵⁹ All the while, the pro-secession elements of Muscogee County, and the state, acted as if secession was a foregone conclusion and inevitable. This general assumption caused the most rancor for cooperationists and unionists. One cooperationist felt it was better to “fall in defence [sic] of justice and truth, than to be even victorious and triumphant in the advocacy of error.” Secession was not the answer and it did not show “true patriotism...without making a single struggle to maintain” the Union. To secede without even attempting compromise seemed simply unforgivable to cooperationists.¹⁶⁰ Dr. Daniel Lee of Dougherty County argued that due to the financial importance of cotton, the “true policy of the North is to let the people of the South govern themselves” in the Union. Lee was confident the South was safe in the Union and that secession was due to “party and fanatical impulses.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Editor, *Columbus Daily Times*, December 27, 1860.

¹⁶⁰ Editor, *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, January 3, 1861.

¹⁶¹ Daniel Lee, *Albany Patriot*, December 20, 1860.

In Thomas County, the cooperationists were pulling out all the stops. Published quotes from northern newspapers “proved” that northern opponents of the Republicans were everywhere and did not want the South to break up the Union. At the same time, in an editorial, Lucius Bryan pessimistically proclaimed that surely “Georgia will secede” after delegates were chosen for the convention because “the plan of the secessionists has been successful.” These secessionists, he claimed, were ignoring “the interests of the people” in favor of “prejudice, selfish ambition, or party ties.” Bryan warned readers that George Washington had been scared at the prospect of building the country up, yet these secessionists did not tremble at the “appalling magnitude” of the prospect of tearing it apart. The editor urged Georgians not to fall for the trap and vote for cooperationist candidates, but at the same time his editorial read like it was written by an angry, defeated man.¹⁶²

Yet, who could blame Bryan for feeling defeated? As 1860 wound to a close, it appeared that the immediate secessionists were likely to win the majority of seats at the convention. To be sure, Bryan and many other cooperationist leaders and newspaper editors felt that the result of the January 2 election would not be the popular sentiment of the people. This may sound strange considering the people got to vote, but Bryan and many cooperationists felt the people of Georgia were being bamboozled by secessionist leaders who continued to harp on issues that either were not true or could be dealt with due to the Republicans not having a majority in Congress. The cooperationists, however, somewhat had no one to blame but themselves. Cooperationist leaders such as Alexander Stephens did little, if any, speaking throughout the state while secessionist leaders, such as Benning, Robert Toombs, and Howell Cobb, toured their county, and often other parts

¹⁶² “Georgia State Convention,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 2, 1861.

of the state, to advocate for secession. Furthermore, the secessionists even brought in people from outside Georgia, such as Alabamian William Lowndes Yancey, to bolster their campaign.

As the new year beckoned, there was both excitement and trepidation in Georgia. Many residents realized that a decisive moment in the history of their county, state, and country was fast approaching. On December 16, Muscogee County Douglas supporter turned secessionist Absalom Chappell wrote his wife: “You can not form an idea what a dead stand all business is. Cotton is no more sold here than if it were mid-summer. The perfect stillness of things is like that which prevails...just before a mighty earthquake.”¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Edwards, “River City,” 58.

Chapter 5: “They cannot represent a majority of the people:”

The State Convention

Perhaps forebodingly, January 2, 1861, dawned rainy and cold all throughout the state as Georgians slogged to the polls to cast their votes for delegates to the state convention that would decide whether or not the state of Georgia would remain in the Union. Alexander Stephens called it the “worst day” for an election he had ever seen.¹⁶⁴ Ballots were cast and the waiting game began. Peyton Colquitt was confident that “we have done all in our power to carry the State out of the Union.” Secession was “the only safety for the South” and cooperationists “will repent” when “Georgia has spoken.”¹⁶⁵ James Bethune hoped for a secessionist triumph, seeing the alternative as the victory of “allies here to help” the North “whip us in to submission.”¹⁶⁶ Very little was written or said by the cooperationists, thus making one think they did not like their prospects of success.

Cooperationists feared that the storms had hampered their cause, but this was certainly not the case in Thomas County. Ponder, Hansell, and Spencer won easily, with Ponder receiving 419 votes, Hansell 405, and Spencer 379.¹⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that Spencer, considered the most radical of the three, received the fewest votes of the cooperationists. There was no organized opposition, but James L. Seward, James McDonald, and Henry Mitchell ran as immediate secessionists and tallied just 392 votes

¹⁶⁴ Crutcher, “Disunity and Dissolution,” 232.

¹⁶⁵ Editor, *Columbus Daily Times*, January 3, 1861.

¹⁶⁶ Editor, *The Corner Stone*, January 1, 1861.

¹⁶⁷ Figures were reported in *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 9, 1861 and confirmed by Michael P. Johnson in “A New Look at the Popular Vote for Delegates to the Georgia Secession Convention,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56 (1972): 259-275.

total, with Seward earning the most at just 178.¹⁶⁸ Roughly 75 percent of the votes had been for cooperationists. The vast majority of voters had voted for moderation, but knew their candidates had stated they would do what was deemed best for the state, which could include secession.

Despite their campaign throughout Muscogee County, the cooperationists were roundly defeated when the votes were tallied. The secession ticket of Benning, Ramsey, and Rutherford garnered 944 votes (67%) to 459 votes (33%) for the cooperationist ticket of Holt, Howard, and Ingram.¹⁶⁹ Still, despite the overwhelming majority, this result still showed that secession was far from unanimous in Muscogee County. As was the case throughout most of the state, voter turnout was much less than for the Presidential election two months prior. In fact, nearly 300 fewer votes were cast on January 2 despite the momentous issue at hand.¹⁷⁰ Muscogee County was similar to other Georgia counties that contained a major town in that these counties delivered large majorities for secessionist candidates. In contrast, Georgia counties that were largely rural and did not have a major town or city tended to be cooperationist.¹⁷¹

Reaction in Muscogee County was obviously not one of surprise. The cooperationists, however, did not believe the sentiment in Muscogee County represented that of the state. One newspaper editor believed that even if a majority of secessionists

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Results published in Columbus *Daily Times*, January 4, 1861 and confirmed by Michael P. Johnson in "A New Look at the Popular Vote for Delegates to the Georgia Secession Convention," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56 (1972): 259-275.

¹⁷⁰ The voter turnout throughout the state was much lower than the Presidential election. Some historians have argued this was because of the weather and some have argued it was because cooperationists felt that secession was a foregone conclusion due to South Carolina's secession and the likely imminent departure of Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida.

¹⁷¹ See Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Republic*, xxii, 5, 73, 201.

were elected to the convention “they cannot represent a majority of the people.”¹⁷² The rationale behind this was that many candidates throughout the state had not been honest and had not run as avowed secessionists. Instead, there were many secessionists running as cooperationists. Therefore, if the convention did vote to take Georgia out of the Union, it should have to be ratified by a popular vote of the citizens of the state. Secessionist editor R.J. Yarrington thought this laughable. After all, “it is at least a natural and reasonable conclusion, that the sentiment of the people is largely in favor of withdrawing from the Union.” The people had spoken already and it was “evident that submitting that result [a vote in favor of secession by the convention] to the people of Muscogee” would be a waste of time “because the vote of the people has been already unmistakably expressed through the ballot box.”¹⁷³

Thanks to popular support and their Democratic roots, the immediate secessionists won Dougherty County easily. Clark and Mallory tallied 281 votes to just 121 for Warren and Barbour. The editor of the Albany *Patriot* urged those who favored cooperationism to rally behind the secessionist candidates since they represented the “declared opinion of the people.” The editor was sure that the 121 votes the cooperationists received were “complimentary.” What excited the editor the most was that he was sure that Mallory and Clark would join with the other Georgia delegates to “positively unite on *immediate secession*” from the Union.¹⁷⁴ A letter writer agreed with Macarthy, urging Dougherty County’s citizens to “banish...selfish party action” to get behind the secessionists so the South could have their freedom.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Editor, Columbus *Daily Sun*, January 10, 1861.

¹⁷³ Editor, Columbus *Daily Sun*, January 10, 1861.

¹⁷⁴ Editor, Albany *Patriot*, January 3, 1861.

¹⁷⁵ “Get Ready,” Albany *Patriot*, January 10, 1861.

When the state convention convened on the 16th, the outcome was nearly a foregone conclusion. Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi had seceded from the Union. Momentum alone seemed to be pushing Georgia toward secession. However, cooperationists like Lucius Bryan felt Georgia should “view the whole ground” and chart “her course with that dignity and firmness, which has always characterized her movements.”¹⁷⁶ Immediate secessionists held a numerical majority in the convention and appeared to be better organized as well. The official Georgia vote total had been 50,243 for secessionists and 37,123 for cooperationists.¹⁷⁷

Immediately, the secessionists dominated the convention, with pro-secession former Governor George Crawford being elected President of the convention and Columbus’ Albert Lamar named secretary.¹⁷⁸ Commissioners from Alabama and South Carolina addressed the meeting and asked Georgia to join her sister states out of the Union. Crawford noted in his opening speech that disunion was Georgia’s only viable option due to the South’s grievances against the North.

On January 18, delegate Eugenius A. Nisbet offered a resolution to uphold Georgia’s “right and duty” to secede and advocated the state’s participation in the creation of a southern confederacy.¹⁷⁹ This motion was a gauge to see if a secession ordinance would pass. In response, cooperationist Herschel Johnson presented a substitute resolution asking the convention to postpone final action until a convention of

¹⁷⁶ Editorial, *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 19, 1861.

¹⁷⁷ These figures were published by Governor Brown in April 1861 after several cooperationists asked for the total, thinking they had the actual majority. In the 1970s, research showed that Brown had falsified the returns and the actual total was much closer. In fact, the cooperationists may have actually had a majority after all. Michael P. Johnson has estimated the actual vote at 44,152 for immediate secessionists and 41,632 for cooperationists. See Johnson, “A New Look at the Popular Vote...,” 259-275.

¹⁷⁸ Crutcher, “Disunity and Dissolution,” 243; Allen D. Candler, *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, 6 vols. (Atlanta: Charles P. Byrd, 1909), 1: 212, 216, 219 (hereafter Volume I unless cited otherwise).

¹⁷⁹ Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, 229.

all Southern states could meet and make a coordinated action. Judge Richard H. Clark remembered that Johnson had a “strong conviction...that for existing causes secession was unwise, unnecessary, and destructive.”¹⁸⁰ Johnson’s goal was simply to stall secession as long as possible and his substitute motion triggered intense debate. Perhaps the key speech was given by Alexander Stephens.¹⁸¹ Stephens said that secession would never receive his blessing, but it seemed obvious to him that secession was inevitable. Both Johnson and Hansell described Stephens as a beaten man and Hansell later recalled that “there were several members near me who had been disposed to wait a little but they came at once to the conclusion that it was time to act” after hearing Stephens’ speech.¹⁸² It appeared that not only Johnson and Hansell but many delegates who had favored cooperationism were swayed by Stephens’ speech. Following the debate, Nisbet’s resolution passed with 166 in favor and 130 against. All of the delegates from the counties being studied voted in favor of the Nisbet resolution.¹⁸³ With the vote in favor, a committee with members of both factions was appointed to draw up an ordinance of secession.

The next day the ordinance of secession was presented to the convention by Nisbet. In an attempt at delaying secession, Benjamin H. Hill resubmitted the Johnson resolution from the previous day, asking the convention to delay action until after all the Southern states could convene. The vote was close, but Hill was shot down 164 to 133. Again, all delegates from the counties studied voted against Hill’s resolution and the way

¹⁸⁰ Wylie, ed., *Memoirs of Judge Richard H. Clark*, 291.

¹⁸¹ With the exception of Stephens’ speech, none of the debate was recorded.

¹⁸² Crutcher, “Disunity and Dissolution,” 246; Augustin Harris Hansell, “Augustin Harris Hansell Memoirs, 1905,” University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Southern Historical Collection.

¹⁸³ Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, 236-238.

was paved for the secession ordinance to pass.¹⁸⁴ With Hill's resolution defeated, many cooperationists felt further resistance was futile and joined the disunionist majority in backing secession ordinance. Nisbet offered the secession ordinance and it passed with 208 in favor and 89 opposed. Despite being elected as cooperationists, all three Thomas County delegates voted in favor of seceding. Not surprisingly, all five of the immediate secessionist delegates from Dougherty and Muscogee counties voted in favor of seceding as well. Even B.H. Hill had voted in favor, but Alexander Stephens did not, staying true to his word.¹⁸⁵

On January 21, the Secession Ordinance was publicly signed before large crowds. Six delegates refused to sign, but cooperationist leaders Linton Stephens, Alexander's half-brother, and Herschel Johnson gave speeches backing the ordinance. The editor of the *Times* was not surprised by the response of men like Stephens and Johnson. He felt that cooperationists had been "as loyal to Southern interests as the secessionists" and would "give all they have and hope for the South and will be found gallantly fighting her cause when imperiled."¹⁸⁶ Many cooperationists had said all along they would go along with the state and many did. However, there was worry that secession would not be as peaceable as all of the secessionists had claimed. Further, there was also nervousness by the editor of the *Columbus Enquirer* that the convention had been "a triumph of one section" of the state "over the other" and there was genuine concern that the secession of the state of Georgia could lead to further divisions in the state.¹⁸⁷ There was even talk that Georgia should not join the other Southern states in a nation because if the old Union

¹⁸⁴ Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, 252-256.

¹⁸⁵ Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, 256-260.

¹⁸⁶ Editor, *Columbus Daily Times*, January 14, 1861.

¹⁸⁷ *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, January 22, 1861.

could dissolve, what would stop a new Union from fracturing?¹⁸⁸ Peyton Colquitt had an answer, stating that “in unity, there is strength” and the Southern states would be better off banding together and their common interests would keep them together.¹⁸⁹

Some cooperationists in Thomas County were less enthusiastic about the prospect of cooperation with the people they had just been competing with for national, state, and regional offices. Lucius Bryan wrote that southerners had been talking about how they had the welfare of the whole country at heart but had actually embarked on a “fruitless” assault on the North. Instead of preserving the country, they had “compelled to surrender up that country *so dear to our hearts*” and now “not one remains to raise a voice” for the good of the whole country. Not so subtly, Bryan blamed the Democrats, writing that “the victory of the enemy has been complete.”¹⁹⁰ Bryan was so enraged that the ordinance of secession was placed on the second page of the paper and in small type.

There was little sense of outrage in Dougherty or Muscogee counties, at least publicly. Upon learning of the secession of the state, much of Muscogee County was nearly euphoric. On the night of January 21 the city held its third large pro-secession rally, only this time they were toasting their own state for leaving the Union. The celebration was complete with fireworks, speeches, and a torch-lit parade. The *Times* described the night as “thrilling, entrancing, bewildering—such alone as can be inspired by tremendous events and the triumph of great principles.”¹⁹¹ The *Sun* noted that many homes were “brilliantly illuminated” and the positive feeling toward Georgia seceding was “more deep seated” than it had been during the demonstration in honor of South

¹⁸⁸ *Augusta Daily Chronicle and Sentinel*, January 29, 1861.

¹⁸⁹ *Columbus Daily Times*, January 31, 1861.

¹⁹⁰ “Promoting the Welfare of the Country,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 23, 1861.

¹⁹¹ *Columbus Daily Times*, January 22, 1861.

Carolina's secession in December.¹⁹² Muscogee newspapers were more than willing to pass along the news that reports from the state at large were happy too, as "all quarters of Georgia bring us accounts of jubilee and general demonstrations of joy on account of her secession."¹⁹³ In Albany, despite unpleasant weather, delighted citizens carried "a blaze of living light" through the streets. People gathered under flags that spelled out "Georgia and her Rights! Liberty or Death!" While a parade marched by, including local militia, slave musicians serenaded the revelers.¹⁹⁴

Perhaps the Columbus newspapers were overstating the general reaction, however. Despite railing against abolitionists and the Republicans, cooperationist sentiment in many parts of Georgia remained apprehensive, at best, to the state's secession. P.W. Alexander, a delegate to the convention from cooperationist Upson County (whose newspaper was liberally quoted in Thomas County), went so far as to present a resolution advocating the Union's reconstruction "whenever...the full measure of the rights and equality of the people of the slaveholding States" could be guaranteed just one day after the Secession Ordinance had been signed.¹⁹⁵ The resolution ended up being buried in the newly formed Committee on Foreign Relations, of which Hansell was a member, but the idea of reconstruction of the Union would be discussed until the firing on Fort Sumter precipitated the start of war in April. Cooperationists in Thomas County saw reconstruction as a possibility because they felt that war was the likely outcome otherwise. With seceded states clamoring for the federal government to abandon property in their states, it was feared that war would commence and the states would "be

¹⁹² Columbus *Daily Sun*, January 23, 1861.

¹⁹³ Columbus *Daily Sun*, January 28, 1861.

¹⁹⁴ Albany *Patriot*, January 24, 1861.

¹⁹⁵ Candler, ed., *The Confederate Records of the State of Georgia*, Vol. I, 262.

wrecked.” This upset cooperationists in Thomas County, who were willing to go along with peaceable secession, but they had reservations about going to war. After all, as Lucius Bryan argued, “the Seceders have declared their Secession to be *peaceable*,” but were chancing war by agitating the federal government. What would be the point of dissolving “*peaceably* so great and renowned a Government as this *was*” to only “go to war on so insignificant a question as the territories?”¹⁹⁶ This was obviously a shot at Southern Democrats, who had been agitating secession over the issue of slavery being extended to the territories for many years. Bryan went so far as to call Democrats “absolutely demented” for instigating the “political ruin” that had occurred.¹⁹⁷ The editor of the *Columbus Enquirer* complained that Democrats were only out “for the accomplishment of selfish ends” and were nothing more than demagogues.¹⁹⁸ Despite all the calls for unity now that secession had occurred, deep political divisions remained.

Within a few weeks, the idea of Georgia being independent started to sink in but debate raged over what course the state should take. Both the cooperationists and the immediate secessionists jockeyed for power in newly independent Georgia. In Thomas County, the secessionists had been in the minority, but were now loudly expressing their views on how the state should proceed. To their opponents, like Bryan, this was yet another example of “the leaders of that party” attempting to “hold” on to their influence and power, only now in the independent state.¹⁹⁹ The vitriol toward Democrats was still there, but it was less about taking Georgia out of the Union and more about who would control the state post-secession. The conservatives in Thomas County admitted that the

¹⁹⁶ “The Beginning of Trouble,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 30, 1861.

¹⁹⁷ Editorial, *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 30, 1861.

¹⁹⁸ “The Value of a Statesman,” *Columbus Enquirer* in *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, January 30, 1861.

¹⁹⁹ Editor, “Let The South Prepare For War,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, February 6, 1861.

reunification of the Union was an admirable goal, but was totally unattainable.²⁰⁰ The goal had shifted from staving off secession to keeping the Democrats from controlling the state and the South. Perhaps the goals had changed, but the ideology remained the same.

The main rhetorical battle centered on the prospect of war. The cooperationists felt that secessionists had the South on the precipice of war and they needed to be removed from power. Cooperationists like Lucius Bryan complained that the hotheads in South Carolina, of whom all the leaders were former Democrats, accepted “war with all its consequences in preference even to honorable co-operation” among the Southern states and this could not be accepted.²⁰¹ John G. Winter was a wealthy Columbus businessman who was known throughout the South “for the boldness of his enterprise” and “the soundness of his judgment.”²⁰² In this instance he exemplified the worry of war. Winter deplored the “diabolical heresy of Secession” yet what worried him more was the fact that secession may result in war.²⁰³ Cooperationists feared the North would not let the South go peaceably, but many cooperationists stated that they would fight if necessary. Secessionists were sure war could be averted, but they boldly asserted that they did not shrink from it and were sure the northerners could, and would, be whipped. A.J. Macarthy likely spoke for many secessionists when he advised Georgians not to be afraid of war. Macarthy was sure war would not occur and was willing to bet that the blood of “every Southern man from being killed in a war by the abolitionists” could be soaked up with “a postage stamp.” Besides, Macarthy crowed, every musket in Dougherty County could be placed “in the hands of women and little children...and they

²⁰⁰ See “Re-Construction” and Editorial, *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, February 13 and 20, 1861.

²⁰¹ Editor, “Re-Construction,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, February 13, 1861.

²⁰² “Hon. John G. Winter,” *DeBow’s Review* X (May 1851): 582-586.

²⁰³ LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, “The Letters of a Georgia Unionist: John G. Winter and Secession,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 45 (1961): 388, 390.

can whip every abolitionist” the North could put in the army.²⁰⁴ An Albany man wrote that he was willing to fight if that was the price it took for Georgia to be free from the North.²⁰⁵

No matter which camp they fell in, the underlying uneasiness regarding war was there. This apprehension is perhaps best described by Columbus store clerk and militia member Thomas E. Blanchard:

Georgia seceded on yesterday from the United States—the news was received with great exultation and welcomed by the ringing of bells—shooting of cannon & c.—how much I wish all may be settled satisfactorily—and that every thing may soon return to its accustomed channels.²⁰⁶

The *Southern Enterprise* was filled with stories of militias being mobilized, states setting aside funds for war, and forts and arsenals being seized. A convention met in Montgomery beginning on February 4 to mark the formal beginning of the Confederate States of America. The hope in Thomas County was that the forming of a central, Southern government would lead to a “speedy termination of our suspence [sic] upon the war question.”²⁰⁷ The avoidance of war seemed possible after Georgia’s own Alexander Stephens was named Vice President. If war was required, secessionists and cooperationists both were stating the South must unite and preserve their rights together. The two sides were beginning to at least agree that they would have to join together to defend the South in the event of attack. Once the realities of war set in, it was obvious

²⁰⁴ Editorial, *Albany Patriot*, November 15, 1860.

²⁰⁵ “Get Ready,” *Albany Patriot*, January 10, 1861.

²⁰⁶ Thomas E. Blanchard Diary, Columbus State University Archives, Columbus, Georgia.

²⁰⁷ Editor, “President of the South,” *Thomasville Southern Enterprise*, February 13, 1861.

that the divisiveness over political matters remained and this has been recently cited as one of the reasons the Confederacy ultimately failed.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ For example, see Jon L. Wakelyn, ed., *Confederates Against the Confederacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002); Emory Thomas, *The Confederate Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1979); Richard E. Beringer and others, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

Conclusion

The story of Georgia's road to secession can be seen in these three southwest Georgia counties. Although Muscogee County did have more industrialization than Dougherty or Thomas counties, the three counties still relied heavily on agriculture and slave labor for their economies. However, this study is more useful for how diverse the three counties were and how they are useful as examples of other counties throughout Georgia. Muscogee County was one of the larger counties in Georgia based on total population, but was also typical of many Georgia counties in that 45 percent of the county's total population were slaves. This is typical of the state as whole, whose population was 44 percent slave.

The one constant throughout the secession crisis was political divisiveness. Leading up to the election of 1860, both sides claimed the other was to blame for the crisis of the Union. Both blamed the other for the disunity of state politics. This mutual distrust would remain after Lincoln's election and even after secession. Bell and Douglas supporters, many of whom became cooperationists, claimed the Democrats wanted to rule or ruin the country, had misrepresented themselves, and had forced secession upon the majority of Georgians who were against it. The Democrats responded by accusing the former Whigs of being willing to allow the South to be overrun by abolitionists who were out to rob the South of their life and liberty.

This political divisiveness holds a clue to understanding why all three counties in this study elected the candidates to the state convention that they did. Thomas County would elect cooperationist candidates to represent them at the convention. While it is true that all three delegates voted for secession once they were at the convention, all three

were avowed cooperationists. Despite writing a brief memoir, Augustin Hansell never stated exactly why he changed allegiances. However, his description of Alexander Stephens' speech showed how much of an effect Stephens' statement that secession was inevitable had upon cooperationists. Thomas County historian William Warren Rogers believes that all three delegates voted for secession despite their previous allegiance because it was obvious there was "no turning back."²⁰⁹

Regardless of the delegates, the historiography tries to tell us that Thomas County was the quintessential secessionist county. It was in the Lower South, was largely dependent on agriculture for its relatively great wealth, had many large slaveholders in positions of power and influence, and the majority of the population were slaves. Despite all of these factors, the majority of the citizens of Thomas County voted for Bell or Douglas in 1860 and voted for cooperationist candidates in 1861. Certainly, there were many factors why they did this, but long-standing political allegiance played a vital role. Although the county had voted for Democrats in the late 1850s, it had long been a stronghold of Whigs and this influence returned when secession reared its head. While this is true of just this one county, it is indicative of why cooperationism or Unionism could flourish in a black belt, Lower South area.

On the opposite side, studying Muscogee and Dougherty counties provide equal answers as to how southwest Georgia counties came to support secession. Muscogee County had seen a shift in sentiment during the 1850s. Henry Benning, Martin Crawford, and James Ramsey had all supported secession in 1850 at the Nashville Convention, yet Benning was resoundingly defeated by a unionist when running for a Congressional seat later that year. The people of Muscogee County had repudiated secession. However, by

²⁰⁹ Rogers, *Ante-Bellum Thomas County*, 119.

the end of the decade the sentiment had shifted. In 1859, Senator Alfred Iverson, of Columbus, had given a speech at Griffin, Georgia, advising the formation of an independent nation of slave states.²¹⁰ Muscogee County voters handed Iverson a victorious bid for re-election the following year. While the states' rights candidate in the election of 1860, John Breckinridge, only won the county by two votes, the voters gave an overwhelming majority to the secessionist candidates to represent the county at the state convention in January. In 1850, the people of Muscogee County were not ready for disunion and were largely indifferent to national affairs. By 1860 and early 1861, the majority of the people were active and passionate participants and favoring the secessionist cause. However, there was always a sizable minority on the other side of the issue and this led to fierce debate in the county. Still, the shift in sentiment over the course of the 1850s kept course with the advancement of the Democratic party in Muscogee County.

Dougherty County had remained committed to at least the idea of secession since 1850. The county was led by Southern Rights Democrats who were not willing to say that disunion had to occur in 1850, but they were willing to threaten it and had a receptive audience. Dougherty County voters supported Southern Rights politicians like Nelson Tift and R.N. Ely throughout the 1850s. By 1860, even before the election had occurred, influential citizens such as Judge Richard H. Clark, Charles Mallory, Ely, A.J. Macarthy and others had been advocating secession. The people of the county apparently listened as Dougherty was the first county to commend the Georgians who left the national Democratic convention in 1860. Dougherty County residents would stay true to their

²¹⁰ Telfair, *A History of Columbus, Georgia, 1828-1928*, 99.

Democratic roots as they overwhelmingly chose Breckinridge for President and secessionists as their convention delegates.

The three counties discussed in this work supply evidence that the battle over secession was yet another battle of political parties, just with new names. Class conflict, economic factors, and geography have previously been cited and certainly played a role, but political divisiveness and party affiliation need to be studied more carefully to see what role they played in Georgia's reaction to Lincoln's election and subsequent election for delegates to the state convention.

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