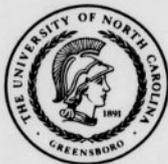


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ROBERT PAUL AMBROSE. A "Critical Year" (April 1860 - April 1861): A Study of Unionist Sentiment in Western North Carolina During the Culminating Year of the Secession Movement. (1975) Directed by: Dr. Loren Schweninger. Pp. 51.

In 1860, much of the western part of North Carolina was on the verge of economic "takeoff." That is not to say this region was, by any stretch of the imagination, an industrial society in the same light as the manufacturing centers of the North. It was, however, experiencing a time when the old impediments and resistances to economic growth were finally being overcome. Sustained prosperity was within the grasp of western Carolinians. It could be achieved by better transportation systems to open new markets, technological changes to increase production, and innovations to facilitate further industrialization. The embryonic state of manufacturing in 1860 was the product of a half century of slow and often painful development; its mere presence foretold of extensive industrial activity in the future. The growth pattern in this area would resemble that which was begun decades earlier in the North.

The economic needs of the eastern section and of the cotton growing areas of southwestern North Carolina, unlike those of the West, coincided with other areas of the South which were facing economic stagnation. For decades, planters had been investing mainly in slaves and in land and since the amount of good land was limited each additional investment dollar brought a smaller return. The only hope for continued growth was in the opening of new lands to be exploited by the "planter capitalists." If this could be done, then, for a period of time, investments would bring substantial returns. Most importantly, the future of the eastern and southwestern parts of North Carolina were intertwined

with the dominant southern economic system. Western Carolinians, on the other hand, were moving toward a diversified economy similar to that in the North. The attempt by westerners to block the secession movement must be seen as partly resulting from the particular state of economic development of this section and the subsequent psychological ties with the North.

Of critical importance in understanding the attitudes of western Carolinians toward secession is to understand this diversifying economic system, which goes a long way in explaining the strong Unionist sentiment during the "critical year," April 1860 to April 1861. The infant industries of western North Carolina relied heavily upon the technological leadership of northern manufacturing centers. Consequently, there was among westerners an incentive to preserve the Union which was not found in areas dominated by slave interests. The Unionist response by western Carolinians reflects the seeds of their expanding, diversified economy in the same sense that the demand for secession was the result of an effort to protect the economic interests of the planter-slavery society.

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<sup>1</sup>Any paper concerned with this subject must acknowledge Joseph C. Sitterson's book, The Secession Movement in North Carolina. This definitive study utilizes an exhaustive number of primary and secondary sources to present a scrutinizing account of the move toward secession in North Carolina during the twenty years prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The following manuscript, "A Critical Year . . .," examines many of the sources used by Dr. Sitterson, as well as other valuable materials which were not available to him, in order to present the story and the reasons for the pro-Unionist response by western Carolinians during the culminating year of the secession movement.

A "CRITICAL YEAR" (APRIL 1860 - APRIL 1861):  
A STUDY OF UNIONIST SENTIMENT IN WESTERN  
NORTH CAROLINA DURING THE CULMINATING  
YEAR OF THE SECESSION MOVEMENT

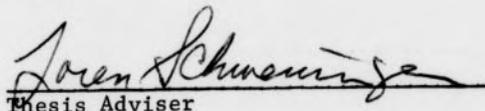
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Robert Paul Ambrose

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the western part of North Carolina there rises up a mountainous region with bold scenery and a more bracing climate than exists to the east. This region and the land surrounding its long ridges and awesome precipices has a prevailing character of fertility. The forest trees and smooth undulating surfaces of waving grasses found in the Western Piedmont are magnificent sights. The landscape is variegated by large tracts covered with dense forests of balsam fir trees and hardwoods alternating with grasslands filled with countless varieties of wildflowers. From the sides of mountains rushing streams and broad rivers flow along the beautiful valleys which lie in the shadows of the highest peaks in eastern United States.<sup>2</sup>

The inhabitants of this area have a common reverence for their homeland. They seem to feel that their lives more than the lives of others are controlled by a superior law, the law of nature. This attitude is understandable since men who are intimate with nature are often more aware of her restrictions. Daniel Webster, a native of a similar region, clearly understood the parameters of physical geography when he declared before the United States Senate on March 7, 1850, that despite the desires of some men, slavery was excluded from certain places by

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<sup>2</sup>"Debow's Review," Vol. XXIX, p. 658. This region was similarly described by Senator Thomas Clingman to the North Carolina State Agricultural Society in 1860.

Mother Nature herself. Webster maintained that a profitable slave system would not endure unless the land on which that system is implemented could support a labor intensive and a large scale agriculture needed to effectively utilize slave labor. The counties situated in the mountains and Western Piedmont of North Carolina offered no such conditions.<sup>3</sup> Here the farms were small, usually consisting of a house, barn and a few acres of cultivated land. Most places had no slaves but those that did commonly had only between five and ten blacks who worked the fields side by side with their master and his family. The institution of slavery was not economically crucial to western Carolinians.<sup>4</sup> In fact, workers were openly opposed to its existence. One contemporary writer observed that "it was noticeable that slavery, even in the days of greatest excitement over the slave question was of a milder type in western counties than elsewhere."<sup>5</sup> There was not only the common religious and philosophical opposition, but also the problem of many mechanics who found themselves competing with blacks for work. Consequently, those not owning slaves disliked slavery because of the difficulty finding employment.

Benjamin S. Hedrick, a professor at the University of North Carolina and a "westerner," acknowledged this when he observed that

many is the time I have stood by a loaded emigrant wagon and given the parting hand to those faces I was never to look upon again.

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<sup>3</sup>In the ante-bellum period the Piedmont and Mountain region together were called the "West."

<sup>4</sup>"Westerners," were unsympathetic to the expansionist policies of the slave aristocracy which dominated Southern society. However, they emphatically opposed abolition.

<sup>5</sup>James S. Brawley, The Rowan Story (Salisbury, N.C.: The Rowan Printing Co.), p. 179.

They were going to seek homes in the free west, knowing as they did that free and slave labor could not both exist and profit in the same area.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary analysis of the economic effects of the slave system was relatively unsophisticated and most often distorted by the intense emotional feelings of the writers either for or against slavery. Hinton Rowan Helper, also a "westerner" and author of the controversial book Impending Crisis, insisted that slavery had ruined agriculture and made the South economically dependent upon the North. Helper accused all slaveholders of being more despicable than thieves and murderers. Impending Crisis was so feared that it became unlawful to distribute the book in North Carolina. On March 30, 1860, the Reverend Daniel Worth was sentenced to one year imprisonment for circulating the book. Governor Jonathan Worth later recalled that his cousin's "zeal got the better part of his discretion."

But for every Southern writer who saw the economic disadvantages of slavery there were many more men who continued to argue that slavery had been profitable in the past and, therefore, should continue to be the basis of the Southern economy. John Witherspoon Debow, an ardent secessionist and editor of the influential "Debow's Review," was such a man. He maintained that slavery not only did not hurt the non-slaveholder, but was actually beneficial to him. In his article, "Interest in Slavery of Southern Non-Slaveholders," Debow stated that the real wages of non-slaveholders were higher than those received by equally skilled northern workers. Apparently Debow's political motives impaired his economic analysis, at least as it applied to the situation

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

in western North Carolina. Even if the wage scale was as high as he suggested the fact remains that work which could be done by slaves would be denied their white competitors. In Mecklenburg County "it was no uncommon thing to find the finest blacksmiths, carpenters, tanners, shoemakers and in fact all kinds of mechanics among the slaves."<sup>7</sup> From this evidence it must be assumed that the high wage scale was the result of a shortage of qualified workers in certain occupations.

The farmers who lived in ante-bellum western North Carolina raised nearly everything for their domestic use. This subsistence agriculture restricted capital accumulation and as a result reinvestment.<sup>8</sup> The farms remained relatively small. Of the twenty-one counties in the state which did not contain a single plantation of 1000 acres, fifteen were western counties.<sup>9</sup> To the planters of the east the yeomen farmers of the west were economically and socially backward and often regarded

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<sup>7</sup>J. B. Alexander, History of Mecklenburg County, p. 125.

<sup>8</sup>As compared to the "planter capitalism" which existed where there was capital accumulation and reinvestment. However, Eugene D. Genovese points out in The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economics and Society of the Slave South, that this reinvestment was only along the same lines as the original investment, in slaves and land. This quantitative approach to economic progress, according to Genovese, brought economic stagnation. Further evidence can be found in the Lindsay Patterson Papers. There are a number of instances where farms in western counties were rented for corn which indicates a scarcity of money.

<sup>9</sup>Roser Howard Taylor, Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View. Taylor also states that in the Mountain district only one county had more than 25% slaves and the percentage of slaves in this region declined in the period between 1840-1860 from 11% to 10.2%.

as politically dangerous.<sup>10</sup> However, as they were removed from the political economy of the South so too were they separate from its disputes with the North over tariffs and the expansion of slavery into the territories. Self-sufficient farmers and mechanics were indifferent to the commercial policies of these two societies as well as to any attempt by southern planter capitalists to avoid economic strangulation by spreading slavery into the territories.

The yeomen farmers and mechanics of the mountains and western Piedmont of North Carolina understandably had little liking for the planter-capitalists or the institution of slavery. These people, whose lifesblood came from "lackadaisical digging in forlorn cornpatches" were, as workers, forced to compete with slaves for jobs and, as producers, left out of the market economy because of geographical restrictions. Zebulon Vance, a United States Congressman from Ashville, would recall after the War that "seven tenths of our people (westerners) held no slaves at all and to say the least of it, felt no great and enduring enthusiasm for its (slavery's) preservation."<sup>11</sup>

These "southern Yankees" were only on the periphery of the dominant southern society. They were mechanics competing with slaves for work. They were farmers producing outside the realm of a market economy. They would soon become soldiers fighting in a war created by

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<sup>10</sup>According to Genovese, planters did not want to appropriate State funds to build a transportation system into the back country because they did not want to increase the economic strength of the small farmers by opening new markets. Farmers, on the other hand, consistently voted in support of State aid for internal improvements.

<sup>11</sup>J. A. Sloan, North Carolina in the War Between the States, p. 101.

what, to them, were uncritical issues. Slavery, states' rights, "Black Republicanism," and the tariff question were all around during the 1850's but the west remained indifferent to the secession movement. In the "critical year" between April 1860 and April 1861, these men stubbornly withstood the increasing desire for secession which came from the east and south. Ultimately, however, after Lincoln's call for troops on April 15, 1861, the majority of westerners complied with the demands of radicals and "let the Union rip." This region, where in 1861 "slave owners were so rare that the institution of slavery may be said practically to have had no existence,"<sup>12</sup> sent more than 15,000 fighting men into battle. The story of events which led the western counties of North Carolina to that decision is the subject of this paper.

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<sup>12</sup>J. P. Arthur, Western North Carolina: A History (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards and Boughton, 1914), p. 636.

Map No. 1 on page 8 shows the area considered in this paper.

A tier of counties in southwestern North Carolina has been excluded because it lies within the "cotton belt" and consequently must be regarded as part of the "planter-slavery" region.

Map No. 2 on page 9 shows the density of slave population in North Carolina in 1860. It should be noted that the majority of counties considered in this paper had less than 5 slaves per square mile whereas the statewide average was 9.5 slaves per square mile.

This is a copy of a map found in Roser Howard Taylor's, Slaveholding in North Carolina: An Economic View, p. 50.



MAP NO. 2



-  10 or more slaves per square mile
-  From 5 to 10 slaves per square mile
-  Less than 5 slaves per square mile

## CHAPTER II

### THE POLITICAL CONVENTIONS TO THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1860 was an election year. This political year, however, was more crucial than past ones, for the country's survival might well be at stake. Over a decade of intense hostility between northerners and southerners had created an apparently irreconcilable rivalry between these two sectors of the country. Consequently the task before Americans was to find a suitable candidate within their political party who represented the philosophy of the sector in which they lived and to insure his election.

Democrats began first by calling a convention at Charleston in April of 1860. At this meeting the severity of tension between the North and South was first revealed when the platform committee presented three conflicting recommendations to the body of the Convention. Of these, the majority resolution embodied the principles of "states' rights" and promoted southern extremists' demands for Congressional protection of slavery and their right to expand that institution into the territories. This proposal was defeated by powerful northern delegates who in turn supported the first of two minority reports which proposed that the doctrine of popular sovereignty as it was presented in the Cincinnati Platform of 1856 be accepted. At the same time, northerners voted for the rejection of a second minority resolution calling for Supreme Court jurisdiction concerning the expansion of

slavery into the territories. This action was expected by everyone since a majority of the Supreme Court judges were southerners and could be expected to support the spread of slavery.

The defeat of this report combined with the acceptance of an anti "states' rights" platform caused a furor among many southern delegates.<sup>13</sup> The following day the delegations from Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, and a majority of delegates from South Carolina, Arkansas and Georgia left the Convention disgusted with northern colleagues.<sup>14</sup> The fractured convention which remained after the walkout was unable to find a nominee for the party. For fifty-seven ballots the delegates from the majority of northern states stood behind their choice, Stephen A. Douglas, refusing to accept a compromise candidate. Consequently, in an atmosphere of despair, the convention was adjourned to meet at Baltimore on June 18, 1860.

The interim between the two Democratic conventions was filled with political activity. Baltimore, where an unprecedented twin Democratic ticket would be presented, produced the Constitutional Union Party and another pair of candidates entered what was becoming a political stampede. The new party was pieced together from the remains of the old Whig Party and the southern wing of the American Party.

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<sup>13</sup>Dwight L. Dumond, The Secession Movement 1860-1861 (New York: Macmillan, 1931), pp. 37-38. Dumond points out that much of the hostility between Douglas and "states' rights" men was due to resentment by southerners that of fifteen states in which the popular vote of Lincoln was to exceed those for Douglas, Breckenridge and Bell combined, twelve sent their delegations to the Democratic National Convention instructed for Douglas. They represented 120 votes on the floor, 19 more than one-third.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

John Bell of Tennessee, a former United States Congressman and Secretary of War, and Edward Everett, former Governor of Massachusetts and President of Harvard University, were the standard bearers. The Unionist platform purposely avoided the slavery issue and emphasized national patriotism. The delegates from the twenty-four states which participated believed the country was tired of the slave question and would rally behind a call for unity. Nevertheless, the platform was distinctly pro-Southern. Although it recognized no principles other than "the Constitution of the country, the union of the States, and the enforcement of laws,"<sup>15</sup> it did not commit its endorsers to uphold the Union under all circumstances. On the contrary, the motive of the Unionist platform was to guarantee "states' rights." It did not uphold the idea of majority rule but rather insisted upon Constitutional protection of the rights of the Southern minority. This was a revitalization of Calhoun's "concurrent majority" theory. "Unionists" assumed the country would remain whole.<sup>16</sup>

With this philosophy in mind, "Unionists" denounced Douglas' advocacy of popular sovereignty as an infringement upon states' rights and criticized the Breckenridge platform for precipitating disunion. John Bell and Edward Everett became very popular in old Whig strongholds such as western North Carolina. In this conservative area their neutrality toward the slave issue and their plea for unionism were especially welcome.

In Chicago, on May 18, a darkhorse candidate named Abraham

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

Lincoln was nominated as the Republican Presidential standard bearer. Though his personal beliefs concerning slavery were relatively unknown at the time, he lost any chance for Southern support when the Convention presented him with a distinctly anti-Southern platform.

#### Republicans

denied that slavery was based in common law, denied that Congress or territorial legislatures had the right to establish it in any of the territories and denounced the principles of nonintervention and popular sovereignty as deceptions and frauds, and defined the doctrine of right of secession as treason.<sup>17</sup>

These statements made Lincoln and his running mate, Hannibal Hamlin, unsuccessful candidates in all areas of North Carolina. They were to receive one percent of the vote the following November.

The first days of summer were approaching when Democrats finally reconvened in Baltimore to again try to find a nominee for their badly divided party. The first order of business was to determine the status of the disaffected delegates. Members immediately decided that the seats of those who bolted at Charleston were to remain vacant unless they were refilled by another vote of their constituents. This obvious anti-Southern action led to another walkout. This time a majority of delegates from the border states of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky left.<sup>18</sup> The Southern states were now virtually unrepresented. The rump convention which remained was free to nominate Stephen Douglas and Herschel V. Johnson and to adopt the original majority resolution which embraced the idea of popular

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph C. Sitterson, The Secession Movement in North Carolina (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), pp. 161-169. (All but three of the North Carolina delegates left.)

sovereignty. This ticket was, of course, unacceptable to most southern Democrats, including those from North Carolina and the other border states.<sup>19</sup>

Five days later, on June 23, in an effort to find a candidate who more closely adhered to southern ideology, the delegates of the seventeen dissenting states met, again at Baltimore, and nominated John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky and Joseph Lane of Oregon. The delegates of this seceders convention, in a bid to gain recognition of their rights within the territories, adopted the original majority platform which had been rejected at Charleston two months earlier. Breckenridge men entered the race with the hope that Unionists would come to their senses and support Breckenridge in order to defeat the "Black Republicans."<sup>20</sup>

During the summer of 1860, for the first and only time in the nation's history, four presidential candidates came before the American people. In the ensuing months emotional and hard fought campaigns enveloped nearly all of the states. The contest in North Carolina was clearly between John Bell and John Breckenridge. The western counties became a unit supporting John Bell and the preservation of the Union. Prominent citizens of this area began to speak out against the disunion spirit which was brewing in the large slaveholding, Breckenridge counties to the east. On June 8, Reverend J. Buxton of Ashville wrote a relative that he believed

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<sup>19</sup>Douglas received only a few thousand votes from the entire state of North Carolina that November.

<sup>20</sup>It should be noted that even if Bell's votes were given to Breckenridge, Lincoln still would have won the election.

the disunion mania to be a practical blindness and a jereboom scheme against God and man. Mr. Everett's letter is a statesmanlike production and Washingtonian throughout. A sectionalized politician on the slavery question pro or con is my abomination, object of my implacable disgust. We want breadth, patriotism, moderation, honesty and my opinion is (which however I do not preach) that we won't find any of these things at large in either the Democratic or Republican parties.<sup>21</sup>

Reverend Buxton's mode of conservatism prevailed in western counties. Slavery was neither wanted nor needed there and as a result the proponents of that institution found no more support than could be gotten from ambivalence. Whenever anyone went so far as to argue that secession might be necessary to protect the slave institution, westerners such as Samuel Johnston quickly responded that "the people here are too great to be dashed to pieces by the folly or the madness of...politicians for their personal aggrandizement."<sup>22</sup>

Reverend Buxton and Samuel Johnston, along with their Unionist colleagues, rallied behind the influential newspapers, such as the Weekly Raleigh Register, an old Whig paper, to accuse Breckenridge men of using the doctrine of "states' rights" as a method to dissolve the Union if they could not hold office under it.<sup>23</sup> Westerners contended that when a state entered the Union by adopting the Constitution it did not retain the right of secession, but by such action consented to seek the preservation of its rights by means provided by the Constitution.

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<sup>21</sup>J. Buxton to Ralph Buxton, Ashville, June 8, 1860. Ralph Potts Buxton Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.

<sup>22</sup>Pettigrew Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, N.C.).

<sup>23</sup>Weekly Raleigh Register, February 8, 1860.

Accordingly, Breckenridge men violated the Constitution by insisting that a state could nullify or secede if it so desired. Ratification made these rights void, and state sovereignty became limited by the guidelines set forth by the Constitution.

During the initial months of the "critical year", Democrats countered the attacks of Unionists by simply asserting the rights of nullification--that a state could remain within the Union while complying with only the laws which were beneficial to the said state --and secession--that a state had voluntarily entered the Union reserving the right to withdraw at its own will. Again, adherents to this philosophy were generally found in areas where slavery was regarded as an economic necessity. This was the essence of their argument against anti-slavery legislation perpetrated by the federal government.

It is important to realize that neither the majority of North Carolinian Unionists nor Democrats advocated secession at this time. Moreover, as late in the campaign as November, the only secessionist papers in the state were the Raleigh State Journal, the Goldsboro Rough Notes, and the Charlotte Bulletin. The argument was theoretical, at least for the moment. Breckenridge men maintained the right of secession but they were not ready to carry out that privilege. The mood of the vast number of Democrats in North Carolina was perhaps best expressed by William Holden, editor of their chief political organ, the North Carolina Standard. Holden had originally favored Douglas because he felt he was more likely to defeat Lincoln than was Breckenridge. As the campaign progressed it became apparent that Breckenridge was the

stronger candidate in North Carolina. For this reason, Holden shifted his support to the Breckenridge ticket, but continued to plead for caution and oppose the idea of "disunion for existing causes." An editorial revealing the position of the Standard as well as most North Carolina Democrats appeared in the North Carolina Standard on July 11, 1860. Holden wrote:

North Carolina has been for the space of seventy years a member of the federal Union. She entered this great sisterhood of States after mature deliberation. She did so believing she would thereby best promote her own interests, and more effectually than in any other situation protect herself from the encroachments by foreign states.

The editor maintained that certain conditions must occur before North Carolina could leave this Union:

Some great cause must move her- some great wrong must either be inflicted or must overshadow her, before she will contemplate her own act of severance from the Union. She feels that while Virginia and Tennessee and Maryland, and Kentucky are safe in the Union she will be safe also; and that her honor, as sensitive and untarnished as theirs, has been confided to her own keeping, and not to that of South Carolina, Alabama and Mississippi. She is a breadstuff rather than a 'cotton-State'. Her interests are central among the southern states relying as she does for protection not more on the slaveholding states to the south of her than on those of the north and west.

Holden called upon Unionists to:

cling to such a Union as 'the mariner clings to his last plank when night and the tempest close around him'. As long as the Constitution is preserved inviolate we shall have nothing to fear. It will be time enough when that instrument, which is the bond of the Union, shall have been broken, or its spirit disregarded, to dissolve existing relations and provide new guards for future security.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>North Carolina Standard, July 11, 1861. William Holden was probably Unionist in North Carolina at this time. His views accurately reflect the attitudes of Unionists from western North Carolina.

This editorial was a response by moderate Democrats to the radical wing of their party. It also expressed the sentiment of most westerners, with the exception of those who already pledged to "go with the Union until the lanes end." There was, however, this subtle difference between the position taken by moderate Democrats and that of their more conservative counterparts of the Whig stronghold to the west. The "great cause" which would warrant disunion was not a prescribed event. Many democrats believed that Lincoln's election would be reason to dissolve the Union. Others thought that Lincoln should be given a fair trial and if his actions were anti-Southern, then that should bring secession. Most westerners, however, stood against secession. Since slavery was not an intimate part of their economy, anti-slave legislation was not an immediate threat to their welfare. Understandably they did not want to risk bringing on a bloody war over such uncritical circumstances.

During the early summer much time was given to local and state elections. By August 9, the returns had been published in local newspapers and peoples' attention focused away from Pool Versus Ellis and the ad velorum question to the national presidential race. The west became noticeably more vocal than it had been that spring. The few newspapers there at last began to choose sides. On August 24, the Iredell Express, an influential Unionist newspaper, criticized Douglas' "squatter sovereignty" policies, but was more vehemently opposed to Breckenridge for supporting these policies at Cincinnati in 1856 and then coming out against them in 1860. Breckenridge was also accused of once being allied with abolitionists and free soilers such

as B. F. Hallet of Massachusetts. In that same issue, editor Eugene B. Drake wrote that:

the only chance there is to defeat Lincoln and save the country, will be for the conservative, Union loving men of all parties-- to lay aside their party predelictions and vote for Bell and Everett. They must do this or Lincoln will be elected inevitably; and as inevitable will the Union be dissolved, and a scene of bloodshed and anarchy will ensue that never was witnessed before in any country.<sup>25</sup>

During the late summer a number of other western newspapers came out for John Bell. The Western Advocate, which was renamed the Ashville Spectator, Western Carolinian and the Carolina Watchman all supported the Constitutional Union Party. These papers, like the Iredell Express, regarded John Bell as the more likely candidate to defeat Lincoln and further denounced Breckenridge for advocating secession as a way to insure southern rights. The federal government was viewed as "the fairest and best on God's earth" and those who would destroy it were guilty of a wicked crime. Western "Unionist" papers saw no just complaint against the government, especially anything which warranted disunion. They opposed the whole secession movement and sought to convince the people of North Carolina that their interests were bound up in the Union, not in the thralldom of "King Cotton."

Those western newspapers which had been traditionally democratic in most cases continued to support their party's nominees. The papers were forced to mold their candidates to be acceptable within an area of such extreme Union sentiment. For example, the Ashville News, edited by Thomas W. Atkins, supported Breckenridge for President and Ellis for Governor. On July 4 in an editorial expounding upon the

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<sup>25</sup>Iredell Express, August 24, 1860.

merits of these men, the News referred to both as "firmly insisting upon all the Constitutional rights of the South" while being "moderate, conservative Union men."<sup>26</sup> A few months after the summer elections, newly elected Governor Ellis wrote to Robert Gaurdin in South Carolina that "we (North Carolina) will stand by you (South Carolina) to the death whether in or out of the Union." Governor Ellis was after all a secessionist. Western democratic newspapers had tried to hide this behind a disguise of "Constitution and Union"<sup>27</sup> in order to make both Ellis and Breckenridge more appealing to their conservative readers. Nevertheless, it remained that men whose loyalty to the Union was questionable would not be popular in western counties.

In the months preceding the election, well known Southerners who favored the Breckenridge ticket came out for disunion. This made it seem even more certain that secession was the aim of his supporters. "We shall fire the Southern heart, instruct the Southern mind, give courage to each other and at the proper moment, by one organized concerted action we can precipitate the Cotton States into revolution,"<sup>28</sup> proclaimed William Yancey. J. T. Morgan exclaimed, "If I had the power I would dissolve this government in two minutes,"<sup>29</sup> while John D. F.

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<sup>26</sup> Ashville News, July 4, 1860.

<sup>27</sup> "Constitution and Union" was the motto of the Salisbury Banner. This paper's editor, John Spelman, became as active for the Democratic Party as was J. J. Bruner of the Carolina Watchman for the opposition as evidenced by the appearance of his name as secretary of several Democratic meetings held in Rowan County.

<sup>28</sup> Iredell Express, August 17, 1860.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Williams bitterly exclaimed that he would "break up and dissolve this rotten Yankee government"<sup>30</sup> if it were up to him. Statements such as these helped to label all Breckenridge men as secessionists even though the vast majority of North Carolina Democrats still opposed immediate secession. These spokesmen made it seem unlikely to westerners that Breckenridge and Lane were as much for Constitution and Union as some newspapers portrayed them. This fact hurt the Democratic ticket in western counties, but to make matters worse, a committee in Columbia, South Carolina, headed by John Witherspoon Debow, agreed that in the event of the election of Lincoln the South should secede. Further, leading newspapers reported that South Carolina Breckenridge men had formulated a plan to take the South out of the Union even before the election. This plot involved the violent seizure of the federal forts by volunteers from the "Cotton States." It was hoped that such action would force other slave-holding states into the league. North Carolina and Virginia would become the likely battleground and would therefore be unable to remain neutral.

Despite these obvious movements toward disunion, the "West" remained a stalwart against the growing secessionist pressure. Union men fervently opposed what to them were despicable ideas brewing in the "deep South" and in the slave counties of eastern North Carolina. On October 5, the Iredell Express reported that "our mountain friends are being thoroughly aroused in behalf of the Union, Constitution and the enforcement of laws."<sup>31</sup> Most western counties called special

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Sitterson, p. 194.

meetings to reassert the resolutions which they had passed the previous winter. For example, in January the Whigs of Wilkes County resolved that:

we, the Whigs of Wilkes County are decidedly in favor of the Union of these states as they now exist and are determined to oppose all efforts come from what source they may, that either does or tends to weaken the bonds of Union under which we live; and that we pledge ourselves to maintain the Union and Constitution as they now exist as long as they afford the protection to our lives and property that they do.<sup>32</sup>

In October, the citizens of Wilkes County met again to reaffirm that position.

Other meetings were held throughout western North Carolina to openly condemn the actions of the ever growing and more vocal group of disunionists. On October 11, "The Great Union Meeting," described as "the largest gathering held in North Carolina since the days of 1840,"<sup>33</sup> was held in Salisbury. Four days before the election, five thousand people met at Wilkesboro to hear leading Unionists, including Zebulon Vance, Honorable J. M. Leach and Dr. J. G. Ramsey argue in favor of preserving the Union. Similar sessions were held in other western cities and towns until that part of the state became an orgy of oratory expressing an intense devotion to the Union.

During the final days of the presidential campaign, concern over the effects of a "black Republican" administration continued to grow throughout North Carolina. The people of the state reacted to this potential threat in one of three ways. On one extreme

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>33</sup>The Weekly Raleigh Register, October 17, 1860. Similar meetings were also held in Caldwell, Macon, Wildes, Surrey, Iredell, Yancy, Buncombe, Madison and Henderson Counties.

secessionists insisted that Lincoln's election would be sufficient reason for disunion. In North Carolina, "secessionists" were found predominantly in counties with large slave populations. Their most influential leaders included Governor Ellis and Senator Thomas Clingman. In the middle the majority of North Carolinians shared the belief that Lincoln's election by itself would not be cause for any state to leave the Union. This group of "conditional Unionists" adopted a policy of "watch and wait" and maintained that even if the Republicans were victorious the South would still control two of the three departments of government and could therefore block any inimical legislation. On the other extreme, "unconditional Unionists" vowed to preserve the Union at all costs and regarded the idea of "right of secession" as an absurdity. The relatively few adherents to this policy came mostly from the far west and were to remain faithful to the United States Government throughout the Civil War.

It must be noted that gradations of opinion existed within the three groups, especially among "conditional Unionists." "Conditional Unionists," as stated earlier, did not agree upon what action would constitute sufficient cause for seceding. In fact, many eastern Democrats who were being influenced by Senator Clingman and Governor Ellis were leaning toward disunion before the election. On the other hand, most westerners were firmly opposed to the whole idea. B. F. Eller, member of a prominent Wilkes County political family, wrote,

...the good old State is not as much of a turncoat as he is (Clingman). Neither are willing to unfurl the great flag of our Country for the cause of Lincoln's election until we have seen that his actions require such an act to be done.<sup>34</sup>

Eller seems to reflect the opinion of most westerners and his statement is supported by the areas' newspapers.<sup>35</sup>

In the days just before the election, the number of people who favored secession steadily increased as it became apparent that Lincoln quite possibly would be the next President of the United States. Despite this added pressure, the fidelity of the "West" toward the Union remained unfaltering, as evidenced by the large Whig vote on November 6, and by the numerous pro-Union meetings which were held during the following months.

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<sup>34</sup>F. W. Johnston, "The Papers of Zebulon B. Vance," State Department of Archives and History, Raleigh, 1963, p. 74. Eller called Clingman a turncoat because he believed that the Senator wanted secession in order to become President of the Confederacy.

<sup>35</sup>For example, on October 26, the Iredell Express told her readers that "we do not assert that the election of Mr. Lincoln by a constitutional majority would be a cause for dissolution of the Union; we do not hold any such doctrine."

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ELECTION TO THE INAUGURATION OF LINCOLN

Prior to Election Day most editorials in local and state newspapers dealt with the effect that an "anti-slavery" administration would have upon the country. Since no one, including westerners, thought that a Lincoln victory would do anything to unify the North and South, concern was expressed as to the extent to which the nation would be further divided by his administration and whether the South would have any honorable choice but to secede. Western North Carolina newspapers warned people that the great question to be settled at the polls was whether Constitution and Union would be maintained or whether the South would break up the Union and begin a bloody civil war. Union men maintained that a Republican victory would increase dissension between North and South. If people on both sides used restraint, the Country could be saved. They openly condemned radicals who, in the days before the election, proclaimed that a Lincoln victory would be "the death knell of the Union," and if such an event occurred the country would last only a few months.

The election of Lincoln on November 6, 1860, was dreaded by nearly all North Carolinians. For the first time in the nation's history the government would be headed by a purely sectional party; and to make matters worse for southerners, that party represented interests

which conflicted with their own. Conservative newspapers recommended that everything possible be done to save the Union. On November 12, the Weekly Raleigh Register asked the people of North Carolina to give Lincoln a fair trial before making any decision.<sup>36</sup> The Greensboro Patriot (November 19) did not approve of Lincoln's election but called for tolerance and caution.<sup>37</sup> The Iredell Express (November 23) argued that the result of the election was not just cause to leave the Union because the President-elect would not have enough authority to injure the South.<sup>38</sup> He, like Buchanan, would have to contend with Congress and the Supreme Court, both of which were controlled by Southerners.

One moderate Democratic newspaper, which sustained the position taken by the conservative press, was the influential North Carolina Standard. Editor William Holden headed what was perhaps the most effective pro-Union campaign in the state of North Carolina. Holden's skillfully written editorials accurately convey the sentiment of all strong Union men resulting in a strong following of readers in the western part of the state. In an article entitled "Disunion for Existing Causes," Holden gave the most persuasive argument against "disunion" following Lincoln's election.

A Confederacy or Union composed of the fifteen slave-holding States would, after a while, encounter some of the same difficulties which now beset the existing Union. The States south of us would produce and export cotton, while the middle or 'bread-stuff' States would become deeply interested in manufactures.

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<sup>36</sup>Weekly Raleigh Register, November 12, 1860.

<sup>37</sup>Greensboro Patriot, November 19, 1860.

<sup>38</sup>Iredell Express, November 23, 1860.

Foreigners from Europe and the North would pour into the latter and push the slave population farther south. Manufacturers would demand and obtain protection, and free labor would contend with and root out slave labor in the Middle States, until at length the latter could commence to agitate against the cotton States as the North is now agitating against us.

Holden maintained that:

Our honor as a people is still untarnished - our Constitutional rights, so far as the federal government is concerned, are still untouched. If the federal government should attempt even to tarnish the one or to deprive us of the other, we for one would be ready to resist, and ready to dissolve the Union without regard to consequences. But not now! The slave holder, whose property civil war would involve in imminent peril, says not now! If we must dissolve the Union, let us do it as one people, and not by a fair majority. Let us wait until the people of the State are more united on the subject than they are now.<sup>39</sup>

A great number of North Carolinians disagreed with the moderate position taken by the Standard and the many pro-Union papers of the West. During the later part of November and December, meetings "which were noticeably absent in western counties"<sup>40</sup> were organized to muster support for disunion in an attempt to take control of the state away from the Unionists. On November 20, Governor Ellis suggested to the Legislature that a conference of southern states and a convention in North Carolina be called to consider the question of secession. These post-election maneuvers by Secessionists made it obvious that despite earlier promises a Lincoln victory would not justify separation; the election of a "black Republican" did in reality pose a sufficient threat against "planter aristocracy" interests to further the cause of separatists. This group, headed by Governor Ellis and Senator Clingman, became larger and more influential after November sixth. People living

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<sup>39</sup> North Carolina Standard, December 1, 1860.

<sup>40</sup> Sitterson, op. cit., p. 140.

in the southwestern counties, where land and slave prices fell rapidly as a result of the Republican victory, began to find the arguments for secession in order to protect southern rights very convincing. The position of the Ellis-Clingman faction was definitely strengthened by the outcome of the Presidential Election.

Unionists confronted the expanding influence of their opponents by simply reasserting their previous position at "Union meetings," in newspaper editorials and before the North Carolina Legislature. Probably the most accurate summary of the attitudes held by most westerners was described in a series of resolutions introduced in the House by Dennis Ferebee. His proposal stated that:

1) the Constitution of the United States is not a compact of sovereign States; 2) that no State can withdraw from the Union without revolution; 3) that it is the duty of North Carolina to defend the rights of the Union, and 4) that the election of Abe Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin is not sufficient cause for dissolution.<sup>41</sup>

During the period between November 6, 1860 and the secession of South Carolina on December 20, 1860, the principles of Ferebee's bill, which were nearly identical to the resolutions made at the western county meetings nearly a year prior to this time, were the substance of the reasoning offered by "westerners" against disunion for "existing causes."

At one o'clock on December 20, South Carolina left the Union; so began the secession winter of 1861. North Carolina soon witnessed a bitter struggle between Unionists and secessionists. One distressed westerner exclaimed that, "I have never in all my public life, met with

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<sup>41</sup>North Carolina Standard, November 27, 1860.

so much recklessness, so much violence and tyranny as I have here this winter among the disunionists."<sup>42</sup> The "reckless" display of power by North Carolina disunionists following the secession of South Carolina made it clear to Union men that time was not on their side. The trend was now toward secession and they would have to take positive action. Attempts at compromise had repeatedly failed. The Crittenden proposal, a package of six Constitutional amendments, institutionalized the principles of the Missouri Compromise and, thereby, guaranteed that slavery would be recognized south of 36° 30'. This plan was rejected by Northern leaders who envisioned annexing all of Mexico and Central America. They saw no reason to allow slavery to monopolize their anticipated acquisitions. A Central Confederacy was hoped for by Zeb Vance and was overwhelmingly supported by most western counties. Evidently the idea grew out of a statement made by Henry Clay to Senator Graham of North Carolina nearly twenty years earlier. Clay had said,

There are four states in this Union which in its conformation bear to it about the same position that the heart does to the human body; as long as they are quiet and contented there is no danger of disunion, but if they shall become dissatisfied and restless, trouble will not be far off; these States are Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky.<sup>43</sup>

The idea of a Central Confederacy never had widespread recognition. Disunionists were, by now, too confident that they would achieve their goal and had nothing to gain by compromise.

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<sup>42</sup>William Barney, Road to Secession (New York: Praeger Publishers), p. 194.

<sup>43</sup>Major William A. Graham, "The North Carolina Union Men of Eighteen Hundred Sixty-one," North Carolina Booklet, Vol. XI, July 1911, p. 9.

Efforts to curtail the disunion sentiment by dealing directly with the leaders of the secessionist group had failed. Conservatives now used the only course of action left to them. In the State Legislature, and in meetings throughout North Carolina, they attempted to convince the rank and file of the Democratic Party to break away from irresponsible radicals, notably Ellis and Clingman, and join the cause of the Union. It was for this purpose that, in early January, Bedford Brown, of Rowan County, asked the Senate and the people of North Carolina whether they were ready for such a resolution.

Are you ready to lay violent hands on the fairest and best governmental fabric on God's earth and all your own distinguishing you as the most favored people in the world, and tear it in pieces, thus depriving yourselves and your children of their birthright. You have no just complaint - not even a shadow of a complaint against the Government; and if you commit this wickedness in the sight of this age of civilization and religion, you will call down upon your guilty heads the amassed curses and reproaches of the whole world. Your children for generations to come as they shall read the wonderful history of the Country established under the pure and patriotic fathers of the Revolution and its needless destruction by you will curse you.<sup>44</sup>

Brown's purpose was to shame secessionists. Paradoxically, he urged people not to allow "passion" to direct them, but at the same time expounded upon the emotional impact that a civil war would have upon the children of future generations as they read their history lessons.

State Senator Brown's type of argument is typical of the methods of persuasion used by both the Union and the disunion groups during December and most of January. At this time there was no issue important enough to occupy the attention of the disputing factions. Consequently, during the months following the Presidential election,

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<sup>44</sup>Carolina Watchman, January 15, 1861.

the rivalry was characterized by emotionalism and name calling. The Carolina Watchman pointed out that the people on both sides had their minds made up about secession and excepting some earth shattering occurrence they would not change their opinions.<sup>45</sup> Radicals maintained that the State had no choice but to secede. Westerners and all conservatives said that the preservation of the Union was vital to the interests of North Carolina. Both used every opportunity to promote their cause.

In the West, Union meetings were held in every county to offer support for the federal government. These meetings were criticized by disunion men for being submissionist and for supporting an abolition government headed by a base negro-equality administration. The Carolina Watchman, a western paper, responded to the attacks of secessionists. A January editorial described the opinion of most westerners concerning disunionists and their reason for meeting. It read:

The people of Rowan are utterly opposed to such terrible folly. They believe it is easier, safer and better, to seek a redress for grievances in the Union than out of it; and hence they meet together in the county meeting and so declare themselves. They are not untrue to their rights, and sensible men, North and South know it. They do not desire, nor do they expect by a menacing attitude to accomplish what may be better accomplished by argument, and by an appeal to fairness, justice and truth....It is then to save our Country from horrors, to preserve our independence and secure the continued prosperity of all our interests that Union meetings are held; and with these motives for action the Union men will struggle while there is hope.<sup>46</sup>

This western newspaper delineates the attitudes of its predominantly pro-Union constituents. Westerners hoped that the government could be

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<sup>45</sup>Carolina Watchman, January 15, 1861.

<sup>46</sup>Carolina Watchman, January 20, 1861.

saved. They were aware that the "planter-aristocracy" advocated disunion to insure southern rights and revitalize through expansion the dying slave institution. But westerners, as their most distinguished leader, Zeb Vance, attested, "felt no great and enduring enthusiasm for slavery's preservation"<sup>47</sup> and moreover, did not desire to leave the country they loved to protect it. The economic growth of western North Carolina would not depend upon a healthy slave system. The diversified structure of this economy would follow the pattern of Northern industrial areas, not that of the cotton planters. However, westerners were still emotionally attached to the South. Robert G. Twitty, a strong Unionist, admitted that "I am a strong Union man but when they send me south it will probably change my notion. I can do nothing against my own people."<sup>48</sup>

The first few weeks of 1861 found westerners playing a defensive role against the expanding influence of the Ellis-Clingman faction. This was done primarily through Union meetings, newspaper editorials and private correspondence with political leaders. In early January a meeting was held at Organ Church in Rowan County. Those present were asked to vote by secret ballot whether they thought there was sufficient cause for North Carolina to secede from the Union. On January 15, the Carolina Watchman published the results of the poll. The Watchman reported that by a vote of 180 - 0 the people recommended that South Carolina be censured for seceding, that North Carolina not be armed, and

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<sup>47</sup>F. W. Johnston, "The Papers of Zebulon B. Vance," Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

that the State should not secede. The article continued by stating that,

we unhesitatingly assert that this is the sentiment of almost every portion of the County, the misrepresentation of the State Journal and others notwithstanding. The people of Rowan are utterly opposed to this whole secession movement.<sup>49</sup>

Private correspondence between westerners and political leaders offered further evidence that the mountains and western Piedmont were still in favor of Union. Samuel Deaver of Madison County wrote Zeb Vance, "concerning the secession movement, Madison County is three-fourths Union. I saw a man from Cherokee today and he says they are all Union or about it in his county."<sup>50</sup> Similarly, C. C. Jones, a prominent political leader of Caldwell County, wrote Vance that "North Carolina and especially Caldwell and Wilkes are deeply attached to the Union."<sup>51</sup> It is clear from newspaper reports, proceedings of the numerous Union meetings, and private correspondence that the old-Whig stronghold was determined to repulse secession.

The plea of westerners for time to reweigh the value of the Union offered little comfort to easterners, who were weary of the seemingly endless struggle over slavery. In January, while westerners were defending themselves and the Union, North Carolina radicals took positive action toward secession. The citizens of Wilmington organized a group to seize control of federal forts Caswell and Johnson. The effort was unsuccessful as Governor Ellis ordered the forts returned

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<sup>49</sup>North Carolina Watchman, January 15, 1861.

<sup>50</sup>F. W. Johnston, "The Papers of Zebulon B. Vance," op. cit., p. 87.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

to federal authorities. However, the incident did have great impact upon the politics of the State. As a result of this "abortive seizure" and the subsequent fear that the forts would be reinforced with federal troops, the Legislature proclaimed, on January 29, that a statewide vote would be held to determine whether there should be a convention to consider the question of secession, and, if so, to elect delegates to that convention. Discussion over the necessity and meaning of this convention would rapidly become the "gut issue" which had been lacking in the conservative-radical struggle during the first two months after the Presidential election. This debate dominated the North Carolina political scene for the next month.

North Carolinians expressed three different points of view in regard to the calling of a convention. Radicals, of course, were greatly in favor of the idea because it was a way to bring about secession. Western conservatives expressed differing opinions. Some, such as Zeb Vance and his law partner, Augustus Summerfield Merrimon, felt that secession should be left for the people to decide and that politicians should merely do their best to advise them. Vance and Merrimon believed that the calling of a convention was not a disunion movement but rather a process by which citizens would become aware of the issues and understand for themselves the importance of remaining in the Union. Most westerners were less confident in the peoples' ability to make the right decision. Jonathan Worth emphatically opposed a convention. Worth exclaimed that, "any convention called by the General Assembly to consider the National affairs I regard as

revolutionary, and I am sure my constituents are not ready for revolution for existing causes."<sup>52</sup> Worth also warned people not to believe those who tell them that the convention is called to save the Union. "It is called to destroy it. If you desire to preserve the Union, vote no Convention and at the same time be careful for whom you vote as your representatives."<sup>53</sup>

The people of the western Piedmont and the mountains region again stood against secession. Westerners were convinced that the idea of a convention was but another plot by secessionists who realized that there must first be a convention if North Carolina was to follow the lead of the "cotton states." Western Carolinians would resist any move which brought the state closer to leaving the Union. They asserted that the only action which would warrant secession would be if the federal government coerced the seceded states back into the Union. This would be regarded as unconstitutional and would be degrading to the South. However, no such policy had been initiated and it was unlikely that the pusillanimous Buchanan would pursue this course. For this reason Union men of the west generally agreed that a Convention at this time would accomplish nothing but to further the interests of secessionists. On February 19, they again united against the demands of disunionists. The Carolina Watchman read,

We have no hesitation in saying that the Union candidates in Rowan will be elected by an overwhelming majority. The people in every portion of the County are thoroughly aroused and will go to the

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<sup>52</sup>J. G. de Roulac Hamilton, Party Politics in North Carolina, 1835-1860 (Durham, North Carolina: James Sprunt Historical Publications, xv, 1916), p. 45.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

polls with the determination to settle the question of Union or disunion, so far as they are concerned, in the most decided manner.<sup>54</sup>

James Sudger, a lawyer from Haywood County, reported that people of the western counties were in favor of Union. He wrote he was confident that this district would almost unanimously vote against a Convention. Union meetings were again organized to inform the voters on the real impact of a convention. People were warned to beware of disunionists disguised as moderate men. They were reminded that secessionists had told them that the election of Lincoln would not be cause for dissolution; since that time they had done everything possible to take the state out of the Union. Westerners had been deceived once; they would not be deceived again. The west voted decisively for pro-Union delegates and against the calling of a Convention. Accordingly the Convention Bill was defeated by a vote of 47,323 to 46,672.<sup>55</sup>

The feeling of success enjoyed by Unionists as a result of the convention issue was shortlived. On February 27, it was learned that the Washington Peace Conference had failed to adopt any plan of compromise. Westerners had hoped that the Conference would offer North Carolina a way to stay in the Union without having to choose between the North and the South. Zeb Vance revealed the desperation felt by most westerners when he exclaimed, "Now what, the Union is dissolved of course." Despite this setback westerners, including Vance, worked tirelessly for preserving the Union throughout the spring of 1861.

They continued to have strong hopes that the country could be

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<sup>54</sup>Carolina Watchman, February 19, 1861.

<sup>55</sup>North Carolina Standard, March 20, 1861.

saved, but they also recognized that the Union was more fragile now than it ever had been. On March 5, the Carolina Watchman took a more militant position and warned that coercion would be tolerated by no Southerner, not even those who had for so long condemned the actions of the slave-aristocracy.

....Another point: That of coercion of the seceding states, as a means of bringing them back into the Union. The triumph of Union men here, if they have triumphed, does not affect this question; but believing there is no constitutional power in the government for such a measure and that it would be mischievous in its effects for reasons independent of its unauthorised character, the Union men of North Carolina are not less opposed to this doctrine because they have condemned the actions of the seceding States; nor will they fail to resist any attempt to use them for a purpose to ravant to their feelings, and to their convictions of duty....

Nor do the Union men of North Carolina mean to submit the State to an unequal or inferior station in the Union. They demand and will sustain for their mother the position of equality and honor she has ever enjoyed, believing that nothing less can preserve that amity and good feeling indispensable to the common welfare.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Carolina Watchman, March 5, 1861.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE INAUGURATION TO LINCOLN'S CALL FOR TROOPS ON APRIL 15, 1861

On March 6, the hopes of westerners met another serious setback. Lincoln's Inaugural Address had proven to be less than comforting for those people who had thought he would insure the Seceded States against coercion. The Address did not blatantly assert that the "cotton States" would be forced back into the Union nor did it threaten the existence of slavery. But Lincoln did promise "to collect revenue and to hold, occupy and possess property and places belonging to the government."<sup>57</sup> This implied coercion was interpreted by disunionists as a declaration of war. The subsequent propaganda drove many "conditional Unionists" to the side of the secessionists.

Westerners still strongly supported the Union after the Inaugural Address, but most realized that their influence was lessened with each passing day. T. Page Ricard wrote on March 13, that there "is an ominous silence, and I fear, every day's influence is strengthening the Secession ranks."<sup>58</sup> Disunionists utilized the failure of the Peace Conference and the aggressiveness of Lincoln's address as their latest arguments for separation. They stated that the only hope for

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<sup>57</sup>Sitterson, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>58</sup>Jones Fuller Papers, T. Page Ricard to Jones Fuller, March 13, 1861.

the South was to unite against the "double dealing" tactics of Lincoln. Secessionists professed that war was inevitable and that North Carolina would in the end come to the side of southerners because "blood is thicker than water."

Meanwhile, western newspapers urged Union men to stand firm and pay no attention to rumors perpetrated by secessionists that Lincoln was "...going to make war on the south...is going to free the niggers...and wants to put them on an equality with Southern white folks, and any amount of such stuff."<sup>59</sup> The Carolina Watchman and the Greensboro Patriot both criticized the state wide secessionist meeting held in Goldsboro on March 22 and 23.<sup>60</sup> These papers agreed that if "Southern Rights" men wanted a new expression of the popular voice they should seek it in a regular way, not by calling a meeting of disunionists. Unionist papers also reminded people that Lincoln had no more power to coerce than Buchanan had, and that, in government, he was without "friends or funds."

Westerners were, by mid-March, finding it difficult to defend the Union. On March 12, the Carolina Watchman revealed the sense of futility felt by all Unionists. The closing lines of that day's editorial read, "Let us stand firm and work like patriots, hoping unto the end. The future historian will award the highest praise to those who hold out the longest against the efforts of madmen to destroy this great Country."<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Carolina Watchman, March 25, 1861.

<sup>60</sup> Carolina Watchman, April 2, 1861; Greensboro Patriot, April 5, 1861.

<sup>61</sup> Carolina Watchman, March 12, 1861.

During the period between Lincoln's Inaugural Address and his call for troops on April 15, "holding out" was exactly what the people who opposed the secession movement were doing. They did not succumb to the pressure brought forth by disunionists until after Lincoln had made it clear that he would use force to resupply the federal forts situated within Southern states. Newspapers continued to warn people to beware of the hurried actions of the secessionists. Westerners were advised by their leaders that there was still time to make judicial decisions and that every effort should be made to preserve the Country. Unionist sentiment was still very strong in the west before the April 12 attack on Fort Sumter.

During the time between the Inaugural Address and Lincoln's call for troops, an aggressive campaign to promote disunion was carried on by the newly formed "Southern Rights" Party. Secessionists, however, needed one more decisive issue to take North Carolina out of the Union. Lincoln indirectly obliged them with his announcement, April 8, that he intended to resupply Fort Sumter.<sup>62</sup> Southern extremists interpreted this change in policy as a move to prepare the North for war. Consequently, on April 12, South Carolinian troops attacked Fort Sumter. The following day the garrison surrendered.<sup>63</sup> Reports of the battle filled with fiction and thrills filtered back to the North Carolina secessionists, and added to the intensity of their purpose. Westerners were generally saddened by the attack on Sumter but they did not abandon their hope for Union until April 15, when Lincoln issued an

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<sup>62</sup>Sitterson, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 239.

order for 75,000 troops, two regiments from North Carolina, "to coerce" the seceded states. In the minds of Unionists from the western counties of North Carolina, this unconstitutional action by Lincoln signified the end of the Union. They now believed that they had no other alternative than to fight for or against the South; and as secessionists had predicted, "westerners" turned their back on the Union.

Leading westerners, with the exception of a few "unconditional Unionists," immediately supported the Southern cause. Zeb Vance later recalled that,

For myself, I will say that I was canvassing for Union with all my strength; I was addressing a large and excited crowd, large numbers of whom were armed, and literally had my arm extended upward in pleading for peace and the Union of our Fathers, when the President's call for seventy-five thousand volunteers came. When my hand came down from impassioned gesticulation, it fell slowly and sadly by that of a Sectionalist. Immediately, with altered voice and manner, I called upon the assembled multitude to volunteer not to fight against but for South Carolina.<sup>64</sup>

John A. Gilmer, of Guilford County, wrote that Lincoln's proclamation destroyed Union sentiment in this County.<sup>65</sup> Jonathan Worth appealed to the people of Randolph County to unite in defense of the South because it would be inexpedient for the Government to attempt coercion by military force.<sup>66</sup> In his address to the people of Randolph, Worth exposed the remorse of most westerners when he wrote that:

The President must have known that all of us in the Slave States, who in spite of the unfriendly action of the North, had barely become able to stand up for the Union would be crushed by

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<sup>64</sup>Clement Dowd, "The Life of Zebulon Vance" (Charlotte, North Carolina, 1897), p. 441.

<sup>65</sup>Sitterson, *op. cit.*, pp. 240-241.

<sup>66</sup>Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

the first shot he fired against the South. I believed he still desired to protect our rights and preserve the Union, and that he had some sympathy with those that he would not voluntarily drive us out of the Union--though the President had been elected as a partisan, upon one Sectional idea. I hoped and believed when he and his party had gained control of the government, that he would be enough of a statesman and patriot to exert his powers to protect our rights and preserve the Union.<sup>67</sup>

The Unionist newspapers of western counties immediately reversed their policy and declared themselves to be in favor of resistance. Lincoln was accused of violating the Constitution by making war without the consent of Congress. His proclamation calling for troops was interpreted as a malicious desire to promote civil war between the North and South. Western papers asserted that the President had no expectation that the two sections could ever again live peaceably under the same government. On April 23, the Carolina Watchman stated that:

Old lifelong conservative men, who throughout have labored and prayed for a peaceful solution of the national troubles and have never once given up all hope, yielded with anguish of the heart when they could hold out no longer. The miserable duplicity of Abraham Lincoln stung them to the quick, one and all are freely bringing their sons and their treasures to offer on the altar of liberty..Who would measure the deep damnation due to those, North and South, who have through the years of ceaseless agitation, brought this terrible calamity upon us. As there is a just God in heaven they will get their reward.<sup>68</sup>

William Holden, as he had in the past, reflected the thoughts of all Union men. He wrote:

The proclamation of Abraham Lincoln, which we publish today, has completed the sectionalization of the Country. The two extremes are now arrayed against each other with warlike purposes, and the only hope for peace is in the border States....

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>68</sup> Carolina Watchman, April 23, 1861.

Holden called upon Unionists to:

Unite and command the peace, if possible; if we fail in that, we must fight. This is the duty of the border States. They will prove equal to the crisis. They can muster five hundred thousand fighting men. They will take Washington City, if necessary, and hold it; and they will continue the conflict, if it be forced upon them, until the present federal government is demolished and a new one established on its ruins.<sup>69</sup>

Mr. Lincoln's call for troops undermined the Unionist cause in western North Carolina. This proclamation made "the minds of all people run in the same direction,"<sup>70</sup> and that direction was south. For the many the "critical year" had been one of frustration and confusion. For the few it was a year of ambition. Now, on April 15, 1861, triumph belonged to those few alone. In a few short weeks, however, the horror which they had created would belong to everyone. Nearly a century later, the British poet Dylan Thomas wrote an appropriate ending to the story of Unionist sentiment in the western counties of North Carolina from April 1860 to April 1861.

Thomas wrote:

"The hand that signed the paper  
felled the city.  
Five sovereign fingers taxed the breath  
Doubled the globe of dead and  
halved the country  
These five kings did a King to death."

"The five kings count the dead  
but do not soften the crushed wound  
nor stroke the brow.  
The hand rules pity as a hand  
rules heaven.  
Hands have no tears to flow."

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<sup>69</sup>North Carolina Standard.

<sup>70</sup>Mary Shannon Smith, "Unionist Sentiment in North Carolina During the Civil War," Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Session of the State Literary and Historical Association of North Carolina (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1916), p. 59.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this paper it was stated that antebellum western North Carolina was in the process of changing from a subsistence agricultural to a diversified, growing economy. Conditions there, in 1860, foretold of a future more similar to that of the North than to the "planter capitalist" system which dominated the South. The welfare of westerners would depend upon the sustainment of a highly diversified and technologically advanced economy. This fact helped to separate East from West, secession from Union, during the "critical year" discussed in this paper.

The years after the War offer substantial proof that antebellum western North Carolina was on its way to economic expansion. The tobacco industry, headed by the Dukes and Reynolds families, expanded rapidly creating a sophisticated commercial agricultural system by combining smaller and weaker tobacco men. The textile industry by 1870 was already producing more than it had in 1860, and by 1880 production would be double. Yet it was after 1880 that the greatest advances in production were made. Growing towns which resulted from this industrial expansion created new markets for farmers growing foodstuffs. The banking business grew rapidly as investments promised greater and greater returns. The transportation system was improved and the bulk of the state's trading gradually moved westward. An

excellent supply of skilled labor and supervision came from initial industries that provided training for men who would become major contributors to future North Carolina development. A New Hampshire mill man attributed the great success in this area "not to long hours of work and low pay, nor to unintelligent workers, as labor unions would have this country believe, but to efficient management. By efficient management I mean 100 per cent efficiency."<sup>71</sup> Labor came principally from the mountain country and the tenant classes of the Piedmont. These people, "like the original New Englanders, have worked hard to make a living, and appreciate opportunity. They are of great native intelligence and quick to learn."<sup>72</sup> All of these factors, industrial expansion, new markets, better banking and investments facilities, commercial trading, and an exceptional source of supervision and labor helped western North Carolina to sustain a period of phenomenal growth following the Civil War.

This remarkable growth began in 1860 in this region where nature had denied any profitable use of slavery. In time the area would rank first in the South in all aspects of industrial development. It would be first in the United States in textile manufacturing and monopolize almost every phase of the tobacco industry. By the end of the nineteenth century, this region was contributing four-fifths of the state's industrial output. The fact that it was economically expedient for the

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<sup>71</sup>Samuel Huntington Hobbs, Jr., North Carolina - Economic and Social (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), p. 147.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

west to stay in the Union led to little enthusiasm for the expansion of slavery or secession. Between April 1860 and April 1861 western Carolinians made every attempt to stay within the Union. However, when President Lincoln called for troops from North Carolina they responded as Southerners and went with their section.

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