

Slavery and Secession

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Slavery and Secession in Tennessee

Essential Question: Why was Tennessee divided on the question of secession and how did that division affect Tennessee during the Civil War?

As the turbulent 1850s drew to a close, Tennesseans found themselves divided over the question of slavery. Fertile soil and flat land made large plantations possible in West Tennessee, so the population was largely pro-slavery. West Tennessee was tied to the Deep South states not only through their shared interest in cotton, but also in their dependence on the Mississippi River as a transportation route. By contrast, in East Tennessee where rocky soil and mountains made large scale farming difficult, there were few enslaved people and less interest in expanding slavery. In Middle Tennessee enslaved people labored on tobacco plantations as well as smaller farms that produced food destined to feed enslaved populations in the Deep South.

The presidential election of 1860 was a turning point for the nation and for Tennessee. The Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln who vowed not to interfere with slavery where it already existed, but also to stop slavery from spreading in the West.¹ The Democratic Party could not decide on a candidate and split. Stephen Douglas, the Northern Democratic candidate, favored popular sovereignty. This policy allowed the question of slavery to be decided by voters in the territories. The Southern Democratic candidate, John Breckinridge, campaigned in favor of supporting the *Dred Scott* decision which stated that Congress had no power to ban slavery in the territories.² The compromise candidate from the new Constitutional Union Party was John Bell, a

¹ Joyce Appleby et al., *The American Journey*. (Columbus, Ohio: Glencoe McGraw Hill, 2003), 450.

² *Ibid.*

Tennessean, who campaigned in favor of keeping the Union and slavery as they were. Bell received 48% of the votes in Tennessee. Breckinridge received 45%, Douglas 8%, and Lincoln none because his name did not appear on the Tennessee ballot.³

Lincoln's election led South Carolina to secede in December 1860 followed by Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida and Georgia. Leaders in these states believed that Lincoln would abolish slavery despite his promises and were angry that voters in the North and West had the power to elect a candidate who did not receive any electoral votes in the South. Tennessee governor Isham Harris, a West Tennessee native, shared these views, but knew that many Tennesseans still opposed secession. Harris carefully maneuvered the state towards secession by asking the state legislature to authorize a vote on the subject on February 9, 1861.⁴ Secessionists and Unionists campaigned throughout the state. A state convention on secession was rejected by 55% of voters. Voters had also been asked to select delegates to attend if the convention were held. More than 75% of the delegates selected were Unionists.⁵

However, Tennesseans' support of the Union was conditional. Many Tennesseans believed that states did have a right to secede and that the Union should not interfere with secession. Between February 1861 and June 1861 a number of events occurred that caused many Tennesseans to shift their support to the Confederacy.⁶ First, Lincoln decided to resupply the troops at Fort Sumter. This led the Confederacy to attack the fort on April 12, 1861. Just three days after the battle. Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 state militia troops to suppress the rebellion. He appealed "to all loyal citizens to favor, facilitate, and

³ Paul Bergeron, Stephen Ash and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 133.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

aid this effort to maintain the honor, the integrity, and the existence of our National Union.”⁷ This was the final straw for most of the conditional Unionists. They agreed with Governor Harris when he said that “Tennessee will not furnish a single man for the purposes of coercion, but fifty thousand, if necessary for defense of our rights.”⁸

When a second vote on secession was held on June 8, 1861, 69 percent of voters favored secession. Tennessee formally joined the Confederacy on July 2, 1861. However, Tennessee’s secession did not end the struggle between Unionists and Secessionists. East Tennesseans had overwhelmingly voted against secession in February and June. Under the leadership of Andrew Johnson, William G “Parson” Brownlow and others, plans were made for East Tennessee to secede from Tennessee and form a new Union state.⁹ Governor Harris believed that East Tennessee would eventually come to support secession and allowed the Unionists considerable freedom to dissent until early November. Unionists plotted with Union generals in Kentucky to burn key railroad bridges along the East Tennessee & Virginia and East Tennessee & Georgia railroads prior to a Union invasion. The goal was to weaken the Confederacy by cutting Virginia off from the Confederate states of the Deep South. The invasion did not happen, but five bridges were burned, which led to a crackdown by Confederate forces and an end to any hopes of East Tennessee becoming a separate state.¹⁰ However, Tennesseans continued to fight for the Union as soldiers, home guards, partisans and bushwhackers throughout the war. Hurst

⁷ Lincoln, Abraham, Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916: Abraham Lincoln, Monday, Proclamation on State Militia. 1861. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal0907400/>. Accessed 22 June 2021.

⁸ Isham Harris, “Message to Simon Cameron, April 15, 1861. *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, Vol. 5., pp. 272-273. Civil War Sourcebook, <http://www.tnsos.net/TSLA/cwssourcebook/index.php> Accessed 9 July, 2018.

⁹ Bergeron, Ash and Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History*, 139.

¹⁰ Dorothy Kelly, "The Bridge Burnings and Union Uprising of 1861." *Tennessee Ancestors* 21, no. 2 (August 2005):123-129.

Nation and the Free and Independent State of Scott represented attempts by Unionists to separate themselves from Confederate Tennessee.

Generally speaking, most Unionists lived in Eastern Tennessee, but pockets of Unionists could also be found in western Tennessee along the Tennessee River. In McNairy County, people living in the southern part of the county tended to support secession, while those in the northern half opposed it.¹¹ The leading Unionist was Fielding Hurst. Hurst was an enslaver and large landowner in McNairy County. Hurst was imprisoned in Nashville for publicly speaking out against secession. Once released, he was made a colonel by Andrew Johnson and raised the 6th Tennessee cavalry.¹² The land controlled by Hurst and his Unionist followers came to be called Hurst Nation. The division in the county led to brutal warfare between its residents. Many homes on both sides were looted and burned during the war years.¹³

Similarly, in East Tennessee, residents of Scott County were strongly Unionist. On June 4, 1861 Senator Andrew Johnson gave a speech at the courthouse in Huntsville, the county seat, in which he condemned secession.¹⁴ The residents of Scott County voted against secession by the highest margin of any Tennessee county. However, their efforts could not stop Tennessee from seceding. The residents of Scott County responded by seceding from Tennessee and declaring themselves to be the “Free and Independent State of Scott.” Tennessee did not recognize Scott County’s independence. As in McNairy County, Scott County experienced guerilla warfare throughout the war years.¹⁵

¹¹ Bill Wagoner, “McNairy County.” Tennessee Encyclopedia. 2018.
<https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/mcnairy-county/> Accessed 9 July, 2018.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

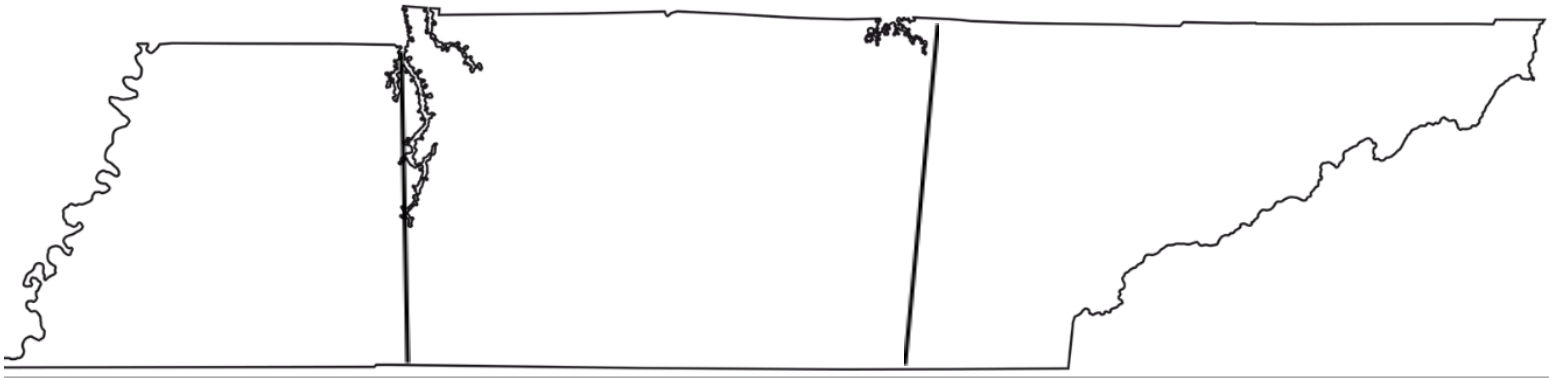
¹⁴ Margaret D. Binnicker, “Scott County.” Tennessee Encyclopedia. 2018.
<https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/scott-county/> Accessed 9 July, 2018.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The Free and Independent State of Scott and the less formally organized Hurst Nation both represented attempts to fight secession and remain true to the Union. Consciously or not, both communities drew on Watauga and the State of Franklin as examples of communities formed by and for the people they represented. Both communities endured years of brutal guerilla warfare as they sought to uphold their Unionist beliefs. Like many communities in Tennessee, Hurst Nation and the State of Scott faced challenges in forgetting the horrors of guerilla warfare as they rebuilt after the war.

Slavery and Secession *Complete each section of the graphic organizer below.*

Part I: Why was Tennessee divided on slavery and secession?



Label the map above using the phrases in the word bank box.

**East Tennessee Middle Tennessee West Tennessee Pro-slavery, Pro-slavery, Neutral on slavery,
Flat land and fertile soil, Rocky soil, fertile soil, pro-secession, pro-Union, pro-secession**

Part II: What events occurred between February, 1861 and June, 1861 that changed many Tennesseans' minds about secession?

February 9, 1861

Voters reject
state convention
on secession

April 12, 1861

June 8, 1861

Voters accept
Tennessee's
secession

Use the text to fill the missing events on the timeline

Part III: How did unionists continue to resist secession after June 8, 1861?

Hurst Nation	State of Scott	Bridge Burners
Who?	Who?	Who?
Where?	Where?	Where?
What?	What?	What?
Why?	Why?	Why?

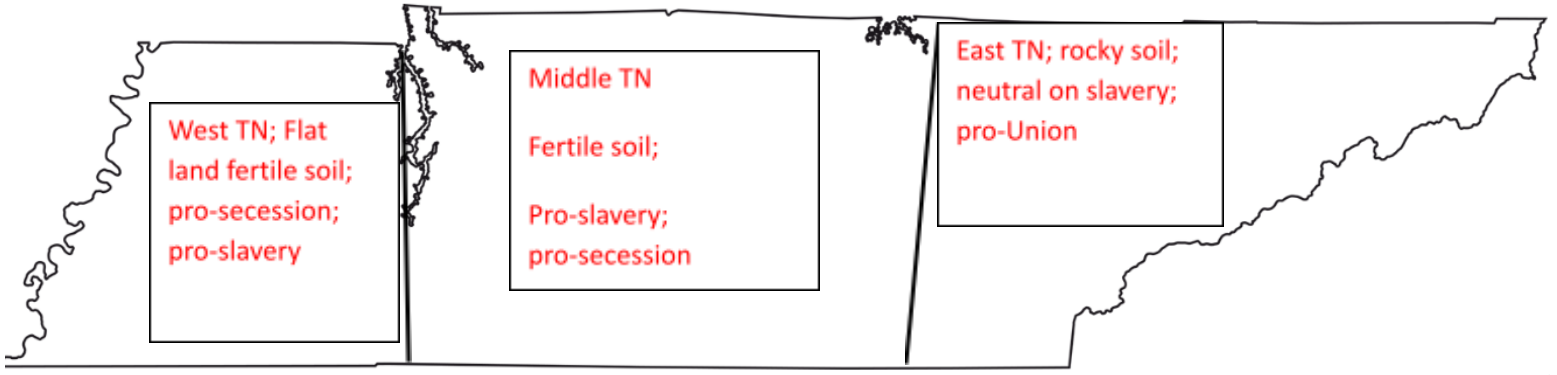
Use the information in your graphic organizer to write an essay that answers the following question:

Why was Tennessee divided on the question of secession and how did that division affect Tennessee during the Civil War?

Slavery and Secession Key

Complete each section of the graphic organizer below. *Answers will vary*

Part I: Why was Tennessee divided on slavery and secession?



Label the map above using the phrases in the word bank box.

East Tennessee Middle Tennessee West Tennessee Pro-slavery, Pro-slavery, Neutral on slavery, Flat land and fertile soil, Rocky soil, fertile soil, pro-secession, pro-Union, pro-secession

Part II: What events occurred between February, 1861 and June, 1861 that changed many Tennesseans' minds about secession?

February 9, 1861 Voters reject state convention on secession	Lincoln decides to send supplies to Fort Sumter	April 12, 1861 Confederates open fire on Fort Sumter; beginning of Civil War	Lincoln call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion	June 8, 1861 Voters accept Tennessee's secession
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Use the text to fill the missing events on the timeline

Part III: How did unionists continue to resist secession after June 8, 1861?

Hurst Nation

Who? **Fielding Hurst**

Where? **McNairy County**

What? **Spoke out against secession; raised TN cavalry unit; fought against secessionists from southern part of the county**

Why? **Disagreed with decision to secede**

State of Scott

Who? **Residents of Scott county**

Where? **Scott County**

What? **Declared themselves independent from TN and loyal to the Union**

Why? **Disagreed with decision to secede**

Bridge Burners

Who? **East TN Unionists**

Where? **Railroad bridges in East TN**

What? **Plot to burn railroad bridges before Union invasion**

Why? **Separate Virginia from rest of Confederacy**

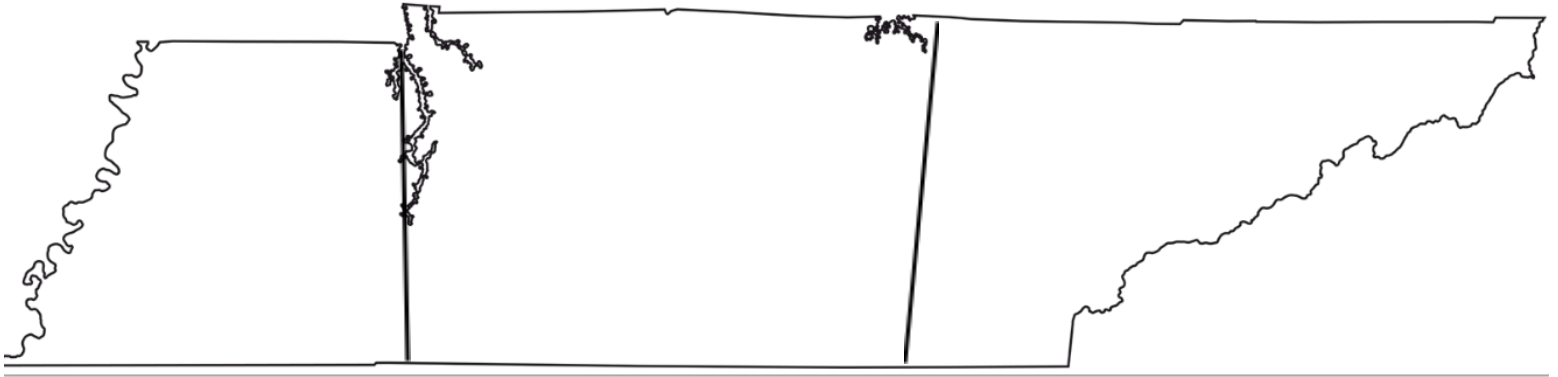
Use the information in your graphic organizer to write an essay that answers the following question:

Why was Tennessee divided on the question of secession and how did that division affect Tennessee during the Civil War?

Secession in Tennessee, Hurst Nation, and the State of Scott

Complete each section of the graphic organizer below.

Part I: Why was Tennessee divided on slavery and secession?



Label the map the Grand Divisions of Tennessee on the map above. Then summarize each region's geography and economy, views on slavery and views on secession

Part II: What events occurred between February, 1861 and June, 1861 that changed many Tennesseans' minds about secession?

February 9, 1861		April 12, 1861		June 8, 1861
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Use the text to fill the missing events on the timeline

Part III: What role did Governor Isham Harris play in Tennessee's secession?

Part IV: How did unionists continue to resist secession after June 8, 1861?

Hurst Nation

Who?

Where?

What?

Why?

State of Scott

Who?

Where?

What?

Why?

Bridge Burners

Who?

Where?

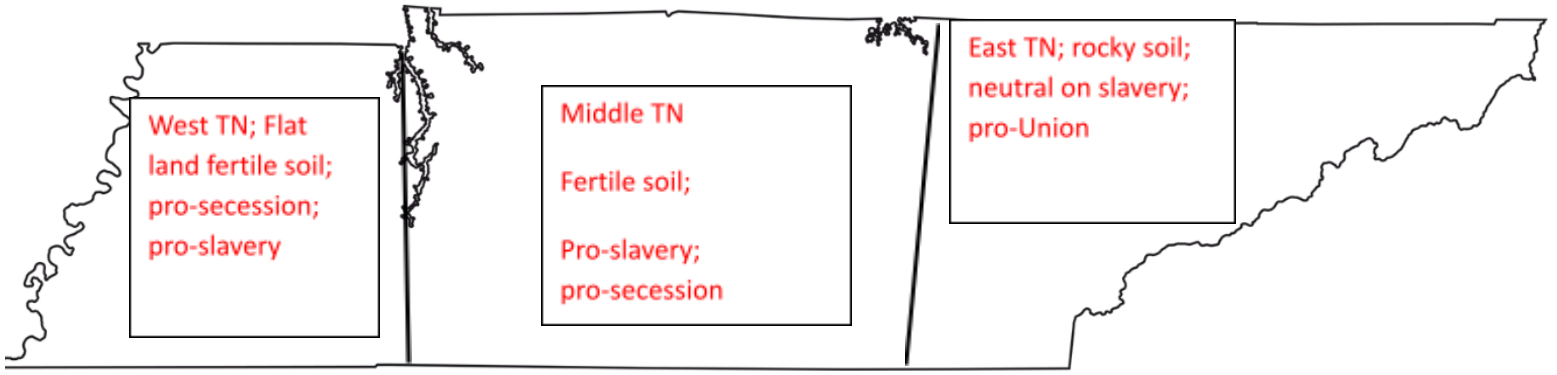
What?

Why?

Secession in Tennessee, Hurst Nation, and the State of Scott Key

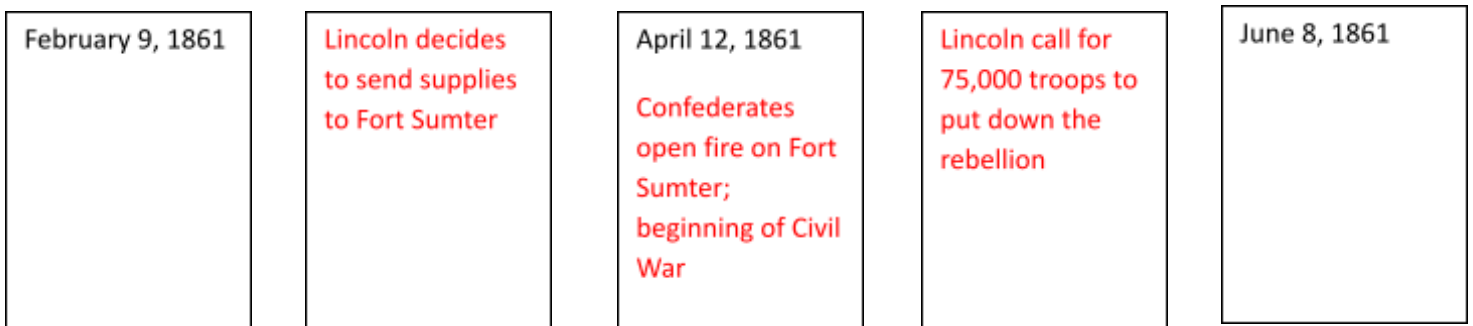
Complete each section of the graphic organizer below.

Part I: Why was Tennessee divided on slavery and secession?



Label the map the Grand Divisions of Tennessee on the map above. Then summarize each region's geography and economy, views on slavery and views on secession

Part II: What events occurred between February, 1861 and June, 1861 that changed many Tennesseans' minds about secession?



Use the text to fill the missing events on the timeline

Part III: What role did Governor Isham Harris play in Tennessee's secession?

Harris pushed for secession. He encouraged the legislature to call for the February vote on secession. After Lincoln issued the call for troops, Harris echoed the feelings of many people when he said that Tennessee would not help coerce the Confederate states back in the Union.

Part IV: How did unionists continue to resist secession after June 8, 1861?

Hurst Nation

Who? Fielding Hurst

Where? McNairy County

What? Spoke out against secession; raised TN cavalry unit; fought against secessionists from southern part of the county

Why? Disagreed with decision to secede

State of Scott

Who? Residents of Scott county

Where? Scott County

What? Declared themselves independent from TN and loyal to the Union

Why? Disagreed with decision to secede

Bridge Burners

Who? East TN Unionists

Where? Railroad bridges in East TN

What? Plot to burn railroad bridges before Union invasion

Why? Separate Virginia from rest of Confederacy

A Petition from Union Citizens in East Tennessee to Military Governor Andrew Johnson

From Tennessee Union Citizens

November 22, 1862 State of Tennessee

His Excellency, Andrew Johnson Military Governor of Tennessee

The undersigned would respectfully, as Union Citizens of Tennessee, request you to enforce your Proclamation of May last, and arrest or cause to be arrested ten rebels, or some such number, for each loyal Citizen of Tennessee now under arrest, or who may hereafter be arrested by the rebels, or under their authority, to be treated in all things as the loyal citizen may be treated by them. Such arrests, as far as practicable to be from the neighborhood of the loyal Citizen. So arrested. The undersigned, in making the above request are satisfied that they represent the Union sentiment of Tennessee and by pursuing the policy of the Proclamation, hundreds of loyal citizens, now confined in loathsome prisons will soon be released and at home with their families and others can remain at home in security. If the aid of the Military is necessary for the purpose, they would respectfully suggest that the aid of the gallant Rosecrans be invoked.

Respectfully your fellow Citizens.Note 1

Nov. 22 1862

Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 6, p. 66.

Note 1: The petition contained 132 signatures, most of them from East Tennessee, including W. G. Brownlow, Horace Maynard, William J. Clift and A. B. Shankland, all mainstays of devoted Unionism in East Tennessee.

Source: "November 22, 1862 - A petition from Union Citizens in East Tennessee to Military Governor Andrew Johnson" Civil War Sourcebook, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 3 July, 2014. < <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/cwsb/1862-11-Article-157-Page214.pdf>>

Governor Isham G. Harris' Reply to Lincoln's call for troops after Fort Sumter

April 15, 1861 - Governor Isham G. Harris' reply to President Lincoln's request for Tennessee militia to support the Union

Executive Department

Nashville, Tennessee

April 15, 1861

Hon. Simon Cameron Secretary of War

Washington, D. C.

Sir:

Your dispatch of the 15th Inst. informing me that Tennessee is called upon for two Regiments of Militia for immediate service is received.

Tennessee will not furnish a single man for purposes of coercion but 50,000 if necessary for the defense of our rights and those of our southern brothers.

Isahm G. Harris, Governor of Tennessee

Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, Vol. 5., pp. 272-273.Note 1

Note 1: See also: OR, Ser. III, Vol. I, p. 81.

Source: "April 15, 1861 - Governor Isham G. Harris' reply to President Lincoln's request for Tennessee militia to support the Union." *Civil War Sourcebook*, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 3 July, 2014. < <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/cwsb/1861-04-Article-13-Page16.pdf> >

Tennessean Sam Tate, President of the Memphis to Charleston Railroad, to Robert Toombs Confederate States Secretary of State warning him about conditions in East Tennessee

June 28, 1861, Chattanooga

Honorable Robert Toombs

Richmond:

I came through East Tennessee yesterday. Saw some of our friends but many more of our enemies. There is truly great disaffection with those people. It is currently reported and believed that Johnson has made an arrangement at Cincinnati to send 10,000 guns into East Tennessee, and that they have actually been shipped through Kentucky to Nicholasville, and are to be hauled from there to near the Kentucky line and placed in the hands of Union men in Kentucky on the line to be conveyed to Union men in Tennessee. They openly proclaim that if the Legislature refuses to let them [i.e., East Tennessee] secede [from the state] they will resist to the death and call upon Lincoln for aid.

Nelson, Brownlow, and Maynard are the leaders. If they were out of the way we would be rid of all trouble. That they will give us trouble I doubt not unless they are promptly dealt with. They rely on aid from Southeastern Kentucky and Lincoln. You must see Davis and get him to order Floyd down to about Cumberland Gap to intercept these arms if they attempt to cross into Virginia. Governor Harris has ordered one regiment to the various passes on our northern border, but the people here say they are not sufficient. A number of Union companies are forming and drilling daily in the disaffected districts for the avowed purpose of resistance. Let the Government look closely to this movement. Unless nipped in the bud it may become very troublesome.

OR, Ser. I, Vol. 52, pt. II, p. 116.

Source: "June 28, 1861 - Tennessean Sam Tate, President of the Memphis to Charleston Railroad, to Robert Toombs Confederate States Secretary of State warning him about conditions in East Tennessee." Civil War Sourcebook, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 3 July, 2014. < <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/cwsb/1861-06-Article-54-Page76.pdf> >

The Union, Constitution and Laws: A Song from the *Knoxville Whig*

This song appeared in Brownlow's pro-Union newspaper, the Knoxville Whig.

The Union, Constitution and Laws.

A Ballad for the Times

Tune-Dixie

The Union, Constitution and Laws,
Will be maintained for just is the cause
Fight away, fight away, fight away for the Union.
Oh! Winfield Scott is just the man,
To quell the traitors of this land;
Chorus-Fight away, fight away, fight away, for the Union
I'm glad I'm an American:
HUZZAH! HUZZAH!
By the Stars and stripes I take my stand
To live and die for the Union
Fight away, fight away, fight away for the Union.
The Southern rights shall be maintained
By fighting under Scott's command
Right away, fight away, fight away for the Union
Poor Jeffy Davis will have to die,
His destination is drawing nigh:
Fight away, fight away, fight away for the Union

Chorus-I'm glad I am, &c.

The friends of the Union stand opposed
To Northern and to Southern foes;
Fight away, fight away, fight away, for the Union
They can not fight in a better cause
Than to maintain their country's laws;
Fight away, fight away, fight away, for the Union

Chorus-I'm glad I am, &c.

This land of liberty was brought
By the battles which our forefathers fought:
Fight away, fight away, fight away, for the Union
Then pledge your lives, and spill your blood,
And Let your trust be in your God
Fight away, fight away, fight away, for the Union

Chorus-I'm glad I am, &c.

Secession brothers cease to stand,
So hostile to our fathers' land
Come away, come away, come away, from Secession
Your cause it long has been condemned
By Jackson, Clay, and other men;
Come away, come away, come away from secession

Chorus-Declare you are an American

Huzzah! Huzzah!

By the Stars and Stripes then take your stand
And live and die for the Union
Come away, come away, come away from Secession

Come away, come away, come away from Secession

The ladies too will lend a hand,

To restore with us our happy Land:

Work away, talk away, sing away for the Union

Their better nature can prevail

When all the deeds of men have failed

Work away, talk away, sing away, for the Union

Chorus-Then having them to bless our cause

Huzzah! Huzzah!

We'll hoist our flag, enforce our laws,

And live and die for the Union

Work away, talk away, sing away, for the Union;

Work away, talk away, sing away, for the Union.

Knoxville, June 1861

Source: "July 6, 1861 - "The Union, Constitution and Laws." Civil War Sourcebook, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 3 July, 2014. <
<http://share.tn.gov/tsla/cwsb/1861-07-Article-12-Page18.pdf> >

Troubles in Morgan, Scott and Fentress Counties

Monticello, Ky. 12th July 1861

Hon. Andrew Johnson, Sen. Tennessee

Dear Sir

Knowing your position & the labors imposed on you it is with reluctance I now for the first time attempt to trouble you[.]

The emmergency of our Condition in Morgan, Scott & Fentress Counties with very precarious condition of East Tennessee generally impels me to call on you for some exertion on your part for our protection [.]

There are about 400 Secession Troop in Morgan & Fentress Counties [.] the first squad of 210 passed through Montgomery peaceably by the Flag that waved over you & Col. Trigg but on Tuesday last (the 9th) a second Squad passed through after having beaten & abused one of our peaceable & unoffending Citizens of Morgan to wit James Jones on account of his Union sentiments came on through Montgomery with their secession Flag halted opposite our Flag & one of their ensigns snatch it down while from three to four of the men stood with fixed [bayonets?] upon each man & child with their muskets in a ready position (our women were excited looking on as he started of with our flag when my wife sprang at him & the first motion took it from him. he then waved his Southern flag over her & told her & all there that soon they should all bow to it-) I was not there but came home shortly afterwards[.]

Our folks would have followed them but for the fact that we had information that upwards of 200 hundred more would pass the next Wednesday the 10th[.] we determined if they insulted us to whip them [.] I was asked to go to Scott County & send men to Montgomery by 11 Oclock which I rode all night to do

& sent over 100 & came on to Kentucky Wayne County to meet B. T. Staples & other[s] who started on the 26th of June to Cincinnati to procure assistance if possible[.] the Reb foes of Morgan & Scott Counties found out [about] that mission North and have instructed the stationed rebels & those in Ky. To inter- cept all the passes & capture them a victory they shall be deprived of if possible [.]

My greatest object is inform the proper authority they are rushing all the forces they can into the Western portion of East Tenn. & all along the line of Kentucky to prevent or deprives us of all possible assistance in the way of arms or men & coerse us into submission before the August election [.]

All of which I have been and am contending against with scarcely any ammunition or other hopeful means of success and at the same time to prevent the captures of Staples Hall & DuncanNote 1 &

for the restoration of our Government—knowing that they have sworn I shall not live but I hope I will yet be able so see them disappointed[.]

I think if Hon. Maynard was instructed he would give us the news by express if no other way. I would have no hope of getting any thing through the mail from your or Sect. Cameron.

In haste your Obt. Servant,

G. W. Keith

Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 4, pp., 560-561.

Note 1: Morgan County Unionists.

Source: “July 12, 1861 - Troubles in Morgan, Scott and Fentress Counties; a letter to U. S. Senator Andrew Johnson.” Civil War Sourcebook, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 3 July, 2014. < <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/cwsb/1861-07-Article-24-Page31.pdf> >

The State of things in East Tennessee is incredible

Jamestown Russell Co.

Ky August 16, 1861

Hon Andrew Johnson Dear Sir.—

I arrived at this point to day in Company with about 240 men from Morgan, Roan, Scott, Fentress, and Overton Counties. We have just decided to proceed to Camp Robinson [Kentucky], near Lancaster.- We are out of money—and traveling on the hospitality of our Union friends of Ky. We left our homes by different routs, and are together by some chance.—

The state of things in East Tennessee is indescribable.- Many of our people are prisoners in the rebel Camps.—Squads of Cavalry are Continually Scouring over the Country taking what they like—are pasturing their horses in Corn fields—taking prisoners all they can. The line between Tennessee and Kentucky is the main line of their Operation. The East Tennesseans are tying to get to Kentucky by thousands, for the purpose of Arming and Organizing— and then going back to relieve those we have left behind us.—We expect now, to reach Camp Robinson in three or four days, and hope to meet many of our friends there—and if possible hope you will be there soon to aid us, by your Council.- If you know where Maynard is, Communicate the above to him, that he may assist if possible in giving us aid.—

G W. Bridges was taken prisoner on the 7th. of August.—he came to Monticillo and ventured back to see his family, who was coming by Jamestown, and was taken three miles inside the Kentucky line.- Myself and G.

W. Keith came with him to Monticello and considered him out of reach of the enemy—We have not been back home since.

To conclude—I cannot write all.- we need help and must have it or we are lost. Your friend B. J. Staples

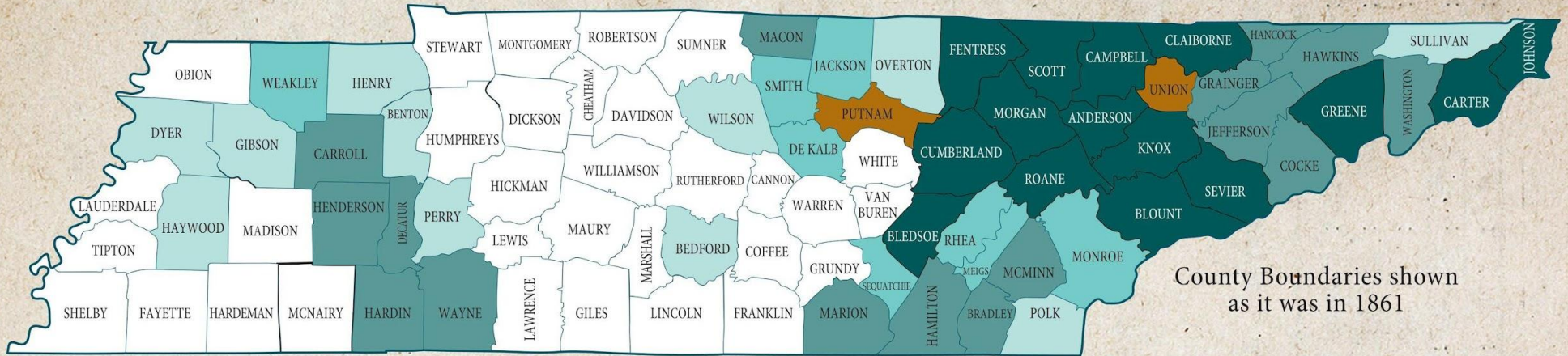
Of Morgan Co. E. Tenn.

Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 4, pp. 681-682.

Note 1: Slightly different versions of this letter appeared in the Louisville Journal, August 28, 1861; Knoxville Register, September 19, 1861; Memphis Appeal, August 30, 1861. See The Papers of Andrew Johnson, Vol. 4, fn. 1 p. 682.

Source: Source: "August 16, 1861 - "The state of things in East Tennessee is incredible;" a letter to U. S. Senator Andrew Johnson." Civil War Sourcebook, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 2011. Web. 3 July, 2014. < <http://share.tn.gov/tsla/cwsb/1861-08-Article-37-Page49.pdf> >

How Each County Voted for Secession, June 1861



Percentages Voting for Secession

