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THE EDUCATION OF A SOUTHERN MIND:

Extracts from the Diary of John Coffee Williamson,
1860-1861

Edited by BEN HARRIS MCCLARY

In the growing library of edited diaries, this one might be noteworthy on at least three counts. First, it was written by a young man of the southern middle class, perhaps even lower middle class. Few men of his element chose to leave any record of their daily activities. Second, it is a Rabelaisian, stream-of-consciousness record of events which the diarist considered personally significant. He made no conscious attempt at writing history; thus a national issue may on occasions be subordinated to a love affair of this backwoods Casanova. His experiences as an old-field schoolmaster, told with complete frankness, are an illustrative addition to the history of southern education. Third, from it can be gleaned various factors which acted upon the diarist's mind, preparing him for his swing to the Confederacy. The things he read and the people with whom he associated guided the development of his mind as surely as he directed the mental growth of his young students. For these general reasons and others apparent in the diary, this work is worthy of a place in southern history.

John Coffee Williamson, a fifth-generation American, had an ancestry of sturdy southern pioneers. His father's uncles had distinguished themselves at King's Mountain while his maternal grandfather had fought Red Coats and Red Skins under John Sevier. His childhood filled with tales of the exploits of his forefathers, Williamson's roots were deep in southern soil.

The diarist, born on April 4, 1833, in Forsythe County, Georgia, was taken at a very early age to Murray County, on the Tennessee-Georgia line, where he lived until his sixteenth year. At that time, as the diary tells, John Coffee Williamson, seeking his fortune, went to northwest Arkansas with an uncle, Thomas Williamson.

In 1855, at the age of twenty-two years, he turned eastward, and, with money earned in the Southwest, began school at the Ocoee Male

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Academy in Benton, Tennessee, approximately twenty miles north of his Georgia home. Except for a short time while he was hauling copper from Polk County's Ducktown District to the railroad at Cleveland, Tennessee, he studied at the Academy until July, 1859.¹ In that month he contracted to teach school at Old Fort, a community on the Federal Road below Benton, planning to finance his law education in that way. He was still teaching in that place when the excerpts given here begin on November 6, 1860. His studies in law, begun in 1859, were being completed as this diary ends. On February 25, 1861, he passed the bar examination and went to Benton for a short stay before entering the Confederate army.

Why did he join the Southern Cause? We can understand his action by remembering his southern background and by noticing some of the factors acting upon him in 1860 and 1861. Earlier, in diary entries not included here, Williamson made it plain that he was an American, but by December, 1860, he was not so sure about his loyalties. By January, 1861, he called southern Unionists "Submissionists," and by spring of that year his actions indicated that his life was in the hands of the South, for he was a willing member of its army. Extensive economic interests certainly did not motivate his new southern patriotism. The slave question did not seem to disturb him a great deal. Perhaps the answer lies in the breakdown of his ties with the people of the North. Since he was a member of no church, his only real connection with the North had been his political loyalty, and when the Democratic party split, the last link connecting him with that portion of the United States was cut. With nothing in the North to call forth any special allegiance from him, he and hundreds like him were fair game for the insidious propaganda of the fire-eaters. Having no reason to believe the best, he did not bother to question the worst.

Thus Williamson read regularly the *Cleveland Banner*; biased

¹ When John Coffee Williamson came to Benton in September, 1858, he began a diary which eventually filled four leather-bound volumes, approximately four-by-seven inches in size, now in the possession of the Rev. Mr. J. C. Williamson, Dalton, Georgia. In 1957 the present writer edited the complete diary, entitled "Fun, Fact and Philosophy: The Diary of John Coffee Williamson, 1858-1861," as a master of arts thesis at the University of Tennessee. The early parts of the diary provide an excellent picture of the educational processes in a classical male academy and of the social life of the students. From August, 1859, to November, 1860, the diarist did not make daily entries; instead, at the end of that period, he made a general summary covering his activities. On November 6, 1860, the date on which these excerpts begin, he resumed his custom of making daily notations.

beyond the point of credibility, it was nevertheless his chief source of information. And he read the rabidly pro-southern New York *Weekly Day-Book* and the New York *Herald*. His reasoning might have been that if *two* northern publications such as these even partially verified the assertions of the *Banner*, the validity of the statements in that paper could not be doubted. Further, he read the speeches of W. L. Yancey, Joseph E. Brown, and T. R. R. Cobb, and he heard from Jefferson Davis that Washington City was a nest of plotting northerners. He knew that Governor Isham G. Harris, whom he admired very much, was extremely suspicious of the North, and locally most of the older men such as John Hoyle and Judge Rowles gave their full support to the Southern Cause. So John Coffee Williamson was prepared for the break which did come.

As chief quartermaster of Company E of the Fifth Tennessee Cavalry, he saw active duty in Tennessee, Georgia, and North Carolina.² At the end of the war, he returned to Benton, married Susan Jane Bible, and became one of the Bourbons in post-war East Tennessee politics. In addition to his law practice, from 1870 to 1879 he was circuit court clerk for Polk County. In 1893 he became United States commissioner for lower East Tennessee, a position which he held until he died on December 19, 1898.

The diarist's spelling, punctuation, and capitalization are preserved as he wrote them originally with only minor editorial aids to facilitate reading. Usually a misspelled word is corrected in brackets or indicated by the use of [*sic*] after its initial appearance in the diary text.

That these notes are only small extracts from larger diary notations should be stressed. Ellipses are not used because, properly placed, they would make the text given here a flash of dots, which would be not a little disconcerting to the reader. Generally speaking, the more mundane aspects of Williamson's day-to-day existence are omitted—including daily references to having taught school and/or read law except in instances where they have special meaning. Many interesting items, some dealing with his "skuffles" with the girls, have been cut out because they seemed to contribute little to the main topic of the article.

² During the war years Williamson kept a diary, most of which was lost during that time. A portion, August-November, 1864, he did manage to save, and this was edited by his grandson, the Rev. Mr. J. C. Williamson, as "The Civil War Diary of John Coffee Williamson," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XV (March, 1956), 61-74.

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The diarist's remarks on the following pages were selected because each seemed to reflect his state of mind or to contribute something to the "southern education" of its author.

* * * * *

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY OF JOHN COFFEE WILLIAMSON
1860-1861

Nov 6 1860 [Old Fort, Tenn.] I went to the Presidential election, but the Judges of the election would not let me vote, because I had gone to Cleveland and remained a while and then come back. If I had wanted to vote for Bell it would have been all right with them but as I wanted to vote for Breckenridge [Breckinridge] my vote was illegal.³ Such is the Wickedness of man

Nov. 11 1860 [Sunday] I have read some Law⁴ in the morning. I borrowed Bascomb's [sic] Sermons⁵ and read some of them. News has come that Gov. Wise has been assinated [sic] and that New York has been burned.⁶ Times are squally.

Nov. 12 1860 I have read the Banner and Visitor.⁷

Nov. 13 1860 Lincoln is elected and the people are all expecting Civil War. The women and children are afraid of the negroes.⁸

³ In the spring of 1860, his school at Old Fort completed for the time being, Williamson removed to Cleveland to do some residence work in the office of John B. Hoyl, under whom he was reading law.

With the Democratic party split by the conventions of that year, Stephen A. Douglas, the candidate of the northern faction, was not even to be considered by Williamson. For him, as for Tennessee and the border states as a whole, the contest was between John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky and John Bell of Tennessee. Breckinridge, a strong believer in slavery and the right of secession, was the candidate of the Southern Democrats; Bell represented the hopes of the newly formed Constitutional Union party, made up of remnants of the defunct Whig party and other conservative elements. Its platform, ambiguously phrased, advocated "The Constitution of the Country, the Union of the States, and the enforcement of laws." The slavery issue was ignored in the call for union. When the election was over, Bell had taken Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia, but Breckinridge carried the South. See Marguerite B. Hamer, "The Presidential Campaign of 1860 in Tennessee," *East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications*, No. 3 (1931), 3-22.

⁴ According to previous entries, the diarist had studied Joseph Chitty's *Contracts*, James Kent's *Commentaries on American Law*, Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries*, Selwyn's *Abridgement of the Law of Nisi Pruis*, and Joseph Story's works, chief among them his *Commentaries on the Conflicts of Law*.

⁵ *Bascom's Sermons*, published in two volumes in 1849, were part of the campaign of eccentric and bombastic Henry Bidleman Bascom, an itinerant Methodist minister, to show that slavery was approved by God.

⁶ These are typical of the rumors which were rampant in the area. Henry Wise, the governor of Virginia, advocated immediate secession from the Union when it became apparent that Lincoln had been elected. He was not assassinated, however, as the diarist later points out. Henry T. Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861* (Richmond, 1934), 122.

⁷ The *Cleveland Banner* was edited by Robert McNelly. The man and his paper were uncompromisingly Democratic, and he was one of the leaders of that party in East Tennessee. In a mock announcement of the "Funeral of E. Tennessee Democracy," *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig* (August 13, 1859) McNelly was given more space than any other single Democrat. Writing about McNelly's connection with the war, J. S. Hurlburt declared: "The editor . . . did more than any other one man of his intellectual calibre to keep alive the rebellion and to fan the fires of persecution in Bradley county." *History of the Rebellion in Bradley County, East Tennessee* (Indianapolis, 1866), 143-44. The "scare stories" of the *Banner* were undoubtedly often the source of some of Williamson's wildly erroneous statements. *The Visitor*, later called the *Sunday School Visitor*, was an organ of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

⁸ According to the published census reports of 1860, there were 434 Negro slaves and 31 free Negroes in Polk County. There were 8,228 white citizens.

Nov. 14 1860 Some of my students have no shoes. We have no definite [sic] news from the election, but it is given up by all that Lincoln is elected

Nov. 15 1860 [I received] the news, that Gov. Wise was not killed as reported. I attended the [prayer] meeting to night. I never in all my life seen such a meeting before. All of the women shouted and many of the little Girls and boys got religion which they will beyond a doubt keep until they get home.

Nov. 16 1860 I learned that South Carolina had ceceded [seceded] and declared herself independent.⁹

Nov. 17th 1860 I heard that Buchanan [President James Buchanan] had stationed Ten Thousand Soldiers in Charl[e]ston South Carolina.¹⁰ A Civil War is looked for.

Nov. 20 1860 [Tuesday] I learned that there is great excitement, in all the extreme Southern States about the election of Lincoln. They say that Han[n]ibal Hamlin¹¹ is part negro, and they will not stand it. The people here are all for the Union. I am satisfied anyway I have no riches.

Nov. 21th 1860 There was a squall of snow this morning The first I have seen this season. I had some planks nailed on the school House. I got the Clev[er]land Banner and have read of all the troubles of our people; particularly the South. I see that horses are dieing [dying] fast.¹² South Carolina will be sure to go out of the Union.

Nov. 22 1860 I am reading the 3rd volume of Greenleaf on evidence.¹³ I have a good school and I am getting along very well with the boys. They come very late but it suits me all right for I put in the time reading Law.

Nov. 23 1860 I have had a full school and a cold time around the old stove. I talked with Brown¹⁴ awhile to day about the dis[s]olution of the Union. John Hannah¹⁵ has gone to Charleston to day to make a contract about supplying the army with provisions At night I shaved and fixed to go to Cleveland to morrow where I can get all the news.

Nov. 24 1860 I awoke and found some snow on the ground but the air was not very cold. Higgins, his wife,¹⁶ and myself started for Cleveland at 8 oclock A.M. When we got on the road We found it very cold, and we had to walk most of the way to keep warm. I saw the wind blow a woman's hoops almost over her head. I recited a Law lesson and returned home by dark. While

⁹ Another wild rumor. South Carolina did not secede until December 20.

¹⁰ An incredible tale! In April, 1861, when Fort Sumter was bombarded by Southern forces, the United States Army's total strength was only slightly more than 16,000 men. James Truslow Adams (ed.), *Dictionary of American History*, 5 vols. and index, rev. ed. (New York, 1940), I, 111. No more than the usual functionary force was maintained in the United States forts in Charleston Harbor, and President Buchanan fearfully refused to reinforce them. Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln*, 2 vols. (New York, 1950), II, 347-51.

¹¹ Hannibal Hamlin of Maine was Lincoln's Vice President during his first term. Formerly a Democrat, in 1856 Hamlin gave up his allegiance to that group because of his anti-slavery views and became an avid Republican. Rumors that he was part Negro were widely and effectively circulated in the South, but in reality there was no suggestion of Negro blood in his ancestry. William A. Robinson, "Hannibal Hamlin," *Dictionary of American Biography*, 22 vols. and index (New York, 1928-1958), VIII, 196-98.

¹² It is later shown that an epidemic was killing much of the livestock in the area.

¹³ Simon Greenleaf's *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence*.

¹⁴ Riley Brown, aged 36, shoemaker. United States, Eighth Census (1860), Original Schedules, Population, Tennessee, Polk County, Fourth District, 71. Hereafter cited as Eighth Census, Pop., Tenn.

¹⁵ John F. Hannah, aged 64, a well-to-do farmer. *Ibid.*, Third Dist., 50.

¹⁶ Ananias Higgins, aged 38; Eleanor Summy Higgins, his wife. *Ibid.*, Fourth Dist., 71. Williamson boarded with the Higginses when he was at Old Fort.

in Cleveland I got to see Miss Eliza Wood.¹⁷ She is as pretty as a girl can be. I bowed to her as she passed by. I found the people all cool on politics. The Southern States are all holding conventions to consider about going out of the Union. Tennessee will be apt to remain in the Union. I fear not.

Nov. 25 1860 [Sunday] Brown came over, and I read Yancey's¹⁸ speech to him. He said there was nothing wrong in the speech. I saw that Underwood's¹⁹ Mare had the blind staggers. They were pouring water on her head.

Nov. 26 1860 I am reading Law The Pleadings of Mr. Chitty.²⁰

Nov. 28 1860 The boys barred up the door [to the schoolhouse] and would not let me in. I was a little vexed at them, but I went away and they opened the door.

Nov. 29 1860 The boys put a lock on the school house door and I took the axe and prized out the steeple and went in. I was mad enough at the boys to have whipped them, but did not. I got Brown's message and a paper from N. Y.²¹

Dec. 2nd 1860 [Sunday] In the afternoon I wrote a letter to Virgil Parks,²² and in it, I opposed the Southern secession movement.

Dec. 3rd 1860 Eleven years ago to day (Dec. 3—1849) I crossed the Mississippi River at Memphis on my way to North Western Arkansas. I learned that Bob Askins, Bill Waters, and John Samples²³ had barred up the School House door yesterday. I got Smithermans boys²⁴ to go and unbar it. They crawled under the floor and took the benches away [from the door]. I whipped the boy's [.....] for that and other things. I saw Clayton²⁵ and heard him talk. He was in the Creek War, under Gen. Jackson. I read a piece in Brownlows paper.²⁶ It was Bruchhannon's [Buchanan's] message. I have heard to day that there is an army of abolitionists marching from Kansas to Missouri to free the negroes. This army is commanded by Gen. Montgomery.²⁷ I hear that he has taken two of the U. S. Forts, and that seven hundred men from Mo. have marched to meet him. great trouble is looked for.

Dec. 4 1860 This morning I got up at 4 o'clock and read Law until 8 o'clock. Then took up school and taught until 4 P.M. My chalk gave out and I

¹⁷ Lisa Wood, 22, schoolteacher. *Ibid.*, Bradley, Sixth Dist., 10.

¹⁸ William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama was called "the orator of secession."

¹⁹ John Underwood, 50, farmer. *Ibid.*, Tenth Dist., 139.

²⁰ Joseph Chitty's *Precedents in Pleading*.

²¹ Probably the reference here is to the message of Governor Joseph E. Brown to the Georgia legislature defending that state's right to secede.

The "paper from N. Y." was most likely the New York *Weekly Day-Book*, mentioned occasionally later. This paper was founded to promote the pro-slavery cause among the commercial interests in New York and ultimately enjoyed a wide circulation in the South. Its editor was the notorious Negrophobe, Dr. John Van Evrie. The *Day-Book* lost its mailing privileges in August, 1861, and promptly changed its name to the *Caucasian*. Using that title, it carried on a sort of underground war against the Negro until it was discontinued altogether in 1868. Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism*, rev. ed. (New York, 1950), 354; Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 337.

²² Virgil A. S. Parks, a former schoolmate of Williamson, was at this time living in Sparta, Georgia.

²³ All in the vicinity of ten years of age, these boys were respectively the sons of John Askins, John Waters, and Sam Samples. See Eighth Census, Pop., Tenn., Polk County, Fourth Dist.

²⁴ Andrew and McNair (?) Smitherman, 12 and 8, the sons of Jesse Smitherman. *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁵ Elijah Clayton, 65, Baptist minister. *Ibid.*, Ninth Dist., 179.

²⁶ *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*.

²⁷ Montgomery could not be located in any available sources. It appears that he might have been a part of the *Banner's* campaign to win southern minds to its cause.

did not hear but one class in Arithmetic. I have heard nothing more of our national troubles. At night I got the Cleveland Banner and learned that the Abolitionists had made a raid on the South western part of Mo. The desperadoes are all well armed with the best arms of the day. they number about 300 and are well supplied with money from the east. They are commanded by Capt. Montgomery. He is a bad man. I now believe that the Union is gone, and that through the remainder of my life we will have Civil War.

Dec. 6th 1860 Brown went to Cleveland and brought the Banner. I read the Banner before I went to bed.

Old Fort—Dec. 7—1860 I taught school and we had cross spelling and I read some Law. Collins²⁸ asked me to a corn husking I did not go. I have quit going to cornhuskins I have quit chewing tobacco.²⁹ My school thinks there are three weeks of school, when there are only two. Cal Samples³⁰ got the credit mark to day. she now has eight. she will get the book.³¹

Dec. 8th 1860 I read Law, until I got tired, and then I read McGuff[e]ys reader,³² and the Banner. A large drove of beef cattle passed on going to Charlston South Carolina to feed the soldiers. I went to Putmans to see Eliza³³ and found her at home, and as good a friend as ever. I sat up with her and kissed and hughed [*sic*] her as long as I wished to. She is a good and virt[u]ous girl and I would love to marry her; but am too poor.

Old Fort Dec 11—1860 Mrs. Higgins came into my room this morning and told me that I had better treat the school children that the children and their parents were expecting it.³⁴ I went to the school room, and sent Tom Elliot³⁵ off and got one and one half bushels of Apples and gave them as many as they could eat.

Old Fort—Dec. 12—1860 I have taught school and read Law to day. I am thinking about a location [to settle and practice law] and a library. I have not got the money to buy books. I am very poor. When I get through the Law I will not have any money. I will have to manage well or I will not succeed.

Old Fort Tenn. Dec. 13—1860 I am not doing much teaching to day. I have treated them to 75c worth of apples and I will make it up in laziness G. W. Clemmer was ducked twice last week. They wanted [him] to treat to a stew, and he would not do it. He did right.

Old Fort, Tenn. Dec. 14—1860 I had a cross spelling match. Tedford³⁶ has lost a fine colt. worth \$100.00 many horses are dieing [*sic*] of the blind staggers. Bleeding is said to be a good remedy—in the neck and boring in the nose.

Old Fort, Tenn. Dec. 15—1860 I read Law, and wrote a small communication for the New York day book, which I concluded not to send. Higgins bled all of his horses and colts. He is afraid of the Blindstaggers they are all for secession in Georgia, and are wearing the white plume in the city. *Our*

²⁸ C. M. Collins, 35. Eighth Census, Pop., Tenn., Polk, Fourth Dist., 82.

²⁹ See January 1, 1861.

³⁰ Caroline Samples, 8, daughter of Sam Samples. *Ibid.*, 71.

³¹ Apparently a prize which Williamson was offering to his best student.

³² William Holmes McGuffey's series of *Readers*, appearing first in 1836, were nationally popular throughout the last half of the nineteenth century.

³³ Nancy E. Putman, 21, the daughter of Anderson Putman. *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ Toward the end of each term, the time-honored custom of "treating" the students was mandatory. Apples or chunks of sugar were the usual treats; sometimes demanding students expected more. See December 13.

³⁵ Thomas Elliot, 16. *Ibid.*, 65.

³⁶ J. H. Tedford, 59, farmer. *Ibid.*, 76.

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Union is gone I got the Banner and learned all the news. The Presidents Message³⁷ is in the Banner.

Dec. 17—1860 [Monday] I met my school at 9 o'clock. I had a fuller school than I have had for weeks. I whip[p]ed Bill Waters for going to Browns and having a fight with Bill Brown and saucing Mr. Brown. I arranged a list of speeches for the last day and find I have ten. Higgins returned from Benton and reports ever thing [everything] all right. He brought the New York Daybook with him. I have concluded to take it next year.³⁸

Old Fort Tenn. Dec. 18—1860 This is said to be the last day of the Union. To day South Carolina goes out of the Union,³⁹ and then Civil War shall arise and then bloodshed and carnage the remainder of the time I have to remain on earth—I have outlived my Country. I have read a little Law and taught school.

Dec. 20th 1860 tomorrow is the last day, and I am spurring the boys and Girls up all that I can. I am rejoiced to know that I will soon be able to return to the study of Law. When I leave here I will have about \$50.00 and that will pay my board for about 5 months.

Old Fort Tenn. Dec. 21—1860 This is the last day of my school After 12 I had an examination of the students in the spelling book and arithmetic. I had a walk with Miss Lizzie Putman. She loves me. I have taught school at this place 120 days and have not lost a single day. I have had good luck with my school and have prospered with the girls.⁴⁰

Dec. 31 1860 [Murray County, Ga.] I awoke and found the deepest snow on the ground I ever saw. There is great excitement about secession. Georgia will go out of the Union.⁴¹

January 1st 1861 I came from Fathers⁴² to the old Fort. I bought some paper and Tobacco. I have a bad cold and a bad pair of boots. Brown promised to mend them for me. South Carolina is out of the Union I now look for Civil War and hard times

January 2nd 1860 [*sic*] I arose and went over to Browns to get my boots fixed Brown had gone to Milburns⁴³ to bleed a fellow. I read the speech of T. R. R. Cobb.⁴⁴

³⁷ President Buchanan's "Fourth Annual Message," in James D. Richardson (comp.), *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 11 vols. (Washington, D. C., 1897-1909), V, 626-53. Secession, declared Buchanan, might be unconstitutional, but there was no power to compel a state to remain in the Union. Thus both northerners and southerners found the message irritating.

³⁸ The *Day-Book* sold regularly for \$3.00 a year. At this time, a special offer was being made to clergymen and teachers, \$1.00 per annum. Clearly the editor was attempting to gain a hold on the minds of the people.

³⁹ Not until December 20 did South Carolina officially secede from the Union.

⁴⁰ On December 22 Williamson left Old Fort, going first to Cleveland and then to Benton, where he spent the Christmas holidays, attending parties and noticing the local belles—especially Susan Jane Bible. On December 27 it appears that he visited what the trustees of the Ocoee Male Academy called a "bawdy house." National troubles were forgotten during this period; at least, he made no mention of them. On December 30 he went to Murray County, Georgia, to visit his family, and he was awakened again to the problems of his country.

⁴¹ Citizens of Georgia would on January 2 vote for delegates who would two weeks later meet in Milledgeville to decide if that state would remain in the Union.

⁴² William Williamson, IV. Listed in Eighth Census, Pop., Ga., Murray County, 1011 Dist., G. M., 124.

⁴³ Probably J. L. Milburn's. Professor Milburn was in charge of the Ocoee Male Academy and its students. *Ibid.*, Tenn., Polk County, Second Dist., 19.

⁴⁴ Almost certainly Georgian Cobb's speech of November 12, 1860. Of this, Alexander

Jan. 3rd 1861 I went over to Brown's shop and while I was there [saw] the New York daybook from which I learned that South Carolina had succeeded [sic] on the 20th of Dec. 1860.⁴⁵ In the evening just before sundown the Earth quaked a long time—some part of the world has sunk. I was sick I took some pills went to bed and slept soundly

Jan. 6th 1861 [Sunday] I talked with Eliza Putman and gave her the parting kiss this morning A South Carolinian stopped at Higgins and stayed all night. South Carolina is out of the Union, and Fort Moultrie [Moultrie] is taken.⁴⁶ times look dark.

Jan 7—1861 Higgins and I left in a hard rain for Cleveland. I got wet, but the rain stopped before we got to Town. I took dinner with John B. Hoyl, and then made arrangements with Mr. Horton⁴⁷ to board with him for \$10.00 per month. I then read some Law, and went to supper. I found I had located among good people.

Jan. 8th 1861 I have been in court all day and have heard several cases tried. I hear that Andrew Johnson is to be burnt in effigy to night in Knoxville.⁴⁸ All hopes of the Union is gone. Squally times.

January 11t 1861 I sat about the Court House all day. I learned South Carolinians had fired into a ship that had attempted to go into fort Sumpter [sic]⁴⁹

Cleveland Jan 12—1861 I have the headache. It is generally given up that we will have civil war. I went to Dr. Mahonies,⁵⁰ and got a dose of medicine. At night I attended a lecture given by a phrenologist.

Cleveland Jan. 13—1861 [Sunday] I got a little sick from having taken some medicine. I went to Sunday School and saw Miss Eliza Wood. I love her

H. Stephens said: "The truth is, in my judgement, the wavering scale in Georgia was turned by a sentiment, the key-note to which was given in the words—'We can make better terms out of the Union than in it.' It was Mr. Thomas R. R. Cobb who gave utterance to this key-note, in his speech before the Legislature. . . . This one idea did more, in my opinion, in carrying the State out, than all the arguments and eloquence of all others combined." *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States: Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1868-1870), II, 321.

⁴⁵ New York *Weekly Day-Book*, December 29, 1860, carried these headlines: "Dissolution of the Union! SECESSION OF SOUTH CAROLINA!!" and "Manifesto of the President Elect—South Carolina to be Coerced!" Glowing terms were used to picture the spirit of the South which was marred only by "an unfounded rumor of a threatened negro insurrection" in Richmond.

⁴⁶ In Charleston Harbor stood three United States forts: Castle Pinckney, Fort Moultrie, and Fort Sumter. With the secession of South Carolina, the position of the Union troops in these forts became precarious indeed. So, on December 26 the commander, Major Robert Anderson, evacuated Pinckney and Moultrie and grouped his men in Fort Sumter, the best located of the three. The next day the South Carolinians occupied the evacuated forts. This, though probably quite different from the *Banner's* version, was how Fort Moultrie was "taken." Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 367-68.

⁴⁷ J. M. Horton, 24, merchant. Eighth Census, Pop., Tenn., Bradley County, Thirteenth Dist., 3.

⁴⁸ Andrew Johnson declared himself for the Union on December 18, 1860, and when other southern senators withdrew, he remained alone. To the fire-eaters and in fact to most of the South he became a traitor. He was burned in effigy in Memphis, Lynchburg, and Nashville, but Union men prevented this from happening in Knoxville. Robert W. Winston, *Andrew Johnson: Plebeian and Patriot* (New York, 1928), 170.

⁴⁹ Buchanan had at last decided to reinforce the United States forces in Charleston Harbor, and on January 5 the steamer *Star of the West*, carrying two hundred well-trained troops, sailed for South Carolina. When the ship arrived on January 9, it was fired upon by the Southern forces and driven away. Nevins, *Emergence of Lincoln*, II, 379-80.

⁵⁰ James Mahoney, 26, "Reformed Physician." *Ibid.*, Sixth Dist., 5. For a statement of his medical belief see his professional advertisement which first appeared in the *Banner* on February 3, 1860. He practiced the "Botanic System" which stressed the use of herbiferous medicines.

as well as ever. She is not pretty. The Rail Road has taken off the accomodation train. Our Legislature met and the Governor recom[m]ends the calling of a Convention.⁵¹

Cleveland Jan. 14—1861 I sat around the bar all day and listened to a case that was being tried, involving all the principals [principles] of the School Law. I heard a dog lawsuit tried, a verdict of ten cents was awarded for killing the dog. Hoyl was mad because he lost the dog case, by negligence by not putting in the right plea.

Cleveland Jand. 16th 1861 I read law to day. after dinner I went down to see the Phrenologist, and acted the fool, and got him to examine my head and paid him five dollars for it. I am dertermined [*sic*] to be more saving with my money after this, and this is the last Phrenologist I am going to run after. I have now paid several dollars to rascals and I will do so no more. He said that I should marry a woman with dark hair, large eyes, and full deep chest, that I would make a good Lawyer or Politician or a Doctor. That I was eloquent when excited and was liable to diseases of the kidneys, brain and rheumatism. That I was a skeptic in religion to some extent. I went and heard him lecture at night, and tore my coat.

Cleveland January 17th 1861 I have read Law in the office. A man was put in jail for stealing \$1 worth of coffee at Tibbs.⁵² The Legislature has called a convention to go out of the Union.⁵³ I went to Burkets⁵⁴ room and read Blackstone with him.

Cleveland Jan. 19—1861 I got up soon and read Law with Burket until breakfast. I then came to the office and read all day. people are excited about disunion.

Cleveland Jan. 20—1861 [Sunday] I went to church and heard Hiram Douglass⁵⁵ preach. He preached a political sermon. he bemeaned the northern preacher and politicians generally. It was the first political sermon that I ever heard. In the evening I went to Church and heard Douglass preach again.

Cleveland Jan. 21—1861 I have read Law. I have some symptoms of rheumatism in my hips and knee. I went to the Masonic Hall and attended Lodge. Burkett was in a bad humor with Hortons Clerk about some eggs.

⁵¹ Governor Harris had called a special session of the Tennessee legislature to meet on January 7 to consider the position which Tennessee would take in the national crisis. He sent to the assembly a message proposing that they submit to the people the question of Tennessee's future, confidently concluding that the state would join the Southern Confederacy. Philip M. Hamer, *Tennessee: A History*, 4 vols. (New York, 1933), I, 527-29.

⁵² William Tibb, 34, merchant. Eighth Census, Pop., Tenn., Bradley County, Fifth Dist., 69.

⁵³ This was far from the truth. The act providing for an election on February 9 in which voters would cast ballots for or against the holding of a state convention to consider secession was passed officially on January 19. In that election, the convention was defeated by a majority of 88,803 to 24,749, the greatest Union support coming from East Tennessee. The secessionists, however, did not weaken. After Fort Sumter was fired upon, the legislature was again called into special session and this time drew up an ordinance of separation which was submitted to the people in an election on June 8. It was approved by a vote of 108,399 to 47,233. Of those votes cast against separation, 33,000 were from East Tennessee. Tennessee would be the last state to leave the Union, and before that happened Williamson was a member of the Confederate army. Hamer, *Tennessee*, I, 529-51.

⁵⁴ Theodore M. Burkett, 21, head of the Oak Grove Male Academy and also a law student in Cleveland. John Morgan Wooten, *A History of Bradley County* (Nashville, 1949), 90-91.

⁵⁵ The founder of the Cleveland Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Cleveland, Douglas was a firm champion of the Southern Cause. Hiram Arnett Douglas, "The Story is Told: Rev. Hiram Douglas" (mimeographed copy, Minneapolis, Minn., 1940).

Merchants here are not doing much. They have cried out that the Ocoee Bank would break and have made the people afraid of it. Everybody wants to get rid of their Ocoee Money. *good idea.*⁵⁶

Cleveland Jan. 22—1861 I have read Law, but my mind is not clear. I can not keep my mind on the subject. I learn that Georgia Suceded [*sic*] last Saturday, and that last night Dalton was illuminated,⁵⁷ and that there was great rejoicing all over Georgia. [Burkett] has lost a book of notes, and many other things. He thinks the negroes stole them.

Cleveland Tenn. Jan. 23—1861 I have read Law all day at the office, and at night I read Blackstone with Burkett at his rooms. Burkett has lost his shawl. Everbody [*sic*] is quiet with regard to Secession. I do not think that East Tennessee will want to secede. She is Abolitionized.

Cleveland Tenn. Jan. 24—1861 I read Law, and also the Cleveland Banner, and learned that there was nothing of importance going on through the County.

Jan. 25 1861 I went over to the Depot and saw the train come in. Jefferson Davis was on the train, and I saw him. He is a little scrawny man, about 50 years of age.⁵⁸

Cleveland Jan. 26—1861. I awoke and found a snow on the ground, about three inches deep. I went to the Court House and heard Judge Rowls⁵⁹ make a very good speech. He is in favor of a National Convention—and secession provided Lincoln sends the Army around to fight the South. The Crowd treated Rowls very unmanly, and called him *Secession Rowls*.

Cleveland Tenn. Jan. 27—1861 [Sunday] Burkett and I took a walk after which I went to the Presbyterian Church and heard a sermon. After dinner I went to see Miss Eliza Wood and found her at home. I went too early they were eating dinner. I sat and read Dow's Journal⁶⁰ till they finished eating. I stayed for supper. I got home at 10 oclock P.M.

Cleveland, Tenn. Jan. 28—1861 Burket and I read Blackstone. The men I heard talk to day are for the Union—*Submissionists*

Cleveland Tenn. Jan. 29—1861 Everybody that I hear is for the Union. Tennessee will not secede. I read the New York Herald⁶¹ and saw all the girls.

Cleveland Tenn. Jan. 30—1861 I have read Law to day Williams on Executors,⁶² which I find to be a very hard book. I learned that we will have

⁵⁶ An advertisement in the *Banner* on May 24, 1861, announced that all Tennessee bank notes were redeemable at par except those of the Ocoee Bank in Cleveland which were subject to a twenty-five per cent discount.

⁵⁷ Georgia seceded on January 19. "Illumination" was a practice used often during the early days of the war to celebrate Confederate achievements. Hurlburt, *Rebellion in Bradley County*, 144.

⁵⁸ Having made his famous withdrawal speech from the Senate on January 21, Jefferson Davis was on his way home to Mississippi. He was approaching 52. For his encounter with a Union man that night in Chattanooga see Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, *The Chattanooga Country* (New York, 1952), 175.

⁵⁹ George Washington Rowles was a leader of the Democratic party in East Tennessee. As a member of the state legislature in 1857, he became involved in a quarrel with T. S. Heiskell and shot off one of Heiskell's thumbs. When Howell Cobb of Georgia resigned as United States treasurer, President Buchanan, following his doughface policy, offered the position to Rowles. He declined the position. Wooten, *Bradley County*, 148.

⁶⁰ Lorenzo Dow, *The Deals of God, Man and the Devil; as exemplified in the Life, Experience, and travels of Lorenzo Dow, in a Period of Over Half a Century: Together with his Polemic and Miscellaneous Writings . . .* (New York, 1856). A Methodist evangelist of doubtful sanity, Dow raved against Catholics, Anti-Masons, and Whigs.

⁶¹ Just before the war, the *New York Herald* was outspoken in its sympathy for the Southern Cause. Mott, *American Journalism*, 236.

⁶² Edward Vaughn Williams' *Treatise on the Law of Executors and Administrators*.

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no secession candidates [for the state convention] in this county. The Legislature has passed the Stay Law, you cannot collect any money for twelve months.⁶⁹

By February 1, 1861, the push was on for Williamson. Preparing for his bar examination scheduled on February 25 and caught up in the whirlwind of the Southern movement, he stopped making his daily notations, and so he quickly fades into the standardized picture of the gallant young southerner riding off to defend the South against northern aggression.

⁶⁹ Taking into consideration the fact that the political crisis had had an unfortunate effect on the financial condition in the state, the legislature gave banks permission to suspend specie payments, postponed the collection of delinquent taxes, and deferred collections under court judgments for one year. Hamer, *Tennessee*, I, 530-31.