

The Jackson Purchase Considers Secession: The 1861 Mayfield Convention

by *Berry F. Craig*

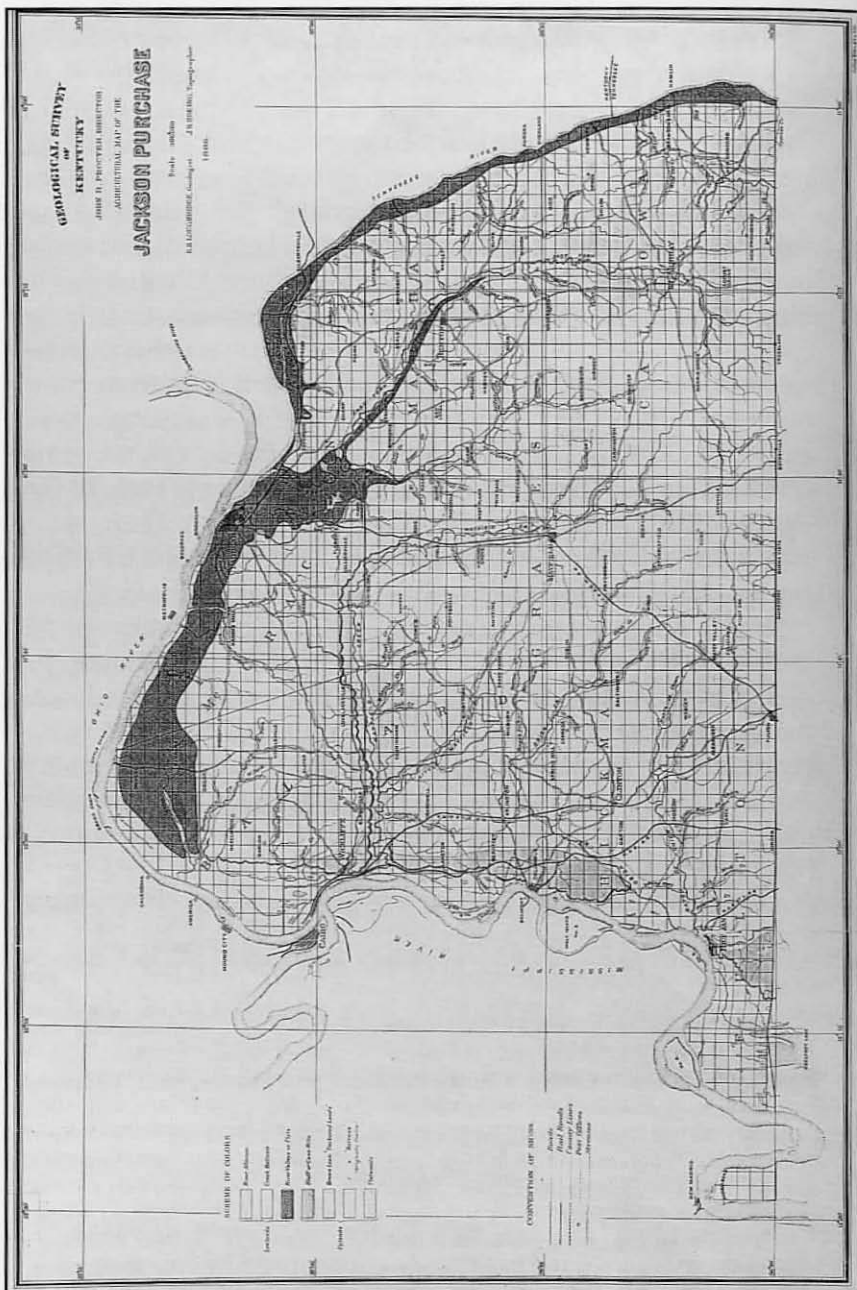
The Mayfield Convention is all but forgotten, relegated to a couple of lines in a handful of books and a historical marker in the small western Kentucky community where it was held. Yet this gathering in the Graves County seat made headlines in New York and flowed with many of the same passions of state conventions across the South. West Virginia left its parent commonwealth in 1863 to return to the Union as a separate state, and some claim that East Tennessee might have done the same if Union troops had not occupied much of the state early in the war, but the convocation in Mayfield in late May 1861 represented the only organized consideration of secession by a section of a Union state.¹

Unionism prevailed to one degree or another in every region of the commonwealth save one: the Jackson Purchase, the 6,000 square miles lying west of the Tennessee River.² Informally known as "the South Carolina of Kentucky," it was pro-Southern from the beginning and remained that way. For many years it was isolated from the rest of the state by the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, bridgeless until the twentieth century.

The author is an associate professor of history at Paducah Community College and a freelance journalist. He lives in Mayfield. Unless otherwise indicated, all illustrations are from Special Collections, Kentucky Historical Society.

¹For West Virginia, see Boyd B. Stutler, *West Virginia in the Civil War* (Charleston, W.V., 1963); George E. Moore, *A Banner in the Hills: West Virginia's Statehood* (New York, 1963); Richard O. Curry, "A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia During the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1961); for East Tennessee, see Noel C. Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerrilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1860-1869* (Chapel Hill, 1997); W. Todd Groce, *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville, 1999).

²On Kentucky's divided loyalties, see Lowell H. Harrison, *The Civil War in Kentucky* (Lexington, 1975; hereafter *CW in Ky.*); E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill, 1926; hereafter *CW&R in Ky.*); John A. Boyd, "Neutrality & Peace: Kentucky in the Secession Crisis, 1861" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kentucky,



The then-seven Jackson Purchase counties as they were at the time of the Mayfield Convention.

As a result, many of the early settlers of the region were from Tennessee, the Carolinas, and other southern states, not Kentucky. Commercially, the area was linked much more closely to Memphis than to Louisville or Cincinnati. Columbus, Hickman, and Paducah were at the end of important railroads that ran into the South. All three port towns carried on a brisk rail and river trade with Memphis. The Purchase's political hero was also a Tennessean, Andrew Jackson, its namesake and acquirer. Even in the generation from the 1830s to the 1850s while Henry Clay and John J. Crittenden made Kentucky a bastion of the Whig Party, the Purchase remained steadfastly Democratic.³

When war broke out, both sides recognized the strategic importance of the area and its corresponding region in West Tennessee, the land between those vital arteries of the Confederacy, the Mississippi and Tennessee Rivers. The Purchase is bordered on the north by the equally important Ohio River, and in April 1861, Federal troops quickly seized Cairo, Illinois, at the confluence of the Ohio and the Mississippi, placing them right across both rivers from Ballard County, Kentucky. At the same time, Tennessee state troops, soon to become Confederates, mustered at Union City, just over the southern border from the Purchase. The region was being squeezed by both sides. Fearing a Union invasion, four citizens of Columbus, Kentucky,

1999); Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson, *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays* (Knoxville, 1997); John David Preston, *The Civil War in the Big Sandy Valley of Kentucky* (Baltimore, 1984); James E. Copeland, "Where Were the Kentucky Unionists and Secessionists?" *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 71 (1973): 344-63 (hereafter *Register*); Krista Smith, "Slaveholders vs. Slaveholders: Divided Kentuckians in the Secession Crisis," *Register* 97 (1999): 375-402; Lowell H. Harrison, "The Civil War in Kentucky: Some Persistent Questions," *Register* 76 (1978): 1-22, esp. 1-5; idem, "Governor Magoffin and the Secession Crisis," *Register* 72 (1974): 91-110; Wallace B. Turner, "The Secession Movement in Kentucky," *Register* 66 (1968): 259-78; Thomas Speed, *The Union Cause in Kentucky, 1860-1865* (New York, 1907).

³The Jackson Purchase in 1861 included seven counties: Ballard, Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, McCracken, and Marshall (Carlisle County would be created from part of Ballard in 1886). On the history of Purchase and Kentucky sectionalism, see David Perry Sullivan, *Purchase Overview: The Early History of the Jackson Purchase* (Melber, Ky., 1986); Don Simmons, *History & Genealogy in the Purchase of Kentucky* (Melber, 1990); Thomas D. Clark, "The Jackson Purchase: A Dramatic Chapter in Southern Indian Policy and Relations," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 17 (1976): 302-20 (hereafter *FCHQ*); Berry F. Craig, "The Jackson Purchase Region of Kentucky in the Secession Crisis of 1860-1861" (master's thesis, Murray State University, 1973); Alan Bearman, "'The South Carolina of Kentucky': How Evangelical Religion Influenced the Jackson Purchase Region of Kentucky to Support Secession" (master's thesis, Murray State University, 2000); James R. Robertson, "Sectionalism in Kentucky, 1855-

twelve miles down the Mississippi from Cairo, wrote Confederate president Jefferson Davis on April 22 encouraging Rebel troops to take their town and Cairo as well. "We acknowledge no Union but that of the Confederate States," they wrote. "We recognize no President but Your Excellency."⁴

With its steep dirt bluffs, Columbus was a strategically important site. From the high ground, an army could command the river and surrounding area for miles. The only troops available in the spring of 1861 to seize Columbus were the militia of the commonwealth, the Kentucky State Guard. The majority of guardsmen were pro-Southern and their local leader, Lloyd Tilghman of Paducah, was a Rebel sympathizer who would become a Confederate general. This group placed cannons on the bluff, and the clerk of a steamboat that passed Columbus in late April reported seeing one of the guns and a Confederate flag flying over the town.⁵

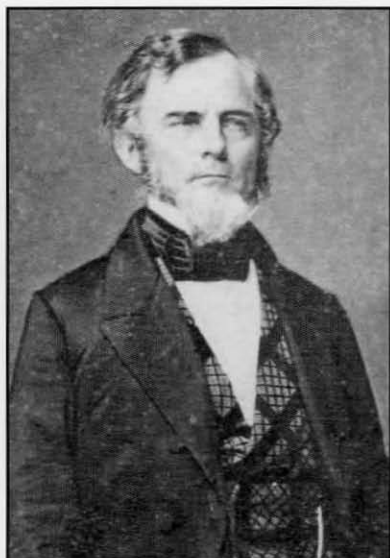
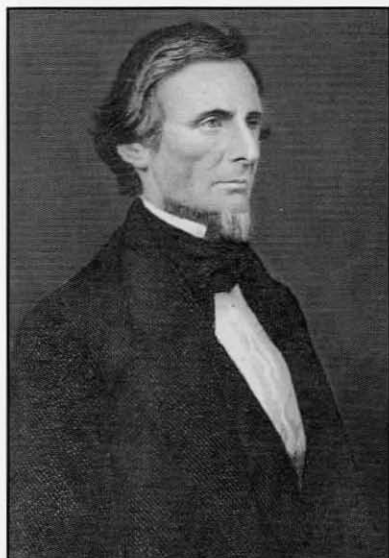
Paducah, where the Ohio and Tennessee Rivers join, was another obvious Union target. The town was State Guard headquarters for the Purchase, but the militiamen there were heavily outgunned and outmanned by the bluecoats in Cairo. Several communities across the Purchase promised volunteers to help defend the city. James Brien, a War of 1812 veteran, offered three hundred men from Marshall County. The old soldier boasted that he could "take one thousand men armed with dog-wood cudgels, and swim the Ohio with them at hightide and clean Cairo of the scum that now infests it."⁶

1865," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 4 (1917): 49-63 (hereafter *MVHR*); Jack Calbert, "The Jackson Purchase and the End of the Neutrality Policy in Kentucky," *FCHQ* 38 (1964): 426-38. McCracken County was the Whig exception to general Purchase politics, continuing the tradition through its strong vote for Constitutional Unionist John Bell in the presidential election of 1860. John E. L. Robertson, *Paducah: Frontier to the Atomic Age* (Charleston, S.C., 2002), 25-35.

⁴A. J. Barry, Horne & Moore, and George B. Moss to Jefferson Davis, April 22, 1861, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, 1880-1901), ser. 1, vol. 52, pt. 2, 61-62 (hereafter *OR*). Davis referred the letter to Secretary of War Leroy Pope Walker. Haskell M. Monroe Jr., et al., eds., *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, 10 vols. to date (Baton Rouge, 1971-), 7:116 (hereafter *Davis Papers*).

⁵*Louisville Daily Courier*, April 29, 1861. Tilghman (1816-63), a Baltimore native, West Point graduate, and Mexican War veteran, had moved to Paducah in 1852 as a railroad engineer, supervising construction of the New Orleans & Ohio Railroad. Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge, 1959). For the State Guard, see Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 82-91.

⁶*Louisville Daily Courier*, May 6, 1861. See E. B. Long, "The Paducah Affair: Bloodless Action That Altered the Civil War in the Mississippi Valley," *Register* 70 (1972): 253-76.



Confederate president Jefferson Davis (left) and Gideon J. Pillow of Memphis, the commander of the Tennessee state troops.

Seeking more firepower, a Columbus delegation met with civil and military authorities in Memphis. These envoys probably saw Gideon J. Pillow, commander of Tennessee state troops. "Could you assist Kentucky with artillery and small-arms, and to what extent?" Pillow wired Confederate secretary of war Leroy Pope Walker on May 1. "I speak not without authority." Oscar Turner of Ballard County, a former commonwealth's attorney, also appeared in Memphis after arms, and Columbus mayor B. W. Sharp went to Montgomery to make similar requests of Confederate authorities. Albert P. Thompson, a Paducah lawyer and friend of Tilghman, wrote Walker from Murray to request guns: "Should Lincoln attempt to invade the South from Illinois . . . we, with arms in our hands, would resist to the death." On May 16, Pillow wrote Jefferson Davis to ask for approval to occupy Columbus in the name of the Confederacy. All this note seems to have done, however, is generate alarm in Montgomery that Pillow might violate Kentucky neutrality.⁷

⁷OR, ser. 1, vol. 52, pt. 2, 78, 80-81, 89-90, 94-95. See also Nathaniel C. Hughes, *The Life and Wars of Gideon J. Pillow* (Chapel Hill, 1993). Davis had already received word of "wide spread and decided dissatisfaction" at Pillow's appointment and would

Indeed, while Tennessee was moving toward secession in May 1861 (with voters confirming separation by a two-to-one margin on June 8), the Bluegrass State chose to remain neutral, making the policy official on May 20. Governor Beriah Magoffin, although personally pro-Southern, acceded to the will of the Unionist/neutral Kentucky General Assembly, which adjourned on May 24.⁸ Elections in June would confirm that the legislature represented the sentiment of the moment of the majority of the commonwealth, but secessionists still predominated in the Purchase. The general assembly had "sullied the fair fame of Kentucky in not arousing our people and calling a [state] convention," Thompson declared. Turner and others began promoting an alliance between the Purchase and West Tennessee, and a regional convention was set for May 29 in Mayfield.⁹

Locally and statewide, Unionists feared the worst. George D. Prentice, editor of the *Louisville Journal*, warned in the state's most important pro-Union newspaper on May 21 that "the object [of the Mayfield Convention], though not officially ex-

soon be getting regular notices of his incompetence and "peculiarities." *Davis Papers*, 7:74, 183, 221, 256, 257, 291-93, 309. For Turner (1825-96), who was born in New Orleans, raised in Lexington, and moved to Ballard County in 1843, see *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1996* (Alexandria, Va., 1997; hereafter *BDAC*). This source is accessible online at <<http://bioguide.congress.gov/>>.

⁸The day before he proclaimed Kentucky's neutrality, Magoffin wrote Davis explaining that Kentucky was trying to maintain neutrality, but that the U.S. government had placed troops in the state and kept them there, despite protests to Lincoln. Magoffin also expressed his general unease about the "bodies of troops" along the Tennessee border and the hope that the Confederacy would respect Kentucky's neutrality. Magoffin had sent Benjamin Hardin Helm to Montgomery on May 9 with a letter of introduction, so it is likely that Helm and William Preston Johnston, whom Magoffin had sent in mid-April, had given Davis good background on the political situation in the commonwealth. Magoffin to Davis, May 19, 1861, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 52, pt. 2, 102-3; *Davis Papers*, 7:108, 157. See also Donald W. Zacharias, "John J. Crittenden Crusades for the Union and Neutrality in Kentucky," *FCHQ* 38 (1964): 193-205; William P. Shortridge, "Kentucky Neutrality in 1861," *MVHR* 9 (1923): 283-301; A. C. Quisenberry, "Kentucky's Neutrality in 1861," *Register* 15 (1917): 9-21; Harrison, "Magoffin and the Secession Crisis," 91-110; Michael T. Dues, "Governor Beriah Magoffin of Kentucky: Sincere Neutral or Secret Secessionist?" *FCHQ* 40 (1966): 22-28; idem, "The Pro-Secessionist Governor of Kentucky: Beriah Magoffin's Credibility Gap," *Register* 67 (1969): 221-31; Turner, "Secession Movement in Kentucky," *Register*, 66:259-78; Mark Grimsley, "Conciliation and Its Failure, 1861-1862," *Civil War History* 39 (1993): 317-35. For Magoffin (1815-85), see John E. Kleber, ed., *Kentucky Encyclopedia* (Lexington, 1992; hereafter *Ky. Ency.*).

⁹Thompson quote from *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 52, pt. 2, 94. On West Tennessee during the secession crisis, see Charles Lawson Lufkin, "Secession and West Tennessee Unionism, 1860-1861" (Ph.D. diss., Memphis State University, 1988); Nathan Kent Moran, "Civil



Biographical Encyclopædia of Kentucky (1878)

George D. Prentice (1802-70), a Connecticut native and Whig who edited the *Louisville Journal* from 1830 to 1868.

plained, is believed to be the separation of the First [Congressional] District from Kentucky if Kentucky remains in the Union, and its annexation to Tennessee." He demanded that Magoffin stop such a move and challenged the *Louisville Daily Courier*, the state's largest pro-Confederate paper, to condemn it. The next day he ran a letter from an unidentified Paducah Unionist who reported that Purchase secessionists were determined that the region "shall go out whether the state does or not" and that "all who oppose it should have a dagger run through them." The correspondent warned readers of "some infernal scheme now being concocted by traitors in this end of old Kentucky."

War Government in Northwest Tennessee, 1861-1863" (master's thesis, Memphis State University, 1989); Peter L. Hahn, "A State Dividing: Reactions of Tennesseans to the Early Secession Crisis, November-December, 1860" (master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1984).

Prentice agreed. "We have no doubt that the impression entertained by the writer of this letter in regard to an infernal plot are true and will soon prove so," he predicted.¹⁰

Prentice's sources were reliable, as he was reporting on May 28 that "a secession convention in the First District is soon to be held." He warned those bent on rebellion that "Kentucky is too proud of her fair proportions to be hacked up" and noted that if they were thinking of calling on Tennessee for aid, "we can assure them that they wouldn't find this paying business." In the same issue, Prentice published more correspondence from Purchase Unionists reporting a secret dispatch of state guardsmen and arms from Paducah by night train, either to Mayfield or down the tracks to the Rebel camp at Union City, ten miles from the state line. Tennessee troops reportedly were poised to cross into Kentucky. One of the *Journal's* sources said Pillow himself had been seen scouting Cairo from the Kentucky side of the Ohio and that the Confederates had designs on Mayfield as a training camp.¹¹

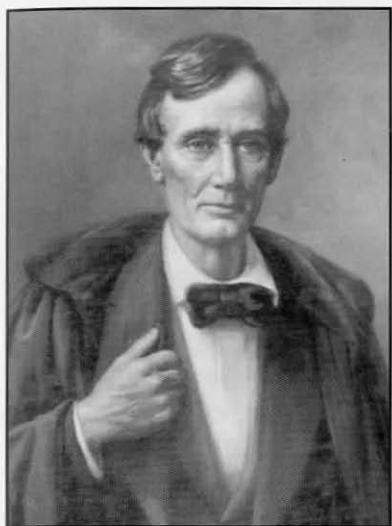
A convention was indeed convening as Prentice predicted, and on May 30 George B. McClellan, then commander of Federal forces north of the Ohio, felt compelled to write Abraham Lincoln of "a very delicate question" that was "arising as to Western Ky—that portion west of the Tenna. River." He noted that he was sending Kentucky Unionist William O. Nelson to "explain to you that a convention is now being held at Mayfield which may declare the 'Jackson Purchase' separate from Ky, its annexation to Tenna, & that this will be followed by an advance of Tenna. troops upon Columbus & Paducah."¹²

Delegates from a dozen counties in the First Congressional District, described as "a large and influential number of gentlemen," began arriving in Mayfield on May 29, where they were joined by "several distinguished gentlemen from Tennessee."

¹⁰In addition to the Purchase, the First District in 1861 encompassed Caldwell, Crittenden, Hopkins, Livingston, Lyon, Trigg, Union, and Webster Counties. For Prentice (1802-70), see *Ky. Ency.*

¹¹Pillow insisted to Davis on May 16 that occupying Columbus was necessary for the defense of West Tennessee. *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 52, pt. 2, 100-101.

¹²Lincoln Papers, Series 1, Library of Congress (accessible online at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>>). McClellan wrote Winfield Scott on June 5 that he had watched "the Kentucky movement with far more than ordinary care." It was his "firm belief" that "the Union party is gaining strength every day, & that with care & great tact the State may be saved to the Union." He emphasized that



Abraham Lincoln (left) and the man who was sent to inform him about the proceedings in western Kentucky, Maysville native William O. Nelson, who would become a Union general.

Reportedly, 3,500 spectators viewed the convention, which began that evening at the Graves County Courthouse.¹³

Neither the building nor the official records of what has become known as the Mayfield Convention survive. The courthouse burned in 1864 and its successor was lost to fire in 1887, with the records likely perishing in one of the blazes. Unofficial accounts are also scarce. Paducah, Mayfield, Columbus, and Hickman all had pro-Southern newspapers, but no 1861 copies of these publications still exist. Ironically, the most detailed accounts are from a Unionist, Mayfield resident James N. Beadles, whose extensive notes were published in Prentice's *Journal* on June 6 and in the *New York Daily Tribune* four days later. The *Louisville Daily Courier*, *Frankfort Tri-Weekly Yeoman*, and *Lexington Kentucky Statesmen* also ran stories about the three-day meet-

the Kentuckians should be "treated with the utmost delicacy until the elections are over." If troops from Tennessee invaded the commonwealth, he would drive them out, but he wanted the "first invasion [to] take place from the South; not from here." Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865* (New York, 1989), 30-31.

¹³*Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 1861; *Lexington Statesman*, June 11; *Frankfort Tri-Weekly Yeoman*, June 11. Delegates came from Ballard, Caldwell, Calloway, Fulton, Graves, Hickman, Livingston, Lyon, Marshall, McCracken, Trigg, and Union Counties. Hopkins and Webster were not represented.

ing. Surprisingly, there were no reports from the gathering in the Memphis and Nashville papers.

Based on ballots cast during the meeting, there were 155-160 delegates who attended. Although secession immediately came to the fore, it is possible that the gathering was convened ostensibly to renominate incumbent Henry C. Burnett for Congress on a pro-Confederate platform. On April 14, Lincoln had called for an emergency session of Congress to convene on July 4, with special elections set for June 20 in Kentucky. Burnett, a Cadiz lawyer, had been born in Virginia, raised in Hopkinsville, and had represented the First District in Congress since 1855. An outspoken secessionist who would be expelled from the House in December 1861 and subsequently serve in the Confederate Senate, Burnett had been derided by the Republican *Cincinnati Commercial* as a "big, burly, loud-mouthed fellow who is forever raising points of order and objections, to embarrass the Republicans in the House."¹⁴

Whatever its announced purpose, the Mayfield Convention opened on the evening of May 29, 1861, with secession as the primary topic. Oscar Turner of Ballard County, who had been one of the main organizers, favored a sectional military alliance with Tennessee, but Turner's was the minority opinion according to Beadles. Richard D. Gholson of Ballard County, a former Kentucky state senator who had become governor of the Washington Territory in 1859, gave a ninety-minute speech "against any attempt to take out any portion of the State without the whole. It was contrary to State rights and State sovereignty," he declared, "the very thing for which the South was fighting. Jeff Davis could not accept it." Gholson, speaking by candlelight, warned that secession by western Kentucky "would destroy the friends in upper Kentucky, and possibly defeat the ultimate secession of the State." He believed that Lincoln would have to invade Kentucky, a development that would allow the secessionists to win a majority in the August elections for the state legislature, call a secession convention, and "by Fall the State would be in the Southern Confederacy." In the meantime, Gholson, who had resigned as Washington governor in Febru-

¹⁴For Burnett (1825-66), see Berry F. Craig, "Henry Cornelius Burnett: Champion of Southern Rights," *Register* 77 (1979): 267-74; *BDAC. Commercial* quoted in *Frankfort Weekly Kentucky Yeoman*, February 8, 1861.

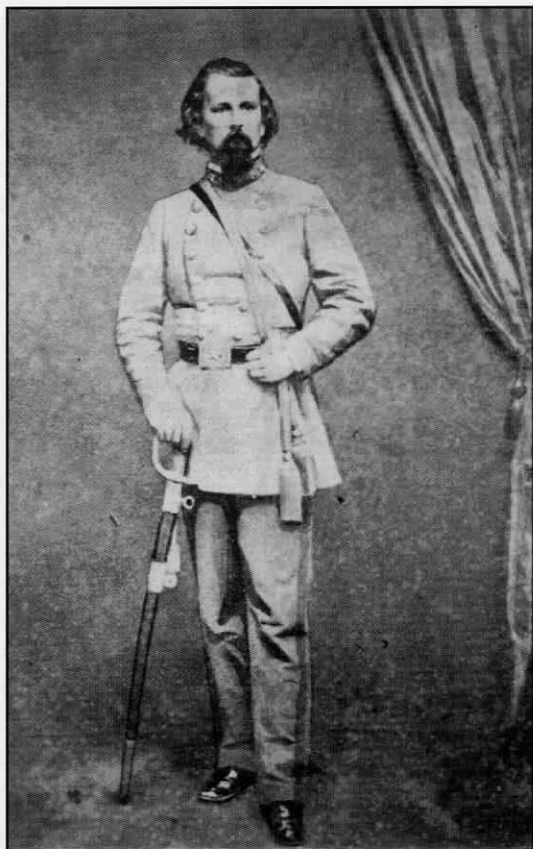
ary, urged the organization and training of local military companies and suggested that men who wanted "to be in more active duty" go to Tennessee and join the Rebel army. Gholson planned to raise a company of volunteers and do just that.¹⁵

Because of an overflow crowd on the morning of May 30, convention chair G. W. Boshier moved the proceedings to the grounds outside the courthouse. Jurist Henry Clay King of Memphis, formerly of Paducah, made a speech calling for Confederate volunteers. (Good to his word, he and the company he raised in the Purchase enlisted in Tennessee on June 13.)¹⁶ Next, a Colonel Austin of Memphis told the gathering that "Kentucky was bound to belong to the Southern Confederacy—destiny had fixed it." Neutrality was "equal to secession," he maintained, and declared that he was "prepared to furnish every man in Western Kentucky in twenty-four hours with a gun of any size and character that might be desired." Austin said the weapons were "within 25 miles of this place," probably referring to the Confederate camp at Union City.

Austin proposed that Columbus be fortified with cannons and become a military training camp. "Men for that purpose were now on the ground," Austin said, evidently referring to the State Guard. The camp would be for "home protection," as "our aim and policy is not to assail, but to defend . . . [Southern] firesides from the desecrating tread of hostile aggressions

¹⁵*Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 1861. Richard Dickerson Gholson (1802-61), a Virginia native and lawyer, had served as a captain in the Mexican War and in the Kentucky senate from Ballard County, 1851-55. His appointment as third provisional governor of the Washington Territory resulted from his campaigning for James Buchanan in 1856. Although Gholson made a strong pro-Union speech to the territorial legislature in 1859, he resigned on February 14, 1861, "unwilling, even for a day, to hold office under a Republican President." He returned to his home state and when Kentucky did not secede, he moved his family and slaves across the line to Troy, Tennessee, where he died in late August due to injuries from a runaway wagon. Edmond S. Meany, "Richard Dickerson Gholson," *Washington Historical Quarterly* 8 (1917): 180-82; Gholson surname file, Thomas D. Clark Library, Kentucky Historical Society.

¹⁶*Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 1861. King (1830-1903) and his men, known as King's Hell Hounds, went through several different unit designations, eventually becoming the First Confederate Cavalry Regiment, with King serving as major and colonel. His force fought at Belmont, Perryville, and Stones River, but was completely destroyed at Shelbyville, Tennessee, on June 27, 1863, with the entire unit captured or killed. King was sent to Camp Douglas in Chicago. After the war he was best known as the compiler of two editions of Tennessee judicial decisions. *Tennesseans in the Civil War: A Military History of Confederate and Union Units with Available Rosters of Personnel*,



Future Confederate general Lloyd Tilghman, a Paducah resident who was the Kentucky State Guard leader in the Purchase in 1861.

... from the grasping blue-nosed Yankees, and illiterate abolitionist scoundrels in the North."¹⁷

Tilghman followed Austin to the podium and emphatically denied accusations that he was pro-Union and antislavery, claiming that the man who said so was a "d— liar." He vowed that "if there was one ounce of abolitionist flesh in his frame, he would cut it out." The colonel denounced the *Louisville Journal* and Prentice and declared that "the moment Lincoln's forces

2 vols. (Nashville, 1964), 1:46-47, 219-20; Stewart Sifakis, *Compendium of the Confederate Armies: Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, the Confederate Units and the Indian Units* (New York, 1995), 10, 166-67.

¹⁷*Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 1861; "home protection" from *Lexington Statesman*, June 11, 1861. Austin was possibly Hugh Rice Austin (1810-70). *Confederate Veteran*, 32:75.

put a foot upon Kentucky soil he should attack them if he had but 500 men to do it with." Tilghman advised young men "not to leave the state" because "all who wanted to fight would soon have an opportunity to do so, and would be needed at home." He added only that "a movement was on foot which it was not proper . . . to divulge at this time."¹⁸

After Tilghman's remarks, the majority committee, headed by Circuit Judge James Campbell of Paducah, and the minority committee, chaired by Turner, reported resolutions. According to the *Yeoman*, the seven-part majority report pledged that western Kentucky would abide by neutrality "for the present" but warned that the region would fight to repel any invader. The statement obviously referred to Union troops because the *Yeoman* also reported that Tennessee representatives had solemnly declared that "neither the authorities nor the people of their State, entertained any wish or design to violate Kentucky's neutrality in this wicked war." They promised that Tennessee troops would never cross into Kentucky "unless invited by our lawful authorities."

Campbell's committee also condemned "the war being now waged by the President of the United States" as unconstitutional and leading "to the entire subversion of republicanism, and the establishment of despotism." The report denounced the federal government for sending weapons, nicknamed "Lincoln Guns," to Kentucky to arm pro-Union "Home Guards," which the state general assembly had created in May to check the Southern-sympathizing State Guard.

Additionally, the committee declared that while the First District would stand by neutrality, "we proclaim to the world our entire sympathy is with the South; and whenever the final adjustment takes place between the North and South, we will claim our natural and legitimate position with that [Southern] government." The document commended Magoffin for refusing Lincoln's April call for Kentucky troops to help put down the rebellion and urged the governor to muster the State Guard "and hold them prepared to resist any invasion of Kentucky soil—from what quarter soever it may come."¹⁹

¹⁸*Louisville Daily Journal*, June 6, 1861; "abolitionist flesh" sentence from *Lexington Statesman*, June 11, 1861. The Louisville paper reported Tilghman's cryptic comments about the secret movement in an article separate from Beadles's narrative.

¹⁹*Frankfort Yeoman*, June 11, 1861. For the creation of the Home Guards, see Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 86-91.

Turner's minority-committee report denounced Lincoln and the Union troops at Cairo and labeled neutrality "futile, . . . cowardly and unworthy of the character of Kentuckians." "The course of the South is our course," the committee declared, and the Kentucky government should fight any Yankee invasion "with the whole power of Kentucky," noting that "the aid of Tennessee or the Confederate states should be invited to accomplish this purpose." The report ended with a warning: "If this policy is not carried out by the authorities of Kentucky, it is the determination of the people of this district to co-operate with the Tennessee troops and troops of the Confederate States to repel any invasion of this district, and to fortify such points in this district as they deem necessary."²⁰

According to the *Yeoman*, "a very animated debate" then began over the reports, with Beadles noting in the *Courier* that it lasted into the wee hours of the 31st. Congressman Burnett, state senator Benjamin P. Cissell of Union County, and state representative Willis B. Machen of Lyon County, who subsequently represented Kentucky in the Confederate Congress, sided with Campbell against Turner. "The main point of discussion was upon the last resolution in the minority report," the *Yeoman* recorded, "which seemed to imply not only a contingent design to take the First District out of Kentucky but to carry a hypothetical censure against Governor Magoffin."²¹

Burnett then proposed four resolutions in lieu of the majority and minority reports.

They condemned Lincoln for "waging a bloody and cruel war" against the South and urged Magoffin to drive away any Union invasion of the state with "all the force at his command." Burnett denounced the "Lincoln Guns" and praised Magoffin for spurning Lincoln's call for Kentucky soldiers. Delegates approved Burnett's substitution for the minority report by a vote of 125-30 and endorsed his measure over the majority report by 142-13. Judge William H. Edmunds of Caldwell County

²⁰*Frankfort Yeoman*, June 11, 1861.

²¹*Ibid.*; *Louisville Daily Courier*, June 5, 1861. For Benjamin P. Cissell (1821-1904), a Union County native and lawyer who served in the state senate, 1859-62, and for eighteen postwar years as a circuit court judge, see Kentucky Writers' Project, *Union County Past and Present* (Louisville, 1941), 205-6; for Willis Benson Machen (1810-93), a Caldwell County native who would briefly serve in the U.S. Senate (1872-73), see *Ky. Ency.* and *BDAC*.

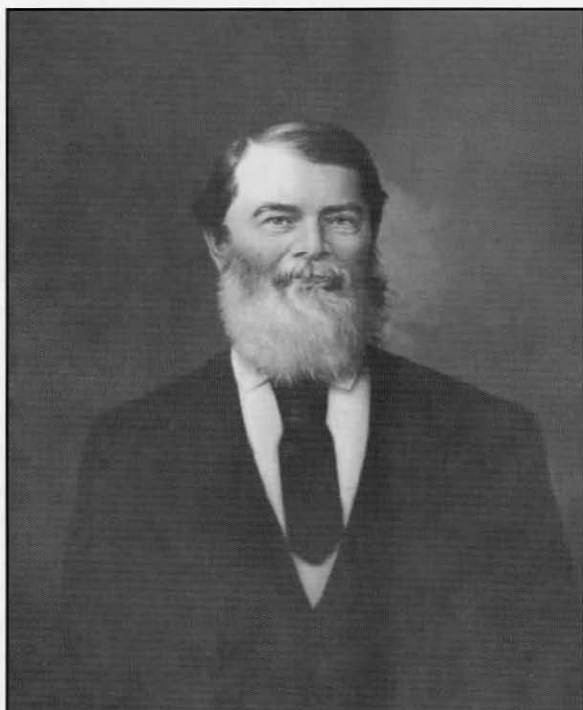
then offered three resolutions over two of Burnett's. Edmunds heaped "condemnation, scorn and contempt" on Kentucky Unionists Garrett Davis and Charles A. Wickliffe for helping arrange for the Lincoln Guns. He also resolved that as Kentucky had the right to determine its future by majority vote "at the ballot-box," it was "the duty of the minority to submit thereto." Edmunds added that "the cause of the South . . . is the cause of Kentucky" and wanted it stated that the convention would "use all fair and honorable means to place Kentucky in her true position, side by side with the South." Delegates rejected Edmunds's proposals 132-23.²²

The convention concluded by considering the question of whom to nominate for the First District seat in Congress. Burnett was put forward for the post he had held since 1855, as were four others, apparently including Turner, Machen, and Cissell. According to Beadles, Turner, who would later hold the First District seat for three terms (1879-85), stated that he was still "in favor of immediate action toward uniting with the Southern Confederacy," adding that "no man who is engaged in the cause of the South could go to Congress and take the oath of office without perjuring himself, and, for his part . . . [he] would not do it." Burnett, Machen, and Cissell said they could take the oath and if elected would swear to "do all they could to promote the interest of the South, as it was the object and the aim of the South to uphold and protect the Constitution." Burnett received 124 of the 155 votes on the first ballot and was made the unanimous choice on the second.²³

In his acceptance speech, Burnett "could not say for certain that he would take the oath at Washington," the *Statesman* reported. "If he could take his seat with honor to his constituency, and if he could be useful, he would enter the walls of Congress in July next." Burnett remarked that should he go to Congress, "it was his firm determination to arraign the traitor Lincoln before the bar of his country for treason, and if, in his

²²*Frankfort Yeoman*, June 11, 1861. Edmunds was a lawyer originally from North Carolina who moved to Caldwell County in the 1850s. He resigned from his state senate seat in 1862 and was reportedly killed by a guerrilla that October while aboard the steamer *Nashville*. G. Glenn Clift, "Biographical Directory of the Kentucky General Assembly," 2 vols., typescript, Clark Library, Kentucky Historical Society, 1:302, 307. For Davis (1801-72), a four-term U.S. congressman, and Charles Anderson Wickliffe (1788-1869), a Kentucky governor and U.S. congressman, see *Ky. Ency.* and *BDAC*.

²³*Frankfort Yeoman*, June 11, 1861; *Lexington Statesman*, June 11, 1861.



Beriah Magoffin (1815-85), a Democrat from Harrodsburg who was governor of Kentucky during the secession/neutralty crisis, serving from 1859 until he resigned in 1862.

endeavors to bring the usurper to justice, he should lose his life, he expected that Kentuckians would avenge his death."

After Burnett's speech, Cissell endorsed Burnett's resolutions, praised the pro-Southern Magoffin as a "pure patriot and noble statesman," and denounced Lincoln for "vilely and falsely" violating his oath of office. Cissell urged Burnett to take the oath, "then, with a clear conscience, go into the battle with any foes who are trampling its sacred precepts underfoot."

Before it adjourned, the convention also unanimously resolved to turn the congressional election into a referendum on secessionism. The delegates voted to request election officers to add "for the South" and "for the North" to the ballot "and that citizens be requested to cast their votes on the subject."²⁴ Fulton County is the only county for which there remains any evidence of this referendum, and its vote was overwhelming:

²⁴*Lexington Statesman*, June 11, 1861.

645 for the South, none for the North, and three for neutrality.²⁵

The rest of the June 20 canvass did not go nearly as well for the secessionists, however. In the congressional election, Union candidates swept nine of Kentucky's ten House districts. Burnett was the only triumphant Southern Rights candidate, and his victory over Unionist Lawrence Trimble of Paducah was hardly a landslide—8,988 to 6,225. Burnett won overwhelmingly in the Purchase, 5,626 to 1,785, but trailed Trimble in every county east of it except his home one, Trigg, which Burnett carried by only twenty votes. Statewide, the ten Unionist candidates received 55,000 more votes than their Southern Rights opponents. Burnett won eight of the fifteen counties carried by Southern Rights men. Clearly, the Purchase stood virtually alone in its united southern sentiments, although at the time, the statewide results were seen as pro-neutrality within the Union rather than a rejection of the Confederacy.²⁶

Unionists pushed to make the August 5 general assembly elections more of a pro-Union referendum, and while six Southern Rights candidates swept the then-seven (now eight) Purchase counties—all but one ran unopposed—Unionists won gloriously statewide. The results were a 76-24 majority in the house and a 27-11 slant in the senate. Three Mayfield Convention delegates were elected to the house from the Purchase: William M. Coffee of Ballard County, Daniel Matthewson of Calloway, and Andrew R. Boone of Graves, who would serve in the U.S. House after the war. Voters returned Cissell to the state senate from Hopkins and Union Counties, also on the Southern Rights ticket. Edmunds triumphed in Caldwell

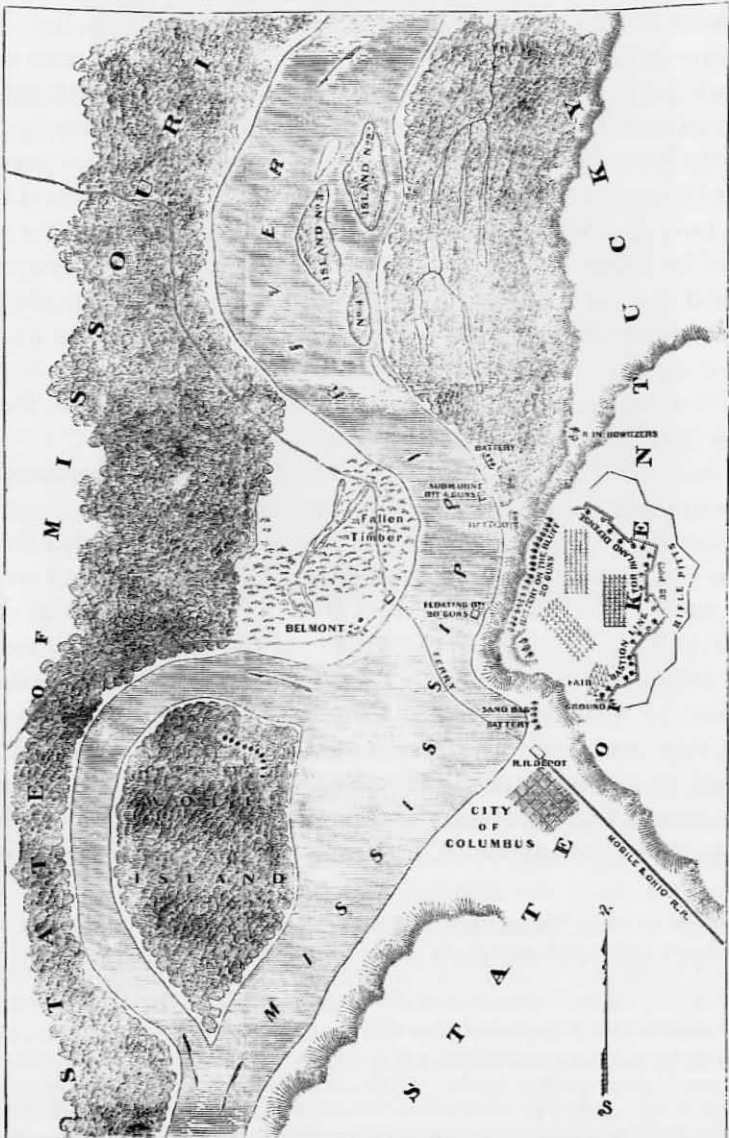
²⁵*Louisville Daily Courier*, June 28, 1861. Other counties may have also had the North-South-Neutral referendum, but the *Courier* did not publish any more results.

²⁶*Ibid.* Statewide, Unionists received 92,365 votes, Southern Rights men 36,845, and candidates classified as independent or other allegiance 921. The total number of votes cast was 130,131. It has erroneously been written numerous times that the turnout in this election was less than half of that for the 1860 presidential election; in fact, it was 89 percent of the number of 1860 voters. The only other reasonably close race was in the Eighth District (Bourbon, Fayette, Franklin, Jessamine, Owen, Scott, and Woodford Counties), with incumbent William E. Simms, an outspoken secessionist, receiving 41 percent of the vote against the venerable, seventy-four-year-old John J. Crittenden, who was retiring from the Senate but was convinced to run to displace Simms. Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1st through 105th Congresses* (Jefferson, N.C., 1998), 189; Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 95; Albert D. Kirwan, *John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union* (Lexington, 1962), 438-39.

FIG. 21. 1862.

FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER.

221



PLAN OF THE FORTIFICATIONS OF COLUMBUS, KENTUCKY, AND THE SURROUNDING STRATEGIC POSITIONS, FROM ACTUAL INSPECTION.—See Fig. 21.

County as a Southern Rights candidate.²⁷

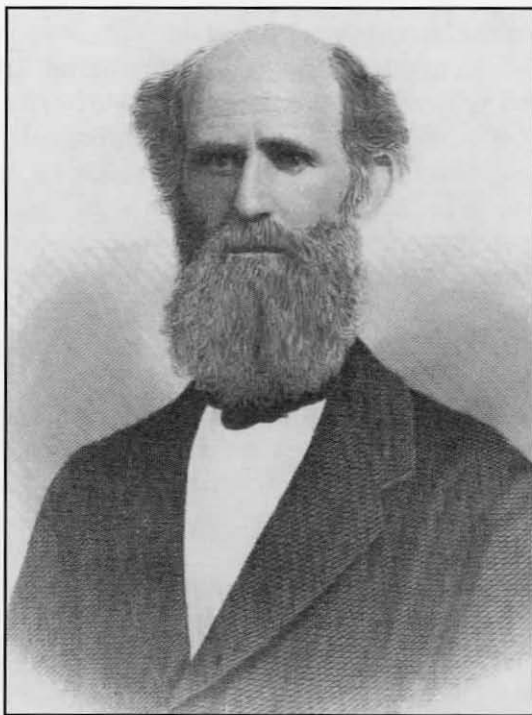
Events began to move quickly soon thereafter. The Confederates under Gideon Pillow, acting on authority given by Leonidas Polk without Jefferson Davis's approval, seized Columbus on September 4. Ulysses S. Grant, fearing a Confederate advance but believing he did not have proper authorization, nevertheless sent Union troops into Paducah two days later. Magoffin denounced both sides for violating Kentucky's neutrality and called for the general assembly to pass a resolution demanding that both armies withdraw. Instead, the pro-Union legislature rejected his resolution and sent him one calling for Confederate withdrawal only. Magoffin vetoed it, but the assembly overrode him on September 13 by resounding 68-26 and 25-9 margins.²⁸

In the midst of this fight over resolutions, a meeting variously labeled the Peace Convention or State Rights Convention was held in Frankfort on September 10. Representatives from seventy counties called for strict adherence to neutrality, blamed the Union for acts of provocation, and appointed a committee to "carry out the purposes of this convention." Many of the men appointed would become leaders in the provisional Confederate state government.²⁹ On October 29-30, 1861, dogged secessionists gathered at Russellville, safely behind Confederate lines near Bowling Green, to create their version of a Confederate Kentucky. They condemned the Unionist legislature as unrepresentative of the people and called for a convention to meet at Russellville on November 18th. The second Russellville Convention drafted a declaration of independence from the Union and created a "Provisional Government" of Confederate Kentucky with Bowling Green as its capital. This body had no legal standing and represented only a minority of

²⁷*Louisville Daily Journal*, September 7, 1861; *Louisville Daily Courier*, August 10, 13, 16, 17, 1861; Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 96-98.

²⁸*Davis Papers*, 7:328; Steven E. Woodworth, "'The Indeterminate Quantities': Jefferson Davis, Leonidas Polk, and the End of Kentucky Neutrality, September 1861," *Civil War History* 38 (1992): 289-97; John Y. Simon, "Lincoln, Grant, and Kentucky in 1861," in Kent Masterson Brown, ed., *The Civil War in Kentucky: Battle for the Bluegrass* (Mason City, Iowa, 2000), 1-22; Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 114; Harrison, *CW in Ky.*, 12-13; *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1861-1863* (Frankfort, 1863), 85-86, 99-100; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, 1861-1863* (Frankfort, 1863), 81-84, 101-4.

²⁹Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 113; *Frankfort Daily Kentucky Yeoman*, March 3, 1862.



Biographical Encyclopædia of Kentucky (1878)

William E. Simms (1822-98), a Bourbon County lawyer, lost his seat in the U.S. House to John J. Crittenden in 1861 and subsequently served in the Confederate Senate.

Kentucky opinion. After the Union army drove Southern forces from the state, the Confederate government of Kentucky existed as a shadow regime, a few powerless civilians accompanying Kentucky units in the Army of Tennessee.³⁰

Burnett presided over both Russellville gatherings. At the November convention, delegates voted to send him and former U.S. congressman William E. Simms of Bourbon County as commissioners to the Confederate Congress. They helped persuade

³⁰Lowell H. Harrison, "The Government of Confederate Kentucky," in Brown, ed., *Civil War in Kentucky*, 79-102; idem, "George W. Johnson and Richard Hawes: The Governors of Confederate Kentucky," *Register* 79 (1981): 3-39; idem, *CW in Ky.*, 20-23; Coulter, *CW&R in Ky.*, 137-39. For accounts of the Russellville meetings, see Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events*, 11 vols. (New York, 1861-68), 3:259-61; "Proceedings of the Convention Held at Russellville, November 18th, 19th, & 20th," manuscript, Filson Historical Society; Robert E. McDowell, ed., *Resolutions of the [Confederate] Congress [in Kentucky], 1861* (Lyndon, Ky., 1970); *OR*, ser. 4, vol. 1,

the Confederacy to admit Kentucky as a Confederate state on December 10, 1861, seven days after Burnett was officially expelled from the U.S. Congress.³¹

No region of Kentucky was better represented at Russellville than the Jackson Purchase. All six of the region's state representatives and one of its two state senators attended. In Frankfort, the general assembly viewed them all as traitors and prepared to remove them and other pro-Southern legislators. Coffee resigned his seat and the legislature expelled the other five Purchase lawmakers who were at Russellville. A total of thirty-three men resigned or were expelled during the session.³²

The groundwork for what happened in Russellville had been laid in Mayfield, although it remains unclear exactly what the convention there did decide. After decades of Lost Cause mythology across the South and the commonwealth, Judge Herbert Carr of Fulton County declared in a 1907 speech that the Mayfield gathering did indeed adopt a secession resolution. The highway marker in front of the current Graves County Courthouse makes the same assertion.³³ These claims seem unlikely, however. As a Unionist, Beadles would have been

740-47; A. C. Quisenberry, "The Alleged Secession of Kentucky," *Register* 15 (1917): 15-32; *Bowling Green-Nashville Daily Courier*, October 31, November 1, 4, 1861; *Louisville Democrat*, November 20, 1861.

³¹Harrison, "Government of Confederate Ky.," 84-88; idem, *CW in Ky.*, 22; Quisenberry, "Alleged Secession of Ky.," 20-27. William Preston was also named as a commissioner for the state but was serving as a volunteer aide for his brother-in-law Albert Sidney Johnston and did not travel with Burnett and Simms to Richmond. For William Elliott Simms (1822-98), a Harrison County native who, like Burnett, became a Confederate senator, see *Ky. Ency.* For Burnett's expulsion and subsequent activities, see Craig, "Henry Cornelius Burnett," 273.

³²Those from the Purchase expelled were Boone, Matthewson, John Quincy Adams King of Paducah (Henry Clay King's brother), G. W. Silvertooth of Fulton and Hickman Counties, and J. C. Gilbert of Marshall County, all from the house, and John M. Johnson from the senate. Also expelled from the house on December 17 were G. R. Merritt of Logan and G. W. Ewing of Livingston and Lyon. Five other congressmen were investigated but not expelled; two of them later resigned. In all, fourteen men resigned from the house during the session and ten were expelled. Only Johnson and William Anthony of Owensboro were expelled from the senate, both on February 15, 1862. Seven other members of the senate resigned, including Cissell, along with Governor Magoffin. Clift, "Biographical Directory," 1:298-309; *House Journal, 1861-1863*, 475-76, 545, 561; *Senate Journal, 1861-1863*, 594, 619, 621, 626, 707.

³³Speech in the Carr Family Papers, Special Collections, Forrest C. Pogue Library, Murray State University. Marker text in Dianne Wells, comp., *Roadside History: A Guide to Kentucky Highway Makers* (Frankfort, 2002), 49.

quick to report such a development. He wrote that the western Kentuckians rejected secession from the state at that time because they believed the entire state would leave the Union eventually. Neither the majority nor the minority committee report—neither of which passed—explicitly stated that the Purchase should secede. In fact, despite Beadles's bias against the proceedings, his accounts are very much in line with those of the pro-Confederate *Louisville Courier*, *Frankfort Yeoman*, and *Lexington Statesman*.

Though its exact outcome is not known, the Mayfield Convention was unique in the Civil War. In addition to western Virginia and eastern Tennessee, there were pockets of defiant Unionism throughout the Confederacy: Winston County, Alabama; Jones County, Mississippi; upland North Carolina and Georgia; and German settlements in Texas. There is, however, no record of any part of another loyal state seriously contemplating or carrying out a union with the eleven states in rebellion. Missouri had a rump, minority Rebel government like Kentucky's. But Missouri was even more Unionist than Kentucky, and no section of the state talked about joining the Confederacy on its own. There evidently was nothing like the Mayfield Convention in the Union border states of Maryland or Delaware, either.³⁴

During the war, the Purchase would supply around ten times as many men to Confederate service as to the Union, in stark contrast to the rest of the commonwealth, which produced

³⁴Works on Southern Unionism include William H. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (New York, 2001); Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1989); John C. Inscoe, ed., *Enemies of the Country: New Perspectives on Unionists in the Civil War South* (Athens, Ga., 2001); Richard N. Current, *Lincoln's Loyalists: Union Soldiers from the Confederacy* (Boston, 1992); Victoria E. Bynum, *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* (Chapel Hill, 2001); David Pickering, *Brush Men & Vigilantes: Civil War Dissent in Texas* (College Station, Texas, 2000); Thomas G. Dye, *Secret Yankees: The Union Circle in Confederate Atlanta* (Baltimore, 2000); Georgia Lee Tatum, *Disloyalty in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, 1934). For Missouri, the secession crisis, and non-secession, see William E. Parrish, *Turbulent Partnership: Missouri and the Union, 1861-1865* (Columbus, Mo., 1963); Christopher Phillips, *Missouri's Confederate: Claiborne Fox Jackson and the Creation of Southern Identity in the Border West* (Columbia, Mo., 2000); Walter H. Ruyle, *Missouri: Union or Secession* (Nashville, 1931); Douglas Lloyd Craig, "An Examination of the Reasons for Missouri's Decision Not to Secede in 1860" (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1970); Lawrence Daniel Garrett, "Missouri's Disrupted Path to Secession" (master's thesis, University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1971).

perhaps three times as many Federals as Rebels.³⁵ Nevertheless, the Mayfield Convention demonstrated the unwillingness of the section to act without the state, in many ways modeling the ambivalence and confusion that led Kentucky into neutrality in the first place. Despite fiery oratory, the Mayfield delegates ultimately chose to wait for the rest of the commonwealth to turn Confederate. Subsequent developments showed that this was not going to happen, so the Mayfield men and emotions became the building blocks for Russellville and the Provisional Government. In the end, the Confederacy gained a section of the people, but not of the state.

³⁵Estimates of Purchase enlistments are around 5,000-5,500 Confederates and 500-650 in the Union army. Numbers vary widely for the entire state; recent estimates have Confederates at anywhere from 25,000 to 40,000, with Union service at 90,000 to 100,000. J. Tandy Ellis, *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kentucky, Confederate Volunteers, War 1861-1865* (Frankfort, 1915); M. Juliette Magee, *Ballard's Brave Boys* (Wickliffe, Ky., 1974), 25; Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, 1997), 195.