Table of Contents

Introduction

The name John Janney has long been forgotten in American history, even though Henry Clay once called him the "first man of Virginia." Janney sat as the President of the Virginia Secession Convention, a meeting that would help decide the fate of the United States. The story of Janney is crucial to American history because the entire nation watched the convention to see which way Virginia would side. Janney's story can also help answer two questions that have long plagued civil war historians: why the South or Virginia seceded, and why southerners fought in the war.

Following Abraham Lincoln's election in November, 1860, seven southern states led by South Carolina severed their ties with Washington, D.C., and formed their own independent government in Montgomery, Ala. The eyes of the two nations now fell on the remaining southern states: the so-called border states of Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, North Carolina, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. The Confederate government needed the border states to add size, population, and means of production to its small nation. Both sides knew that the key to the border states was Virginia. If the Union could keep Virginia, then the other states would remain loyal. Lose Virginia and the Union would possibly lose them all.

The Confederacy needed Virginia's support for many reasons. The Old Dominion had the largest population in the South. With war on everyone's mind, Virginia's numbers became a priority. Of greater importance were resources and industry. The majority of the South's wheat, corn, and slaves came from Virginia. If armed conflict came and the South had to feed itself, then Virginia's cereal supply would be needed. Virginia also had the largest industrial output in the South. The Tredegar

Iron Works was the largest steel mill in the slave states and the only one capable of building a locomotive. Tredegar's main importance would be in manufacturing cannons and munitions during the future war.[1]

The most important aspect of Virginia cannot be measured. The Old Dominion boasted a prestigious history in the nation, from its humble beginning at Jamestown to its early monopoly on the White House. Virginia was the land of Henry, Jefferson, Madison, Marshall, Monroe, Tyler, and Washington. In 1861, leaders of Virginia were the children of the leaders of the original revolution. The South claimed that it was following the Founding Fathers' example of "give me liberty or give me death." Having the descendants of Patrick Henry on its side would give much needed moral support.

The Union needed to keep Virginia. If Virginia remained in the Union, the rest of the border states might also stay. Federal officials hoped that the seven seceded states in the South might still realize their mistakes and rejoin the Union; but if Virginia and the other border states joined the Confederacy, the chances were smaller. The North also needed Virginia for strategic reasons. Washington was on the Potomac River, snuggled between the southern states of Virginia and Maryland. If Virginia left the Union and Maryland followed suit, then the Union capital would be surrounded. The loss of Virginia could affect commerce within the Union because of Virginia's location adjacent to the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. In case of war, Virginia served as a buffer against the South as well as the capital and made an important launching point for invasions. The Shenandoah Valley served as doorway into the deep South. By the same respect, if Virginia joined the Confederacy, Virginia's strengths became weaknesses for

[1] Henry T Shanks. The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861 (New York, 1971), 1-3.

the Union. The South could invade through the same corroridor and strike the Union capital.

For the border states, the question of whether to secede or not was simple: they would follow Virginia. Maryland and Delaware could not leave without Virginia or they would have no access to the South. North Carolina did not have much choice. If Virginia left, it had to do the same or be cut off from the North. If Virginia stayed and they seceded, then North Carolina became the first state invaded. As for Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee, they did not bring with them the kind of industry that Virginia had, so the South's chances of survival without Virginia were small. The smart thing for the border states was just to wait and see what Virginia did. The country had to wait for three months while Virginia endlessly debated and argued over the issue of secession. During the Convention, it was Janney's job to keep a tight rein over things.[2]

[2] John Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 6, 1861, Janney Collection—Virginia Tech. (All Janney correspondences cited hereafter are from the Janney Collection.)

Chapter I
Behind the Man

This thesis is not meant to tell the full story of the Virginia Convention of 1861. Its purpose is to bring a human element to the story by looking at the Convention the way Janney did. Janney, as a dutiful husband who wrote his wife Alice almost every night during his three months at Richmond. These letters give an insight into the happenings in the convention as well as Janney's personal opinions of the situation.

In an address given before the Leesburg Rotary Club on December 15, 1938, Wilburn C. Hall, a Loudoun historian, said of Janney: "He was distinguished for his honor, honesty, and fair dealings in his practice—and for his excellent common sense and judgment in his business transactions, as well as for his acumen and skill."[1]

Janney was born November 8, 1798, in Alexandria, Virginia. In 1810, he moved to Loudoun County, where he lived as a well-respected resident until his death on January 5, 1872. His parents, Elisha Janney and Mary Gibson Janney, were members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. The Janney family came from a long line of famous Quakers from Pennsylvania. His cousin, Samuel McPherson Janney, was a famous preacher and anti-slave advocate in Pennsylvania.

Janney received what he called a "plain English education" consisting of reading, writing and arithmetic, yet he excelled enough to study law under Loudoun attorney Richard H. Henderson. In 1825, at the age of 27, Janney passed the Loudoun bar and began his own practice in Leesburg. He became known throughout the state as a competent lawyer. Janney's fame grew to the point that he maintained clients throughout the eastern United States. He even represented the Owens Brothers utopian socialist

[1] Wilburn C. Hall Address, Janney Collection.

movement in Indiana. Janney received from the Owens Brothers a letter stating that their payment would be late because their boat came under attack by river pirates on the Mississippi and they had lost their entire cargo.[2]

On January 26, 1826, Janney married Alicinda S. Marmaduke. The couple began a love affair that lasted the rest of their lives. Whenever Janney left home, he wrote almost every night. His letters to "Alice" during the 1861 Convention were more like love letters then correspondence. Janney's greatest complaint about the Convention was the fact that the constant array of speakers kept him from his love. "I have not felt very bright to day and have kept [in] my room thinking of many things but most of all of you my own precious darling. The hours I would like to have spent this day with you in person as well as in spirit."[3]

The couple never had children, but they remained close to nieces and nephews through letters. Janney in particular nurtured the growth of his nephew, Charles Janney, who followed him in his law practice and later became mayor of Leesburg.[4]

Janney and Alice made their home in Leesburg, the largest town in Loudoun County. Leesburg and Loudoun County sat near the Maryland border. The town became a favorite stopping place for Robert E. Lee as he moved north during his 1862 Antietam and 1863 Gettysburg campaigns. Northern Loudoun contained mostly small farms owned by Quakers and German immigrants. Some tobacco was grown in North Loudoun, but crops were mostly wheat, corn, fruit, and livestock. South Loudoun had some English plantations and was the center for most of the slaveholders in the county.

---

2 Anne Sarah Rubin. "Honorable Whig: The Life and Politics of John Janney of Virginia." M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia, 1993. 5-6; Owens Brothers Letters, John Janney Collection.

3 Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 28, 1861.

4 Hall Address, Janney Collection.

Yet no matter north or south, Loudoun County was a Whig stronghold. Citizens believed in internal improvement, the American System, and--above all--the Union.[5]

Although Janney never sought political positions, his reputation brought him political offices time and again. As a strong Whig supporter, even after the party's official demise, Janney almost became President of the United States. Virginia delegates became angered at the Whig convention when Henry Clay did not win the party's nomination for the 1840 presidential election. To appease the Virginians, the convention allowed Virginia to choose the vice president. Virginia put forth two names, John Janney and John Tyler. Tradition has it that Janney, not wanting the nomination, voted for Tyler. Tyler won by a margin of one vote and became Vice President of the United States. After only three weeks, President William H. Harrison died. Presidential responsibility fell to Tyler.[6]

Janney had many other opportunities to serve his state. In 1829, he was a canvasser for the state constitutional convention. Western Virginians felt that they were not adequately represented in the state Legislature. They had problems competing with the large landholders in the east. Janney had political insight into the convention because his mentor, Richard Henderson, served as the Loudoun County representative. The outcome was a compromise that allowed property requirements to be dropped in order to vote. This was Janney politics; he worshiped men like Clay and Webster who promoted the ideas of compromise. Janney always looked to earlier political figures and followed the old ways of compromise.[7]

---

[5] Rubin, "Honorable Whig," 6.
[6] Loudon County Bicentennial celebration, 1957, Janney Collection.
[7] Rubin, "Honorable Whig," 7-14

Like most of the nation, Virginia worried about slavery. In August 1831, Nat Turner led a raiding party of slaves that killed several whites. In January and February of 1832, Virginia debated the existence of slavery. Loudoun County decided to appoint a committee of nine to debate the slave question and draft a county letter to the state. The committee consisted of five slaveholders and four non-slaveholders, including Janney. The report to Richmond was that slavery should be abolished for the reasons of safety and expense. The state government voted to keep slaves.

Even though Janney's committee sided against slavery, it did not do so because of moral reasons. Janney did not believe slavery was wrong; it was permittable to own a few house slaves and possibly a few for farm work as long as they were treated well. In 1834, Janney bought his first of four slaves. Even though Janney owned slaves, he never changed his mind over the slavery question. In 1855, Janney was elected vice president of the Colonization Society of Virginia, which hoped to send slaves back to Africa. He felt that colonization was essential both politically and socially. Sending slaves back to Africa would eliminate the fighting between North and South and between East and West in Virginia.[8]

In 1833, Janney won a seat in the Virginia House of Delegates, a position he held for the next twelve years. That same year, he became president of the Valley Bank of Leesburg when his mentor, Henderson, died. Even after his unsuccessful vice president run, Janney continued to support the Whig party. As a highly prized speaker, he traveled the state to campaign for William Henry Harrison. In the 1844 presidential election, Janney received over fifty invitations within the state to speak on behalf of Clay's

[8] Major John Orr, Janney Collection; Rubin, "Honorable Whig," 15-16.

presidential hopes. Janney was also an elector from Virginia for the presidential election.[9]

Janney's next call to duty was as a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850. Again western Virginians felt that they were not being represented fairly. This time the question centered on how to apportion delegates. The west wanted representation based on population. The east wanted representation based on population and taxes (allowing for slaves to be counted). Westerners had a higher population base, yet they had fewer seats. They wanted to change the voting requirements to allow for more men to vote. Easterners had a lower population base, so they wanted to count their slaves as population to keep their edge in the state congress.

Janney entered the convention with two goals: to support representation based on population and taxes, but to allow for more internal improvements to help build commerce in the west that would raise their tax revenue; and second, he wanted universal white suffrage for all males over twenty-one. Serving as a member of the judiciary committee, he used his background as a compromising Whig to help develop a plan for Virginia. The final plan encompassed both of Janney's ideas. Total male suffrage was granted to all men. With the new suffrage laws, western Virginia won a fourteen-seat lead over the east in the House. Yet eastern Virginia won because it controlled the Senate, fifty seats to thirty. Other outcomes were a direct election of the governor and judges without life terms.[10]

From the success of the constitutional convention, Janney resigned as president of the Leesburg Valley Bank and ran for the State Senate. He lost, along with most other

---

[9] Ibid., 14-25.
[10] Ibid., 32-36.

Whigs running for offices across the country. The Know-nothing Party picked up most of the members of the old Whig party throughout the country, except in Virginia, where they remained loyal to the Whig name. Loudoun County and Janney especially remained strong in supporting Whigs.[11]

Janney's greatest role was as the president of the Virginia secession convention. When slavery became a disunionist political topic, whispers of secession crept into the national discourse. Some of Virginia's sons made threats of secession, but the majority of the population did not take them seriously. All that changed after the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln and the secession of the lower seven states; there were now more grumblings about withdrawal. Most Virginians still supported the Union and wanted to remain loyal; most did not question the fairness of Lincoln's election and were content to wait and see what course of action he would follow. After all, Lincoln had not called for the abolition of slavery in the states where it already existed. He supported a strong fugitive slave law and opposed Negro suffrage. [12]

Prominent Virginians came to the aid of the Union. Ex-governor William Smith lobbied for Virginia to work with the Union. Secretary of War John Floyd, a strong supporter of states rights and secession, believed it unwise for Virginia to think of leaving the Union at that time. Western counties in Virginia formed groups calling for support of the Union. They feared that radicals in the east would not concern themselves with the welfare of the west. The western counties' fears had merit. A small minority in the east did speak out against Lincoln and for secession.[13]

---

[11] Ibid., 36-39.
[12] Shanks, Secession Movement, 120.
[13] Ibid., 121-23.

The Richmond Enquirer called for immediate secession. The Enquirer did not fear Lincoln freeing the slaves; it opposed the presidency of a man elected solely by northern voters. Ex-Governor Henry Wise was a strong advocate of secession. He believed that the lower South would secede and that Virginia should be with it. Even ex-President John Tyler wanted to work for a peaceable separation. The remainder of 1860 played out the same way, with newspapers and politicians championing both sides of the argument.[14]

On January 14, 1861, Governor John Letcher called for a meeting of all the states to seek a peaceful solution to their problems, even if the solution was separation. John Tyler led the Virginia delegation to the subsequent Peace Conference. Few felt that the conference would succeed. On January 26, ten state assembly members, feeling that the efforts of peace could not be reached, called for a state convention to decide the issue of secession.[15]

On February 4, the voting for the delegates took place. The outcome of secession seemed answered by the elected representatives. Delegates ran on one of three platforms: those who stood strong by the Union, those who wanted to do all they could before cutting ties, and those who wanted immediate secession. On the morning of February 3, the Richmond Daily Whig declared; "Rain or shine, let the conservative voters of Richmond rally to the polls today, and visit upon the disunion precipitators in

---

[14] Ibid, 120-41.
[15] Ibid, 143-45.
[16] Richmond Daily Whig, Feb. 3, 1861. (hereafter referred to as Whig)

Virginia an overwhelming defeat! … We expect to see elected a vast preponderance of fair minded, rational conservative men."[16]

The Whig's call must have been heard. After the votes were tallied, the secessionist had won only thirty-two seats. The two groups that wanted to work with the Union joined together into the Unionist party and comprised 122 votes. One of them was the senior statesman from Loudoun, John Janney.

It seemed that Virginia's loyalties fell with the Union. The delegates consisted of one ex-President, two ex-cabinet officers, one ex-governor, and two ex-lieutenant governors. Most of the members supported the old Whig party, and most had not served in politics for several years. The Richmond Daily Examiner described the delegates as "dead and forgotten enemies of that party which for sixty years defended the ark and the covenant of States Rights … Like the fabled vampire, they have left their graves to hold high carnival the living, through sleeping state … Two thirds and more of the seats in the Convention are occupied by political gamesters, long since spotted, found out hum bugs, and notorious martyrs of the people … [and are] old fogies who had not represented Virginia in the past thirty years."[17]

---

[17] Shanks, Secession Movement, 143-50; Richmond Examiner, Feb. 28, 1861. (hereafter referred to as Examiner)

Chapter II
Richmond

On February 11, 1861, Janney arrived in Richmond to take his seat at the Convention. The Richmond that Janney would make his home for the next three months looked like most eastern cities, full of diversity and excitement. By 1859 the population had reached 38,000 people divided between white, black, and ethnic cultures. Various activities from all walks of life existed in Richmond: reform movements, clubs, shops, beer halls, hotels, and theaters. Churches of every denomination dotted the landscape. Frederick Law Olmsted complimented the city in 1856 when he stated, "Richmond at a glance from adjacent high ground, through a dull cloud of bituminous smoke, upon a lowering winter's day, has a very picturesque appearance … but the moment it is examined at all in detail, there is but one spot, in the whole picture, upon which the eye is all attracted to rest. This is the Capitol, an imposing Grecian edifice, standing alone, and finely placed on open and elevated ground, in the center of the town."[1]

Slavery dominated the city. Visitors to Richmond talked of slave auctions and the large slave population working in the factories. Richmond was also the home of many free blacks who came to the city for jobs. With the large population, they could easily blend in and gain some sense of freedom. Richmond was also home to many immigrants. It had a higher percentage of immigrants then many northern cities. German and Irish immigrants arrived during the 1850s to work in the factories. They numbered 2,000 by the time Janney arrived.[2]

---

[1] Mary Newton Standard. Richmond: Its People and its Story (Philadelphia, 1923), 153; Gregg D. Kimble. American City, Southern Place: a Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond (Athens, 2000), 3, 37-52.

[2] Ibid., 29-55.

Charles Dickens had a different viewpoint from Olmsted when he visited Richmond in 1842. "In this district as in all others where slavery sits brooding … there is an air of ruin and decay abroad which is separable from the system … log cabins squalid in the last degree … miserable stations by the railway side … negro children rolling on the ground before the cabin doors, with dogs and pigs … There are pretty villas and cheerful houses in its streets, and Nature smiles upon the country round; but jostling its handsome residences, like slavery itself going hand in hand with many lofty virtues, are deplorable tenements, fences unrepaired, walls crumbling into ruinous heaps, hinting gloomily at things below the surface, these and many other tokens of the same description force themselves upon the notice, and are remembered, with depressing influence, when livelier features are forgotten."[3]

As well as being the capital, Richmond was noted for its industry. Richmond served as a transport center, bringing in wheat, corn, and tobacco to its many factories and mills. Five different railroads and the Kanawha Canal made Richmond easily accessible. However, the most important place was the Tredegar Iron Works. Founded in 1837, Tredegar occupied five acres between the James River and the Kanawha Canal. Before the Civil War, Tredegar built railroad equipment. About forty locomotives were constructed between 1850 and 1855. Tredegar employed 700 white workers (many of them immigrants) as well as 80 slaves.[4]

---

[3] Ibid., 58.
[4] Ibid., 4-26.

There were about fifty tobacco factories in Richmond. They employed around 3,400 slaves. All of the industry in Richmond gave the city a modern look. Most visitors mentioned smoke in the air.[5]

When Janney reached Richmond, he went to the Exchange Hotel in hopes of finding his friend Valentine Southall of Albemarle County. The two had known each other for years. In 1833, they were freshman representatives together in the House of Delegates. They served together over the next decade and forged a bond of friendship. Southall was also a member of the Constitutional Convention of 1850. More importantly, he held the same moderate ideas as Janney.

The two delegates, along with many other members of the convention, lived at the Exchange Hotel. It was considered one of the top establishments in the city. The hotel was adjacent to most entertainment in Richmond, including the theaters. The staff consisted of black servants who made it a comfortable stay for Janney. The Dispatch called the Exchange "one of the most pleasant and comfortable Hotels." In a letter to her father, a minister in North Carolina, Bessie Lacy wrote: "I have seen the famous Exchange and ho! What a splendid building." Minor Blackford, a student from Lynchburg wrote in his diary, "Bye the bye the Exchange is just now the very beau ideal of a fine hotel in my eyes, the most elegant a[nd] complete establishment I ever stopped at."[6]

As Janney met and spoke with the other arriving delegates, he realized that many of them wanted him to be the president of the convention. His many years of service in

---

[5] Ibid., 19-26.
[6] Richmond Daily Dispatch, Feb. 16, 1861 (hereafter referred to as Dispatch); Kimble, American City, 42-44.

Virginia had caught up with him. Even though he did not want the office, if Virginia asked, he would comply.[7]

The next day, February 12, the convention began. The editor of the Whig welcomed the delegates by writing that " the proceedings of this body … will be looked to with the deepest interest, not only by the people of Virginia, but throughout the Union. It is charged with high and responsible trusts. It will represent the most emphatic and intelligent expression of the public sentiment of the Commonwealth that we have ever witnessed in all our observation of public affairs."[8]

James Cox of Chesterfield County, a secessionist advocate, sat as temporary president. Cox began the day by delivering a speech on the importance of the meeting. He told the delegates that "you hold in your hands the destinies of this great nation"[9]

The first order of business was to elect a permanent president. George Summers of Kanawha County offered the name of Janney. Summers declared: "I am sure it will not be expected that I should enlarge at all upon the fitness of this nomination. The name which I present will be found the synonym of purity of personal character, wisdom in council, and fidelity to the Commonwealth under all circumstances."[10]

Thomas Flournoy of Halifax County nominated Janney's good friend, Southall. As Janney had done in the 1840 vice presidential race, he actively campaigned to have Southall elected. This time it did not work. Janney was elected President by a 64 to 54

---

[7] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 11, 1861.
[8] Whig, Feb. 13, 1861.
[9] William H. Gaines. Biographical Register of Members Virginia State Convention of 1861 (Richmond, 1969), 29; George H. Reese, ed. Proceeding of the Virginia State Convention of 1861 (Richmond, 1965), Vol. I:4. (hereafter referred to as Proceedings.)
[10] Ibid., I:6.

vote. He wrote Alice that he won because the separatists wanted Southall to win, so the Unionists threw their vote to him.[11]

Janney took his place at the head of the Convention and delivered an address. He did not know if he would be president of the convention and did not have a prepared speech. He stated in part:

"Gentleman, I am without experience—I am without knowledge of parliamentary law, or the rules of order which govern bodies of this sort, and have, therefore, nothing in return for you kindness to promise you but fidelity and impartiality. Errors, I know, I must commit, but as they shall be errors of the head and not of the heart, in your kindness I shall find an excuse for them, and in the wisdom of this body their prompt correction.

"It is now, gentlemen, seventy-three years since a Convention of the people of this Commonwealth was assembled in this hall for the purpose of ratifying the Constitution of the United States, and one of the main objects of that instrument was to consolidate, not the Government, but the Union of these States. Causes which I do not mean to enumerate, causes which have passed and are daily passing into a history, which will set its seal upon them all, have brought that Constitution and this Union into imminent peril, and Virginia has come to-day to the rescue of them; and well she might … It cannot be then, gentlemen, that a government thus founded, thus administered by our own sons, can now be permitted to fall without bringing either reproach upon the wisdom of its founders, or upon our own virtue, intelligence and patriotism.

"Gentlemen there is an old flag, the flag of the Union, which has been born in triumph now for nearly a century through the battle and the breeze, and that flag now

[11] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 12, 1861.

floats over this Capitol, with a star upon it representing this ancient Commonwealth of ours. God grant that it may remain there forever. [Applause.]

"Gentlemen, the responsibility resting upon this body is an awful one. When I agreed to be a candidate for this Convention—when I said to my constituents, if it was their pleasure to give to me their unsolicited suffrages for a seat in this body, I would serve them—I said it with fear and trembling. The people have said they will revise our work; but still, the consequences of our action here, although subject to that revision, may be full of good or full of evil. We may, I trust—I trust in God we shall so conduct our measures here, and bring them to such a conclusion, as that some of our sister States of the South who, for what they believed to be just cause, have wandered a little from their orbits, may be brought back into the old constellation, to give and receive light to and from their old sisters. I am not without hope that even old Massachusetts, when she comes to remember the past—for she has a past as well as a present—when she comes to remember whose sword it was first torn from the scabbard upon her own soil, and never returned to the shield until her independence and liberty were secured, and remembers from whence he came, will waken up to a sense of justice, and, following the example of her sister, Rhode Island, will expunge from her statute book that which her own wisest and best citizens say is a disgrace to it.

"Gentlemen, this is no party Convention. It is our duty in considering the subjects that will come before us, to elevate ourselves into an atmosphere where party passion and party prejudice cannot live, and to conduct our proceedings in a manner, as I doubt not

we shall, that will reflect credit upon all. I hope and trust that the result of our labors may rebound to the good of the State and the Union." [Applause.][12]

The Whig wrote that Janney's speech, "was indeed admirable in tone and sentiment, and was evidently received with great favor by the Convention." The paper added: "Janney is known to the whole Commonwealth as a gentleman distinguished for ability, patriotism, and moderation, being also eminently conservative, but at the same time ready to insist upon our equal rights in the Union at all hazards and to the last extremity."[13]

In the third paragraph of his acceptance speech, Janney foreshadowed his own involvement in the convention. He said that he would be impartial and not make any errors from the heart. Janney lived up to his promise. The official proceedings of the convention did not give any hint of Janney's feelings. He treated all the delegates the same whether for secession or not. With only one exception, Janney never addressed the convention.

After the first day, delegates did not meet at the Capitol because the state legislature was in session. Convention meetings were held at the nearby Mechanics Institute. The Institute was a large hall with iron rails dividing the room. This allowed space for spectators. On the north side stood a platform raised above the floor with a seat for Janney. Above Janney's chair hung a large picture of Washington crossing the Delaware River. On the other walls hung pictures of major figures. Directly in front of the platform were tables and chairs arranged in a semi-circle for the delegates. Behind the tables, chairs were placed for specially invited guests. Carpet covered the entire

[12] Proceedings, I: 7-9.
[13] Whig, Feb. 13, 1861.

room, and ample furnishing made the hall worthy for the occasion. Everything was removed from the West Hall to allow extra seats for women. They even had their own separate entrance.[14]

On February 14, delegates completed the organization of the Convention. The entire day passed in electing officers. Hugh Nelson of Clarke County, a moderate Unionist, was elected sergeant-at-arms, and Benjamin Linkous became doorkeeper.[15]

That same day, Janney received into the convention John S. Preston from South Carolina, Fulton Anderson from Mississippi, and Henry Benning from Georgia. They were Confederate commissioners who wanted to address the Convention. Janney saw no problem with this and pushed to have them admitted. He felt that allowing them to talk would not take up too much time and that the whole convention would be over in ten days. Janney showed his fairness by helping the commissioners address the Convention. There mission was to invite Virginia to join the Confederacy. Because of Janney opposition to secession, he could have tried to keep them from swaying the convention.[16]

Some of the delegates already realized that they were consuming too much time. William MacFarland of Richmond, embarrassed over how long it took to elect officers, moved that Janney appoint the rest of the officers. The president did not agree with the suggestion. True to his promise of impartiality, Janney did not feel that his votes should count more than any other delegate. He had people that he wanted, but he knew they would not be agreeable to all.[17]

---

[14] Dispatch, Feb. 11, 1861.
[15] Proceedings, I: 14-18.
[16] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 14, 1861; Proceedings I: 18-19.
[17] Ibid., I:13-14.

As Janney wrote home, the most common theme throughout his letters home was health. He and Alice were elderly. How they were feeling was a major concern. Janney had suffered from a headache since his arrival in Richmond. On the 14th, it began to dissipate. Janney assured Alice that Southall would take care of him (which he did on many occasions). Because of her illness, Alice often had to remain at home. She could not move around without help from a wheelchair.[18]

Janney was happy when the first week ended. The weather had been so nice that he did not have to light a fire or wear a coat. He was pleased with the reception he had received from the other delegates over his performance as president. Yet one continuing source of pain was ex-Governor Henry Wise. Janney wrote home: "Wise took his seat yesterday morning and has been talking almost all the time."

On February 15, Robert Conrad of Frederick suggested that Janney appoint a committee on federal relations to handle all issues dealing with the Union. The committee would regularly report back to the convention. Wise took exception to the idea. He wanted the right to debate all issues. Wise wanted the Convention to have majority rule. Having a committee would take power away from the convention.

Wise also did not want to have to wait on a committee before being able to act. He even incited action on the part of the galleries so that Janney threatened to clear the hall of visitors. After spending much of the day in debate, the Convention agreed to a committee of twenty-one members to handle Federal government issues. The committee was instructed to report periodically to the Convention. Wise wasted the rest of the day trying to clear his name from rumors of planning a raid on Washington.[19]

---

[18] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 14 and 17, 1861.
[19] Ibid., Feb. 16, 1861; Proceedings I:24-32.

The next day Wise continued complaining about the committee of twenty-one. He may have had an ulterior motive behind his arguments, because that was the day the committee was to be elected, and he wanted to be part of it. After all his ranting, Wise was appointed a member. Yet, Wise was not done. He continued ranting about who the real disunionists were. He categorized disunionists to be "black Republicans" who asked for peace when clearly there was none. States like Ohio were to blame because they condoned the "underground railroad" and "stole" slaves from western Virginia.

Wise felt Virginians needed to stop worrying about the expansion of slavery in the territories and start worrying about its own slaves. Lincoln had asked the country to wait a few years and it would be relieved of its problems--meaning relieved of slaves. Wise claimed to be for the Union; but under current circumstances, his loyalty was difficult to discern. Now was not the time for Virginians to fight among themselves. He exclaimed the delegates needed to stand together and tell the Lincoln government that if it really wanted peace, it should take Federal forces out of Virginia and let the state leave peaceably. [20]

The last of Janney's problems that day came from a future Confederate general, Jubal Early of Franklin County. Early suggested that tickets be handed out to hear Preston's speech so that the more aged men could have an opportunity to attend the proceedings. Robert Montague of Middlesex County, a secessionist, stood and opposed Early's suggestion. The gathered crowd erupted with applause. Janney again threatened to clear the galleries. After such an uproar two days in a row, Janney declared that if the problem continued he would have the galleries cleared before any further proceedings.

---

[20] Janney to Alice, Feb. 16, 1861; Proceedings, I:38-48.

Janney knew it was an exciting time, but he also knew that excitement was not a justification for disorder.[21]

Before leaving the hall that evening, MacFarland invited Janney to supper at his home. Janney established another pattern by declining MacFarland's invitation. As always, his main concern was his health. He had promised Alice that he would not go out after dark as a preventive measure against sickness.[22]

The next week opened with speeches from the Confederate representatives, Anderson of Mississippi, Benning of Georgia and Preston of South Carolina. Janney did not place much faith in the ambassadors' ability to sway the members. "No body on our side [was] either killed or wounded or frightened," he later wrote his wife.

Anderson began his speech by playing on the pride of Virginians. He said they were the leaders in the last struggle and they were needed to lead again. Northerners were the real disunionists. They knew what would happen if Lincoln gained the White House, and yet they elected him anyway. He wanted to take away their slaves and instead, enslave the white classes in the South. For years the North had taught hatred against the South in every aspect of their lives from churches to schools. Mississippians wanted peace, but they also had pride and would fight to keep their honor—something they learned from Virginia. All of Mississippi knew that Virginia would fight with her. The Confederacy was the "destiny of the Southern people, and this destiny Virginia holds in her hands." If Virginia joined the South, peace could prevail, if not, there would only

[21] Ibid, I: 40.
[22] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 16, 1861.

be bloodshed. Virginia needed to take her rightful place as the leader and older brother to the South, and not be lined with an enemy who hated her.[23]

Benning spoke next. He did not have the power to make promises, he only came to invite Virginia to join the Confederacy. Georgia left the Union for one reason: a split from the North was the only way to save slavery. The Republican Party was all Northerners; as a majority, it left the South powerless. Republicans wanted to make blacks equal with whites. The secession of the South had benefits for both sides. By taking slavery out of the political debates, politicians could be elected on merit, not on their stance on slavery. Virginia's best interest fell with the South. The Southern economy would continue to grow with cotton and sugar, but it needed the foodstuffs that Virginia could easily supply. If Virginia joined the North, Benning felt that it would be competing with those it joined. However, if Virginia joined the South, it would be a leader and an industrial giant. Virginia's industry could continue to grow as the South gained more slave territory. [24]

The next day Preston spoke. He admitted the other ambassadors had given most of his speech. He flamboyantly explained why South Carolina legally left the Union. After the Revolutionary War, the colonies split but came back together by choice and as sovereign states. While the North turned to industry, the South remained agricultural. The North placed tariffs on the South in order to allow the entire burden of revenue to fall on the South. After the South became successful and made the rest of the nation rich, the North attacked the very thing that made possible its wealth: slaves. The North even elected a man to the presidency whose mission was to destroy slavery.

---

[23] Proceedings, I:50-62.
[24] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 18, 1861; Proceedings, I: 62-75.

Slavery was a matter of life or death in South Carolina. The state had 300,000 white citizens and 400,000 slaves. If the blacks were freed, they would rob, kill and rape all of South Carolina. Preston tried to stroke the egos of the Virginia delegates and play on their emotions. Preston claimed the South was not going against the past but looking forward to the future where its children would be free. Plain and simply, slavery could not exist in the North and the South could not survive without it. There was no possible way for the two to stay together. Janney was glad to see the speeches end because he was ready to get down to more important business.[25]

Instead of moving forward quickly with important business, between February 13 and March 9 the convention delayed. The conservatives were content to do nothing. The delegates mostly debated secession, the importance of Virginia, and the idea of coercion. Delegates did not want either side to force Virginia's hand. Doing so would drive the state in the other direction.[26]

Janney continued to stay busy during his time in Richmond by working mostly on appointments. By February 21, he was exhausted. Having contracted a slight cold, he decided to take a break in his duties and rest in his room. Janney appointed Robert Montague to take the president's seat. Montague had experience in politics, having served as lieutenant governor of Virginia. Janney was not the only one suffering from a cold at the time. To give delegates a chance to rest, the convention adjourned for four days. Janney felt that everyone needed rest. The Committee on Federal Relations was to

[25] Ibid., I:77-92; Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 18, 1861.
[26] Shanks, Secession Movement, 58-64.
[27] Gaines, Biographical Register, 59; Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 21, 1861.

make its first report when everyone returned. Then, Janney said, "the war of words will fairly commence."[27]

He took the free time to catch up on some work but mostly to write his wife. Janney had been away from home for too long; he desperately longed for Alice. He had just missed her sixty-first birthday. Alice had mentioned that she now had spent half of her life with him. For a man married thirty-five years, Janney made a beginner mistake by correcting her. Yet he showed how he stayed so happily married. He told Alice that her arithmetic was "a little at fault" because she was twenty-six when they wed and she just turned sixty-one, so they had been married longer then half her life. He then added: "And a richer blessing no man ever had."[28]

Answering letters consumed Janney's time. He received so many letters every day that he could not even write his close friends. He would pick through the letters, and pull out the ones from Alice. Most of the other letters were essays from people everywhere who felt they could solve the problems in Virginia. Janney told his wife that too many people were scared that their wisdom would die with them, so they wrote everything down and sent the letters to him. He felt obliged to try to read as many as possible but admitted that four-fifths of them went into the fire. Janney also spent time with the editor of the Enquirer in working out a contract to report and publish accounts of the convention proceedings.

For what must have been a cruel twist of fate, Wise's room was directly across from Janney's, allowing him to drop by late that night to talk. Wise kept Janney busy for

---

[28] Ibid., Feb. 22 and 25, 1861.

over an hour discussing things such as farming. It was a waist of time because neither one was particularly fond of the other.[29]

The convention resumed on Saturday, February 23, with Janney in his seat. The delegates had nothing to discuss, so they remained in a holding pattern. The Committee on Federal Relations could not report until Monday. This gave validity to Wise's argument that waiting on the committee was not productive.

Along with waiting for the committee report, delegates also waited to hear from the Peace Conference. Tyler and his group had been in Washington for weeks. The Convention wanted to learn of progress, but they had received no word. After a day of nothing, Janney found solace in going to hear a local clergyman give an excellent sermon. Janney felt fortunate to have made friends with many of the clergy. He gave clergy, both Christian and Jew, tickets to the Convention for their friendship. With the stress on Janney, he spent a lot of time asking for help from higher powers.[30]

As the new week began, things heated up. Janney wrote his wife of a spicy debate between Robert Moore of Rockbridge and John Goode of Bedford. Moore had served with Janney in the 1830 convention and also in the House of Delegates. A strong Unionist, Moore, did not want Virginia's rights to be trampled, but he did not believe either side could secure their rights. Virginia could not join the Confederacy unless it agreed to abandon the African slave trade. The slave trade would hurt Virginia's economy if it could not continue to sell slaves to the lower South. Moore agreed with the Confederate ambassadors that problems with the North must be resolved. However, Moore did not believe that the problems of the lower South were the same as those of the

[29] Ibid., Feb. 22, 1861.
[30] Ibid., Feb. 24.

border states. The lower South worried about tariffs. It did not have a problem with slaves running away as did the border states. Moore argued that by Georgia threatening to use force to bring border states into the Confederacy, it was taking freedoms away, just as the North was doing.. Furthermore Virginia was not ready for war. Virginia's sons "are a good deal like Irishmen who stepped into a crowd and said 'Gintlemen, there any one of ye's who wud do me the favor to tread upon the tail of me coat, for I very much like fighting this morning'."[31]

John Goode of Bedford County, a secessionist, spoke next. Goode focused his comments on Moore for the way he attacked the South. The North was the reason there was a convention. Goode played to the crowd by asking why Virginia should be frightened when it could easily trample any army. Goode declared: "Sir, I know not what may be the views of the Convention, I may be in a minority here; but I believe I speak the voices of Virginia, when I say …"

At that point, he could not finish because of the loud applause from the crowd. Janney quickly ordered the sergeant-at-arms to clear the galleries. Goode and other delegates asked Janney to let the observers stay and only remove the troublesome ones. Janney wrote his wife: "I positively refused to as so stating that as I was made officially responsible for the orders of the body I would not yield."

The galleries were cleared, and Goode was able to continue. Goode had known Lincoln in the past; he knew him to be a good man, but he did not agree with his current politics. Neither did Goode like the speeches of the Confederate ambassadors. They warned Virginia of the standing armies of the North. The ambassadors told the convention that if Virginia remained in the Union, their slaves would run away. The

[31] Gaines, Biographical Register, 60; Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 25, 1861; Proceedings I: 172-84.

ambassadors proposed to build forts across the border to protect the slaves. Did that not go against a standing army? They also said that cotton was king but forgot to mention that Great Britain could rival them. Further, Virginia grew tobacco, not cotton.

Goode also feared leaving the Union without the other border states. He wanted to meet with those states and decide whether they should gather strength to protect all their rights. If the South opened the slave trade, then the border states would be reduced to second-class citizens. The Enquirer believed that speakers on both sides spoke so negatively about the South that Virginia would never join them. "The Convention demanded by the Slave Oligarchs of the East has proved their destruction, and instead of 'hitching' Virginia to the tail of South Carolina, will ultimately detach her from the Slave States of the South, whether in or out of the Union."[32]

When the day ended, Janney knew he was in for abuse because he had cleared the galleries. He wrote his wife: "I shall satisfy myself by doing my duty and let consequences take care of themselves. I know that 4/5th of our members approve of my action."[33]

Alice did not care as much about duty as her husband did when she told him "do not allow mistaken notions of duty to neglect yourself." She wanted her husband to take another adjournment to rest, but she admitted: "Oh if anything can be done to save the Country we ought not to murmur at personal sacrifices."

In her sad and worried state, Alice told Janney, "Mr. Lincoln has disappointed me, I had hoped he was a sensible man." Her disappointment with the President also led

---

[32] Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 26, 1861. (hereafter referred to as Enquirer)
[33] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 25, 1861; Proceedings, I: 188-219.
[34] Alice Janney to John Janney, Feb. 25 and 28, 1861.

her to comment that with the "Ides of March" approaching, maybe Lincoln would be killed.[34]

On February 28, Janney received news he had been anticipating: the Peace Conference had adjourned. He was both excited and nervous. Janney wanted to know the outcome of the Conference, but he feared the other state conventions would not accept the any measures that guaranteed peace. The rest of the delegates were in "a perfect rage" about the reports and wanted to know the outcome. Yet they had to endure a long-winded speech from Jeremiah Morton of Orange County. He spent half of the time repeating what others had already said and the other half talking about all the different positions he had held. Alice told Janney that everyone knew that Janney was ill and so he should have someone replace him during long and boring speeches.[35]

As March finally arrived in Richmond, the weather turned warmer. The previous day, Janney had asked Alice for a warm flannel hat and drawers. Now he complained about the heat and asked for thinner stockings. Nothing of importance happened, but Janney still worried about the Peace Conference report. He feared that the U.S. Congress would not accept the compromising recommendations. Members of the peace conference tried to report to the convention but were blocked by delegates who wanted reports in writing. Men such as Samuel Price of Greenbrier refused to waste time having the delegates read the report when they could read it themselves. However, Wise wanted to hear the report in order to understand fully what had happened. Wise demanded to know if the convention was a peace conference or a war meeting.[36]

---

[35] Janney to Alice Janney, Feb. 28, 1861: Proceedings, I: 251-70.
[36] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 1, 1861; Proceedings I: 275-16.

That Sunday, Janney poured out his heart to Alice. He did not know what to do next. Everyone was upset over the fact that the Federal administration did not accept the plan for peace. Janney admitted to Alice that he did not feel "equal to the task." On top of everything else, the heat now crippled him, and forced him to stay in his room the entire day. There was still hope; Lincoln was to deliver his inaugural speech the next day. Maybe something he said could help stave the tide for war.[37]

March 4 was a day everyone anticipated. The Convention waited all day to hear news of Lincoln's speech but news never came. Instead, Waitman Willey of Monongalia County, a strong Whig, took the floor and gave a speech that impressed Janney. Willey believed the Founding Fathers did not put the states together without thought of the Union or togetherness. If the states were only loosely joined, it would be like living together in sin.

Willey continued with the reasons the lower South seceded and how those reasons did not apply to Virginia. The first reason to secede was the bombardment of the northern press. If Virginia left the Union, would it stop the press attacks? Second, the North encouraged and helped slaves run away. If the slaves fled it would be more difficult to retrieve them if Virginia left. Third, why condemn the entire government for some states passing personal liberty laws? Virginia had the right to be angry over Republicans' efforts to take away their slaves, but it still did not represent a strong enough reason for secession. The crowd began hissing at Willey. He asked Janney for help with the noise, whereas Janney told him he did not hear any noise; but if Willey did, Janney would clear the galleries.

[37] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 3, 1861.

Willey continued. Virginia would not submit to inequality in the territories. Since the Supreme Court gave Southerners the right to take slaves anywhere, they would not have to submit to the North. Virginia had no right to complain about Lincoln's election; it was fair. The South placed itself in the minority by the will of the people. The nation had grown great in a short period of time. Secession would only serve to divide the nation into small territories that eventually would be destroyed like Greece. Willey said that Virginia was a central state now, but if she joined the South, she would be an outsider. Willey ended by referring to a statement from the Enquirer that said only Black Republicans would endorse the Peace Conference. Yet, Willey was a slaveholder and he endorsed it.[38]

The next morning Richmond awakened to what Janney called a "flare up over the inaugural." All of the newspapers printed their thoughts over Lincoln's speech. The Enquirer stated, "Virginia wanted peace, but after Lincoln's address war must come … no action of our Convention can now maintain the peace. She must fight! … she may march to the contest with her sister states of the South, or she must march to the conflict against them. There is left no middle course; there is left no more peace."[39]

The Examiner, after writing that the Convention only pretended to represent Virginians, exclaimed that "the 'scarlet letter' of submission to Lincoln has been burnt into her brow, and what her future career may be, she has lost that which seven of her sisters gained by prompt and decided action … yesterday fixed upon the neck of Virginia the yoke of this abolition despotism."[40]

---

[38] Ibid., Mar. 5, 1861; Proceedings, I:352-374.
[39] Enquirer, Mar. 5, 1861.
[40] Examiner, Mar. 5, 1861.

The conservative Whig wrote: "Let Lincoln carry out the policy indicated in his inaugural, and civil war will be inaugurated forthwith the length and breadth of the land…If Lincoln and his advisors wish to avoid serious trouble, and save the peace of the Country, they will abandon their coercion policy and take their stand on the broad platform of common sense and common justice." Worse yet, there were the people dancing in the streets over the prospect of war. [41]

Inside the Convention, James Cox of Chesterfield County stood and called Virginia and the Border States to action. He wanted a meeting of the states to address the situation. William Goggin of Bedford was the next speaker. He feared Lincoln would use force against the South. He wanted Virginia to stand with him when Lincoln said, "The Union will constitutionally defend and maintain itself, and that the power confined to him will be used to hold, occupy and possess the property and places belonging to the Government, and to collect the duties on imports." Janney and Early seemed to be the only calm ones in the Convention when Early suggested they wait for an official report before damming Lincoln further.[42]

March 7 began with more talk about Lincoln's speech. John Carlile of Harrison gave what Janney called a good speech. Carlile had served with Janney in the State Convention of 1850 and was one of the strongest advocates for the Union in the 1861 Convention. He felt that the South had used Lincoln as an excuse to call for secession when they had clearly come to their decision before the President spoke. Carlile asked why the Enquirer had changed its mind since 1858 when it rejected secession? Nothing had happened except for a change in the presidency. The President could not make laws;

---

[41] Whig, Mar. 4, 1861.
[42] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 5, 1861; Proceedings, I: 380-407.

he could only enforce laws already in place. Carlile asked why in one week and one address did Virginia want to be either a foreign power or in rebellion? Virginia was dedicated to slavery. The government had not made laws about slavery without the consent of the slave states. The government protected slave rights, allowing slavery to travel freely, but now the South wanted to destroy it. Too much had been spoken about rights but nothing about duty, Carlile asserted, and South Carolina shouted the loudest. South Carolina used the irrepressible conflict as its reason for secession but it really wanted control. South Carolinians claimed to protect rights of the South. However, they only allowed men with more then 500 slaves to serve in all government houses.

Carlile cited reports that claimed the "Black Republicans" had killed the Peace Conference in the Senate. However, John Crittenden of Kentucky said the failure of the six southern senators who would not vote killed it. Two of the senators, Dr. M. J. Hunter and James Mason, were from Virginia. They claimed the federal government was too powerful, and they would not help to make changes. Carlile felt the only way for coercion to occur was by war. Lincoln had not mentioned war. He spoke of peace, but said that he would protect the Constitution.[43]

Most importantly, Carlile spoke of two names worshiped by Virginians: Henry Clay and God. Henry Clay was against secession and felt that force could be used to keep a state in the Union. The Founding Fathers Carlile stated, "agreed upon a Union for Union's sake, and, by all the gods, I too, go for the Union for the Union's sake! Jefferson did not make it, nor Madison, or his co-laborers made it. GOD ALMIGHTY MADE IT. It was the work of inspiration. I believe that, as I believe the Bible." The galleries sought

[43] Ibid., I: 449-64.

to disrupt Carlile's speech but Janney maintained order. Carlile was hissed at as he left the building, even though two ladies accompanied him.[44]

March 8 was a slow day. It was spent waiting for the Committee on Federal Relations to report, which never happened. That evening Janney was declined several invitations to functions and stayed true to his promise to Alice not to go out after dark. He was suffering from a cold, as was Alice. Janney instructed her to rest and recover because when he returned, he wanted her "well and fat." He complemented her on a letter she had previously written. It was a "very acceptable sensible and judicious letter," and the convention would be better if she were in charge. Like so many men in high positions, Janney had a good women behind him. In Janney's case, he had a wife who knew politics as well.[45]

[44] Ibid., I 464-77.
[45] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar 7 and 8, 1861

Chapter III
Trouble Ahead

On March 9, the second stage of the Convention began when the Committee on Federal Relations released its written report. The convention went from inactivity to party schemes, compromises, and emotional cries from the fire-eaters. Everyone knew on Monday that a battle had begun.[1]

Everyone was in bad sorts. The report from the Peace Conference was in the Convention's hands. However many delegates were too sick to argue. Janney felt better, but the rest could not talk because of coughing. Conservative delegates came under attack from the radical delegates, who called them submissionists. The Whig came to the defense of the delegates. "We know it [the convention] is denounced, day after day, without rhyme or reason, as a body of submissionist, abolitionists, and traitors! But is it really the fact that the people of Virginia … have elected submissionist, abolitionist, and traitors to represent them in the present convention?"[2]

On March 11, George Summers of Kanawha stood to speak. Summers, a strong Unionist, served as a member of the 1850 Constitutional Convention and most recently represented Virginia as a member of the Peace Conference. Summers spoke for an hour and a half and the next day for two and a half hours. He gave what Janney considered a good speech. Summers felt that most people at the Peace Conference wanted peace, especially the border states. He did not understand why the South wanted to kill a compromise. The Dred Scott case allowed slavery into all territories. Below 36 degrees 30 minutes, slavery was well established and protected by laws. Slavery could not be

[1] Shanks, Secession Movement, 158.
[2] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 11, 1861; Whig, Mar. 12, 1861

touched in Virginia with its roots in common law. The new compromise from the Peace Conference allowed slaves to travel between other slave states or on trains or boats bordering slave states. Summers did not understand why the South saw the compromise as a threat when they claimed to believe in states rights. Should not a state law outlawing slavery trump a federal law allowing slavery everywhere?

The South wanted the federal government to pay for lost slaves, but Summers thought that was wrong. If the government paid for lost slaves, the money would come from taxes that the South had to pay. In reality, the South would be paying themselves for lost slaves. Summers wanted cities and states that were not doing their duty to return runaway slaves to pay the monetary costs. Yet, he did recognize a major obstacle to this solution. Suing the states for money would not keep peace. Slavery would still be an issue. He did not like the idea of the federal government having the power to collect money, because in the future what would stop them from collecting money from the South?

Summers thought everyone was to blame for the failure of the Peace Conference. Its biggest problem was the time limit. Delegates only had three days to debate. The North tried to pass a clause that allowed for states to make citizens out of blacks, which the South fought. The lower South did its share of damage even though its major concerns had to do with the border states and not themselves. Southerners should not care about the fugitive slave laws because the border states lost many more slaves than they did. The question of the expansion of slavery was also important for the border states. The lower South did not leave rich lands and move west; it was the border states who populated the territories.

.

Summers believed there was still hope. The Peace Conference had awakened the Northern people. If the peace proposal were given to the Northern people, they would pass it. They would then allow the South to return home like the prodigal son.

Lastly, Summers reminded the other delegates of Virginia's duties. First, Maryland was its sister state more then any other. Seceding before Maryland had a chance to hold a convention would cause problems. Second, North Carolina was counting on Virginia. If Virginia left, then North Carolina must follow. Third, Tennessee had not called a convention. Fourth, Virginia's "daughter", Kentucky, needed Virginia's support. Lastly, Virginia did not want to be coerced. However by seceding, it coerced all the other states around it. Janney felt that Summers' speech had, "great prowess and ability" and would have a good effect on the Convention.[3]

On March 13, John Tyler of Charles City County responded to Summer's speech. Tyler was the most famous member of the convention. He had been governor of Virginia, a U. S. senator, and President of the United States. He led the Virginia delegates to the Peace Conference, but was disillusioned by the process and wanted to secede from the Union. Tyler was a states right secessionist who, upon his return from the Peace Conference, became a pain in Janney's side. However, he described Tyler as; "very feeble and I believe everyone pities his condition." Because of Tyler's condition it took him two days to deliver his speech. He had to rest between parts to maintain strength. Janney felt his speech made no impact upon the delegates.[4]

Tyler began by admitting that he was in bad health. Yet Virginia had called him out of sixteen years of retirement, so he came. He was called to restore the Union.

---

[3] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 11 and 12, 1861; Proceedings, I: 549-628.
[4] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 11 and 13, 1861.

However, states like New York would not budge an inch, so how could he? Tyler was now against the peace plan. The day he arrived in Richmond he denounced it to a mob on the street. Tyler did not understand the point in arguing about the plan when the Federal Congress had rejected it. In order to pass, the peace plan had to be ratified by every remaining state in the Union. There was no chance of all the states agreeing. Tyler denied that the plan failed because of time restraints. The Crittenden Plan had been debated for a long period and was essentially the same.

Tyler continued talking about points in the peace plan. He was afraid that Lincoln was seeking too much power. Lincoln wanted to dismiss the territorial governors and appoint men loyal to him. Tyler tried in the Peace Conference to add an amendment to the plan to stop Lincoln, but only five states agreed with him. Tyler voted against closing the slave trade in case Virginia needed to trade with the South. He voted against government reimbursements of runaway slaves because it would only motivate slaves to run and marshals to ignore the runaways if they knew the government would have to pay.

Virginia received no benefits from the peace plan. It gained no land or right of transit. It still could not extract fugitive slaves from other states. The personal liberty laws were not repealed and they received no help against the "Underground Railroad."

Tyler warned Lincoln that if he wanted to keep the peace, he needed to evacuate Fort Sumter and not reinforce it. Lincoln needed to let the South go and save as much of the Union as he could. If he wanted to save Virginia then he needed to make constitutional guarantees to protect its rights. Tyler ended by saying Virginians needed to "maintain their liberties peaceably if they can, forcibly if they must."[5]

[5] Proceedings, I: 636-79.

That night, Janney admitted to his wife that Tyler finished much better then he expected. Janney felt that Tyler wanted to join the South because if Virginia stayed in the Union, Tyler's party would be in the minority in both houses and he would be worthless.[6]

After Tyler spoke, Janney hoped the Convention would be done within the week because all the arguments had been beaten to death. However, he knew it would be impossible because at least fifty more people still wanted to speak. The Examiner agreed with Janney. "The Virginia Convention is inexhaustible in its contrivances of delay. Never was the great science of 'How not to do it' so fully appreciated and understood by a parliamentary body. When will the submissionist of Virginia look truth in the face, and admit what all but the utterly ignorant and stupid know to be fact?" Even Janney's local paper, the Democratic Mirror, complained that the convention had cost tax payers $2,600 a day, and no one thought it would last over ten days. The Mirror felt that the delegates only looked out for themselves.[7]

Sunday, March 17, was rainy. Janney spent the whole time in his room reading and writing to his wife. The biggest news was that a delegation had arrived from Maryland. Janney was torn because the delegation had not received official sanction from their state and he was not sure if he should admit them. Janney hoped that the convention would end within the next two weeks. He terribly missed Alice, and the people were getting more violent everyday. The Whig reported: "It is very evident that attempts are being made to sway the deliberations of our Conventions, by all the artificers of intimidation and terror. Freedom of expression … is sought to be fettered or silenced

[6] Janney to Alice, Mar. 14, 1861.
[7] Ibid., Mar. 11-14, 1861; Examiner, Mar. 15, 1861; Democratic Mirror, Mar. 13, and 20, 1861.

by opprobrious epithets and personal denunciation … it remains to be seen whether such men as Janney, Scott, Summer, MacFarland, Preston, Marshall, Conrad, Marye, Brent, and others, and even Wise and Tyler, are to be overawed and driven from their propriety by the clamor of reckless mobs and desperate politicians."

Counties around Virginia were submitting resolutions to the convention demanding secession. The Whig called the groups, "packed one-sided" gatherings that "are great humbugs and worthy of little respect." Yet many believed the resolutions were the will of the people. James Brown lived next door to Mechanic's Hall. Everyday he hung a Confederate flag in front of his home to remind the delegates.[8]

March 18 was the beginning of the fifth week of the convention. That morning delegates awakened to a surprise: the rain had turned to snow. Janney said it was the coldest day since he had arrived. He longed for peace and harmony. Instead, he got more of George Randolph of Richmond. Randolph had already spent the previous meeting in a rambling speech, and he would not be done for two more days. By the end of the second day, Janney said Randolph had exhausted the patience of the convention. Randolph began his career as a midshipman in the Navy, then entered a successful law practice in Richmond. He organized the Richmond Howitzers company and became its captain.[9]

He began his speech by observing that his voice or his body might not hold up. Everything was fine because he spoke for three days. Randolph called for a second revolution to uphold the first. He felt all was fine when the South controlled the judiciary and the legislature; but with the North now in control, they were unprotected. The peace

[8] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 17, 1861; Whig, Mar. 10 and 15, 1861.
[9] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 18; Gaines, Biographical Register, 66.

plan failed because it was full of Republican ideas to hurt the South and he wanted to dissect it. The first issue as always was slavery. The peace plan did not recognize slaves as property. Without legal protection, Republican judges could later take away their slaves.

Randolph's second issue was the acquisition of land. In order for the South to acquire more states, they needed twenty northern senators to agree. However, the North only needed eight southern senators to vote for a new northern state.

Randolph's last issue was trade. If Virginia was isolated from the South, it would die. If Virginia could not trade its blacks, then the slaves would take control. Someday one might become the President. Randolph then made the argument that Virginia commercially would be better in the South. With revenue, the North had high protective tariffs while the South had low tariffs. Virginia grew wheat. The North had an excess of wheat and the South did not have enough. With tobacco, the North had competition and the South had a market. Most importantly, Virginia could become a manufacturing powerhouse in the South without northern competition. Virginia's battle was not white verses black, but white verses white. The North flooded the market with laborers and hurt wages.[10]

Once again the length of the convention was concerning everyone. The day after Randolph finished speaking, Janney told his wife that he hoped to be home in a week unless everyone talked as long as Randolph. The Examiner was more pointed. "Five weeks of twaddle have dragged their weary length along, and the Convention had done nothing but impose upon an over-taxed state the heavy burden of paying for every dull, timid, treacherous, abolition and submission speech which has been delivered … The

conceited old ghost who crawled from a hundred damp graves to manacle their state and deliver her up as a hand-maid to the hideous chimpanzee from Illinois have determined that not one word of their fubbishand gabble will be lost to posterity."[11]

The Whig also gave its advice. "We trust that the committee on the whole will hereafter remain in session at least six hours, instead of three. The country is becoming impatient … we are for all reasonable latitude of debate, but … the Convention must not allow itself to be 'talked to death.'"[12]

On March 20, it was James Holcombe's time to answer Randolph's speech with his own. The Albermarle relegate, a strong avacate of states rights, had been a professor of Law at the University of Virginia until his election to the Convention. Janney was not impressed with his speech, calling it below mediocrity; yet Janney suggested, with a bit of sarcasm, that the secessionist papers would publish it as "the greatest of the age." [13]

Holcombe declared that the Convention had to make the most important decision in history while being a ship tossed in a terrible storm at sea. It was Virginia's Christian and patriotic duty to fight the good fight for slavery. Before 1820, the two sides did not fight over slavery; they both knew it was wrong. However, after 1820 the northern people took it upon themselves to fight against the institution while the South began defending it as a great practice. With the attitudes as they were, it was impossible to stay together peacefully.

Holcombe agreed their first job was to save the Union. However. with such inequality and hatred it could not happen. Even the Founding Fathers would not have

---

[10]

[11] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 19, 1861; Examiner, Mar. 21, 1861

[12] Whig, Mar. 20, 1861.

[13] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 20, 1861; Gaines, Biographical Register, 44-45.

written the Constitution if they had foreseen the situation. Northerners wanted the expansion of slavery stopped because they knew that without overflow of blacks there must be "emancipation or destruction of the black race." The Republicans wanted another St. Domingo.

Northerners did not know the South. All they knew about slavery were the lies they read in the paper and what new, radical immigrants said about it. If the South formed a party to rid the country of Mormons and Mohammedites, they would never stop until every last one was gone. It was the same in the North with slavery. Secretary of State William H. Seward was the perfect example. His whole life was about destroying slavery. Seward felt a moral struggle was at hand, so he would not give up.

In Number Ten of the Federalist Papers James Madison warned against one section of the country becoming too strong. The sectional voting of the North made the South worth nothing if it remained in the Union. They were open to humiliation like the Jews of Europe. With such humiliation, Holcombe preferred war to subjugation. The material value of Virginia was nothing compared to the loss of personal liberty and despotism. Holcombe was convinced the North wanted to take away Virginia's manhood. The sooner the government is overthrown he said, the manlier and better the South would be.

Holcomb was convinced that the South would not rejoin the Union. It already had began preparing for war, and hatred was too strong. A new government existed. The North could not force the South back. Blockades cost too much; France and England would not support it. The Union could not maintain a large enough army. If they tried, they would go bankrupt.

Virginia could not wait too long to decide, otherwise, its economy would fail. Holcombe looked out for the welfare of Virginia. It could not afford to wait for the border states because they did not have as much at stake; Virginia had many more slaves than they did.[14]

After Holcombe finished what Janney called a "fine speech but nothing more," John Baldwin of Augusta County took the floor. Baldwin, a staunch Whig and Unionist, was a member of the Committee of Federal Relations and an influential member of the convention. On March 21, he began a two-day speech defending the Union.[15]

Baldwin only cared about the welfare of Virginia, and Virginia only had one problem: slavery. He did not think the government had done anything wrong. People were complaining about what they might do. Baldwin challenged the delegates to point to the occasion where Virginia had been oppressed. If Virginia was not oppressed how was it degraded? Baldwin felt that with Virginia's past honor and glory, he would not let it be degraded as other delegates had.[16]

On March 23, Baldwin did not continue his speech immediately because Wise began the day by calling the Peace Conference a blunder. Once again the galleries burst out in applause, forcing Janney to threaten to clear them if another outburst occurred. Baldwin began his speech by addressing the issue of states injecting a direct tax. Wise interrupted once more, shouting that states can only tax if it was uniform. According to the official proceedings and Janney's letters, the presiding officer let Wise's outburst slide.

---

[14] Proceedings, II: 75-100.
[15] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 21, 1861; Gaines, Biographical Register, 14.
[16] Proceedings, II: 139-145.

Baldwin and most of the delegates spent the majority of their speeches addressing the fourteen-point peace plan proposed by the Committee on Federal Relations. Baldwin's major concern was with the seventh section, which states that "the elective franchise and the right to hold office, whether federal or territorial, shall not be exercised by persons who are of the African race."

Baldwin was upset, the South justified slavery was that blacks were inferior by act of God. The seventh section created the impression that the South feared the possibility of blacks becoming equal and so barred them in the constitution. However, Baldwin felt that the seventh section was not necessary because northern whites discriminated against blacks worse than southerners did. At least in the South there was "mutual respect and affection between the master and slave."[17]

The Examiner was not impressed with the proceedings of the Convention and how Janney had handled the outbreaks. "The Virginia Convention has been the scene of the sickening folly. Mr. John Janney occupied the chair while a tom foolery that a school boys' debating society would have been ashamed of, was brought like a harlequin on top of a hearse, to be farce in the tragedy of a nation's honor."[18]

On March 25, two events occurred. Janney wrote home that a nobody in the House of Delegates had attacked him because he was a Quaker. That same nobody attacked the Convention for allowing a Quaker to sit as president. It is impossible to identify exactly what was said; there is no mention of the statements in the records. The delegate probably had a problem with Janney being a Quaker because Quakers were

[17] Ibid., 226-35.
[18] Examiner, Mar. 25, 1861.

against war and slavery. In Janney's case, because of slavery, he had quit the Quaker faith years earlier and joined St. James Episcopal Church in Leesburg.[19]

The second event of the day was a resumption of Wise's endless ranting, which would almost consume the rest of the convention. Janney wrote home that "Wise has occupied the principal part of it [the convention] with rigmarole." Wise stated that he was ill from influenza; but as a member of the convention he had the right to be heard. He claimed that, close to death, he must be heard or his ghost would haunt them all. Obviously, by the length of his speech, he felt much better than he admitted. Wise wanted to explain how the Peace Conference was a failure. However he supported the convention's amendments to the compromise for reasons he planned to address in the future. During Wise's speech, he and Janney expressed contempt for one another in their childish bantering. In no other occasion did Janney have such exchanges.

> Wise: "Mr. Chairman, I rise—as you went into committee whilst I was absent—to enquire what is the original proposition to which a substitute is now proposed. Will the clerk read it."
> Janney: "the entire of which report."
> Wise: "the entire of which report."
> Janney: "Of the committee of twenty-one, sir, the only two reports the Chair is aware of."
> Wise: "Which two."
> Janney: "The partial report and the proposed amendments appended to that report."
> Wise: "Well, does the Chair consider both these reports as being before the committee?"
> Janney: "They are but one report, and that is now under consideration."
> Wise: "Mr. Chairman, I ask again, as there were two reports made by the committee of twenty-one; which report is now before the committee?"
> Janney: "The two reports constitute a whole; the Chair does not consider that they are two distinct reports."
> Wise: "The Chair thinks then that two is one. Am I right in that?"
> Janney: "Sir."
> Wise: "Does the Chair think that two is one?"
> Janney: "Under these circumstances it does." [laughter]

[19] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 25, 1861; Rubin, "Honorable Whig," 16.

> Wise: "Under these circumstances it does. [more laughter] Well, what part—if the report is a whole—what part of the two reports is now under consideration?"
> Janney: "the entire report, both of which being partial reports, constitute one report, and that whole report is now pending before the committee, to which there is an amendment offered by the Gentlemen from Harrison."
> Wise: "That requires the most curious grammar I ever heard of, 'the entire report, both of which'"[Janney interrupts]
> Janney: "The Chair does not wish to discuss with the gentleman from Princess Anne the question of Grammar."
> Wise: "The Chair has made this decision itself. I submit that it is a question for the Committee. I submit that the Chair is not sole arbiter of this question. This statement of the Chair places us in a very false position."
> Janney: "The gentleman mistakes the Chair if he supposes for one solitary moment that it thinks it has arbitrary power to decide any question."

Luckily for the Convention, Robert Conrad of Frederick jumped into the conversation and carried the debate with Wise.[20]

The tide of the convention was beginning to change. Janney could sense it. It was just as he thought: the longer the convention stayed in secession, the more ground the secessionists gained. The Enquirer wrote that conservative members "begin to fear their inability to stem the swelling tide of secession which is berring away, one by one, many of their hitherto staunchest friends of the Union."[21]

Janney did not fear Wise. He told Alice that "Wise is talking a lot but not influencing others." However Janney felt they were losing ground. He wanted to make a speech himself, yet, he told Alice, he would "distinguish myself by being silent." All was not lost though, for William Preston of Montgomery County was next to speak.[22]

Preston was elected as a moderate Unionist, and he served on the Committee of Federal Relations. He had been a member of the House of Delegates, the Virginia Senate, and Secretary of the Navy under President Tyler. Preston said the Convention

---

[20] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 25, 1861; Proceedings, II: 274-82.
[21] Enquirer, Mar. 26, 1861.
[22] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 26, 1861.

was sent to decide the issue of secession. Its job was to follow the will of the people and the people on February 4 had made their wishes clear to remain in the Union. Virginians sent delegates to Richmond to try to secure their rights by amendments to the constitution. If their rights could not be completely secured, then they had the right to secede. The only protection of Virginia's slaves was a constitutional amendment. Anything less would not do.

Preston agreed that there was hostility from the North. Yet he did not see how leaving the Union would fix the problem. The argument was slavery; and if the Constitution said slavery was legal, there could be arguments. Preston wanted the peace resolutions to go directly to the North and not to the border states. Virginians needed to stand together and be strong. He felt the difference between himself and Wise was that he had hope for Virginia on either side. Preston ended by urging the delegates not to say "where liberty is, there is my country, but say where my home is, there shall liberty be." Janney felt Preston gave a good speech. From it, the Unionists could gain some ground back.[23]

On March 27, Janney's headaches, both physical and emotionally, did not quit. Once again the reason was Wise, who, Janney felt, had, "been talking all day about nothing." The only cure for his headache was the hope that he would be home by the following week, (which, of course, was not possible). Wise was angry over a comment that William MacFarland had made. MacFarland did not believe that the present Virginia was a sovereign state. Wise argued that Virginia was a sovereign state. It was called a commonwealth because it had not relinquished its sovereign status. Virginia could still make treaties with other states, and give the federal government the power to declare war.

Virginia only allowed Washington to use its sovereign powers. It could now pull them back.

In a rare moment of reason, Wise asked for the convention to wait a reasonable time to work with the laws and the government. Wise said he would stoop low enough until he lost self-respect before he would leave the Union. However, Wise concluded by declaring that "if no other man in the commonwealth shall raise the flag of revolution, I will raise it as high aloft as I can make it flaunt in Heaven's air. 'If that be treason, make the most of it.'"[24]

Janney may have felt the Unionists were holding strong. However, the secessionist editor of the Examiner did not agree. "The Submission organization in the Convention, like the frozen surface of the great Russian river near St. Petersburg, is cracking to peaces as the grand swell of the patriots and indignant masses come rushing and roaring down from all quarters like the swollen torrents of a thousand mountain streams."[25]

March 30 must have been a blessed day for Janney. On that day Manilius Chapman of Giles County put forth a suggestion to stop debating the peace proposal and vote by the next Thursday. Many thought that not enough members had been give the chance to speak. People like Wise had consumed so much time that only twenty delegates had spoken out of the 152 delegates attending the convention. The ones who had done most of the talking were pushing for Thursday deadline, while other delegates wanted the convention to be patient. The voting was a real victory for the Unionists,

---

[23] Proceedings, II: 757-61; Janney to Alice, Mar. 26, 1861; Gaines, Biographical Register, 64.
[24] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 27, 1861; Proceedings, II: 462-80.
[25] Examiner, Mar. 28, 1861.

because they voted to stop. The longer the convention continued, the Unionists knew the stronger the secessionists would become. Even though the papers clamored for Virginia to secede, the voting kept demonstrating that they were wrong. Janney wrote: "A more desperate faction never existed in any country then the occupants of the South, but they can't move old Virginia yet awhile.[26]

Janney spent Sunday March 31, talking to Alice through "old Abe's" mail. An incident occurred during the previous week dealing with Janney's picture being published. Alice was so upset about it that she told off a man named Morgan. Janney was surprised that she took the matter so seriously. Janney wrote: "It has been said that the very best test of a man's popularity was to be painted on all the tavern signs as was to be the case with George Washington."

Janney told his wife that he never thought about the picture anymore; someday they could have a laugh about it. Obviously Janney had more toleration then his wife. Yet he complained to Alice over issues at Richmond. Everyone in the state wanted appointments to offices, and they all sent their recommendations to him. By this time, Janney had had enough with letter. They accumulated so much that they covered his entire desk. He had decided to stop answering them. He was disgusted with the entire business. Lastly, Janney complained about the House of Delegates. It was trying to pass what he called "Jacobean resolutions" about some guns that belonged to the federal government. The legislature decided to stay in secession until the coming Thursday.

---

[26] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 30, and 31, 1861; Proceedings II: 656-63.

Janney considered the members a, "a public calamity far more fastidious and mischievous [than ever] appointed in this state."[27]

April 1 came at last. Janney had to be relieved that March had finally ended. Janney knew that nothing but talk would be accomplished until Thursday, when the Convention planned to adjourn. Southall, Janney's closest friend, reported on meetings held in his home county of Albermale. Some negative remarks had been said about him at the county meeting. Southall believed the group to be only a few men. They had met and passed a resolution stating "that we herby express and make manifest our most decided disapprobation of the course of our delegate, Mr. V.W. Southall, in the Convention, and we would further urge him to cast his vote in accordance with the ideas of his canvas speech, made in this place, for immediate and direct secession."

Southall was offended by what he called this "discourteous and offensive character." He intended to prove that the people of Albermale knew where he stood. In Scottsville, about twenty miles from his home, he had given a speech in which he reportedly spoke in favor of secession. However, Southall promptly wrote the paper and denied the charge. Janney was a bit frightened over the affair. He worried that if they kept up the pressure, Southall might submit to their wishes. Janney did not want to lose his friend as an ally.[28]

Tuesday, April 2, was a melancholy day for Janney. The pressure had gotten to him, and he missed Alice terribly. She was sick again; it bothered him not to be with her. Janney wanted to board a train and return home for just a day and see her. Yet his friends convinced him that a night journey would not be in his best interest. Janney told his wife

[27] Janney to Alice Janney, Mar. 31, 1861, and Apr. 1, 1861.
[28] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 1, 1861; Proceedings, I: 664-70.

how he longed for her and how he would insure that they were not apart for this long again. He also reminded Alice that his remarks about the delegates were confidential because " it is not proper for the presiding officer to indulge in free criticisms."[29]

The next morning began with what Janney called a "good speech." Robert Scott of Fauquier County, a Unionist, had served in the House of Delegates, was a member of the 1850 Constitutional Convention, and was on the Committee of Federal Relations. Scott recognized that everyone was weary of talking and wanted to adjourn. However, they had only reached debate on the third resolution of the Committee on Federal Relations' peace plan and they were to end the committee the next day. They had spent all of their time squabbling and had not addressed the most important issues. Even though delegates came from different parts of the Commonwealth and would not always agree, they must unite to defend the state's honor and interests. The convention must act calmly and deliberately because it was deciding the fate of the nation. Scott wanted delegates to realize that all the different views were rooted in patriotism.

Scott believed that the South could not secede for long. It was too connected with the Union in traditions, religion, and history. The South created the same basic government as the Union. Rejoining it would not be difficult. However, Scott thought that if the Union did not accept the amendments, Virginia should leave the Union or any demands would seem idle. If Virginia left, they had a bargaining chip to work with the Union to rejoin.[30]

April 4, the scheduled final day of the convention, became an exciting one. Virginia had proclaimed that it wanted to remain in the Union in the February 4 election

---

[29] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 2, 1861.
[30] Ibid., Apr. 3, 1861; Proceedings, III: 57-60; Gaines, Biographical Register, 67-68.

of delegates. Two months later, it received a second chance. The third, fourth, and fifth resolutions to the Federal Committee's compromise plan had already been adopted when the sixth was introduced for debate. Lewis Harvie of Amelia County proposed that the Convention bypass all future debates on the compromise plan and a vote on the question of secession. The proposal was accepted and the delegates cast their votes on secession. After the voting, the Unionist still held a strong majority. The Unionist won the vote by a count of ninety to forty-five, a percentage of two to one. Once again Virginia showed its loyalty to the Union. However, Janney knew the secessionist would try again, but he felt they had little chance of success. Janney's one concern was the Convention dragging on; he hoped it would end by the middle of the month.[31]

Even though Janney rejoiced over the voting, not everyone agreed with him. The editor of the Examiner felt differently: "The federalist majority in the Virginia Convention is responsible for civil war. But their vote on the 5th [sic] of April … their cowardice, their folly, their criminal delay and wicked, selfish, base calculations of what was or was not popular at the moment, makes the war! … Never was a greater trust committed to a Nation's hand, never was it more despicably betrayed."[32]

April 6, started with a lot of excitement. Janney told his wife that a regular barrage happened in the convention. Letters like the one sent to Southall from his county began to arrive at the convention demanding that it vote for immediate secession. On April 6 alone, the convention received letters from the cities of Charlotte and Richmond and the counties of Norfolk and Portsmouth.[33]

---

[31] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 4, 1861.
[32] Examiner, Apr. 8, 1861.
[33] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 6; Proceedings, III: 222-30.

The other excitement came from new resolutions offered by Preston of Montgomery County. Preston wanted to place pressure on Lincoln to express his plans and give him the opportunity to keep or break the peace. His proposal brought on spirited debates, so much so that the resolution could not be voted on because they ran out of time. Janney was pleased with the way he handled himself during the debates. He wrote home that he "held the reins over them with a firm hand."[34]

Preston had three resolutions. First, the federal government had "limited and expressly granted powers," and that did not include the power to control states that had left the Union. Second, the federal government could not employ any kind of coercive policy. Lastly, a three-person committee should go to Washington to ask Lincoln precisely what his plans were. Carlile tried to interrupt Preston in order to block his resolutions from coming on the floor. Janney stopped Carlile and let the debates open. Preston wanted the committee to confer with Lincoln to eliminate any misunderstanding. Lincoln had been silent for too long.

Preston thought Lincoln wanted peace. If that was the case, the convention needed him to know that it wanted peace as well. Preston argued that it was their right to know if the President planned to make war with sovereign states. Lincoln's silence was hurting the nation; too many rumors were floating about his plans. He had received a loan of $8,000,000. Preston wanted to know what he planned to do with the money.[35]

The next several days were not good for Janney. In his letters he turned his attention to his home more then the convention. When he did speak of official matters, they were negative. It seemed as though he had simply lost the will to continue. On

[34] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 6, 1861.
[35] Proceedings, III: 271-82.

April 9, he wrote that he was in bad spirits. First, no letter had arrived from Alice. Second, it had been raining for days. Finally, there had been bad voting on the floor.[36]

Once again, Janney's main concern was his wife. He desperately missed her. The new Preston resolutions were going to force the convention to go longer, but he held out hope of seeing Alice by the 15th. The James River was higher then it had been since 1847. Damage from the water cut off communications, making it impossible for mail to get through. The Dispatch reported that the Crenshaw Flour Mill, the Manchester Cotton Mills, the Danville Depot, and the Alderman Sadlers Tavern had shut down because they were under water. Most of Richmond, from the Jefferson Ward to the St. Charles Hotel, was flooded. The flooding had washed away livestock all around Richmond. A reporter saw a cow floating down the river.[37]

As for the convention, Janney wrote that the leaders on the floor are "bad tactician.," The rank and file were getting disorderly. Janney wanted to adopt resolutions that would stop the debate, but he was never successful. Janney also reported that the delegates were not getting along. They had been together too long. Most importantly, Janney did not want to send a committee to Washington; he felt it would only lead to harm. Even though Janney voted against Preston's idea, it passed and William Preston, Alexander Stuart, and George Randolph prepared to call on Lincoln. On April 9, Janney wrote: "There is great impatience at the mysterious and hesitating policy of the administration and if our commissioners do not bring us assurances of a pacific policy we shall have trouble yet." Yet with all of Janney's problems, one line and one name summed up everything. "The general assumption that if gov Wise had not

[36] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 9, 1861.
[37] Ibid., Apr. 7, and 11, 1861; Dispatch, Apr. 11, and 12, 1861.

been in the Convention that we might all have been at home four weeks ago." Alice responded that "it would be better if Wise was in a lunatic asylum which he certainly is fit for."[38]

April 13 was another dark day for Janney. He was writing home to Alice while cannons were firing in the background in celebration of the "surrender of Fort Sumter and the disgrace of the flag of our country." Janney was not ready to believe the stories about Sumter with all the rumors he had heard. Yet if they were true, then he felt it was Lincoln's fault. Janney stated that if Sumter had fallen, "Abe Lincoln ought to be tarred, feathered, and burnt for not withdrawing the garrison or not reinforcing."

Alice felt the same toward the President, she called him an idiot and the son of Satan. No matter what happened, Janney still held strong to the Union. Such devotion would be tested in the coming days. The fall of Fort Sumter ushered in the third stage of the convention: the collapse of the conservative coalition and the turn to revolution.[39]

---

[38] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 7 and 11, 1861; Alice Janney to John Janney, Apr. 6, 1861.
[39] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 13, 1861; Alice Janney to John Janney, Apr. 9, 1861; Shanks, Secession Movement, 158.

Chapter IV
Secession

Janney wrote that the Examiner, the Enquirer, and the Dispatch were all excited about the possibility of war. Eventually the Whig would follow. A headline in the Dispatch exclaimed: "The Surrender of Fort Sumter—Great Rejoicing Among the People—Unparalleled Excitement." It reported that after the news of Fort Sumter broke, the people of Richmond were happier and demonstrated the "wildest, most enthusiastic and irrepressible expressions of heartfelt and exuberant joy" than ever before in the city. The talk of the town was how the heroic troops handled " the Illinois ape's" forces.

The Dispatch continued reporting that crowds gathered on the corners to hear cannon fire one hundred rounds. Men rushed to the Capitol and raised a Confederate flag. The flag also flew over the Tredegar Iron Works. Over 10,000 people gathered on Main Street in front of the Exchange Hotel for a bonfire and speeches. Janney heard the noise while he wrote Alice. He must have felt crushed. The Dispatch ended the story with "the triumph of truth and justice over wrong and attempted insult was never more heartily appreciated by a spontaneous uprising of the people. Soon the Southern wind will sweep away with the resistless forces of a tornado, all vestiges of sympathy or desire of co-operation with a tyrant who, under false pretenses, in the name of a once glorious, but now broken and destroyed Union, attempts to rivet on us the chains of a despicable and ignoble vassalage. Virginia is moving."[1]

The Enquirer had its own report of events. After the news reached Richmond, citizens marched up Main Street carrying Confederate flags. By the time the crowd arrived at Tredegar, it was 3,000 strong. They then marched to Fayette arsenal,

[1] Dispatch, Apr. 15, 1861.

confiscated weapons, and fired a 100-gun salute at the capitol. Then, led by a band playing "Dixie," they marched to the Governor's Mansion and yelled for John Letcher. The governor thanked them for the compliment but saw no need for demonstrations. The group continued to march throughout the night.[2]

Janney correctly foresaw that the Whig would eventually join the other papers. On the 15th it reported: "It is war—universal and determined war. The labors of Virginia in behalf of peace are treated with scorn and contempt …The question is removed from the forum of argument to the field of battle. It is liberty or death."[3]

Alice had her own opinion to share with Janney over Fort Sumter. Before Alice knew that the fort had fallen, she wrote: "the Southern Confederacy was about to declare war against the Federal government and that if Fort Sumter was given up—Major Anderson's guard would be demanded with it—If the last be true then I would be almost willing to fight them myself."

Since Alice was a semi-invalid, she probably would have had a difficult time fighting. However, she spoke for many Virginians, insisting that either side would not coerce them. On learning of Sumter's surrender, Alice told Janney: "I am very sad indeed—my country, what is to become of it? … I do not feel as if any faith could be put in that man [Lincoln]—or his cabinet—they are all alike—if he had evacuated the forts, this calamity might not have come upon us—I do not know how the case stands now—Virginia would not allow the seceded states to be coerced—but is not the boot on the

[2] Enquirer, Apr. 16, 1861.
[3] Whig, Apr. 15, 1861.

other foot—when they began hostilities—I only wish S. Carolina had to bear the whole night on her own shoulders—I have no … sympathy with her in any way."[4]

Even after the tide for war from the papers, Janney remained an optimist. He felt that the news of Sumter had no effect on the convention. Conservatives could stand fast. However, Janney's optimism went only so far. With a prophetic proclamation, he prayed that the convention would end soon before anything worse happened.[5]

That Saturday night produced a bit of excitement outside the convention. Alice's cousin, Marmaduke "Duke" Johnson, got into a brawl with the editor of the Examiner. Supposedly Johnson would have beaten him badly if the crowd had not pulled him off. Johnson was a member of the convention from Richmond and a Commonwealth's attorney. He was a strong supporter of the Union, which possibly was the reason for the attack. Apparently the editor made a remark that angered Johnson. Janney feared the situation would lead to a duel, so he interceded and made peace between the two. Johnson did have to pay the Mayor of Richmond a security deposit of $3,000 not to have any more problems with the editor for a year.[6]

Coincidencelly, the same evening that Janney made his prophetic statement, the situation became worse. On April 15, the convention heard a telegram containing what Janney called proclamation of war from Lincoln. In actuality it called for 75,000 volenteers to put down the rebellion. Janney told Alice that he needed her support and consolation because the proclamation "threw the whole city into a flame this morning." At first Janney did not believe the report. He felt suspicious. The telegram might be a

---

[4] Alice Janney to John Janney, Apr. 13-14, 1861.
[5] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 13, 1861.
[6] Ibid., Apr. 14, 1861; Dispatch, Apr. 15, 1861.

forgery. However, in the end Janney had to admit: "Abe is foolish enough to make such a folly." When she heard the news Alice told Janney that it had not stopped raining but there was much more to depress the spirit. Alice proved to be even more prophetic then her husband when she wrote: "Oh it left scarcely any spirit in me—I did weep and who that loves his country could blame me. I fear we shall all have to weep tears of blood before long." [7]

Janney reported that there was a slight uproar in the galleries but he had checked it. Robert Scott of Fauquier Virginia should separate from the Union for its protection. The galleries applauded his comments. Janney "declared the occasion was too solemn to admit … the slightest indiscretion," whereupon the galleries became silent for the rest of the day. Much of the debate centered on whether or not to go into secret secession. Some members wanted to debate the reasons for secret secession. Wise gave one of the great quotes during the convention when he said: "It would be worse then an Irish blunder for us to disclose the secrets, when giving reasons why we should go into secret secession."[8]

For Janney, the situation was in a downward spiral. On April 16, Governor Letcher received a communication from the Secretary of War Simon Cameron. "Under the act of Congress 'for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Union, suppress insurrections, repel invasions,' … I have the honor to request your excellency to cause to be immediately detached from the militia of your state the quota designated." The number Virginia had "the honor" of volunteering was just under 5,000. Janney

---

[7] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 15, 1861; Alice Janney to John Janney, Apr. 16, 1861.
[8] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 15, 1861; Proceedings, III: 741-43.

called the calling of troops "a folly on the part of Washington." He knew that he and the Unionists were now in the minority. Full of sadness, Janney wrote Alice, "[I] always believed that national sins are punished in the world and we have committed some of so deep a sin that I fear there is no escape for us." Once again Janney spoke prophetically, almost as if he could see the pain of the next four years that Virginia would suffer.[9]

That day the convention entered into secret secession. Janney did not even tell his wife what was discussed. All the officers, clerks, and doorkeepers were sworn to secrecy. Randolph of Richmond was angered by the call for troops. He felt that there was only one option left for the convention: to vote whether to leave the Union or stay. Alexander Stuart from Augusta, a member of the House of Delegates, the House of Representatives, and Secretary of the Interior under Millard Fillmore, still held strongly to the idea of a border state conference. He wanted all the border states to decide together. If Virginia seceded alone, then it could be surrounded by Union states. William Sutherland, of Pittsylvania County, disagreed with Stuart. He did not care if Virginia was surrounded by Union states. He had been a Union man from the beginning, but he was not a submissionist. Sutherland declared that he would rather fight and die than see Virginia disgraced. He stated that with the first vote, 120 men voted against coercion, but now it was coming from the North and they argued that Virginia should act now before it was too late.

The next to stand was William Preston of Montgomery. He felt a deep pain for what he had to do. Sadly, Preston offered the following: "An Ordinance to repeal the ratification of the Constitution of the United States of America, by the state of Virginia,

---

[9] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 16, 1861; Proceedings, IV: 26-27.

and to resume all the rights and powers granted under said constitution." Janney knew this time the ordinance would pass. He still had some hope that Virginia could remain loyal because the it still had to go to the people for a popular vote. The session adjourned before a decision could be reached.[10]

April 17 opened with the convention still in secret session. Janney could not tell Alice any of the activities, even though he trusted her to keep it secret. The meetings went longer then usual. He had been in the chair since 10 A.M. and was writing Alice from the chair at 6:45 PM because he did not know when he would be finished. During this time, when he should have been paying attention, his thoughts drifted toward home. He worried about Alice. Leesburg would likely be a major crossroad for troops during the future war, and Alice had concerns for her safety in that event. Janney reassured her that she was in no danger, and he would be home to protect her before any danger could happen.

Because of the solemnity of the occasion, Janney broke from tradition and addressed the convention. He told the delegates that the moment had come for him to speak for he was "impelled by a sense of duty, to state, with all the brevity I can, the reason why I cannot vote for this ordinance of secession."

Janney agreed with Scott that they should wait for the other border states. Voting for secession meant a bloody war. Armies would march into his hometown. While Preston's children in Montgomery County slept soundly in their beds, his would be watching their homes burned. How could they vote for secession and declare war without preparation? Janney believed it was foolish to go to war when Virginia was so close to the enemy and without an army, forts, magazines, and full arsenals. Janney

[10] Ibid., Apr. 16, 1861; Proceedings, IV: 6-27.

asked Tyler if he would have declared war when he was President if the odds were the same as they were for the South: eighteen to one. If Lord Palmerston of Briton attacked France with eighteen to one odds against him and no preparations, he would have been impeached.

Janney believed that the Confederate States would not send any troops to protect Virginia. They may be brave, he said, but they would bravely protect their own homes and families. He wanted the convention to face facts. If secession passed unanimously, the North might take it as an act of war. Janney ended with a plea for freedom. "I believe that if this experiment fails there is no hope left for representative government and liberty regulated by law. I believe that the dark night of universal despotism will settle down over the whole glove, upon the failure of this great experiment of ours."[11]

Miers Fisher of Northhampton County responded to Janney. He claimed that they were not rushing into anything because they had been debating secession for two months. The North was just as unprotected as the South, yet the South had valiant men who would protect their rights. After all, Janney had forgotten that Lincoln's call for troops amounted to a declaration of war, and Virginia was involved.[12]

Then the moment came to vote for or against secession. Preston pushed the issue and the question was put to a vote. The secessionists won 88 to 55, Virginia was no longer to be part of the United States. Notably, Southall was among the "yea" votes. He had bowed under pressure. Of course, first on the list of "nays" was Janney. In the course of three months, the convention had gone from a Union stronghold to a den of secession.

---

[11] Ibid., 137-46.
[12] Ibid., 140-46.

The convention was still in secret secession, so news of the vote was withheld from the public. However, Janney wrote that all the world was excited and he was the calmest man in Richmond. The Whig reported that, "the largest, longest, and most demonstrative 'procession' ever witnessed in Richmond" filled the streets. The "great majority" of paraders carried flags, banners, and torches. "The cheering was on continued vociferation along the whole route of procession. One of the largest transparencies bore the inscription, 'Resistance to Tyranny Is Obedience to God."[13]

Alice wrote Janney: "I hope I have patriotism enough in my heart to sacrifice something for the sake of our poor distracted country—and I pray God—that not only you—but the body of which you are as members may have ability given you from him to push some plan which shall eventually settle the difficulty … I have felt prepared to hear that Va had, or would secede—but that thought I cannot bear [sic] for it will throw us immediately into war."

Alice must have been heartbroken to know her prayers were not answered. On April 18, the day after she wrote her letter, the convention emerged from secret session long enough to announce that it had proposed an ordinance of secession. Alice now had to be prepared for the worst. Janney could not tell her much because the secrecy rule was still in effect. It only broke long enough to make the announcement. Janney did tell her that he could not see an end to their separation, which had to only cause more pain. He complained about how long he had to sit in his chair: 10 ½ hours until 11:00 at night. He could only discuss tow duties. First, the Convention had to adopt measures for defense. He named a committee of five to decide the best way to defend the state. It needed to recommend ways to manufacture or buy gunpowder, saltpetre, and sulphur. Yet

[13] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 17, 1861; Whig, Apr. 20, 1861.

Janney's main duty was to send the ordinance of secession to the President of the Confederacy at Montgomery, Ala. Since he did not finish his session until 11 P.M., he stayed up the entire night drafting the letter to Jefferson Davis.[14]

While the Janneys mourned, the papers exalted. There were no longer Union and secession men in Virginia. Now all would be united under Virginia. The Old Dominion would defend the honor won by their forefathers in the War for Independence.[15]

The Whig (in a total reversal from its earlier opinions) reported Virginia, "now asserts the INDEPENDENCE which she won from the King of Great Britain. She fought for seven years to establish her own freedom and the great and precious right of self-government. That right is now denied, that freedom is threatened with subversion. On the hearts and arms of her brave sons—the descendants of those who our liberties—she relies to make good her claim to the inestimable blessing of free Government … Our freedom—Our existence as a people is at stake. Instant vigorous and united action can alone save us."[16]

On April 19 the convention met in secret session. While Janney could not relate events to Alice, she was on his mind. He was a romantic because he assured her by writing: "I am very confident you are in no danger and I invoke you to be calm and collected—the moment there is danger to you I will fly to protect you."[17]

---

[14] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 18, 1861; Alice Janney to John Janney, Apr. 17, 1861; Proceedings, VI: 183-44.
[15] Dispatch, Apr. 19, 1861.
[16] Whig, Apr. 19, 1861.
[17] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 19, 1861.

Janney also commented on reports of fighting in Baltimore. The story he heard was that several Massachusetts and Rhode Island troops were killed as they passed through the city. The Dispatch reported that Baltimore citizens, cheering Jefferson Davis, blocked railroad tracks with paving stones being used as road repair. The troops made it through crowds as far as Canton Avenue where they were assaulted with rocks. Two soldiers were struck and knocked down. They continued to Pratt Street were someone fired a gun. The crowd grew larger until the troops feared for their safety and fired into the mob. It returned fire and a full gunfight began in the middle of the street. Soldiers continued to march to Light Street, where the same scene exploded. The troops began running, stopping every so often to return the fire. All along the way, citizens and even blacks were shooting and throwing rocks. Eventually the Union volunteers made it to the Camden depot and boarded another train.[18]

Janney hoped that the riots would awaken everyone. "Perhaps good may come out of this evil and bring the Country to its senses. May God in his mercy grant it for the dry storm is raging and madness rules the hour." Unfortunately for Janney, the riots only got people more excited. That evening they planned a torch light procession "by way of celebrating the downfall of this Country." Led by General T. P. August and with "Smith's splendid Band," the crowd marched up and down Richmond streets with torches in hand. The streets were lined with ladies waving handkerchiefs; houses with Confederate flags were lit. Mobs surged by the Exchange Hotel, giving Janney a front row view.[19]

---

18 Ibid., Apr. 19, 1861; Dispatch, Apr. 22, 1861.
[19] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 19, 1861; Dispatch, Apr. 20, 1861.

On April 21, Janney's thoughts once again turn to the safety of his wife. He thought there could possibly be trouble in Alexandria. He wanted his wife to invite their friends from Alexandria to come and stay with them. The Loudoun militia had not been called away; they were still there for protection. He would try to keep them at home.

The possibility of danger was on everyone's mind. Citizens of Norfolk had captured the naval station, and were en route to Richmond. Then it was reported the USS Pawnee was in pursuit of stolen powder. Janney did not know whether to believe the rumors because of the number of hoaxes reported daily. The Enquirer stated: "when the report reached Richmond about half past 12 o'clock, that the United States Steamship Pawnee, loaded with federal troops, was on her way up the James River, the bell at the capitol was tolled immediately, as a signal for assembling of the volunteers of the city. The scene at the different churches was very exciting, and many of the ladies were quite unnerved. Quiet, however was soon restored. The volunteers immediately responded … A large body of citizens are also in the ranks, well armed. A number of rifled guns are to be placed in position, and everything is being got ready."[20]

Janney was more concerned with the convention then he was about the Pawnee. Disloyalty in the convention was serious. Most of the delegates from the western part of the state (modern day West Virginia), had angrily left the convention. In an April 21 letter, Janney gave his answer to the question of why Southerners would fight and die for the Confederacy. Referring to the westerners, Janney wrote; "They have shamefully abandoned their duty and I cannot follow their examples unless your protection makes it necessary—I have used every faculty that I posses to prevent this catastrophe but it has

[20] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 21, 1861; Enquirer, Apr. 24, 1861.

come and the Commonwealth and the people must be protected to the up most of our country."[21]

Some Southerners fought for the same reason as Janney. Their states had left the Union; and their loyalty and duty was toward their state. Janney was not the only one who felt this way. Colonel Robert E. Lee, in a letter to General Winfield Scott, wrote the immortal words: "Save in defense of my native State, I never desire again to draw my sword."

Lee loved the Union and had dedicated his life to it, as had Janney. Now both were forced to leave it. However, Janney and Lee were not n the only ones with the same mindset. Thousands who did not own slaves joined the ranks. Those men fought out of duty to God and state as they saw it. [22]

On Monday morning the 22, Janney hoped it would be his last week in Richmond. The city had been crazy with excitement over war and the USS Pawnee. The ship did not come up the James River as expected, but returned to Washington. "The ladies here who have run mad for secession were frightened to death for nothing." However, the city was still abuzz. The Whig reported that, "Richmond has been practically converted into a military cantonment, under the inspiration produced by the late atrocious proclamation of the President of the Northern Confederacy. Nearly every young man in the city has enrolled himself for service. The old companies have suddenly swelled into battalions … if the northern madmen, who have so promptly responded to the ominous of the modern

[21] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 21, 1861.
[22] Douglas Southall Freeman. R.E. Lee, A Biography (New York, 1934-53), I: 430-41.

Nero, desire the honor of a grave in the soil of Virginia, let them come on in any number."[23]

One other reason for the town's excitement was the arrival of two prominent gentlemen, Vice President Alexander Stephens of the Confederacy and Robert E. Lee. Stephens came to Richmond to address the convention. He wanted to convince delegates that their best course would be in the Confederacy. The convention was still in secret session, so Janney made no mention of Stephens' speech to Alice.

That afternoon R. E. Lee met with Letcher. The governor asked Lee to become commander of Virginia forces, with the rank of major general. Lee responded that he wished an abler man had been found, but that he would accept. Letcher sent Lee's appointment to the convention whereupon it voted unanimously in the affirmative.[24]

The next morning, Alice's cousin, Marmaduke Johnson, along with P. C. Johnston, William T. Sutherlin, and John Critcher, escorted Lee to the capitol building. Lee passed the statue of his hero, George Washington, and said, "I hope we have seen the last of secession."

As Lee entered the hall, delegates rose from their seats. Lee stopped at the point where the statue of him now stands. Directly in front of him was Janney. On either side of Janney were Vice President Stephens and Judge John Allen of the Court of Appeals. Next to them was Governor Letcher, Colonel Francis Smith of VMI, and Matthew Fontaine Maury, a fellow defender of the state. Janney told Lee:

"Major General Lee—In the name of the people of your native State, here represented, I bid you a cordial and heartfelt welcome to this hall, in which we may

[23] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 22, 1861; Whig, Apr. 23, 1861.
[24] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 22, 1861; Proceedings, IV: 332-63; Freeman, Lee, I:462-64.

almost yet hear echo of the voices of the statesmen, the soldier and sages of by-gone days, who have borne your name, and whose blood now flows in your veins.

"We met in the month of February last, charged with the solemn duty of protecting the rights, the honor and the interests of the people of this Commonwealth. We differed for a time as to the best means of accomplishing that object; but there never was, at any moment, a shade of difference amongst us as to the great object itself; and now, Virginia having taken her position, as far as the power of this Convention extends, we stand animated by one impulse, governed by one desire and one determination, and that is that she shall be defended; and that no spot of her soil shall be polluted by the foot of an invader.

"When the necessity became apparent of having a leader for our forces, all hearts and all eyes, by the impulse of an instinct which is surer guide than reason itself, turned to the old country of Westmoreland. We knew how prolific she had been in other days, of heroes and statesmen. We knew she had given birth to the Father of his Country; to Richard Henry Lee, to Monroe, and last, though not least, to your own gallant father, and we knew well, by your own deeds, that her productive power was not yet exhausted….

"Sir, one of the proudest recollections of my life will be the honor that I yesterday had of submitting to this body the confirmation of the nomination made by the Governor of this State, of you as Commander in Chief of the military and naval forces of this Commonwealth. I rose to put the question, and when I asked if this body would advise the consent to that appointment, there rushed from the hearts to the tongues of all the members, an affirmative response that told, with an emphasis that could leave no

doubt of the feeling whence it emanated. I put the negative of the question form sake. But there was an unbroken silence.

"Sir, we have, by this unanimous vote, expressed our convictions that you are, at this day, among the living citizens of Virginia, 'first in war.' We pray to God most fervently that it will soon be said of you, that you are 'first in peace,' and when that time comes you will have earned the still prouder distinction of being 'first in the hearts of your countrymen.'

"When the Father of his Country made his last will and testament, he gave his swords to his favorite nephews with an induction that they should never be drawn from their scabbards, except in self-defense or in defense of the rights and liberties of their country, and, that if drawn for the latter purpose, they should fall with them in their hands, rather than relinquish them.

"Yesterday, your mother, Virginia, placed her sword in your hand upon the implied condition that we know you will keep to the letter and in spirit, that you will draw it only in her defense, and that you will fall with it in your hand rather than the object for which it was placed there, shall fail.[25]

Lee realized that he was expected to respond. He kept his remarks short. "Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Convention,--profoundly impressed with solemnity of the occasion, for which I must say I was not prepared, I accept the position assigned me by your partiality. I would have much preferred had your choice fallen on an abler man. Trusting in Almighty God, an approving conscience, and the aid of the fellow-citizens, I

[25] Proceedings, IV: 370-72; Freeman, Lee, I:464-67.

devote myself to the service of my native State, in whose behalf alone, will I ever again draw my sword."[26]

The next day the convention returned to in secret session. The only news Janney had for his wife was that 400 troops had arrived from South Carolina. Janney was not happy with this. Letcher had not requested them to come—they arrived on their own. The Dispatch enjoyed having them. "450 troops under late Congressman Col. Bonham came to Va. ready to give their blood and face Lincoln's mercenaries." Janney should have been happy over their arrival, because one the worries of the conservatives was that none of the Southern states would help defend Virginia.[27]

On April 25, Janney sounded depressed but also a bit relieved when he began letter to his wife. "The die is cast—the long agony is over in one respect but I fear only about to commence in another." He was referring to the ordinances passed that day. The delegates had decided to place all of Virginia's military forces under the forces of the Confederate government. Janney voted against it, yet the ordinance passed by 80 to 16 votes. If that was not bad enough, the convention also passed an ordinance to accept the Confederate Constitution, "in other wise unifying us to them."

The Dispatch reported that the community rejoiced to hear the news of the union between Virginia and the Confederacy. They now joined a family "whose institutions, habits, and blood are one." It claimed the old Union had killed itself with an "irrepressible conflict." Now blood would be shed over slavery. There was reason to rejoice because new confederacy had already risen greater than the old.[28]

---

[26] Proceedings, IV: 372; Freeman, Lee, I:468.
[27] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 24, 1861; Dispatch, Apr. 25, 1861.
[28] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 25, 1861; Proceedings, IV: 492-94; Dispatch, Apr. 26, 1861.

Janney may have accepted secession and was ready to defend Virginia, but he still was not comfortable about joining the Confederacy. Most assumed that secession meant joining the Southern alliance, but Janney held out hope that Virginia would not. He did not give any other options or plans, such Virginia becoming an independent state. However, since Virginia left the Union, it would be in limbo without joining the South. He was upset at the way the Confederacy was seemingly being forced upon citizens. The convention only recommended secession. The issue still had to go to the polls in May for a popular vote. If the people voted down secession, then nothing they had done so far mattered. However, if they voted for secession, they automatically had to accept the Confederate government.

Janney thought joining the Confederacy should be a separate issue on the ballot, allowing the people to vote on secession as well as joining the other southern states. Janney called this voting practice a "most atrocious proceeding." Only one good could come from the mess. "My great comfort now is that having done nearly all the mischief there is possible we should now get away very soon."[29]

On April 26, Janney's main concern was his wife. Alice still feared invasion, but Janney reassured her there would be none. He believed that the Union would not attack Virginia until an assault was made on Washington. If any attack was made, it would not be for a while. However, a real concern for Janney was food. The Enquirer reported "very active demand for breadstuffs and provisions … flour has within the last week advanced a dollar to a dollar and a half … meal from ten to fifteen cents per bushel … bacon with which our market was but lightly supplied from 3 to 4 cents per pound."

[29] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 25, 1861.

Janney had written home to Alice on the 22nd to buy two more barrels of flour because it might get scarce. Now he wanted her to also buy tea, sugar, coffee, and whatever else she could. The Enquirer story said that foodstuffs were needed to feed the growing armies. Janney must have seen the problems that Virginia, especially northern Virginia, was about to face with supplying armies for both sides.[30]

Events in the convention resumed with an issue that would affect the landscape of the upcoming war more than any other. At the end of the session, Jeremiah Morton of Orange County proposed a resolution: "That the President of the Confederate States, and the constituted authorities of the Confederacy, be, and they are hereby cordially and respectfully invited, whenever, in their opinion, the public interest or convenience may require it, to make the city of Richmond, or some other city in this state, the temporary seat of Government."

On the 26th, the convention debated over requesting the capital. Morton's reason for the proposal was that Virginia would be the first hit in case of war. The President should be there to stop it. Surprisingly, the idea of protecting the industrial strength of Richmond never became an issue. Some did not like asking the Confederacy for privileges so soon after joining the government. Others did not want to pass the ordinance because the people had not yet ratified secession. There was a chance that it might not. In the end, the delegates thought that Virginia would be better defended if Richmond was the capital. The ordinance passed 63 to 13. It was Janney's job to write to Jefferson Davis and request that Richmond be made the capital of the Confederacy.[31]

---

[30] Ibid., Apr. 22, 25 and 26, 1861; Enquirer, Apr. 25, 1861.
[31] Proceedings, IV: 494-48.

Janney's last four days in Richmond were far from exciting. His mind was on home more then on the proceedings. He hoped to be home by Tuesday and told Alice he would "fly to you as fast as a storm can carry." He admitted that he was worn out, and he feared that when he returned he would "give way" after the emotion of the convention left him. On the 28 he remained in his room the entire day thinking of home while others were doing their duties. At this point all he wanted was to be home by Tuesday or Wednesday. He did not want Alice to inform anyone of his upcoming return. He knew everyone would want to see him, but all he wanted was rest and to be with Alice. Janney was the only member of the convention who had not been on leave during the proceedings. He felt he was entitled to a discharge from his duties.[32]

The only official information in his letters to Alice during the secret session was the electing of officers to the Confederate Congress. Ex-governor Floyd was nominated; but with indications showing that he would be defeated, Floyd withdrew. R.M.T. Hunter, William Rives, John W. Brockenbrough, Waller R. Staples, and Gideon D. Camden were chosen to represent Virginia at Montgomery, Ala.[33]

On April 30, Janney sent his last letter home. He told Alice that little was being done with the endless babbling of the delegates. He was preparing to leave and expected to arrive on Thursday morning. Like every good husband, Janney promised to bring home some chocolates. [34]

The letter Alice wrote to her husband that same day was a little more interesting. Her communiqué was the perfect conclusion to their correspondence. Alice gave almost

---

[32] Janney to Alice Janney, Apr. 27 and 28, 1861.
[33] Ibid., Apr. 29, 1861.
[34] Ibid., Apr. 30, 1861.

a Jeremiad sermon about the role of Janney as President of the Convention and the future of Richmond. She referenced to Christ in the Gospel of Matthew when he commanded his Apostles: "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city."

Alice continued: "Come home—shake the … dust of that city from your shoes … the Lord—has certainly a controversy with this people—and he will make known his arm of power—but come home there is nothing more you can do—They have shaken the pillars—and the beautiful fabric of which all were too proud—boasting in their own strength and not giving the glory to a higher power—but putting their strength in an arm of flesh."[35]

Alice could have been the prophet in a "Book of Janney" by the way her sermon came true. Janney had arrived in a city that did not heed his words. His views were rejected by the more radical views of secession. When Janney left Richmond he dusted his feet. Destruction eventually came the city. By relying on the arm of flesh and rejecting the "prophet," Richmond would endure four years of hardship and despair. In the end, the city was destroyed by fire as payment for its sins.

[35] Alice Janney to John Janney, Apr. 30, 1861; Holy Bible, Gospel of Matthew 10:14-15.

Conclusion

Not much is known about Janney after his arrival home. In June,1861, he returned to Richmond to take his seat as President of the Convention. However, his health forced his resignation in November. Robert Montague of Middlesex County succeeded Janney. After the war, Janney resumed his law practice in Leesburg until his death on January 5, 1872. Six years before his death, Janney again answered the call to lead a commission to reunite Virginia and West Virginia. The West Virginia delegates never agreed to meet. Janney's services were not needed. In 1869, in a final political act, a sick and feeble Janney publicly voted for Gilbert Walker, the conservative nominee for the new state Constitutional Convention. Janney hoped his vote would be an example.[1]

There is more to learn from Janney than just the story of a patriot. He sat as the President of the convention that decided whether or not Virginia should secede from the Union. A popular trend in popular history today is to blame the cause of the Civil War on everything except slavery. However, when referring to the original speeches of the delegates, there can be no doubt as to why they seceded. The most important issue to the delegates was the idea of coercion. They did not want Virginia to be forced to join either side and thus take away the sovereignty of the state. Yet when the delegates spoke of coercion, what did they mean? Coercion from what?

Their biggest fears were not being forced to stay in the Union, but being forced to stay in a Union that would take away their slaves. Every speech given at the convention mentioned slavery. Delegates feared the "black Republicans" because of their abolitionist views.

---

[1] Hall speech, Janney Collection; Gaines, Biographical Register, 49.

As for the Unionists, they were also concerned about slaves. They had argued that Lincoln would not free the slaves. The courts sided with slavery, and the laws did not exclude it. One of their main concerns with the Confederacy was that it might reopen the African slave trade and hurt Virginia's ability to profit in selling its slaves to the lower South. If they joined the south, their slaves would escape across the Northern border and leave Virginia with no way to reclaim them.

The two parties did not argue over which government was right; they argued which government would benefit Virginia. The one that benefited Virginia was the one that guaranteed slavery. Fort Sumter and the call for troops may have pushed Virginia into secession, but they were meeting as a convention to decide the question of secession because an Republican was elected president.

The second thing to learn from Janney was why the people supported the South. Slavery was the primary reason for the Civil War but it was not the reason for people's support of the South. If not for tax records, no one would ever know that Janney owned slaves. In his writings he never mentioned anything about slavery. Janney was a diehard Unionist, as strong as one could be—yet in the end he sided with the South and even commissioned Lee as commander of Virginia's forces. He did not support the South for slavery; he supported it out of duty. It may be hard for the modern reader to understand the sense of duty that men like Janney and Lee felt to their state. They loved the Union but could not turn their backs on Virginia regardless of the slavery issue.

Janney is a man who deserves the respect and attention given to the other great leaders of Virginia. He may have fought a losing battle, but so did his dear friend Lee. He was a man of great principle and character. He never wavered from his principles

even when many around him did. He conducted the Convention with fairness and dignity. He never used his power to sway the votes of other delegates. Wilburn Hall wrote a fitting summation of Janney's life: "Fate, in those tempestuous years of upheaval, did not send John Janney to the high offices he might have occupied otherwise. But whatever he was asked to do, he did well … The Union he believed in so ardently still endures. The County and State which he lived in and loved cannot find a more deserving son to remember and honor."[2]

[2] Hall, Wilbur C. "John Janney of Loudoun" in Loudoun County in the Civil War (Loudoun, 1961), 17.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

John Janney Collection. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

Proceedings of the Convention of 1861. 4 vols. Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965.

Newspapers

Democratic Mirror, [Va], 1861

Richmond Daily Dispatch, [Va], 1861

Richmond Enquirer, [Va], 1861

Richmond Examiner, [Va], 1861

Richmond Whig, [Va], 1861

Secondary Sources

Masters Thesis

Rubin, Sara Anna. "Honorable Whig: The Life and Politics of John Janney of Virginia." M.A. Thesis, University of Virginia.

General Studies

Freeman, Douglas Southall. R.E. Lee a Biography, Vol. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934

Gaines, William H, Jr. Biographical Register of Members: Virginia State Convention of 1861, First Secession. Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1969.

Hall, Wilburn C. "John Janney of Loudoun County" in Loudoun County and the Civil War. Loudoun: Loudoun County Civil War Centennial Commission, 1961

Kimball, Gregg D. American City, Southern Place, a Cultural History of Antebellum Richmond. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000

Shanks, Henry T. The Secession Movement in Virginia 1847-1861. New York: AMS Press, 1971.

Standard, Mary Newton. Richmond: its People and its Story. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1923

VITA

JAMES WILFORD FINCK

Professional	Home
Department of History Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University e-mail: jfinck@vt.edu	3684 Frame Lane Blacksburg, VA 24060 (540) 268-1442

Education

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	M.A.	2002	American History
College of William and Mary	B.A.	2000	History
Northern Virginia Community College	A.S.	1998	General

Work Experience

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University — 2000-Present — Graduate Teaching Assistant

- Assistant to Dr. James I. Robertson and William C. Davis
- Substitute class lecturer, Civil War History

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University — 2001 — Special Collections, Tech Library

- Researcher
- Processor

College of William and Mary — 1999-2000 — Office Assistant, Dept of History

- Assisted office manager and Department Chair
- Answered telephones, greeted visitors, sorted mail
- Ordered supplies

- Organized and maintained history department library

College of William and Mary 1999-2000 Archaeology Field Work

- Jamestown Island, Williamsburg, VA
- Richneck Plantation, Williamsburg, VA
- Chatham Plantation, Eastern Shore, VA

Mobil Civil War Museum, 1997-1998 Assistant
Northern Virginia Community College

Leadership Experiences

President, History Graduate Student Association 2001-2002

- Plan annual Graduate Student Conference
- Organize graduate student functions
- Assist incoming students
- Liaison between students and faculty
- Prepare yearly budget
- Organize professional teaching colloquium

Treasure, History Graduate Student Association 2000-2001

- Assist president in all duties

Senior Graduate Student for the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies 2001-2002

Awards

Laurie Atkinson Scholarship, 2001
Excellence in Civil War Studies

Roop Scholarship, 2002
Awarded by the Virginia Center for Civil War Studies at Virginia Tech

Professional Presentations

"American Born Religions," paper presented to the annual Virginia Tech History Graduate Student Conference, Blacksburg, VA., 2001