CHAPTER ONE: FLOYD COUNTY, 1831-1861

Secession and Civil War profoundly and bitterly divided the community of Floyd County. Its residents’ decisions to become loyal Confederates or active and passive Confederate disloyalists, separated them, causing suspicion, intimidation, property destruction, violence, chaos, and murder. Their allegiance alignments caused rampant mistrust and forced inhabitants to scrutinize each other’s behavior for signs of Confederate loyalty or disloyalty. Suspicions and factionalization increased throughout the war, transforming much of the community into informants for Confederates, Unionists, or deserters. Floyd residents’ wartime behavior deeply contrasted their thirty-year history of cohesion, cooperation, and solidarity. From their first settlements on the Blue Ridge Plateau at “Wood’s Gap” in the eighteenth century, to formation of Floyd County in 1831 and an economic boom of the 1850s, county residents worked together to better their mountaintop community.¹ They cooperated to bring much needed transportation improvements to their community and profited together from the economic gains that resulted. They worshipped together in the county’s many different religious denominations and in the summer months congregated at camp meetings and revivals.²

¹ A gap in the mountains of the Blue Ridge Plateau first attracted seventeenth-century explorers and later eighteenth-century settlers to the land that became Floyd County, Virginia. The plateau, originating along a point where Floyd, Roanoke, Montgomery, and Franklin Counties now meet, rises from a bifurcation in the southern end of Virginia’s Appalachian mountains. From the initial bifurcation point the plateau rises approximately 1,000 feet and then extends south and outward, forming the southeastern wall of the New River Valley, see R.L. Humbart et al., Industrial Survey of Floyd County ( Blacksburg: Engineering Extension Division, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1930), 20, 281. The gap area of the region, commonly known as “Wood’s Gap,” allowed early settlers access from the Virginia piedmont into what became Floyd County. Colonel Abraham Woods was among the first white explorers to locate and name both the gap and “Wood’s River,” which is better known today as the New River, see South-west Virginia and The Valley (Roanoke: A.D. Smith and Company, 1892), 401. Like other original white settlements in Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains, Floyd County’s initial homesteaders choose the gap region first, procuring land warrants there throughout the 1770s, see Gene Wilhelm, Jr., “Folk Settlements in the Blue Ridge,” Appalachian Journal 5 (Winter 1978): 206-208; Amos D. Wood, Floyd County: A History of its People and Places (Radford, Va.: Commonwealth Press, 1981), 291-294. Many of the initial settlers reached this section of the Virginia backcountry from Pennsylvania as migrants from northern Ireland, the Scottish lowlands, or northern England, see David Hackett Fisher, Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 606, 618, 633-37. “Wood’s Gap” and the plateau lands were considered portions of Augusta, Botetourt, and Fincastle Counties until 1777, when the area became Montgomery County, see J.R.V. Daniel, ed., A Hornbook of Virginia History (Richmond: Virginia Department of Conservation, 1949), 25-26. The gap and Blue Ridge Plateau lands continued to attract new white settlers through much of the early nineteenth century and by 1831 they petitioned the state government for formation of their own county. The Virginia General Assembly and Governor John Floyd were receptive to the petition, granted a county charter, and selected a name for the county in recognition of the governor, see Humbart, Industrial Survey, 8.

² Religion permeated the lives of Floyd County’s antebellum residents. Faiths ranging from
each other in times of need, pitched in to raise neighbors’ barns, swapped labor, and enjoyed each other’s company. However, this pattern of behavior was dramatically shattered beginning in the early days of secession. In the resultant civil war, residents’ conflicts with each other steadily increased, leaving the community profoundly divided and its dramatic economic and social accomplishments of the past thirty years as monuments to the past.

Floyd County’s path to wartime division has its roots in the local economic boom of the 1850s, a decade in which a portion of the community moved away from traditional pre-capitalist economic practices and into the market based economy. Residents incorporated their first township, lobbied successfully for transportation improvements, and experienced growth in agriculture, professional, merchant, and industrial development. Improvements in transportation, the key factor for much of the advancement, eventually linked Floyd’s farmers to markets outside the plateau region, prompting a dramatic shift from production of traditional food crops to more extensive tobacco harvesting. Local farmers’ access to new markets, facilitated first by construction of turnpikes through the county in the early 1850s, was solidified with completion of the Virginia and Tennessee Lutheran to Primitive Baptist to Dunkard thrived in the mountain community; combined the different sects could accommodate over half the county’s white population by 1860, see [United States, Bureau of the Census] “Eighth Census of the United States: 1860” Manuscript Schedules of Social Statistics, Floyd County, Virginia. Local church structures fluctuated from the 1000 seat brick worship house of the local Dunkard denomination, to the windowless log-cabin church of the West Fork Primitive Baptists, see [National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States], “Virginia Inventory, 1960 [folder F].” Manuscript Division, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. Circuit riders organized camp meetings throughout the Floyd community in the 1850s, providing additional opportunity for mass expression of local religious fervor as well as for social interaction. The meetings condensed Floyd’s mostly dispersed community, and for at least a week every summer residents could gather after “the ministers and the shouters had done their work” retreat to nearby fields and “speed their favorite horses.” See, Robley D. Evans, *A Sailor’s Log: Recollections of Forty Years of Naval Life* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1901), 4; and Frank Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1949), 96, 98, 101-104. The county’s widespread and enthusiastic response to the camp meetings eventually made the remote mountain community an important stop for several of the regions’ preaching circuit riders, see Robertson Gannaway, *Sketches of Former Days or Autobiography of the Reverend Robertson Gannaway, Late of the Holston Conference* (Hendersonville, N.C.: Religious Herald Print, 1859), 92-99; Asa B. Cox, *Footprints on the Sands of Time . . . A History of South-western Virginia and North-western North Carolina* (Sparta, N.C.: The Star Publishing Company, 1900), 17. Religion in Floyd, like religion elsewhere in Appalachia, fostered development of community bonds. For Primitive Baptist and Dunkard parishioners their church also acted as an unofficial or “invisible” government, see Durwood Dunn, *Cades Cove: The Life and Death of a Southern Appalachian Community, 1818-1937* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 99-110.

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3Robley Dunglison Evans, a resident of Floyd County in the mid-1850s, left a sketch of his impoverished, but “sincere,” “honest,” “hard-working,” and “straight-dealing” neighbors. He praised the Floyd community’s respect for property, noting that persons attempting to “steal horses or interfere with [a] neighbors’ slaves” met residents who took “the law into their own hands to enforce their ideas.” The county was “thinly settled” and the people “as a rule poor” in the 1850s Evans noted, but neighbors were always likely to “freely share” “what they had.” See, Evans, *A Sailor’s Log*, 1-9.
Railroad to nearby Cambria Depot in Montgomery County later in the decade. The first upgraded road links allowed county farmers safe access to Lynchburg markets and prompted many of them to sell their harvests there and then purchase “sugar, salt, molasses, bale cotton, coffee,” and other “necessities as couldn’t be made at home.” The revolutionary connection to the new railroad offered Floyd farmers an unparalleled opportunity to seek profits in Virginia’s eastern markets, forever changing the county’s agricultural practices and political interests.


Residents’ quests for state and local funding to construct turnpikes through Floyd County began in the late 1840s, when citizens organized regionally to find “the means of getting said roads made.” The county’s state legislature delegates, like most delegates from southwest Virginia, bargained with the representatives of eastern portions of the state, trading votes for the maintenance of slavery in exchange for votes supporting regional transportation improvements. In the early 1850s, these combined efforts resulted in a partial allocation of funds from the state legislature to complete two county toll roads.


5See Floyd County’s advertisement in The [Fincastle] Valley Whig, 1 September 1848.

Eventual construction of both turnpikes provided Floyd County residents with improved access to Carroll and Franklin counties as well as Cambria Depot. The roads served as the primary routes for goods moving out of the county toward markets in Lynchburg and to trains at Cambria linked to Richmond markets and the east. Floyd County’s few slaveholders were early and enthusiastic transportation boosters, serving exclusively as local commissioners selling “subscriptions to the stock of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad Company.” Once completed, the railroad provided access to eastern tobacco markets, gradually moving a portion of Floyd’s farmers into the regional market economy and into more extensive cash crop production. The steady increase in trade with markets in eastern Virginia also fostered a growth in the Floyd community’s ties to that region’s economic and political interests. The bonds that resulted, according to Kenneth W. Noe, eventually drew relatively slaveless Floyd County into the Confederacy, the Civil War, and into economic ruin.

Industry, Agriculture, and Labor, 1850-1860

In early 1858, the town of Jacksonville was carved from 100 acres of Floyd’s Court House district, incorporated by an act of the Virginia General Assembly, and made the county seat. Besides serving as the location for the Floyd County’s government and courts, Jacksonville emerged as an important educational and social center of the county. In 1860, the town’s progress could be seen in six “general merchandise” stores as well as two tailor shops, several doctor and lawyer offices, a tavern, and a hotel. Half the county’s industries also operated there, producing goods varying from saddles and furniture to boots, shoes, and guns. Two Jacksonville academies offered classical

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7 [Virginia Board of Public Works] Floyd Courthouse and Hillsville Turnpike Records, 1850-1864, The Library of Virginia, Richmond; [Virginia Board of Public Works] Cove Spring and White House Road Company Records, 1853-1854, 1859, Library of Virginia; Map of the State of Virginia Containing the Counties, Principal Towns, Railroads, Rivers, Canals, & all other Internal Improvements (Richmond: West and Johnston, 1862).

8 South-west Virginia and the Valley, 321; Wood, Floyd County, 291.

9 The Floyd County commissioners are listed in the Abington Virginian, 14 April 1849. The commissioners named: Dr. A.J. Evans, Dr. Harden, Jackson Godby, Peter Epperly, Ira Howard, George Rosenbaum, Harvey Deskins, and J. L. Howard were all slaveholders listed on [United States, Bureau of the Census] “7th Census of the United States: 1850” Manuscript Schedules of Slave Population, Floyd County, Virginia.

11 Papers of the Floyd County Historical Society, Special Collections, Carol M. Newman Library, V.P.I. and S.U.


education to approximately forty-five male and female students per year. The Floyd Citizen, and later the Floyd Citizen and Intelligencer, both published in Jacksonville sporadically during the late 1850s, providing county residents with political coverage that supposedly assumed “independence in all things.” The Southern Era, a Democratic weekly, replaced the other newspapers in 1860, securing subscriptions among 700 Floyd County readers per week. Jacksonville’s industry, advanced educational facilities, professional services, and newspapers offer a hint of parallel economic gains taking place in the county throughout much of the decade.

1861 Map of Floyd County Showing Turnpikes and the Line of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad From Salem to Newburn. Map of the State of Virginia Containing the Counties, Principal Towns, Railroads, Rivers, Canals, & all other Internal Improvements.


15 The Floyd newspapers are noted in Salem Weekly Register, 5 June 1857; and Salem Register, 29 January 1858.

Although a significant portion of the Floyd community experienced wage labor and the market economy for the first time in the decade before the Civil War, many residents also clung to traditional pre-capitalist notions, relying primarily on trade and labor exchange. Tenant farmers like John A. Ratliff continued to swap “one and a half days chopping wood” and “one day hauling hay” as partial payment for a Jacksonville merchant’s “pine table.”

Like many in the community Ratliff also relied on labor trading for the services of professional classes, often taking years to repay debts. When Ratliff’s wife Adline gave birth to two children in the late 1850s, she relied both times on the services of Dr. Andrew J. Hoback. The doctor noted these visits as well as others to the Ratliff household, presenting Mr. Ratliff a $17.50 bill. Ratliff began payment by spending “one day breaking flax, one and a half days threshing, one day cleaning oats, and providing two bushels of corn,” for which Dr. Hoback erased $3.00 of the debt. Labor trading in Floyd, like in other regions of the South with limited access to paper money and banks, continued to be a popular medium of economic exchange. Although access to new markets throughout the 1850s fostered significant increases in the Floyd community’s participation in market based economics and wage labor, a large portion of its residents clung to pre-capitalist exchange methods.

Gains made during the economic boom period of the 1850s transformed agriculture and industry in Floyd County. During the decade the number of farms operating in the community increased by 47 percent. Improved useable farm acreage rose by 52 percent. The increase in farms and farmland exceeded the arrival of 1,839 new white residents, pushing the county’s total white population to 7,854. Within the total 1860 population, 75 percent of household incomes were based in agriculture, 12 percent on skilled labor, 5 percent on unskilled labor, 3 percent on domestic labor, and roughly 1 percent each in service, civic, and professional occupations. Nearly half of Floyd

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18 Debit Log of Dr. Andrew Jackson Hoback and John A. Ratliff, October 1857 - February 1860, Ratliff Papers.


22 1860 Schedules of Free Population, Floyd County. Except for “farmer” the categories were divided in the following manner: “Skilled labor”: carpenter, blacksmith, miller, shoe maker, stone or brick mason, cooper, gun smith, tailor, distiller, wheelwright, tanner, machinist, saddle maker, painter, cabinet maker, chair maker, wagon maker, weaver, spinning, seamstress, hatter, pipe maker, wool carder.
County’s 1215 farmers owned less than three acres of land and only two farmers owned 500 acres or more. Roughly 40 percent of the county’s farmers rented the land they worked. (See Table 1.0) Floyd’s 89 slaveholding farmers owned almost a quarter of all the county’s improved land, averaging approximately 155 acres each of workable field. Nonslaveowning farmers averaged a significantly less 68 acres each. Although a relatively small number, the slaveowners also possessed nearly a third of local unimproved lands, holding an average of 463 acres each. Nonslaveholders average combined land holding of just 206 acres is only one third the 618 combined acres possessed by slaveowners, significantly reducing nonowners prospects for extensive tobacco cultivation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acres</th>
<th>Number of Farmers</th>
<th>Percent of Total Farmers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>40.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>6.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-49</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>15.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>19.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-499</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>16.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500-999</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1860: Agriculture, 218; 1860 Schedules of Free Population, Floyd County.

The opportunities created in the 1850s by improved roads and a nearby railroad profoundly affected a portion of Floyd’s farmers, altering their nearly exclusive planting of cereals and corn to predominantly tobacco. By 1859, their yearly tobacco harvests


26 1860 Schedules of Slave Population, Floyd County; 1860 Schedules of Agriculture, Floyd County; 1860: Agriculture, 154.
increased over 2000 percent from 1850 totals, prompting one visitor to note that “every man has his patch of greater or less size, according to his means.” The dramatic increase in tobacco harvest weights from 1850 to 1860 thrust many of Floyd’s farmers into Virginia’s unstable tobacco market economy, clearly linking the interests of Floyd’s burgeoning tobacco capitalists with brethren in warehouses to the east. (See Table 1.1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1850</th>
<th>1860</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheat, rye, oats, buckwheat (bushels)</td>
<td>133,125</td>
<td>153,499</td>
<td>+15.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian corn (bushels)</td>
<td>104,630</td>
<td>121,510</td>
<td>+16.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flax (pounds)</td>
<td>16,348</td>
<td>11,366</td>
<td>-30.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes (bushels)</td>
<td>3,694</td>
<td>11,568</td>
<td>+213.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle</td>
<td>5,428</td>
<td>5,607</td>
<td>+3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep</td>
<td>7,248</td>
<td>7,101</td>
<td>-2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swine</td>
<td>9,500</td>
<td>10,280</td>
<td>+8.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter and cheese (pounds)</td>
<td>64,483</td>
<td>88,474</td>
<td>+37.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wool (pounds)</td>
<td>13,015</td>
<td>15,334</td>
<td>+17.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of animals slaughtered ($)</td>
<td>28,499</td>
<td>58,633</td>
<td>+105.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco (pounds)</td>
<td><strong>14,624</strong></td>
<td><strong>375,065</strong></td>
<td><strong>+2464.70</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Floyd County’s industries continued growing in the 1850s and produced goods valued at slightly over $23,000 by 1860. However, the number of local industries, the men they employed, and the gross value of merchandise produced continued to lag significantly behind most Virginia counties. (See Table 1.2) Local industry primarily operated in and around the town of Jacksonville, as did most craft and service businesses. The county’s mill industries, often viewed as the antebellum “socioeconomic centers” of Blue Ridge Mountain communities, were of crucial importance to Floyd’s wheat, rye, and oat farmers. They sold much of their 1859 harvest to mill owner Samuel Spangler, who used their crop to generate 1,600 pounds of flour to sell in local and extended markets. Spangler’s Mill produced by far the most profit of any local business and ground enough wheat to gross $ 9,600 in 1860.


28 1860 Schedules of Industry, Floyd County.

Table 1.2--Floyd County Industry, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Owner</th>
<th>Type of Industry</th>
<th>Capitol Invested ($)</th>
<th>Number of Wage Employees</th>
<th>Number of Slaves Owned</th>
<th>Gross Profits ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Stephens</td>
<td>Saddlery</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Spangler</td>
<td>Mill</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian Wygal</td>
<td>Distillery</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Eller</td>
<td>Wool Carding</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Bentmyer</td>
<td>Tannery</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirby Stephens</td>
<td>Tannery</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James W. LeSueur</td>
<td>Tannery</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Jones</td>
<td>Boots &amp; Shoes</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ferdinand A. Winston</td>
<td>Cabinet Maker</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew Scott</td>
<td>Gunsmith</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floyd County Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,351</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia County Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,001</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9,406</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Antebellum geologists were impressed with the Blue Ridge Plateau’s iron and copper resources; however, neither mineral was exploited to a significant extent in Floyd County until the late 1800s. A handful of local mining and furnace industries operated sporadically during the ten years before the Civil War, but only Robert Toncray’s West Fork Charcoal Furnace produced enough iron to receive mention in an 1859 industry periodical.\(^\text{30}\) The potential for mineral industry development in Floyd, a visiting geologist noted, was present but lacked “the wand of a monied magician” to uncover the vast “sources of wealth [that] lie dormant.”\(^\text{31}\) Despite the possible profits, Floyd’s industrialists apparently lacked the necessary capital to begin local mineral development.

Overall, Floyd County made tremendous economic, social, and population gains in the 1850s. However, despite its profound economic increases the county barely maintained a static growth when compared to other counties in Virginia. The cash value of


\(^\text{31}\) Currey, “The Copper and Iron Region,” 63.
Floyd’s farms ranked behind 82 percent of farms in Virginia counties in 1850 and behind 83 percent in 1860.\textsuperscript{32} Local wheat production barely increased in comparison to other counties, moving in ten years from 68th in production to 65th.\textsuperscript{33} Even Floyd’s dramatic increase in tobacco production occurred during a statewide increase in tobacco yields, and left the county in roughly the same spot production wise that it occupied in 1850.\textsuperscript{34}

The one local group that profited most fully from the regional economic boom of the 1850s were Floyd’s 116 slaveholders. The majority of them possessed slaves prior to the local improvements in transportation, and were therefore in the best position to seek the profits available in a switch to tobacco planting; on the average they owned more land to plant with tobacco and already possessed a labor source to harvest it. Like Appalachian North Carolina, profits from slavery were increasing in southwest Virginia in the 1850s, and despite the small number of locally owned slaves, slaveholders in Floyd reaped extraordinary economic gains during the period.\textsuperscript{35} The Floyd slaveowners also disproportionately dominated both the local economy and local politics. They made up only 9 percent of household heads in 1860, yet controlled a third of local real estate and nearly half of Floyd County’s personal wealth. Their average real estate and personal estate holdings were also over seven times greater than nonslaveholders in 1860, revealing the potential for profits utilizing slaves in mountain farming, industry, and business. (See Table 1.3)

The domination of the local economy by Floyd’s slaveholders mirrored similar wealth concentrations in the western North Carolina mountains, although neither region is widely recognized as being a part of the South’s slaveholder hegemonic economy.\textsuperscript{36} Floyd’s slaveholders also reaped profits by hiring-out their excess slaves, assembling them at the courthouse in Jacksonville each year to be locally rented.\textsuperscript{37} In the mid-1850s, slaves throughout southwestern Virginia were also hired-out to construct line for the Virginia

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{32}Floyd County ranked 112 out of 137 Virginia counties in aggregate “value of farms with implements” in 1850 and 123 out of 148 in aggregate “cash value of farms” in 1860, see \textit{1850: Statistical View}, 320-31; \textit{1860: Agriculture}, 154-63.
  \item \textsuperscript{33}Floyd County ranked 93 out of 137 Virginia counties in aggregate “bushels of wheat” in 1850 and 97 out of 148 in aggregate “bushels of wheat” in 1860, see \textit{1850: Statistical View}, 320-31; \textit{1860: Agriculture}, 154-63.
  \item \textsuperscript{34}Floyd County remained behind roughly 30.6 percent of Virginia counties in aggregate pounds of tobacco produced in 1850 and behind 30.4 percent in 1860, see \textit{1850: Statistical View}, 320-31; \textit{1860: Agriculture}, 154-63.
  \item \textsuperscript{35}John C. Inscoe, \textit{Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 60-61, 121-122.
  \item \textsuperscript{36}Inscoe, \textit{Mountain Masters}, 121-22.
  \item \textsuperscript{37}Evans, \textit{Sailor’s Log}, 2.
\end{itemize}
and Tennessee Railroad. This brought local slaveowners $200 compensation per slave a year. The potential to hire out unneeded slaves allowed Floyd’s slaveholders to purchase more slaves than they personally required, making bondsmen a profitable local investment. The hiring of slaves, and doubtless loaning of slaves to neighbors and kin, also extended interests in the maintenance of slavery far beyond purview of Floyd’s 9 percent of actual slaveholders, further linking local nonslaveholders to slaveholder interests in the region and in the South.

Table 1.3--Floyd County Household Head Wealth Distribution, 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Real Estate Holdings ($)</th>
<th>Personal Wealth ($)</th>
<th>Combined Wealth ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Floyd County</td>
<td>1,331</td>
<td>1,394,658</td>
<td>1,014,772</td>
<td>2,409,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaveholders</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>462,420</td>
<td>502,831</td>
<td>965,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. each</td>
<td>4,404</td>
<td>4,788</td>
<td>9,192</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonslaveholders</td>
<td>1,215</td>
<td>932,238</td>
<td>511,941</td>
<td>1,444,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ave. each</td>
<td>764</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>1,183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Local tobacco expansion and increases in white residents throughout the 1850s did not result in significant growth in the number of slaves in Floyd. At the end of the decade, the local slave population remained at relatively the level established in 1850, reflecting no substantial gain during the economic boom period. Like the rest of Appalachian Virginia, Floyd did experience increases in its slave population throughout the 1830s and 1840s, but saw only minimal growth in the 1850s. The county far exceeded the overall 0.1 percent growth rate of slavery in the rest of Appalachian Virginia during the 1850s, but lagged behind increases in bondsmen that occurred in four out of its six neighboring counties during the same period. (See Table 1.4) Floyd’s minimal expansion of bondsmen and

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39Similar activity is noted in Inscoe, *Mountain Masters*, 70.

40James B. Murphy, “Slavery and Freedom in Appalachia: Kentucky as a Demographic Case Study,” *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 80 (Spring 1982): 155-156.

41Ibid.
rapid increase in white residents reduced the percentage of slaves in the county’s total population as well, reflecting perhaps the upper limits for slave labor in the county.

Table 1.4--Slave and Free Population in Six Counties Bordering Floyd County, Virginia, 1850 to 1860

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Slave Pop.</th>
<th>Percent Change in Slave Pop.</th>
<th>Percent Slaves in Total Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plateau</td>
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<td>Patrick</td>
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Despite their apparent economic domination of the county in 1860, most of Floyd’s slaveholders possessed only one or two slaves each. The size of the county’s slave population ranked 106 out of 148 Virginia counties in 1860, which is an increase of roughly 4 percent in its slave population rank in 1850.\textsuperscript{42} Seventy-two percent of the local slaveowners were farmers, yet only one held “planter” status and only eleven owned between ten and nineteen slaves. (See Chart 1.0)

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart1.0.png}
\caption{Chart 1.0--Slave Distribution
Floyd County, Virginia, 1860}
\end{figure}

\textit{Note:} 1860 Schedules of Slave Population, Floyd County. Notes: One hundred and sixteen distinct slaveowners on schedule, 471 slaves, 4 with undetermined ownership.

\textsuperscript{42}1860: Agriculture, 243-245; 1850: Statistical View, 320-331.
Nearly a quarter of Floyd’s slaves were owned by men operating service or professional businesses. This portion of the local slave ownership integrated slavery into the county’s nonagricultural economy, further diversifying community interests in slavery. Almost all the nonfarming slaveholders lived in and around the Town of Jacksonville. They also held nearly all of Floyd’s governmental positions, making up most of the local political hierarchy. Local nonslaveholders, like slaveless yeoman, poor white, and tenant classes elsewhere in Appalachia and the antebellum South, deferred the majority of county leadership to local slaveowning “elites.”43 In the late 1850s and early 1860s, the group of Jacksonville slaveholders represented the county in the state legislature, served as justices of the peace, clerks of the court, commonwealth’s attorney, sheriff of the county, and later on the local Confederate advisory board.44 Thus, while a minority of the total county population, slaveholders were not only the most economically significant group in Floyd, but also the most politically influential.

Secession: Emergence of Community Discord

The debate over Virginia’s secession revealed the first signs of discord within Floyd County’s community by forcing initial Civil War loyalty decisions on its residents. In the spring of 1861, the community divided; many chose to embrace the prospect of secession, while a portion of the county’s residents chose to remain loyal to the United States. During the initial stages of secession and civil war, local Confederate sympathizers far outnumbered Floyd’s Unionists, a situation that resulted in widespread intimidation, threats, and violence during the county’s secession vote on May 23, 1861.

The roots of Floyd County’s secession decision, like the rest of the South, were firmly planted in slavery. The defeat of southwestern Virginia delegates advocating gradual emancipation at Virginia’s 1831-1832 constitutional convention paralyzed many abolitionist movements in the region, and although this antislavery impulse nearly split Virginia’s mountain districts from the state in the early 1830s, in 1861 it instead divided the mountains.45 However, antislavery sentiment in Virginia’s mountains did not disappear completely. Englishman James Stirling, traveling near Floyd County in 1857, noted that the question of slavery could still split the commonwealth into “two separate states

43 Ronald Eller, Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers: Industrialization of the Appalachian South, 1880-1930 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 11-12; Owsley, Plain Folk, 139.

44 Floyd County Historical Society Papers; 1860 Schedules of Free Population, Floyd County; 1860 Schedules of Slave Population, Floyd County; Wood, Floyd County, 49; George L. Sherwood and Jeffery C. Weaver, 54th Virginia Infantry (Lynchburg: H.E. Howard, Inc.,1993), 178, 189.

divided by the Blue Ridge.”  

Stirling claimed to have found abundant abolitionists in the region, but felt that “the terrorism exercised by the fanatical believers in slavery [was] so powerful” that few of them were willing to profess their beliefs in public.  

Southwest Virginia’s “fanatical believers in slavery” grew in number throughout the 1850s, gaining strength from the region’s new economic links to the east, an 1851 slave revolt in nearby Grayson County, and John Brown’s 1859 raid at Harper’s Ferry.

An 1853 Slave Auction in Nearby Christiansburg, Virginia. The Hornbook of Virginia History: A Ready-Reference Guide to the Old Dominion’s Past

Little antislavery sentiment was apparent in southwest Virginia’s 1860 presidential vote. The region divided almost evenly between (Southern) Democrat James Breckinridge and Constitutional Unionist John Bell, both of whom advocated a maintenance of slavery. Few cast votes for the Republican candidate. Floyd County paralleled the regional vote, casting 49 percent of its ballots for Breckinridge, 47 percent for Bell, 4 percent for (Northern) Democrat Stephen Douglas. The county recorded no ballots for Abraham

46 James Stirling, Letters From the Slave States (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1857), 335-336.

47 Ibid., 326.

48 Noe, Southwest Virginia’s Railroad, 4, 12, 92-93.

49 Richmond Enquirer, 25 December 1860.

50 Ibid.
Lincoln, primarily because local pollsters refused to accept Republican votes.\textsuperscript{51} Five of Floyd’s six neighboring counties mirrored its vote almost exactly. The one exception, fellow Blue Ridge Plateau member Carroll County, gave a clear 70 percent majority of votes to Breckinridge. Local papers fanned the flames of disunion after Lincoln’s election and accused both him and the North of being “mad on negrophilism.”\textsuperscript{52} Their combined “insanity,” \textit{The [Christiansburg] New Star} exclaimed, “would gladly place in the hands of the negro the pike and the torch, to murder their only benefactors.”\textsuperscript{53}

Virginia debated secession in the winter and spring of 1860-1861, holding local elections to assemble representatives for a state convention to decide the matter. On February 4, Floyd County elected Unionist candidate Harvey Deskins, a longtime local politician and slaveholder, as its representative to the secession convention in Richmond.\textsuperscript{54} Voters in Floyd were non-committal in endorsing any decisions Deskins would make. Ninety-one percent of them cast ballots in favor of “reference,” which left Deskins’ votes at the convention unofficial until ratified by residents.\textsuperscript{55} Neighboring counties showed slightly more faith in their convention delegates. In Carroll County less than 39 percent wanted an opportunity to second-guess their representative’s decisions.\textsuperscript{56} State-wide polling on the “reference” vote option was approved by a majority of over two to one, making events at the secession convention in theory non-binding. In reality, however, the reference vote mattered very little.

Before events at Fort Sumter, many Floyd County residents, like most inhabitants of southwestern Virginia, could be considered “conditional” Unionists; they believed that as long as slavery and the South were left alone, they could remain faithful to the Federal government. In addition to the county’s “conditional” Unionists, and its hundreds of overtly secessionist citizens, a significant number of Floyd County residents were utterly opposed to secession. These residents disagreed with the idea of disunion for a myriad of

\textsuperscript{51}Floyd County farmer David Weddle Sr. planned to vote for Lincoln, but could find no pollster willing to record his vote. See Records of the Southern Claims Commission, Record Group 217, Claim Number 2441, National Archives of the United States, Washington, D.C.

\textsuperscript{52}\textit{The [Christiansburg] New Star}, 16 February 1861.

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{The [Christiansburg] New Star}, 16 February 1861.

\textsuperscript{54}\textit{Journal of the Acts and Proceedings of a General Convention of the State of Virginia, Assembled at Richmond on Wednesday, the Thirteenth of February, Eighteen Hundred and Sixty-One} (Richmond: Wyatt M. Elliot, 1861), 4. For Deskins being the Unionist candidate, see Records of the Southern Claims Commission, Record Group 233, Claim 3491, testimony of Samuel Epperly for Eli Epperly.


\textsuperscript{56}\textit{Ibid.}
reasons; some believed slavery could best be protected by the Federal government, others were abolitionists, and some were members of the county’s Dunkard church. Floyd delegate Deskins mirrored the widely varied sentiment of his home district when he cast an April 4 vote against secession.57

Secessionists in Floyd, and in the neighboring New River Valley, organized for war throughout early April, fanning the flames of disunion hysteria by forming citizen militias.58 Events at Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s subsequent call for 75,000 volunteers in mid-April bolstered secessionist arguments in the region and shattered the hopes of Floyd County’s “conditional” Unionists. In nearby Christiansburg, The New Star urged immediate armed rebellion against “the treacherous and cowardly Abe Lincoln.” It expressed the new belief of many readers that the “honor of Virginia” must now be placed in the hands of Jefferson Davis.59 Deskins quickly changed his mind as well. On April 17, he voted with the majority of Virginia’s state legislators for the immediate secession of Virginia from the United States.60

Virginia’s “reference” vote by law sent Deskins’ decision back to Floyd County for a May 23 vote that would officially decide secession. Despite Fort Sumter, and Virginia’s all but assured eventual secession, a wide array of secession opinions existed in the Floyd community. The county’s pro-Confederates, sensing the potential for dissenting votes by Floyd’s staunch Unionists, abolitionists, and Dunkards, organized to ensure a community-wide ratification of secession. This exposed the first signs of serious discord within the county. In the nearby New River Valley, secession hysteria erupted. Merchants began advertising “Rifles, Pistols, and French Cavalry Sabres for counties and volunteer companies desiring arms” as well as manuals on the science of war.61 In neighboring Montgomery County, General Francis Preston advocated violence against anyone daring to vote against disunion. He threatened that there would be “blood spilled” if any voter


58 See advertisements in The [Christiansburg] New Star, 16 February 1861.

59 The [Christiansburg] New Star, 13 April 1861.


61 The [Christiansburg] New Star, 13 April 1861.
opposed the convention’s vote.\textsuperscript{62} Other residents, expressing anti-secession sentiment, faced similar harassment from local secessionists.\textsuperscript{63}

Virginia’s May 23 “reference” vote, like other political polling occurring in Virginia during the period, was conducted by voice. It further encouraged secessionist conformity among anti-secession residents fearful of violence. In Floyd County pro-Union voters were collectively denied their right to vote on “reference” as well as threatened with property seizure or personal injury by the county’s pro-secession residents. Floyd’s local pro-Confederates barred Indian Valley district tenant farmer Madison D. Reed from voting because he expressed anti-secession sentiment at the polls. Reed afterwards reported that “no person at [his] voting place was allowed to vote against it.”\textsuperscript{64} Other county residents suffered similar harassment. At the Court House district polling place of Andrew F. Stigleman, only secession votes were accepted. A terrified Stigleman planned to vote against disunion; but when given no choice except to vote in favor of secession by the crowd at the polls, he “refused to vote for secession at the risk of being mobbed.”\textsuperscript{65}

Intimidation and threats worked on many of Floyd’s Unionists. Local Confederates informed Joseph Phares that his property would be taken and life “endangered” if he proceeded with plans to vote Union.\textsuperscript{66} Phares quickly changed his intentions and voted for secession. Eli Epperly informed fellow Unionist Jacob B. Moses that he “voted for secession and voted through fear” because if he did not vote for secession “the Rebels would destroy his property.”\textsuperscript{67} Local mill owner Samuel Spangler met similar threats at the polls and cast a vote for secession despite his original intention to vote against it.\textsuperscript{68} Dunkard parishioner Samuel Epperly also voted in favor of secession against his will. He afterwards claimed that “I voted for secession but was sorry I done it before I got home. I did not know what they would do if I did not.”\textsuperscript{69} According to Epperly, “it was said at the time of the election that if we did not vote for secession our land and property would be taken away from us.” Threats of physical violence were also common. According to tenant

\textsuperscript{62}Mary Elizabeth Caperton [Blacksburg, Virginia] to George Henry Caperton [1st Virginia Regiment of Mounted Volunteers], 14 May 1861, Caperton Family Papers, Newman Library, Special Collections, V.P.I. and S.U.

\textsuperscript{63}Shanks, \textit{Secession Movement in Virginia}, 212-213.

\textsuperscript{64}Records of the Southern Claims Commission, Record Group 217, Claim Number 2994.

\textsuperscript{65}\textit{Ibid.}, Record Group 233, Claim Number 2436.

\textsuperscript{66}\textit{Ibid.}, Record Group 233, Claim Number 5649.

\textsuperscript{67}\textit{Ibid.}, Record Group 233, Claim Number 3491, testimony of Jacob B. Moses for Eli Epperly.

\textsuperscript{68}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{69}\textit{Ibid.}, Record Group 233, Claim Number 3491, testimony of Samuel Epperly for Eli Epperly.
farmer Charles Huff, “the general influence was exerted very severely in Floyd County in favor of secession,” because the “leading Rebels” openly threatened “that those who refused to vote for secession would be hung.”70 Many of Floyd’s Unionist residents simply “did not have the courage to vote.”71

Much of the official record of Virginia’s “reference” vote was for various reasons never reported. Floyd County’s secession decision, which likely overwhelmingly endorsed disunion, was captured en route to Richmond by agents of the United States government and therefore never officially recorded.72 The few neighboring counties that did register a vote chose secession: Pulaski County residents were unanimous in their approval, Roanoke County voted 1,064 to 18 in favor of disunion, and Franklin County voters chose secession by a margin of 1,787 to 3.73 The rest of Virginia’s voters also convincingly ratified secession. They welcomed Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government into Richmond as well as the war that resulted.

“Summoning the Flower and Pride of Our Young Men”

A vast majority of Floyd County residents embraced their new Confederate government in the months following secession. Many, longing for the prospect of war, rushed to enlist in one of the county’s newly forming infantry companies. Few could have anticipated the coming hardships; life in the Confederate army or as Confederate citizens on the Southern homefront was still intangible.

Floyd resident Henry Lane quickly heeded Virginia’s call for volunteers. In the two weeks following secession, the 35-year-old Jacksonville lawyer recruited 101 local volunteers for his infantry company of “Floyd Guards.”74 By mid-June, Lane successfully

70Ibid., Record Group 233, Claim Number 8740, testimony of Charles Huff for Otey F. Kinsey.

71Ibid., Record Group 233, Claim Number 8741 [Phillip Ratliff].

72There seems reason to believe the vote was seized since inspectors working for the Southern Claims Commission in the 1870s used Floyd County’s May 23, 1861 “reference” voting records to approve or deny claims. See Record Group 233, Claim Numbers 1322, 1147, 947, 1072, National Archives.

73Richmond Enquirer, 28, 31 May; 18 June 1861.

74All Floyd County Confederate recruitment and Confederate service data is compiled from names available in N.J. Agnew, “A Listing of Men From Floyd County Who Served as Confederate Soldiers in the Civil War or War Between the States, 1861-1865: Compiled From the Records the Records of Camp III,” manuscript [in the Floyd County Historical Society Papers, folder number five], Special Collections, Newman Library, V.P.I. and S.U. The names are cross referenced with listings available in each of the H.E. Howard regimental history series titles.
mustered the unit into the newly formed 42nd Virginia Infantry.75 As Lane and his “Floyd Guards” marched off to Lynchburg to begin drilling at Camp Lee, others in the Floyd community moved to organize additional infantry companies. County surveyor Jackson Godby enlisted 74 “Floyd Defenders,” Andrew Dickerson signed-up 89 “Floyd Grays,” and by the end of the summer the Godby and Dickerson companies were followed by three additional Floyd units in the 54th Virginia Infantry. By the fall of 1861, over a third of the roughly 1,400 Floyd men eligible for Confederate service voluntarily enlisted in the county’s six infantry units.76 The majority were mustered into the 54th Virginia Infantry for one year’s service. Floyd’s slaveholders continued their local leadership status and were elected as captains for four of the county’s six volunteer companies.77

Men from Floyd County, like men throughout Virginia, joined Confederate forces for a wide variety of reasons. Most of the soldiers expected a quick and glorious victory. They chose Confederate service as an opportunity to express a sense of duty to their community, Virginia, and the South. Cephas Walton, a twenty-year-old farmer from Floyd’s Simpsons district, expressed sentiments close to those when he wrote “Frends and Relations” from Lynchburg’s Camp Lee in July. Walton confessed that “i volenteered to fight for my cuntry and my wife and my father and my mother and my brothers and friends.”78 Ceph’s two younger brothers, Jessie and James, followed his patriotic example soon afterwards and enlisted in Company D of the 54th Virginia.

In the months after disunion, secessionists in the Floyd community embraced their new Confederate government. G.W. Shelton and Jacksonville lawyer James Luke Tompkins expressed to Virginia Governor John Letcher their “anxious” desire “to get some positions in the Virginia Regiments” and “assist Virginia in her troubles.”79 Both men sought officer assignments and hoped to convince Letcher that appointing them to “positions at headquarters” would encourage local enlistment and “augment the formation of volunteer corps in this section.”80


76 Includes 40 percent of men listed being age 15 to 19 and 50 percent of men listed being age 40 to 49 in 1860: Population, 500-501; Agnew, “A Listing of Men.”

77 Agnew, “A Listing of Men”; 1860 Schedules of Slave Population, Floyd County; Sherwood and Weaver, 54th Virginia, 171, 189; Chapla, 42nd Virginia, 105.

78 Cephas L. Walton, “Camp Lee,” Lynchburg, Virginia, to “Frends and Relations” [Floyd County, Virginia], 14 July 1861, Walton Family Correspondence, Newman Library, Special Collections, V.P.I. and S.U.


80 Ibid.
S.A. Buckingham, captain of a local militia company, wrote Letcher as well. He believed that “the flower and pride” of the county’s young men would “beat back the hired mercenaries of the base and despotic usurper that now occupies the position once occupied by Washington, Jefferson and Madison.”\(^8\) Buckingham informed Letcher that he personally was willing to “pour out blood like water” in defense of Virginia’s “untarnished honor.”\(^2\)

In the initial excitement of the Southern revolt, hundreds of Floyd citizens warmly received and commended Confederate soldiers passing through their community. In June, 1861, Patrick County native Rufus James Woolwine bivouacked with fellow members of the 51st Virginia Infantry at Floyd Courthouse and experienced “a hearty reception” from enthusiastic crowds that gathered to greet the troops.\(^3\)

**Sowing the Seeds of Dissent**

The positive reaction expressed by many Floyd residents to Virginia’s secession contrasted with the sentiments of some county residents who chose to remain loyal to the United States, refused to enlist, and openly resisted their new Confederate government. In the spring and summer of 1861, these residents exposed the first local signs of disloyalty to the Confederacy. They foreshadowed a community-wide trend toward disaffection that eventually grew in magnitude and hostility.

Some of the residents’ initial apathy toward the Confederacy is reflected in the local men who did not volunteer with the Southern army in the first six months of the war. Local members of the Church of the German Baptist Brethren, or Dunkard faith, refused to enlist because the doctrine of their religion forbid members to bear arms in defense of any government.\(^4\) In July, 1861, William H. Dodd, a Court House district farmer, observed that Floyd’s German Baptists were openly refusing to enlist “or bear arms in the defense of their county’s rights... alleging that it is not right to fight.”\(^5\) Dodd urged Governor Letcher to devise a plan that would force the sect into military service. He

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\(^8\)S.A. Buckingham, Copper Valley, Floyd County, Virginia, to John Letcher, “Governor of Virginia,” Richmond, 30 April 1861, Letcher Papers.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Rufus James Woolwine Diary, The Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.


\(^5\)William H. Dodd, Floyd County, Virginia, to Governor John Letcher, Richmond, 8 July 1861, Letcher Papers.
claimed that merely fining its members for failure to muster was not sufficient. In Floyd, and throughout the South, German Baptists were forced into the military until the Confederate Congress implemented a policy in October, 1862, that allowed Dunkards (as well as Quakers, Mennonites, Shakers, and Nazarenes) to pay $500 for an exemption from military service. In Floyd, many Brethren gladly paid the fine, but were nevertheless continually prosecuted by local Confederate loyalists for failing to enlist.

Others in the county also refused to volunteer. Floyd’s Confederate loyalists urged the state government for execution of a draft and posted printed circulars advising residents unwilling to serve that a draft would soon furnish the county’s “full quota of volunteers.” Local secessionist Tazewell Price told Letcher during the summer of 1861 that men living in Floyd County’s Burke’s Fork and Runnet Bag districts were refusing to enlist and that the eastern portion of Floyd County provided “three fourths of the men that have volunteered” while the western districts furnished “comparatively none.” Price claimed the Burke’s Fork and Runnet Bag districts were under the influence of Harvey Deskins, Floyd’s conditional Unionist convention delegate, and pushed the state government for a draft of the county’s western neighborhoods.

Other men in the county sought an arranged way out of Confederate service. Poor House steward William Foster claimed he had “habits” that made him “very unfit for duty” and offered the state $100 to be released from service. L.G. Wickham argued that at age 44 he was unsuitable for military service. He begged Letcher not to order his neighborhood’s volunteers into the army “till after harvest,” because although the men wished to defend Virginia, they also wished to “take care” of their crops. Even those who volunteered for service sought assurances that their commitment was for one year only. Captain Jackson Godby complained that many of his “Floyd Defenders” were

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86 Ibid.
88 For Floyd County Dunkards who paid Confederate exemption fees, see Records of the Southern Claims Commission, Record Group 217, Claim Numbers 2994, 2995, 17710.
89 Tazewell Price, “Copper Hill,” Floyd County [Virginia], to Governor John Letcher, Richmond, 15 June 1861, Letcher Papers (italics mine).
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 For details of William Steward’s offer, see Dr. John D. Stuart and Henry Lane, “Floyd C. H.” [Floyd County, Virginia], to Governor John Letcher, Richmond, 13 May 1861, Letcher Papers.
93 L.G. Wickham, Floyd County, Virginia, to Governor John Letcher, Richmond, 24 June 1861, Letcher Papers.
unwilling to join for an indefinite period. He informed the state that assurances of just one year’s commitment would be needed or his men would “give up the matter” (i.e. dissolve the company) because they were “unwilling to join in any other way.”

Beginning in June, 1861, some Floyd soldiers began deserting their Confederate units. This foreshadowed a stampede of local men that would eventually leave the county’s regiments depleted. In mid-June, less than a month after volunteering for service with Henry Lane’s “Floyd Guards,” John William Howell, David Linkins, and James Manning deserted Lynchburg’s Camp Lee and returned to Floyd. Two weeks later, Andrew Michael Reed and Jackson Brogan also deserted and found their way back to the mountains of Floyd. A distraught Captain Lane turned to the Daily Lynchburg Virginian in an attempt to get the men back. The newspaper published two notices naming the deserters and reminded the Floyd County sheriff and home guard units that they were required to “arrest the said deserters and cause them to be delivered at this camp to be dealt with according to law.”

Initial experiences in the Confederate army for a portion of Floyd’s soldiers were not what they expected. Required adherence to new rules and regulations, strict supervision of movement, and obedience to superiors made many of the county’s men anxious either to end the war or to go home. Sickness and poor provisions also alienated many the county’s soldiers drilling at Camp Lee. In July, 1861, Cephas Walton told relatives in Floyd that he had the “meesels,” his head ached, and he felt “bad all over.” Yet he was continuing to drill – unlike the majority of Company B, which were too sick to drill. Walton admitted that he was well fed at Camp Lee but complained bitterly that many of Floyd County’s soldiers despised their provisions, even though it was “better far then most gite at home.” The deserters from Captain Lane’s company concerned Walton. He informed those at home that the men would be caught and forced to pile rocks on the company’s training ground. By August, all five of Company B’s deserters had been arrested and returned back to camp.

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94 Jackson Godby, “Floyd Court House” [Floyd County], Virginia, to Governor John Letcher, Richmond, 8 July 1861, Letcher Papers.
95 Daily Lynchburg Virginian, 20 June 1861; Chapla, 42nd Virginia, 99, 107, 108.
96 Daily Lynchburg Virginian, 11 July 1861; Chapla, 42nd Virginia, 71, 121.
97 Daily Lynchburg Virginian, 20 June; 11 July 1861.
98 Cephas L. Walton, “Camp Lee,” Lynchburg, Virginia, to “Frends and Relations” [Floyd County, Virginia], 14 July 1861, Walton Family Correspondence.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
Seeds of an antagonistic relationship between Floyd County officials and the Virginia and Confederate governments were also sown in the summer of 1861. Ferdinand A. Winston, a recently elected Unionist magistrate, instigated much of the early conflict. In June, he claimed to have learned of a required oath to the Confederacy prescribed for local officials. Winston mentioned the oath to a local “gentleman of some standing,” who remarked that he “would no more mind ‘taking the prescribed oaths than he would to take a drink of whiskey.’”

102 Winston disagreed, and informed Governor Letcher that he was “for Virginia” but had “no affections for the Dictator of the Confederate States.”

103 He complained that the oath’s real purpose was “to humiliate the people and confer more power upon those who are crushing us with a weight too intolerable to be borne” and told Letcher that he would absolutely refuse to take it. 104 Less than two weeks later, he wrote the governor again and explained that he and many other residents of Floyd longed for “restoration” because they could not forget “the old United States.”

Unionists in Floyd County longing for “restoration” were soon joined by once enthusiastic Confederates stung by new taxes, impressment, and conscription. They were
also joined by residents who were prosecuted for supporting local deserters. As the war continued, county residents were increasingly drawn into opposing ideological camps. Their contrasting loyalty postures plunged much of the community into chaos and turmoil, which eventually removed Floyd County as a positive portion of the Confederate homefront.