

WILLIAM THOMAS SUTHERLIN: PATRIARCH OF DANVILLE

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ABSTRACT

Chapter I

EARLY LIFE

In 1822 the inhabitants of Danville, Virginia lived contentedly in their somewhat isolated village. Their lives were simple, untouched by many modern conveniences that citizens of larger cities enjoyed. April 7 of that year witnessed the birth of a citizen who was destined to change the lives of fellow Danvillians in the varied realms of business, education and social development.¹

Born on his father's farm in Glenwood, about two miles from Danville, William Thomas Sutherlin resided in Danville all of his life. His varied achievements benefited not only his hometown but the populace of Virginia as well.

Sutherlin, one of five children, was the eldest son of George S. Sutherlin and Mary (Polly) Norman of neighboring Henry County. From his parents he inherited a strong-willed, benevolent character that would manifest itself in every enterprise he undertook.²

¹ General Records of the Sutherlin Family, Sutherlin Mansion, Danville, Va. (hereinafter cited as General Records).

² Gary Grant, "The Sutherlins and Their House," address before the Danville Museum Guild, Danville, Va., Nov. 15, 1982; Elijah T. Sutherlin, A Short Genealogy of the

His great-grandfather, George Sutherlin, came with two of his brothers from Scotland to Virginia in the eighteenth-century and settled in Pittsylvania County. His will, filed in 1803, mentioned twenty-one slaves and numerous tracts of land--a sizeable estate for an early nineteenth-century planter. He specified that his holdings were to be divided among his ten children. Sutherlin's grandfather, Thomas, received three Negroes and bed and furniture. Thomas Sutherlin died a few years later in 1819, and his estate was settled among eight children. He evidently did not greatly increase his initial inheritance and passed on very little to Sutherlin's father, George.³

The holdings of the Sutherlin family at this time were meager. Sutherlin's father regretted that he was unable to send his son to college, as was the practice of larger antebellum farmers. Sutherlin instead received his education at the Danville Male Academy, one of three schools in Danville, and at the private school of Joseph Godfrey in Franklin County. Godfrey's academy was well respected in the community, and Sutherlin spoke highly both of the training he received there and of his friendship with

Sutherland Family in America (Kenansville, N.C., 1941).

³ Cassie Averett Young, Last Capital of the Confederacy: Danville, Virginia (Danville, n. d.); Will of George Sutherlin, Jan. 17, 1803. Deed and Will Book II, Pittsylvania County, Va., 271.

Godfrey.⁴

Such a limited education did not prove a disadvantage for Sutherlin. He spent much of youth on his father's farm where he worked with tobacco, one of Danville's burgeoning industries. It was this agricultural experience and the knowledge of tobacco that Sutherlin gained here which greatly influenced not only the course of his life but the lives of his fellow Danvillians as well.⁵

During Sutherlin's youth, Danville, a small town of less than 500 inhabitants, could boast of only two stores, one bank, two tailors, a blacksmith and a shoemaker. A tanner and a haberdashery comprised the remainder of Danville's merchants. A weekly newspaper, The Telegraph, furnished residents with news of local interest as well as with information from Richmond. Trade was accomplished by means of the Richmond Navigation Company, established in 1812 to facilitate the transportation of goods along the Roanoke, Staunton and Dan rivers. The tobacco industry was already of chief importance to Danville's livelihood, but only one factory, that of William P. Johns, existed at this time. Soon the varied achievements of William Sutherlin would drastically alter the face of this tranquil Southside

⁴ Memorial of the Life, Public Service and Character of William T. Sutherlin (Danville, Va., 1894), 5-6.

⁵ Ibid., 7.

Virginia village.⁶

At the age of twenty-one, Sutherlin left his father's farm and embarked on a career of his own. In 1843, when Sutherlin first moved to town, he worked for a tobacco manufacturer. For a brief period, Sutherlin was employed as a clerk, but his knowledge and capabilities soon prompted him to begin peddling tobacco throughout the South. On his maiden venture he realized a \$700 profit. With his one-horse team, he traveled regularly in the southern states. This entrepreneurial acumen never left Sutherlin, and in later years he became the second wealthiest tobacco manufacturer in the state, with only James Thomas of Richmond having a larger dominion.⁷

Only two years after he became involved in tobacco, Sutherlin became a full partner in a manufacturing firm (probably with Peter W. Ferrell). His ventures in this industry lasted until 1861. He owed his success in part to his experimental use of guana. While others were still dusting with outdated fertilizers, Sutherlin gambled and treated his crops with this untested product. As a result, his tobacco was of a finer quality and commanded a higher

⁶ Diary of Thompson Coleman, in Edward Pollock, 1885 Sketch Book of Danville, Virginia, Its Manufacturers and Commerce (Danville, Va., 1885), 19, 26-27.

⁷ Memorial, 7, 27, 36-37, 71.

price. Sutherlin was also responsible for technological innovations such as the powering of his tobacco presses by steam which increased his profit margin and the efficiency of his business.⁸

In 1844, the citizens of Danville were again the benefactors of Sutherlin's generosity. The Roman Eagle Lodge initiated Sutherlin as a Mason at the young age of twenty-two, and he served his chapter as a warden for many years. As a trustee of the Lodge, Sutherlin served on the Ways and Means Committee. He was instrumental in soliciting pledges for the building of a new Temple on the corner of Main and Union streets. Sutherlin himself contributed a large sum to the building fund and, in 1851, the Masons completed the temple at the cost of \$12,000. Danvillians took pride in this lofty addition to their town and appreciated the role that Sutherlin played in its construction.⁹

The later years of the 1840's saw Sutherlin expanding his business activities. Enjoying a time of flourishing trade after the depression of 1837, Sutherlin began increasing his investments in the tobacco industry. In September, 1849, he rented a tobacco factory from local

⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁹ George W. Dame, The History of the Roman Eagle Lodge (Danville, Va., 1895), 100; Memorial, 35.

merchants. Within a few years, Sutherlin had his own factory, located at the corner of Lynn and Loyal streets, one of ten within the town limits. In 1850, fire engulfed a sweathouse at his factory. Yet, Sutherlin still amassed a large profit which enabled him to hire slave labor to work in his factory as well as on his farms.¹⁰

Sutherlin entered into many contracts engaging slave labor for one-year periods. Prices ranged from \$15 for one slave to \$180 for a carpenter and his boy that Sutherlin rented in 1849 from Levi Holbrook. In return for their services, Sutherlin agreed to "treat [them] humanely, [and] to clothe them in the best manner in which hired servants are usually clothed both in summer and winter, (giving to each a good wool hat, large blanket, a pair of strong doubled soled sewed shoes and woolen socks)."¹¹

¹⁰ Contract between William Sutherlin and Stokes and Law, Sept. 21, 1849, William Thomas Sutherlin Papers, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (hereinafter cited as Sutherlin Papers, UNC); Pollock, Sketch Book, 33; M. T. Pace, Thomas O. Neal and John W. Holland to William Sutherlin, Sept. 30, 1850, William T. Sutherlin Letters and Papers, Flowers Collection, Duke University (hereinafter cited as Sutherlin Papers, Duke).

¹¹ Contract between William Sutherlin and Thomas Grasty, Jan. 15, 1849; contract between William Sutherlin and Levi Holbrook, July 12, 1849; contract between William and George Sutherlin and W. C. Terry, July 1, 1848, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

Sutherlin obtained such items from the store of S. H. Turner, one of the few merchants in town. At this time, merchants bought goods in large quantities and only updated their stock twice yearly. Markets were located in Lynchburg, Richmond and Baltimore, and the costs incurred in transporting items to Danville prohibited more frequent additions to stock on hand.¹²

The year 1849 also found Sutherlin altering his lifestyle. On October 18 of that year, he married Jane Erwin Patrick, the daughter of William and Martha W. Patrick of Greensboro, N. C. Fifteen months later, on January 24, 1851, Sutherlin and his young wife were blessed with the birth of their first daughter, Janie Lindsey. Another daughter, Martha Ella, died in infancy.¹³

On the evening of August 25, 1850, a tragedy of sorts struck Danville. A violent storm swept away the only foot bridge spanning the Dan River. The trestle of the Richmond and Danville Railroad crossed the Dan, but this was useless for the general public. Thus, travel and communication came to a halt. The wooden structure that had facilitated the flow of traffic was built in 1780 and was in need of repair

¹² Harry Wooding, Sr., "Sketch of Danville," Harry Wooding Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (hereinafter cited as Wooding Papers).

¹³ Memorial, 7; General Records.

anyway. This disaster was evidence that repair would not suffice; the town must erect a more sound structure--and soon--to keep the commerce of Danville running smoothly. To defray the costs of such an immense undertaking, Sutherlin displayed his benevolent spirit and purchased the razed bridge for \$4500. Then with the aid of other wealthy businessmen, he oversaw the construction of a new bridge quickly completed at a cost of \$12,000, with Sutherlin himself responsible for a third of the cost on the new structure. Once again, Danville benefited from the generosity of Sutherlin.¹⁴

Sutherlin's sense of civic duty also extended into the realm of city government. His long and illustrious career in politics began with his tenure as town alderman, a position he held for four years beginning in 1851. While serving on the Council, Sutherlin recommended that it expand the police force of Danville. The "force" consisted of one man patrolling the unlit streets at night. On September 13, 1854, Sutherlin proposed an ordinance that would upgrade the protection of Danvillians by providing for a "Town Police to be composed of Two persons whose duty it should be to patrol the Town three hours in the night from Nine till Five O'

¹⁴ Pollock, Sketch Book, 31-32; receipt from John Noble to William Sutherlin, Sept. 4, 1850, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

Clock in the morning three nights in each week."¹⁵

Danvillians quickly noticed these additions as the force arrested seventeen persons in a two-month period. Showing their appreciation for his activities on Council, Danvillians elected Sutherlin as their seventeenth mayor. He held this office for the next six years.¹⁶

The Sutherlins made their home on Wilson Street. In 1856, as Sutherlin's social standing increased, he began planning for the construction of a larger residence located on the outskirts of town. He owned numerous tracts of land, many of which were already improved with houses which he rented. In August, Sutherlin purchased four acres of land from Levi Holbrook which would serve as the site of his new home.¹⁷

A Massachusetts native, Holbrook was a schoolteacher and close friend of the Sutherlin family. In return for room and board, Holbrook renounced the interest on Sutherlin's five-year loan. Upon completion of the

¹⁵ Memorial, 8; Wooding Papers; Proceedings of Council, May 1, 1854 to May 5, 1868, Sept. 13, 1854, N. C.-Va. Genealogical Collection, Danville Public Library, Danville, Va. (hereinafter cited as Proceedings of Council).

¹⁶ Proceedings of Council, July 23, 1855; Memorial, 8.

¹⁷ Grant, "The Sutherlins," 3; contract between William Sutherlin and Stephen Barker, Oct. 11, 1853, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

Sutherlin's home, Holbrook occupied a room and an office in the west wing, where he resided until 1860.¹⁸

The stately country manor benefited a man of Sutherlin's means. Located in the country out from the west end of town, the Italian-style chateau was the envy of all Danvillians. Surrounded by groves of trees and gardens, the two-story house with its gabled roof and adjoining wings was the largest and most elegant in the area. A carriage house and stables for Sutherlin's horses also graced the grounds. Imposing as the Sutherlin home was, it lacked many conveniences which he added later in the century. Servants brought in water from the well near the kitchen, and several fireplaces provided the heat. Nevertheless, Sutherlin thoroughly enjoyed his comfortable and elegant home.¹⁹

His tenure as mayor did not hinder Sutherlin's business interests, for he spent much of his time away from his family and the new home. Having established a reputation as a fair and equitable merchant, he enjoyed the respect and continued patronage of firms in cities as far away as New Orleans and New York. Business was brisk, and it was not unusual for Sutherlin to receive orders from merchants who

¹⁸ Jane Gray Hagan, The Story of Danville (New York, 1950), 20; Grant, "The Sutherlins," 3.

¹⁹ John H. Brubaker III, The Last Capital, Danville, Virginia, and the Final Days of the Confederacy (Danville, Va., 1979), 21; Hagan, Danville, 20.

had already contracted to sell his tobacco in advance. One such broker from Cincinnati requested immediate delivery of fifty boxes which he had already promised to sell at twenty-six cents per pound. In Portsmouth, however, the bright leaf was not selling as well. The firm of Bushkink and Davis wrote that it could not afford Sutherlin's asking price of twenty-eight cents, but offered him their business anyway: "Tobacco so plenty in this market we can buy a first rate tobacco for 25c but prefer giving you the preference."²⁰

The firm further described trade as dull and requested only small shipments. Overall, however, the tobacco industry was flourishing. Sutherlin, being at the forefront, amassed a large fortune and thereby increased his social standing.²¹

While Sutherlin was away on business, his wife and daughter travelled some as well. The summer months of 1856 found the Sutherlin ladies vacationing at Rockbridge Alum Springs and visiting the "deaf and dumb and Lunatic Asylum" in nearby Staunton. Mrs. Sutherlin wrote to her husband

²⁰ Compton and Hughes Tobacco Merchants to William Sutherlin, July 30, 1858, Sutherlin Papers, Duke; Bushkink and Davis Tobacco Merchants to William Sutherlin, July 12, 1858, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

²¹ Bushkink and Davis Tobacco Merchants to William Sutherlin, July 12, 1858, *ibid.*

regularly and recounted the details of her daily sojourns. She also sent her husband the latest gossip, informing him who was in trouble (and she speculated as to why), who was ill, and who had recently died. She always closed her letters with a reminder of her love and devotion and sealed them with a kiss from "little Jennie."²²

The social status of the Sutherlin family extended beyond the borders of Danville, and Mrs. Sutherlin enjoyed the attention and respect she received on her travels. On one occasion, she reported that in honor of Governor Henry A. Wise visiting Rockbridge Springs, "I was one of the favoured few to whom Mr. Sales the Clerk sent some ice cream and cake to. There were no ladies at the dinner."²³

While somewhat apolitical, she nevertheless was strongly opinionated. Referring again to Governor Wise, Jane Sutherlin wrote: "I went in the dining room a few minutes to listen to his jabbering about 'internal improvements' but as I did not take much interest in his remarks because I did not trouble myself to understand them, I left soon. He is an ugly old coon as I ever saw. Think the Whigs might have been glad to get rid of him."²⁴

²² Jane E. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Aug. 25, 1856, Nov. 29, 1857, and Aug. 21, 1856, ibid.

²³ Jane E. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Aug. 21, 1856, ibid.

Springs such as those in Rockbridge and the Blue Ridge were favorite vacation spots for those who could afford them. Advertisements proclaiming the tranquil surroundings abounded in journals of the day. Mrs. Sutherlin's visit was for medicinal purposes as well. What her illness was is not known. Several times she remarked to her husband how various friends had commented on her improving health, and she enjoyed these compliments as well as the "healing powers" of the waters. This perhaps prompted Sutherlin's later interest in selling sulphur water.²⁵

The volume of mail Sutherlin received from mere acquaintances was evidence of his success. He was besieged with requests from all over the state for employment even in industries in which he had no stake. Many sought the recommendation of Sutherlin because his name would enhance their chances for procuring employment. One such solicitor expressed great confidence in her qualifications as a candidate for membership in the Board of Trustees of the Danville Female College. "I flatter myself that in this community any special recommendations as to my intellectual and literary qualifications of the situation would be altogether unnecessary." However, as a precautionary

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Pollock, Sketch Book, 195; Jane E. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Aug. 21, 1856, ibid.

measure, she enlisted Sutherlin's approval: "If you can conscientiously give me your support and the benefit of your influence with the board of trustees you will very much oblige."²⁶

Sutherlin's mail was not always filled with requests for favors. Occasionally a business firm would approach him and request his services. The Lynchburg Fire Life and Maine Insurance Company planned to begin operations in Danville and asked Sutherlin to work as its agent. However, at this time Sutherlin's interests were turning to national issues.²⁷

Sutherlin was continually seeking to improve the material interests of his hometown, though not always with success. In April, 1860, he began soliciting bids for the installation of a gas works for Danville. The Greensboro Gas Company, which had completed gas works for the city of Salem, submitted a bid of \$21,000. This price must have been a deterrent to the town because Danvillians did not enjoy power by gas for fifteen more years.²⁸

²⁶ James S. Jeter to William Sutherlin, Nov. 24, 1858; Mary F. Sapham to William Sutherlin, May 12, 1860, *ibid.*

²⁷ Lynchburg Fire, Life and Maine Insurance Company to William Sutherlin, April 19, 1860, *ibid.*

²⁸ Charles F. Halzer to William Sutherlin, April 13, 1860, *ibid.* L. Beatrice W. Hairston, A Brief History of Danville, Virginia, 1728-1954 (Richmond, Va., 1955), 87.

Sutherlin's continuing generosity did not go unrecognized. Because of this benevolence regarding Danville, he was awarded honorary memberships into the literary societies of the Randolph-Macon and Danville Female colleges. Charitable not only described Sutherlin's local activities; his treatment of slaves deserved this label as well. One of Sutherlin's tenants asked Sutherlin to hire one of his slaves. In a postscript to his letter, the tenant wrote: "I had much rather hire my negroes to you than anyone else in Danville because I was told that you treated them better than anyone in the place."²⁹

Sutherlin also corresponded with the families and owners of his blacks. With the aid of their masters, mothers often asked Sutherlin about their children, and requested holiday visits from their families. Sutherlin obliged whenever possible.³⁰

The intelligence and experience of Sutherlin graced yet another new business in Danville, that of banking. On March 1, 1858, the Bank of Danville received its charter and became the fifth bank in town. Sutherlin lent his sense of

²⁹ O. B. Merriel to William Sutherlin, April 11, 1860; Maggie Tansley to William Sutherlin, May 20, 1860; E. L. Stuart to William Sutherlin, Dec. 10, 1860, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

³⁰ C. H. Keningham to William Sutherlin, Nov. 20, 1860, ibid.

management to the bank by serving as its first president.³¹

With all of his activities, Sutherlin's schedule was surely demanding. Yet he actively served his church and participated in the Methodist Conference. Upon the illness of Danville's steward, Sutherlin was asked to attend the 1860 annual conference. His health was evidently not good either. Accompanying the request for his presence was a promise of medical care and the inducement that "a trip to conference away from the cares of business and mingling as an active member of conference will be better medicine for, as I believe, than your Homophalic doses."³² A deeply religious man, Sutherlin said to his departing guests: "Let us pray together, before you leave," and he devoted much time and energy to work in his church.³³

The decade prior to the Civil War was a prosperous one for Danvillians. Sutherlin enjoyed much success in his thriving tobacco business. High spirits accompanied this new found prosperity, and citizens enjoyed travelling entertainment companies that frequently passed through town. Local talent abounded as well. Danville's Histrionic Society, composed of railroad workers and engineers,

³¹ Hairston, A Brief History, 42.

³² Nelson Head to William Sutherlin, Nov. 19, 1860, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

³³ Memorial, 52.

showcased local talent as they presented plays such as "The Lady of Lyons" and "Cousin Joe, the Country Cousin." The newly completed Masonic Temple housed these performances, and Danvillians responded enthusiastically as the players provided entertainment on the lazy nights of summer.³⁴

Compared to more urban areas such as Richmond, the cost of living was low in Danville. Meats such as bacon, pork, beef and lamb were all priced low, and this enabled families to enjoy bountiful meals. Town dwellers felt safe with the recently reinforced police patrolling their streets. Crime was minimal.³⁵

No formal courthouse existed; court, when necessary, was held in a residence at the corner of Craghead and Patton streets. This structure also housed the town's jail. In 1854, the town's first fire engine reinforced Danville's "bucket brigade." After fire destroyed his home, Levi Holbrook donated \$500 to purchase this modern convenience, and Danville's fire department began with that gift. At this time, buildings were lighted by candles, tallow for the majority of households and adamantine for wealthier residents such as Sutherlin.³⁶

³⁴ Wooding Papers.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid. J. Frank Carroll, "The Bachelor was Married," unpublished typescript in Danville Vertical File,

It was a happy, innocent era, but rumblings of discontent were around the corner, and peaceful life in Danville would soon be not only interrupted by national events but completely transformed.

The new decade ushered in numerous changes to Sutherlin and to the lives of Danville's citizens. National events were arousing interest even in this small Virginia town. Following John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry, Danvillians mustered two volunteer companies known as the "Danville Blues" and "Danville Grays." Captained by capable military men, William P. Graves and Thomas D. Claiborne respectively, these units practiced drills and received instructions in military affairs. Later these two companies joined with a cavalry company from Whitmell and formed a battallion. The idea of secession was already circulating, and Danvillians wished to be ready for military service if called upon to defend their rights.³⁷

The agitated state of affairs in Danville mirrored that of the entire South. Trade was stagnant in all commodities, especially slaves. In November, 1860, Sutherlin attempted to sell some of his servants but received a reply from Richmond that there was no market for them at present. The

Danville Public Library, 6;

³⁷ Pollock, Sketch Book, 44.

tobacco market was stymied as well. One Alabama broker reported to Sutherlin that his firm had already issued credit for the next two years. He predicted, however, that the situation would soon improve--unless Lincoln won the presidential election.³⁸

Excitement abounded throughout the entire country as newspapers published the 1860 presidential election results. Many Southern businessmen were concerned that their financial and political future depended on the outcome of this election. Northern financiers were also concerned with reaction from the South. A New York agent reported Lincoln's victory in his hometown to Sutherlin and requested news from the South. The citizens of Danville did not cast a single vote for the man from Illinois. Instead, their votes were as follows: John Bell, 179; John C. Breckenridge, 36; Stephen A. Douglas, 35.³⁹

Southerners quickly reacted to the victorious Republican party. The South Carolina legislature met in December to discuss plans for seceding from the Union. Merchants in the North responded as well. Days after the election, Sutherlin received a notice from a New York

³⁸ Hector Davis and R. D. Davis to William Sutherlin, Nov. 12, 1860; William W. Burch to William Sutherlin, Nov. 8, 1860, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

³⁹ R. I. Pendleton to William Sutherlin, Nov. 7, 1860, *ibid.* Pollock, Sketch Book, 40.

business partner requesting that Sutherlin "provide for [his] drafts maturing this month."⁴⁰

This correspondent however, expressed optimism that the state of affairs would soon improve and that commerce would once again recover and flourish. Other merchants cautioned Southern partners not to make hasty decisions until Lincoln confirmed his policies regarding the South. However, financial and political changes were already underway in the South.⁴¹

The closing weeks of 1860 found Southern commerce in a state of turmoil. Cotton and tobacco prices were falling rapidly. Some firms were accepting South Carolina money only if prices were greatly lowered. Companies bargained for trade, and it occurred only when Southern merchants made concessions. John J. Pettus, governor of Mississippi, proposed a measure "staying all debts due outside State for a term of two or four years." Panic and hysteria concerning their financial straits marked the lives of Southerners everywhere.⁴²

⁴⁰ Coy Matthews to William Sutherlin, Dec. 14, 1860; P. S. March to William Sutherlin, Nov. 9, 1860, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

⁴¹ Ibid. S. F. Hughes to William Sutherlin, Nov. 23, 1860, ibid.

⁴² William W. Burch to William Sutherlin, Nov. 17, 1860 and Dec. 2, 1860, ibid.

One state, South Carolina, called for formal action to remedy the situation. On December 18, 1860, the legislature of South Carolina voted to withdraw from the United States. Repercussions were many and widespread. A Charleston friend wrote Sutherlin that his fellow citizens were arming themselves, the legislature had already allotted funds to purchase weapons, and federal workers from South Carolina had begun resigning their positions. Authorities were not alone in displaying their loyalties to their state. Some local citizens also took measures to influence others to follow South Carolina out of the Union. South Carolina courted neighboring states such as Florida, Georgia and Alabama and presented them with the possibility of forming a southern union. In Charleston, citizens prominently displayed liberty poles and flags that brandished stars representing the southern states. All of this pomp was not lost on Southerners in surrounding areas. However, advice from Northern states pervaded the mail of southern businessmen as well.⁴³

At the outset of this crisis, Sutherlin vehemently opposed secession. He attempted to continue transacting business with merchants from the North. However, a sense of ambiguity clouded the financial dealings, and Sutherlin's

⁴³ Coy Matthews to William Sutherlin, Nov. 15, 1860, *ibid.*

inquiries concerning commercial matters were all answered with grave forebodings. Trade was virtually nonexistent; replies to his letters were stamped with rejection. Each also expressed the desire that the excitement would soon abate, and that the Union would remain intact.⁴⁴

Sutherlin was not alone in his Unionist convictions. He received letters from fellow Southerners expressing similar sentiments. A North Carolinian confessed his doubts about secession, claiming it would have a "snowball" effect: "Were we to secede to day, in less than one year the middle states would have to Secede from the Cotton States. We here cannot Stand Free Trade for N.C. to raise \$1500 to pay her part of the Southern Confederacy. We could not pay it. If we cannot live together Slavery is gone." Dramatic events soon afforded Sutherlin and others like him an official opportunity to express their views on secession.⁴⁵

The year 1861 was decisive for Virginia. By February, seven states from the deep South had already severed their ties with the Union and formed a Confederate States of America with Jefferson Davis as president. Border states such as North Carolina and Tennessee were wrangling with the question of secession and looked to Virginia for guidance.

⁴⁴ P. S. March to William Sutherlin, Nov. 9, 1860, ibid.

⁴⁵ Peter Adams to William Sutherlin, Nov. 24, 1860, ibid.

On February 13, 1861, delegates from throughout the state met in Richmond to decide the fate of the Commonwealth. Danville and surrounding Pittsylvania County, which comprised one district, sent two delegates to voice their opinion in the state capital. Their constituency was divided over allegiance to the Union. Merchants and city dwellers favored joining sister states in the South, whereas farmers and planters sided with the Union. Voters in the county lent their support to Sutherlin, since he was staunchly pro-Union. He, along with William Tredway, journeyed to Richmond to determine Virginia's stance in the Union.⁴⁶

During the winter months of 1860-1861, fellow Virginians and other Southerners as well flooded Sutherlin with "advice" and directions. Eloquent and impassioned pleas presenting both sides of the issue filled his mail. A "true friend" from nearby Milton, N. C., praised Sutherlin's stand and encouraged him to hold to his convictions so as to keep Virginia in the Union. He encouraged Sutherlin and advised him to ignore the cries of the Danville Appeal, whose editor, Billy Coleman, lambasted Sutherlin's views in

⁴⁶ George H. Reese (ed.), Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861, 4, (Richmond, 1965), 1:3 (hereinafter cited as Reese, Virginia State Convention) ; Memorial, 9; Pollock, Sketch Book, 43.

print.⁴⁷

This "true friend" accused Coleman of harboring ill feelings toward Sutherlin because of his high social standing. Coleman had ambitions of working in the post office, and his chances of obtaining such a position would be enhanced if the position were under the control of a new government. Sutherlin's correspondent thus proposed that those who favored secession were serving their own interests and not those of the majority of Virginians. "Most of these sparrow-hawk democratic politicians who roost with impunity where Eagles dare not perch, are activated mainly by selfish considerations. Now you and I (Whigs) would rather 'go down to the dust from whence we sprang, unwept, unhonored and unsung' then seek to rise upon our Country's ruin or better by preying like vultures on the Country's vitals. I presume it is the only way some men have of trying to make themselves great--pulling down the Union when they fail to attain consequence by trying to uphold it." Not all of his guidance was quite as passionate. Others listed "obvious " reasons that appealed to "common sense" for remaining under the hand of Lincoln.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Anonymous letter to William Sutherlin, Feb. 5, 1861, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

The mass of common people were not aware of the full consequences of secession. Sutherlin felt it his duty to explain its full impact, thereby dissuading other delegates from pursuing that option. Points most often mentioned in these appeals were taxation and the finality of secession. The financial burden of providing for armies without federal help was incalculable, thus this topic was avoided. Patriots urged Sutherlin to emphasize the dangers of overthrowing a government which had "so long protected life, prosperity and liberty," and of the problems associated with establishing a trustworthy and permanent form of government. Letters accentuated shortcomings and faults of leading Southern politicians and described histories of previous secession attempts which had failed. However, Sutherlin was not entirely inundated with pro-Union mail. Secessionists also paraded their arguments.⁴⁹

The pleas of secessionists were embellished with well-planned rhetoric as well as "logical" reasons for starting anew. Southerners wrote that vicious black Republicans who wished to punish the South controlled the federal government. Virginia should lead the border states to join her sister states in a government which would protect their interests. One such cry from Memphis urged

⁴⁹ Henry L. Muse to William Sutherlin, Jan. 30, 1861; Abram Anderson to William Sutherlin, Jan. 28, 1861, ibid.

Virginia to provide an example for Tennessee which would "enable [her] to Reconsider her shameful position and join her southern sisters, and thus Reestablish trade which now lies prostrate and bleeding at every pore, by the complete withdrawal of Southern patronage, and the double duties that we have to pay. My God! We are forever ruined unless we undo what we have done; and institute measures to secure our Rights and protect ourselves from Northern aggression."⁵⁰

Secessionists portrayed the North under Lincoln as a vicious predator ready to pounce on and destroy the South. Appealing to Sutherlin's sentimental ties to Dixie, one zealot closed his argument: "Give me my friends and poverty and death rather than a palace in the courts of my enemies."⁵¹

Another angle to their argument appealed to the religious nature of the Virginia delegates. God blessed the Southern nation and "the sun would never shine on a more prosperous, happy and contented people, having the only truly Patriarchical government on earth."⁵²

⁵⁰ B. Sharpe to William Sutherlin, Feb. 26, 1861, ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² A Charleston correspondent to William Sutherlin, Feb. 9, 1861, ibid.

Southern writers also employed propaganda. A Charleston merchant wrote Sutherlin that his business was on the road to recovery. He concluded that, financially, Southerners were better off since they had excluded Northern trade. However, he failed to provide concrete examples to support his claims, thus discrediting his argument.⁵³

All of the attempts to sway Sutherlin's judgment were in vain. On Thursday, April 4, 1861, after prolonged debate, the delegates assembled to vote on an ordinance of secession. By nearly two to one Unionists outvoted those who wished to withdraw from the Union. Sutherlin cast his vote with the majority, and by a vote of 88 to 45, Virginia rejected the proposal to stand as a "sovereign independent state."⁵⁴

Sutherlin's convictions were not as firm as they once had been, and the next session of the convention found him qualifying his declaration of unionism. After the defeat of the first ordinance, delegates spent much time discussing its sixth resolution. This section stated that Virginians understood the position of the seceded states but valued their own ties to the Union as well. It also expressed hope for a peaceful redress of grievances. Sutherlin stressed

⁵³ S. Wyatt and Co. to William Sutherlin, Feb. 18, 1861, ibid.

⁵⁴ Reese, Virginia State Convention, 3:163.

that in order for such a settlement to occur, war between the opposing sections must be averted. The federal government must not enforce acts of a coercive nature upon the South, and it must not fortify its garrisons in the Southern states.⁵⁵

At this time, Lincoln was struggling with the issue of sending supplies to Major Robert Anderson at Fort Sumter. Anderson was low on materials and would have to evacuate the fort if Lincoln did not soon send help. If Lincoln were to abandon the fort, thereby satisfying the South's demand for non-interference, he would be retreating from his inaugural message of securing federal property in seceded states. Conversely, if South Carolina allowed Lincoln to arm Fort Sumter, it would be submitting to the authority of the no-longer-recognized federal government. Opposing sides therefore perceived actions at Fort Sumter in one of two ways: either as aggressive interference or as precautionary measures.

Sutherlin viewed any such action by the federal government as interference. In an emotional speech to his fellow delegates, Sutherlin stated his position. "I say, in any of these events, I am ready to vote to dissolve any connection with this government; and not only that, but to

⁵⁵ Ibid. , 3:171, 173.

pledge myself to resist that authority in the execution, as they may consider nothing more or less than war."⁵⁶

The Danvillian reassured his constituency that he was not retreating from his pro-Union viewpoint. Unless the convention amended the sixth resolution to include assurances that the South wanted a peaceful resolution of differences, he would vote against it. Within a week, Sutherlin would have to test his convictions. On April 12, Lincoln went through with his plan to reinforce Fort Sumter, South Carolina batteries opened fire, and the Civil War officially began.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:173.

⁵⁷ Ibid.,

Chapter II
SECESSION AND WAR

In the days of excitement that followed the attack on Fort Sumter, members of the Convention debated numerous proposals for alternatives to secession. Alexander Stuart of Augusta County proposed that a delegation from the border states go to Washington to meet with federal officials. He hoped that the opposing sides would compromise so that the border states could, without guilt, remain in the Union.⁵⁸

Sutherlin adamantly opposed the scheme. He reminded his fellow delegates of his stance on coercive action by the North, and he proceeded to declare his loyalty to the South. "I tell you, as certain as there is a God in Heaven, that, unless we act now and act promptly, we are a degraded and disgraced people; and I would rather die a soldier's death than stand here and see this great old Commonwealth disgraced by my action. I have been a Union man, but, my God, I never have been a submissionist." Sutherlin ended his speech with an appeal to Stuart and his fellow western Virginians to stand united with their eastern brothers in

⁵⁸ Virginia State Convention, 4:22.

defense of their rights against northern aggression.⁵⁹

April 17 was a momentous day in the history of Virginia. The convention voted once again on an ordinance of secession; and this time, by an 88-55 vote, it passed the measure. Sutherlin voted with the majority to sever the ties with the Union, thereby repealing Virginia's ratification of the United States Constitution. This did not mean that Sutherlin had turned his back on the Union. He knew the consequences of Virginia's actions. To his wife he stated that he "saw in that convention strong reserved men, men of years and dignity, sign the secession Ordinance while tears coursed down their cheeks."⁶⁰

Virginia had avoided this course as long as possible. She now had to act. However, the convention's actions still did not clarify Virginia's status. Eight days passed before the delegation approved an ordinance which would join Virginia with the Confederate States of America. Other middle states followed Virginia's example: Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina followed her out of the Union and into the Confederacy.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4:144; Marta L. Avary, Dixie After the War (New York, 1937), 48.

⁶¹ Virginia State Convention, 4:493.

The Convention of 1861 did not end with the ordinance of secession. Other matters remained for the delegates to resolve. On April 25, Sutherlin concurred with seventy-five other delegates in accepting the Constitution of the Confederate States of America. Only nineteen members opposed. The numbers were reversed when, on the same day, the convention decided (18-76) against making President Davis the Commander-in-Chief of the Confederate army. Two days later, delegates voted to establish Richmond as the seat of the Confederate government. Once they dismissed with such formalities, the delegates discussed many important issues pertaining to their new government. Sutherlin strove always to represent the best interests of Danville as he understood them.⁶²

Now that Virginia was officially joined with the Confederacy, she had to provide her share of troops to defend against Lincoln's army. One issue the delegates discussed concerned volunteer units and their commission in the Confederate army. Sutherlin pointed out that Danville had two such units, and he was in favor of the Commander-in-Chief's receiving them for service. He praised their officer corps and their ability to fight cohesively as a unit, and recommended passage of the resolution that

⁶² Ibid., 4:487, 494, 566.

provided for their commission. This being done, Danvillians responded enthusiastically and became the nucleus of the 18th Virginia Infantry Regiment.⁶³

Sutherlin never forgot that he was elected to the convention to represent the interests of those who voted him into office. His votes reflected this. When delegates discussed financial support of the Confederacy, Sutherlin sagaciously favored measures that would be best suited to the needs of Danville and other small towns. When delegate Sheffey of Smyth County proposed a measure that banks begin issuing five percent of their capital in small notes, Sutherlin arose in opposition. He stated that small banks could not feasibly afford the expense associated with issuing such a small amount of new currency. Instead, he proposed that if ten percent of assets were converted, the cost would be more justified. Or, better yet, why not have the banks issue notes on hand? Using his bank as an example, he argued that smaller institutions had these notes available and could issue them without incurring the expense involved with Sheffey's amendment. However, Sutherlin's argument did not convince a majority of the delegates. The convention passed the ordinance by a 59-28 vote.⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid., 4:739.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4:508-10.

Once Virginia was officially involved in the war against the North, Danvillians quickly mobilized. In addition to the "Danville Blues" and "Danville Grays" in the 18th Virginia Regiment, local men in considerable numbers also joined the 57th Virginia Infantry. Judge Berryman Green captained a cavalry unit; Judge L. M. Shumaker formed a battery of artillery. Those who were exempt from military service formed the "Danville Home Guard" and vowed to do their part to aid the Confederate cause.⁶⁵

Sutherlin's stature would have been well-suited for an officer. Nearly six feet tall. Sutherlin's dashing profile commanded the respect of others. As was the fashion of the time, Sutherlin sported a graying beard, which he kept neatly trimmed. His large dark eyes captured the attention of all who met him. This perhaps explained his effectiveness as a public speaker.

Though he was only thirty-nine when the war commenced, Sutherlin's health prevented him from performing active duty. His exact illness is not known, though he probably suffered from tuberculosis, a common nineteenth-century ailment. Instead, the Confederacy commissioned him major and assigned him the position of quartermaster at Danville. Sutherlin capably performed his duties of supplying the

⁶⁵ Polllock, Sketch Book, 44.

Confederate armies. Executive officers of the Confederate government frequently commended him. A clerk working in the government headquarters wrote: "I am directed by His Excellency the President to thank you for your balanced favor of 14 inst and to say that it is truly gratifying to receive such an evidence of confidence and such offers of material aid in this crisis."⁶⁶

Stationed in Danville, Sutherlin could therefore keep abreast of the activities of his fellow citizens. As he was in a position of authority, friends turned to him with favors concerning family members. He was even asked to assert his influence to acquire exemption for those who, for one reason or another, did not wish to serve in the army. Sutherlin performed his duties to the best of his ability and helped friends whenever he could. Yet some still expressed doubt about his integrity.⁶⁷

In order properly to conduct the affairs of Chief quartermaster, it was necessary to assign a trustworthy and dedicated officer to the position. Sutherlin was a suitable candidate for such an office. He was well respected throughout the community and had unselfishly performed

⁶⁶ T. R. Lubbock to William Sutherlin, March 21, 1861, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

⁶⁷ William C. Terry to William Sutherlin, n. d., Sutherlin Papers, Duke.

numerous civic duties which benefited all of Danville. Having charge of the quartermaster's post entailed handling financial transactions involving large sums of money and goods. Sutherlin had amassed a great fortune speculating in tobacco. Unlike so many Southern planters, he was able to retain his holdings throughout the war.

This naturally caused speculation about possible embezzlement. Rumors persisted that some of his wealth came from selling supplies illegally. These stories, however, remained rumors. An inspection of Sutherlin's post found everything to be in order. His staff, however, was reduced to cut expenses. The inspecting officer closed his report by stating that he was aware of derogatory remarks levelled against Sutherlin's character. Yet he dismissed such allegations as no one could openly prove any indiscretion on Sutherlin's part.⁶⁸

By virtue of his position, Sutherlin received much mail from the front and was often the only means through which families kept in touch with their enlisted kin. Sutherlin himself corresponded weekly with his younger brother, George, who served in the 38th Virginia. The younger Sutherlin, stationed outside of Centreville, faithfully reported war news to Danville. Unfortunately, his letters,

⁶⁸ Record Collection 109, Department Collection of Confederate Records, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

like others from his unit, were usually filled with ominous reports. One such dispatch stated that over 300 cases of typhoid fever existed in the brigade. Sutherlin complained of "Fistulew" which in his words, was "at time very bad, and indeed so much I can hardly walks. I suppose having to keep walking and Running so much in the Drills we have to go through now makes it worse We some times 'Double quick' for a half mile which is siver on me."⁶⁹

Fistula was carcinogenic. George C. Sutherlin's condition steadily worsened and exactly three months later, Major Sutherlin received word that his younger brother had succumbed to his illness. Joseph R. Cabell of the 38th Virginia's "Cabell Guards" forwarded this resolution to the grieving Major: "Whereas it has pleased Almighty God to remove from our midst Second Lieut. George H. Sutherlin of the 'Cabell Guards,' therefore be it Resolved that whilst we bow in humble submission to the dispensation of Divine Providence, a kindly remembrance of the many high qualities of the late Lieut. Sutherlin prompts us his associates in the field to mingle our sermon with that of his family and friends at home. Resolved, that in the death of Lieut. Sutherlin the Company has lost a generous warm hearted and efficient officer and our Country one of her most gallant

⁶⁹ George H. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Sept. 14 and 23, 1861, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

and patriotic defenders."⁷⁰

This surely was a great loss to Sutherlin, especially since both of his parents died a few years previously. Nevertheless, he took comfort in the fact that his brother died while defending the rights of the Confederacy.⁷¹

News of the war still reached Sutherlin from many acquaintances throughout the state. In the closing months of 1861, Sutherlin received word from Fairfax that extensive sickness prevailed in the Danville units. His correspondent, Abram Anderson, related that the young boys were tired and depressed as well. Anderson described in great depth the position and maneuverings of his unit, which was quartered just outside Washington. Anderson and his fellow soldiers, who were within sight of the enemy army, reported that the opponents "lie and look at each other all day long and whenever one of the men from behind a tree or other covering he is shot at by the other party." Days of stagnation followed with neither army advancing. Anderson questioned his commanding officers' tactics, even though he praised their overall ability as military leaders.⁷²

⁷⁰ Joseph R. Cabell to William Sutherlin, Dec. 23, 1861, ibid.

⁷¹ General Records.

⁷² Abram Anderson to William Sutherlin, Sept. 5, 1861, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

This correspondence afforded Sutherlin a unique description of the "imperial city" of Washington and of the men serving in its army. Anderson pointed out that when in such close contact, capturing prisoners was an easy task. Typical prisoners "said they enlisted because they could get no employment and were promised that if they would fight for the government their suffering families should be fed and clothed." Such was the impresssion of a Confederate regarding his adversary.⁷³

Sutherlin soon received word that the Confederate army was in desperate need of clothing. Once again, acquaintances called upon Sutherlin to assert influence in channeling supplies to needy Danville patriots. News came from Cabell that "men are nearly necked and I understand that the Council have given Uniforms to the other Companies from Danville--if so I think it is but right and just that the Council should do the same for my Company as for others coming from Danville and she has the credit of sending four Company, mine being the fourth.--I desire you to see if you cannot get the Council to give them a Suit if you will do so the Company will take it as a great favor and I Will regard it as a personal favor rendered myself." Cabell also remarked on the low morale of his troops. Little did he

⁷³ Ibid.

know that their situation would only worsen in the months ahead.⁷⁴

His duties as post quartermaster were not so demanding that they kept Sutherlin away from his business. The government controlled many railroad lines, and even those that were not were used mainly for transporting war materials. For considerable cost, merchants could ship their tobacco. Hoping to continue trade established before the war, Sutherlin kept in contact with firms throughout the South. Maintaining such lines of communication was rewarding, as one firm requested as much tobacco as Sutherlin could afford to send. Even business correspondence, however, included news of the war. An Alabama merchant reported that troops in his state were drilling in anticipation of a possible invasion by sea. If Lincoln so attacked, they would be prepared.⁷⁵

The late winter of 1861-1862 was gloomy for the Confederacy. Federal Gen. George McClellan was preparing an advance on Richmond. Many Southerners expressed doubts about fending off the Union army. Sutherlin received a dispatch from the Williamsburg paymaster whose family resided in Petersburg. He wished to move his family away from Richmond

⁷⁴ Joseph R. Cabell to William Sutherlin, Aug. 16, 1861, ibid.

⁷⁵ E. W. Gardiend to William Sutherlin, Aug. 19, 1861, ibid.

to a safer locale and requested Sutherlin to furnish him with information about living conditions in Danville. Other friends also expressed fear about the possible fall of Richmond. Confusion surrounded the capital, and Sutherlin received numerous letters inquiring about the situation there, as well as in cities further southward.⁷⁶

The Union plan for capturing Richmond involved Federal troops moving by boat down the Potomoc to the peninsular area between the York and James rivers. They then would attack the capital city from the southeast. Despite high tensions at Richmond, the Southern troops at Yorktown were confident of their ability to rout McClellan's army. In April, 1862, Sutherlin received this news from the eastern seaboard: "It is even surmised by some that, unless McClellan advances on our lines very soon, [Gen. Joseph E.] Johnston will himself bring on a fight."⁷⁷

Richmond would have welcomed the confidence the generals at Yorktown displayed as Confederate troops there failed to take advantage of a chance to overcome inferior Union forces. A soldier stationed in the capital described this scene to Sutherlin. "Our troops ran from a force now

⁷⁶ George Booker to William Sutherlin, Feb. 23, 1862; B. F. Graveley to William Sutherlin, April 2, 1862, ibid.

⁷⁷ Abram Anderson to William Sutherlin, April 28, 1862, ibid.

ascertained much inferior to their own in number and experience. Their commander had no authority even to receive the surrender of the town & did not expect to find any troops at all in that neighborhood, (we had over 3,500 troops)." However, Confederate troops managed temporarily to stave off McClellan and preserve this most important city.⁷⁸

Even with so much uncertainty surrounding the fate of Richmond, merchants expressed confidence in their ability to sell tobacco. This was news that Sutherlin was glad to receive. Thus, ominous messages about the war were somewhat brightened by these business prospects. A friend observed: "Times are indeed very gloomy. I have no doubt but Stonewall Jackson is badly whipped & ditto Beauregard at Island no. 10. & I greatly fear Richmond and New Orleans both will be taken. Notwithstanding Tobacco I think will be a good article. People will chew Tobacco whether they live under Lincoln's Despotism or Jef. Davis' Despotism."⁷⁹

The summer of 1862 ushered in better times to the Virginia front. Under the leadership of Joseph Johnston, and later Robert E. Lee, Confederate forces succeeded in thwarting McClellan's attempts to capture Richmond.

⁷⁸ William Warrens to William Sutherlin, April 26, 1862, ibid.

⁷⁹ B. F. Graveley to William Sutherlin, April 2, 1862, ibid.

Victorious as they were on the battlefield, Southern forces still faced internal problems. Troops sorely needed supplies and reinforcements. Weary soldiers requested that Sutherlin assert his influence to procure greatly desired leaves of absence. After being denied leave, one soldier wrote Sutherlin that he did not intend to leave during the heat of a battle, but if he were granted permission he would return home after hostilities eased somewhat. He reminded Sutherlin that he had not been home in two years, and that it had been over a year since he had seen his family and friends. Long stretches of army life fostered a fatigue that affected soldiers' performance on the battlefield and lowered their morale. These burdens only compounded the inherent disadvantages of the Southern army.⁸⁰

At the outbreak of the war, Sutherlin's poor health forced him to remain in Danville. As the war progressed, however, he petitioned for a transfer coupled with an increase in rank to division quartermaster. Reaction to his request was mixed. One associate applauded his patriotism and reminded him that the prestige accompanying such a decision would enhance his reputation throughout the state. Conversely, others lamented his decision and beseeched him

⁸⁰ James Redd to William Sutherlin, May 17, and 26, 1862, ibid.

to remain in Danville.⁸¹

His constituency appreciated his efforts to secure the property of their area, and Sutherlin kept his post and continued to safeguard their interests. He once asked a judge to review his powers as quartermaster. "I cannot submit to the outrages that has been perpetrated upon the Govt and if by virtue of my office as Brigade Quartermaster with the rank of Major I have the right to command the Confederate forces here to protect the public property, and am in fact commandant of this post. I ask nothing more and will protect the property with mildness if possible but with unflinching firmness."⁸²

Throughout Virginia, Sutherlin enjoyed the reputation of being powerful and accommodating. As quartermaster, he received numerous requests, all of which were prefaced with appeals to his benevolent and charitable nature. These requests ranged from prisoners wanting tobacco to families requesting furloughs for relatives in service. Of course, not all favors related to military matters. One concerned slaveowner, John Jefferson, asked Sutherlin to procure employment for one of his slaves who was currently working

⁸¹ J. M. Smith to William Sutherlin, Mar. 21, 1862; William M. Slade to William Sutherlin, Mar. 6, 1862, ibid.

⁸² William Sutherlin to William Preston, May 25, 1862, William Ballard Preston Correspondence, Virginia Historical Society.

as a smith on the Richmond and Danville Railroad. White men would not allow him to work at the forge where he was highly qualified. Instead, they forced him to perform menial tasks. Jefferson disagreed with this injustice and proposed that if Sutherlin could not use his services, he find suitable work for him elsewhere. Obliging, Sutherlin found work for him, probably in one of his factories or one of one of his many farms in the area.⁸³

Though Danville was not the scene of any skirmishes, she did contribute in other ways to the war effort. The Richmond and Danville Railroad which ran through town was essential in transporting war materials and supplies. In 1862, a general army hospital opened in the town. Unfortunately, all of Danville's contributions were not so productive. In 1864, Danville became home to six prisons where several hundred federal prisoners endured deplorable conditions.⁸⁴

Though the progress of the war weighed on the anxious minds of Southern planters, they routinely conducted their daily business. The buying and selling of slaves was an

⁸³ John W. Hopkins to William Sutherlin, Mar. 15, 1864; Jennie D. Morrison to William Sutherlin, Mar. 10, 1863, Sutherlin Papers, Duke; John G. Jefferson to William Sutherlin, June 27, 1862, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

⁸⁴ Grant, "The Sutherlins," 7; J. M. Smith to William Sutherlin, Apr. 2, 1862; Abram Anderson to William Sutherlin, Apr. 28, 1862, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

integral component of this business. During 1863, Sutherlin purchased numerous tracts of land. As a result, he sent inquiries to several associates concerning the purchase of slaves to work on his new acquisitions. Sutherlin's younger brother, John M. Sutherlin of Alabama, scouted for slaves and land for his brother. In January, 1864, he reported from Montgomery that slaves were selling for as high as \$1600 each. Prices were much higher in Alabama than in Virginia. A lot of fifty-seven slaves sold there for \$53,000, while, according to Sutherlin, they would have netted only \$20,000 in Virginia.⁸⁵

When purchasing slaves, buyers considered not only their price but their character and work habits as well. Buyers often travelled great distances to attend slave auctions. If they knew nothing about the personal background of slaves, especially those from other cities, they often overlooked them and purchased local blacks instead. As the war continued, transportation to and from sales became increasingly difficult for purchasing agents. The government controlled most of the rail lines and used them for transporting war materials and soldiers. Even when buyers could procure accommodations, travelling was often

⁸⁵ Thomas W. Walton to William Sutherlin, Feb. 17, 1863; E. C. Murphy to William Sutherlin, Feb. 2, 1863; John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Feb. 19, 1863, Sutherlin Papers, Duke.

hazardous. John Sutherlin expressed concern about the increasing number of railroad accidents in Alabama and adjacent Mississippi. An agent whom Sutherlin sent to purchase slaves had been away for an unusually long time, and Sutherlin feared for his safety.⁸⁶

John Sutherlin not only aided his brother in obtaining workers for his farms; he acted as a real estate agent as well. During the first month of 1863, the younger Sutherlin purchased plantations for himself and "the Major." While slaves and staple goods were cheaper, real estate was higher in Virginia. Describing a home he recently purchased for \$15,000 in Montgomery, John Sutherlin wrote: "The place is new. Houses just built with all the modern improvements. Gas fixtures in each room; on the whole I must think it an elegant place Such as one in Danville would sell for \$25,000--all the rooms are furnished with new & elegant furniture except the parlour which no furniture at all is in."⁸⁷

Like his older brother, Sutherlin speculated in tobacco, and success evidently ran in the family if Sutherlin was able to afford an estate such as he described

⁸⁶ Silas Ossohundra to William Sutherlin, Jan. 30, 1863; John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Feb. 28, 1863, ibid.

⁸⁷ John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Jan. 17 and Feb. 13, 1863, ibid.

to his brother. He also reported that he was seeking "5 to 800 acres choice land near the city upon which to put [his] negroes."⁸⁸

Major Sutherlin was buying land in Virginia, as well as in Alabama, adding in February, 1863, a 476-acre farm in Pleasant Gap to his holdings. Land in Virginia was selling at \$20 per acre, so a parcel of this size represented quite a large investment. However, these transactions represented no financial burden on the Sutherlins, as the Major had at least \$15,000 in gold. His brother boasted \$4250 "hidden under lock and key." A friend stationed in Charleston asked Sutherlin to purchase land for him in nearby Whitmell. Thus, Major Sutherlin became a land-broker himself, acting as agent for soldiers who were away and could not buy land on their own.⁸⁹

The Sutherlins amassed their fortunes through wise investments and intelligent business practices. Yet the financial situation in the Confederacy at this time was precarious, and the younger Sutherlin warned of impending doom. " I have a presentiment that great events are to

⁸⁸ "Historical Sketch of William T. Sutherlin;" John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Jan. 19, 1863, ibid.

⁸⁹ Thomas W. Walton to William Sutherlin, Feb. 17, 1863; John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Feb. 28, 1863; George W. Oakes to William Sutherlin, Sept. 28, 1863, ibid.

transpire in the next few months which will result either to our zeal or to our woe. A serious disaster to our arms now. at any point with the present condition of our currency would be deplorable." He concluded his message to the Major by expressing his faith that the Lord would continue to watch over and protect the South.⁹⁰

Major Sutherlin's health had not greatly improved during the war. Several letters to him made reference to his impaired condition. In February, 1863, Colonel Robert Withers returned to Danville and aided Sutherlin in his duties. This decreased the taxing workload associated with Sutherlin's many pursuits. John Sutherlin's health also prevented him from active duty in the war. However, after earlier despairing to his brother on the state of the Confederacy, he decided to aid their cause. "I have determined some time since to sell out everything I have for sale and quit and work for the Gov't during the continuance of the war if I can get a situation suited to my physical condition."⁹¹

⁹⁰ John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Feb. 28, 1863, ibid.

⁹¹ Julius A. Gray to William Sutherlin, Jan. 23, 1863, Sutherlin Papers, UNC; Robert Enoch Withers, Autobiography of an Octogenarian (Roanoke, Va., 1907), 191; John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Feb. 28, 1863, Sutherlin Papers, Duke.

As the war continued, Southerners found their government becoming increasingly involved in their daily lives. Transporting goods was difficult. Merchants feared impressment, especially if they were shipping commodities that soldiers needed. However, government wagons sometimes facilitated the movement of goods. Although the practice was of questionable legality, Sutherlin occasionally filled his orders with the aid of such government vehicles to insure against impressment. Sutherlin and the authorities cooperated in other ways as well. Late in 1863, he rented one of his factories to the government for \$200 a month. The government used this building either as a prison or as a storehouse for arm and supplies.⁹²

The year 1864 brought nothing but bad news for the Confederacy. Federal troops scored several victories on the Western front. They now occupied the state of Tennessee and were marching on Atlanta and Richmond. Atlanta, a key financial center, fell early in September. Destroying supplies that his army did not use, Federal Gen. William T. Sherman blazed a path of destruction through Georgia. The burning of Atlanta was particularly significant to businessmen such as Sutherlin.

⁹² Christian and Lea to William Sutherlin, Mar. 16, 1864; C. P. Wright to William Sutherlin, Oct. 7, 1863; Robert Saunders to William Sutherlin, Nov. 2, 1863, *ibid.*

Earlier, the Confederacy had hoped that foreign merchants would purchase their cotton and thus keep the new nation on a sound financial basis. However, the tightening blockade squelched hopes of foreign intervention. Yet Sutherlin did not despair. In September, 1864, he asked a London merchant for information on the market value of various commodities and about the marketability of Confederate bonds. He ended his inquiry with a reassurance of the validity of the Confederate States: "I think I may safely say for my country that we will suffer extermination rather than surrender our nationality." While a noble display of patriotism, these sentiments were hardly reassuring.⁹³

Though he outwardly expressed confidence, Sutherlin was personally beginning to ponder the fate of his beloved Confederacy. He initiated several actions to ensure his financial success in the face of a Southern defeat.

As 1865 drew near, it was obvious that the South was no longer able to mount an effective offensive against the stronger Union troops. The Confederates hoped to back into a victory by breaking the Federals' will to fight. As Union Gen. U. S. Grant approached the rail lines at Petersburg, Confederate soldiers realized the danger of their situation.

⁹³ William Sutherlin to John K. Gillrates & Co., Sept. 13, 1864, ibid.

After describing the situation at Camp Stafford, near Petersburg, one soldier confessed to Sutherlin: "I hope that our Dark hour is near past and our Bright morning of the South will soon appear."⁹⁴

Accompanying defeats in battle, soldiers were forced to contend with severe shortages of supplies. Morale was understandably low, and soldiers blamed mismanagement for the lack of rations and clothes. A friend relayed his discontent to Sutherlin in suprisingly harsh language (considering Sutherlin's position as quartermaster). "I think the General Government is not to Blame for it is Bad management of the officers of the Subsestance Department the most of them are a Set of moled Scoundrels that steal from us a part of the Scanty Returns we get."⁹⁵

Desertion was becoming more commonplace. Officers in one regiment tried to thwart this crime by offering a thirty-day furlough to anyone who captured an attempted deserter. However, as one member of the 38th Virginia wrote to Sutherlin, no one really tried to stop a fellow soldier from escaping. "Four men left our company night before last. . . . it is the topic of conversation here. Numbers of men say they are waiting for Spring and to see what

⁹⁴ George B. Hamilton to William Sutherlin, Jan. 4, 1865, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Congress will do. Our men go over to the Hunkers four or five and some times more. Most when dark night, and one run over the other evening about fifty Guns fired at him but he went clean. I don't believe the men try to shoot them."⁹⁶

Some men were losing confidence in the generals. A friend tendered this advice: "Wilmington still stands and Genl. Bragg says he can hold it, though nobody seems to believe him. . . . I think the fall of Wilmington is only a question of time and our past experiences ought to teach us that it is folly to try to hold any place when their navy can operate. We ought to abandon the coast and concentrate our forces in the interior." He also expressed concern over the low spirits that prevailed in the ranks. It was his opinion that if something was not done to boost these spirits, then surrender was imminent.⁹⁷

Back in Danville, Sutherlin had personal concerns of his own. Declining health forced him to request a two-month leave of absence from his post, which the Adjutant and Inspector General's office granted to him on January 5, 1865. This brief respite from his duties also permitted him to attend to pressing business matters. Many planters feared the consequences of a Union victory and began selling

⁹⁶ James M. Norman to William Sutherlin, Jan. 14, 1865, ibid.

⁹⁷ Julius A. Gray to William Sutherlin, Jan. 23, 1865, ibid.

slaves so as to not to incur a loss if a federal order offered them their freedom. Technically, the Emancipation Proclamation technically did not free any slaves in the South, but owners knew that such freedom would be one of the first orders of business if the South returned to the control of the Union. Since Sutherlin was unable to travel and conduct business he once again enlisted the aid of his brother in ordering his affairs.⁹⁸

John Sutherlin was concerned as well about the fate of the Confederacy. He began selling his slaves and some of his holdings in Georgia. Major Sutherlin kept his brother busy handling his estates. He instructed his younger brother to sell all of his cotton and some of his slaves on his Americus, Ga. plantation. However, because they were closer to his home and easier to manage, he retained his holdings in Virginia.⁹⁹

Even the governments of the opposing sides began making overtures of cooperation. John Goode, Jr., a delegate in the C. S. Congress, wrote to Sutherlin about the prospect of a full-scale exchange of prisoners. However, those inmates still quartered in prison were not so optimistic. With

⁹⁸ Johnathan Withers to William Sutherlin, Jan. 5, 1865; John M. Sutherlin to D. D. Hall, Mar. 27, 1865, ibid.

⁹⁹ John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Mar. 27, 1865; John M. Sutherlin to D. D. Hall, Mar. 27, 1865, ibid.

Southern soldiers suffering from a lack of rations, Federal prisoners had even less given to them. Conditions in Danville's prisons were particularly abominable, but one New Yorker tried a desperate appeal to alleviate his suffering. A member of T. Thomasen Lodge in New York City sent this message to the Masons in Danville: "I Appeal to you for Help as a Brother Mason. I have been a Prisoner of War Six Months my under Clothing is wore out. I have niether a Blanket nor Quilt, & I am Suffering more than I can bear in such Cold Weather as we have had Lately. Hopeing that you are able to assist me."¹⁰⁰

Sutherlin could only do so much. Already, he had requested the services of the Rev. J. H. Forbes Forbes to visit Danville's hospitals and prisons. Sutherlin paid him \$50 a month to counsel patients and inmates, but there was little more he could do to lessen their physical suffering.¹⁰¹

On April 3, 1865, Grant's forces finally captured the all-important railroad junction at Petersburg. The death knell of the Confederacy was at hand. In desperation, Lee fled west from Richmond with the hope of turning southward

¹⁰⁰ John Goode, Jr. to William Sutherlin, Jan. 26, 1865, ibid. William Schagle to Hon. Brother Masons of Danville, Jan. 29, 1865, Letters and Papers of William M. Dame, University of Virginia.

¹⁰¹ Memorial, 12.

and joining Johnston's forces in North Carolina. Fearing the capture of Richmond, President Davis and the Confederate cabinet abandoned the capital. Only John Breckenridge, Attorney General, remained behind to finish the last-minute business of the retreating government. The forlorn Davis and his cabinet boarded a train for the long journey to Danville.¹⁰²

Davis chose Danville as his destination for many reasons. The southside city was far away from Federal troops but close enough for the cabinet to reach quickly to reestablish headquarters. A rail line through the city continued to Atlanta, and Danville contained a large arsenal and fairly well-stocked warehouses. Davis' original plan was to meet Lee's troops in Danville, where they would make "a new defensive line of the Dan and Roanoke rivers, unite his army with the troops in North Carolina, and make a combined attack on Sherman."¹⁰³

Unfortunately, Lee's forces never reached Danville. Had the army carried out this proposed strategy, Danville was prepared to re-stock Lee's troops. In the town warehouses were 500,000 rations of meat as well as large amounts of coffee, tea and sugar. Yet it remains a mystery

¹⁰² Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (New York, 1881), II, 566.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 573-574.

why desperate soldiers did not receive these supplies earlier in the war.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Brubaker, The Last Capital, 34.

Chapter III

END OF WAR AND RECONSTRUCTION

April 3, 1865, was a dreary day for Danvillians and the entire Confederacy. Officials of the city received news of the retreating cabinet's impending arrival just before noon, and they hastily began preparations for Davis' visit. A committee of the town's most prominent citizens met and, under the direction of Mayor James M. Walker discussed plans for the reception of their distinguished guests. They summoned a committee to greet the President's train, which was to arrive at 3 o'clock. Sutherlin recalled that indeed a large crowd of townspeople gathered to cheer their President and his cabinet.¹⁰⁵

The presidential train, pulled by the engine, "Charles Seddon," arrived at the Richmond and Danville depot shortly after 3 p.m. Davis, outfitted in a gray cashmere waistcoat under a Prince Albert overcoat, looked "a little careworn" as he stepped from his car. Because of the deterioration of the tracks, his trip had taken some thirteen hours. Sutherlin met the rest of the cabinet as they departed from the train, and he immediately escorted them to his waiting carriages. Mr. Davis, along with Secretary of the Treasury

¹⁰⁵ Brubaker, The Last Capital, 3; Pollock, Sketch Book, 55; Richmond Dispatch, May 31, 1893.

George Trenholm and his wife, and Stephen R. Mallory, Secretary of the Navy, all proceeded to the Sutherlin manor, where they resided for the next seven days. Davis appreciated the warm welcome he received in Danville. He later wrote: "Nothing could have exceeded the kindness and hospitality of the patriotic citizens. They cordially gave us an 'old Virginia welcome,' and with one heart contributed in every practicable manner to cheer and aid us in the work in which we were engaged."¹⁰⁶

Other cabinet members lodged with two bankers, John Johnston and William Patton, both of whom lived in town on Main Street. Lesser officials boarded at Danville's Exchange Hotel and at the Tunstall House, two boarding establishments which were showing wartime wear. Once the cabinet reached the Sutherlin home, the Major led Davis to his room. There the President rested for the remainder of the day.¹⁰⁷

The new day brought many responsibilities for Davis. His first duty was to organize various offices in Danville, now the Capital of the Confederacy. He established government headquarters at the Benedict House on Wilson

¹⁰⁶ Brubaker, The Last Capital, 3; Danville Register, Apr. 3, 1965; Richmond Dispatch, May 31, 1893; Davis, Rise and Fall, II, 573.

¹⁰⁷ Brubaker, The Last Capital, 19, 22.

Street; the Post Office Department set up operations in the Masonic Temple. Davis' next task involved the defense of Danville. Colonel Robert Withers joined Davis in surveying the terrain on the periphery of the hilly town. Federal troops had now destroyed bridges of the Richmond and Danville Railroad, blocking rail travel between the two cities, and they were threatening to do the same between Danville and cities to the south. Telegraph lines had also been cut. This kept Davis in the dark as to the whereabouts of Lee and his troops--the last hope of the Confederacy.¹⁰⁸

Despite this adversity, Davis still expressed confidence in Lee and hoped his army could reach Danville. Sutherlin's poor health forced him to remain at home during much of Davis' stay, but this afforded him an excellent opportunity to observe Davis and to converse with him about recent events. Mrs. Sutherlin talked with him at great length as well. She was amazed at his pleasant and considerate temperment in the face of such despair. "In the midst of turmoil, and with some fearful cares and responsibilities upon him, he did not forget to be thoughtful and considerate of others." He obviously was under a great deal of stress and in an "anxious frame of mind, but always pleasant and agreeable and

¹⁰⁸ Young, "Last Capital;" Brubaker, The Last Capital, 27; Withers, Autobiography, 214.

self-possessed."¹⁰⁹

Davis worried that he was an imposition to the Sutherlins, especially with the Major's enfeebled condition. However, Mrs. Sutherlin assured him repeatedly that his presence caused no inconveniences and that they were honored to have him as their guest. She made every effort to insure that his visit was as pleasant as possible under the circumstances by serving him the finest meals that she could offer, even though she noticed that Davis "was indifferent to food." His comfortable accommodations did not go unnoticed, however. He appreciated the spacious beauty and serenity of the Sutherlin estate and commented on the soothing song of the mockingbird which greeted him every morning.¹¹⁰

Sutherlin discussed at length with Davis the perilous situation of the Confederate States. One of the President's deepest regrets was having to flee suddenly from Richmond. Davis was quite fond of his former capital and regretted leaving it in the hands of Federal troops. As they became more intimately acquainted, the two men spent hours reviewing the causes of the conflict and the actual course

¹⁰⁹ Richmond Dispatch, May 31, 1893; Avary, Dixie, 47; Danville Register, Apr. 6, 1965.

¹¹⁰ Richmond Dispatch, May 31, 1893; Avary, Dixie, 51; Danville Register, Apr. 6, 1965.

of the war. Sutherlin asked Davis whether he thought the war had been inevitable. In a lengthy reply, Davis mentioned extremism several times. The differences which precipitated the war had been festering for many years, he said, and extremists on both sides of the issue aborted attempts to eliminate or even alleviate these differences. He cited the failure of the Missouri Compromise and the thorny element of slavery in the quest for popular sovereignty as examples. Abolitionists and Southern leaders both refused to allow these measures to work.¹¹¹

Like Sutherlin, Davis remained a "Union man" as long as his conscience allowed. He did not resign his U.S. Senate seat until his home state of Mississippi had left the Union. When this occurred, he then vowed to uphold and defend the rights of the Southern people. When Sutherlin solicited Davis' thoughts on secession, he received this reply: "Sir, when the Government of the United States was formed, the rights of the States that were not surrendered at that time were reserved and the states never surrendered the rights of self-preservation, and when in the judgment of the people it became necessary, secession was their right. I never had any doubt upon this question, and it had no influence upon me whatever in making me slow to leave the Union because I

¹¹¹ Richmond Dispatch, May 31, 1893.

was attached to it--because I believe that if we could live in peace the people of the country would be better off by the Union as it was than by a division." Thus, Lincoln could not consider them rebels, Davis asserted, because their actions were within legal bounds.¹¹²

Displaying his loyalty to the Confederacy until the bitter end, Davis still expressed hope in the South's fighting ability. When Sutherlin asked him if the war could have ended differently, he replied that it was not yet over. Stating that even Lee's surrender would not indicate finality, Davis added: "We'll fight it out to the Mississippi River."¹¹³

He also replied that the people of the Confederacy had done the best that they could, considering they were outnumbered and undersupplied. Lamenting that they were unable to obtain more international aid, Davis remarked: "The enemy had access to the world from which to supply men, arms, and supplies; while we were shut in and were only overcome by overwhelming numbers." He mentioned that he had considered drafting younger men, but decided against doing so because they were "the chief hope of the country in the future." Thus, no matter how bleak their situation, Davis

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

never believed that the Confederates were wrong or that they did not have a chance to win their independence.

When Sutherlin mentioned that he had heard rumors concerning a compromise offer from President Lincoln, Davis assured him that he would settle for no less than complete independence and recognition by the federal government. Sutherlin commented that he had heard that "Mr. Lincoln offered to pay \$300 per head to slave owners for their slaves if they would lower their arms and terminate the war."¹¹⁴

"No such offer was ever made to me," Davis replied, "and I had no authority under the Constitution, or by any act of Congress, or by the people to negotiate any terms of peace except upon the recognition of the southern Confederacy and could not, nor never would have entertained, myself, any proposition of peace on any other basis."

Sutherlin and Davis did not fill all of their conversation with views on the war. Sutherlin later related that Davis was an interesting conversationalist on subjects as diverse as his Mississippi farming practices and his activities in Mexico, where he spent some time during the Mexican War.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Davis formally expressed his sentiments in his last official proclamation, which he wrote April 4, 1865 in the Sutherlin home. He explained to his countrymen the necessity of leaving Richmond, but cautioned them against giving in to the enemy. Their continued strength would bring them victory and with it their cherished independence. He encouraged them to follow his example: "Animated by that confidence in your spirit and fortitude, which never yet has failed me, I announce to you, my countrymen, that it is my purpose to maintain your cause with my whole heart and soul; that I will never consent to abandon to the enemy one foot of the soil of any one of the States of the Confederacy." Davis ended his address by asking Southerners to have faith in God and to mount a new offensive against their Northern enemy.¹¹⁶

On April 5, the Danville Register published Davis' address in a special edition. His words eased the tension that had been mounting in Danville and temporarily restored the town's confidence. However, as the days passed without news of Lee's situation, citizens again became uneasy. On April 8, Davis finally received a wire from Breckenridge. Lee was midway between Richmond and Danville; yet said

¹¹⁶ Pollock, Sketch Book, 53; "Address of President Davis," ibid., 53-54.

Breckenridge, "the situation is not favorable."¹¹⁷

That night brought more bad news. At 8 o'clock, Lt. John Sergeant Wise rode into the quiet town with word from General Lee, the first since Davis had left Richmond. Wise entered the Sutherlin dining room, where Davis and his cabinet were assembled. Regretfully he reported that Lee would soon be forced to surrender. Davis silently received the report and asked to speak with Wise alone. During this meeting he entrusted his last message for Lee to the care of Wise, though Lee surrendered before it reached him.¹¹⁸

Even in these darkest of times, the Sutherlins extended cheerful hospitality to visitors. After his long and arduous ride from Halifax, Wise was near exhaustion. Noticing this, Sutherlin summoned a servant who prepared a meal of "milk, corn-coffee, butter and rolls, and cold turkey" for Wise, while at the same time he apologized for the crowded conditions in his home.

On April 10, Danville's worst fears were realized as new word further confirmed Wises's bleak tidings. Captain W. P. Graves had earlier mounted an expedition to procure news of Lee's army. Upon his arrival in Charlotte County, Graves learned of Lee's impending surrender. Fearing

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 53, 55.

¹¹⁸ John S. Wise, The End of an Era (New York, 1899), 446.

capture by enemy troops, Graves and his party headed to Danville to tell Davis of Lee's actions. Davis immediately began preparations for the government's removal from the city on the Dan.¹¹⁹

News of Lee's surrender spread quickly throughout town. Shocked and saddened that dreams of a Southern Confederacy were now crushed, Danvillians nevertheless banded together to aid Davis in his departure. Residents prepared quantities of food for the departing government, as volunteers prepared trains for a speedy evacuation southward.¹²⁰

After Captain Graves confirmed Wise's earlier report, Davis summoned a cabinet meeting in the Sutherlin home. An associate asked each man in the room how much money he had with which to cover the expenses involved in the forthcoming trip. Each reported his finances except Davis. When questioned again, Davis disclosed that he had no gold, only useless Confederate notes. He then went to say goodbye to his hostess. Reflecting her family's generous nature, Mrs. Sutherlin offered her departing guest \$2,000 in gold. Davis tearfully rejected this kindness, stating: "No, I cannot take your money. You and your husband are young and will

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Pollock, Sketch Book, 56.

need your money, while I am an old man. I don't reckon I shall need anything very long."¹²¹

Davis repeatedly thanked the Sutherlins for their hospitality and related that he believed he would soon be captured and killed. Davis then left for the depot, where hundreds of concerned citizens crowded tearfully to bid farewell to their government.¹²²

Officials were not the only ones fleeing from the federal government. Citizens and remnants of Lee's army who straggled into town crowded the platform at the depot in hopes of boarding a train to safety. For the first time, residents of this small southside town feared invasion by the Union army. Officials opened warehouses full of supplies for beloved soldiers so that their contents could be emptied before Yankees arrived and helped themselves to the spoils. Crowds gathered to divide the remaining food, clothes and even tobacco left in the stores, then made their way to the depot, where trains carrying the last remains of the Confederate Government rumbled off into the night. Danville's brief reign as Capital of the Confederacy had ended.

¹²¹ Danville Bee, Mar. 26, 1961; Burton N. Harrison, "The Capture of Jefferson Davis," in The Century, XXVII (1883), 131.

¹²² Richmond Dispatch, May 31, 1893.

The days that followed the government's evacuation were ones of turmoil and upheaval. Storehouses had been looted of their contents, but the arsenal, located just below the depot, still housed vast quantities of gunpowder and other combustible materials. The day after the cabinet departed Danville, an explosion at the arsenal rocked the town. Details of the incident are sketchy, and no one could determine an exact cause of the explosion. Several men were near the arsenal collecting gunpowder for their own use when the explosion occurred. Survivors discovered fourteen bodies at the site, but it was presumed that there were more undiscovered deaths connected with the incident.¹²³

The situation at Danville indeed looked bleak. Because they had so materially aided the Confederate cause, city officials expected federal authorities to treat them harshly. Almost immediately, however, her leading citizens took charge and prevented destruction of the city.

Though she had resigned her lofty position as capital of the Confederacy, Danville was to play yet another important governmental role. The afternoon of the 10th brought another distinguished visitor. As Davis was preparing to leave, Governor William Smith established Danville as the temporary capital of Virginia. Smith learned

¹²³ Pollock, Sketch Book, 60-62.

of Lee's surrender and met briefly with Davis before going to the home of W. Keen, from whose home the government of Virginia momentarily functioned. Smith later established offices at the home of Captain William T. Clark, where he remained until he heard of President Lincoln's assassination. Thus, Danville's loftiest distinctions came at a time of simultaneous glory and despair. Her citizens gallantly served the Confederacy in all possible ways and regretted they could not do more for the noble cause.¹²⁴

On Monday afternoon, Confederate Gen. Lunsford Lomax arrived in Danville with orders to burn the bridges that spanned the Dan River. Immediately, Col. Withers led a group of Danville's leading citizens who requested that they not destroy the bridges. They pointed out that the river was shallow and easy to cross. Therefore, anyone wishing to escape Danville could still do so, and they successfully convinced General Lomax to spare gutting the town by fire.¹²⁵

A week passed without word of Johnston's army or Davis' flight. Then on April 26, the remainder of Confederate forces surrendered near Durham, N. C. Union authorities dispatched the VI Army Corps under Gen. Horatio Wright to

¹²⁴ Ibid., 63-65.

¹²⁵ Withers, Autobiography, 215.

Danville. On April 27, blueclad troops occupied the town. A committee headed by Walker met the troops at the edge of town and surrendered Danville to their care. Both sides were cordial and carried out their duties with little hostility.¹²⁶

The seizure of the daily paper, The Register, was the first order of business for the Federal troops. They immediately began publishing their own news sheet, The Sixth Corps. Seeing Northern views in print surely was not palatable to Southern citizens who, just days earlier, had been at the center of Confederate operations. The Federal Provost Marshall, Col. Fletcher of Maine, established his headquarters in the office of Col. Withers, who gladly relinquished his office upon request. Withers realized that his home, where the office was located, would now be protected from any ravaging Union soldiers. As it turned out, Federal soldiers held looting and destruction to a minimum. Southern soldiers who entered Danville following Lee's surrender caused more havoc in their search for goods than the occupying troops did during their tenure at Danville.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Danville Register, May 18, 1865; Danville Bee, May 4, 1861.

¹²⁷ Pollock, Sketch Book, 66; Withers, Autobiography, 227.

Once again the Sutherlin family displayed courteous hospitality to Danville's visitors. During the occupation of the city, Gen. Wright and his staff encamped across the road from Sutherlin's home. Instead of being an imposition on their recent enemy, Wright undertook all measures to foster a pleasant relationship with them. To quench his hostess' thirst, the General sent lemonade and sugar to Mrs. Sutherlin. He also offered steaks and other luxuries to the Sutherlins, and they too were careful to insure the General a pleasant stay. Major Sutherlin realized the folly in begrudging his captor, but he did not surrender his loyalty to the Confederacy. When questioned about the location of Confederate icehouses, Sutherlin replied: "It is not my business to give you this information. Your commanders can find out for themselves. Meanwhile, General Wright and his staff are welcome to ice out of my own ice-house."¹²⁸

Mrs. Sutherlin acted as the perfect hostess at the request of her husband, but she did not particularly enjoy her duties, as she still felt ill-at-ease with the victorious Northerners.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Avary, Dixie, 52-53.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 55.

Within the next week, Union Gen. George G. Meade and his staff arrived in Danville. Sutherlin greeted the visitors at the depot and offered them lodging at his residence. Again, Mrs. Sutherlin displayed the signs of a perfect hostess prompting the General to remark: "Madam, Southern hospitality has not been praised too highly. I trust some day that I may see you north that I may have the opportunity to match your courtesy." The commander of the Army of the Potomoc then imparted his sincere wishes that no harm would befall his generous hosts and offered his services if ever there arose a need for them.¹³⁰

Mrs. Sutherlin responded to his offer by requesting a favor: "I would ask you to use your influence to secure more gracious hospitality to our President, who is in prison." Federal troops from Michigan eventually captured Davis in Georgia on May 10. Much to the pleasure of Mrs. Sutherlin, they spared his life.¹³¹

The occupation of Danville was not as trying as citizens had expected it would be. Federal troops prohibited the wearing of Confederate uniforms but did not impose any serious restraints on the daily lives of Danvillians. In fact, routines quickly returned to normal.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 53-54.

¹³¹ Ibid., 54; Pollock, Sketch Book, 66.

Regular church services returned, schools could operate, and businesses reopened under federal guidelines. No serious altercations occurred between townsmen and soldiers, but officials provided means for citizens to redress any complaints they had with federal authorities. Thus, the severe tribulations that citizens had associated with federal occupation did not occur, and the transition back to Union control progressed smoothly.¹³²

One of the first tasks that befell Major Sutherlin was restoring his status in the Union. On May 29, President Andrew Johnson issued a proclamation of amnesty which expanded Lincoln's plan for restoration to the Union. However, Johnson's plan denied certain persons the opportunity to pledge allegiance to the Union unless they received a personal pardon from the Chief Executive. Sutherlin fell into such a class. The thirteenth category of exemptions excluded "persons who have voluntarily participated in said rebellion and the estimated value of whose taxable property is over twenty thousand dollars."¹³³

¹³² Daily Corps, May 2, 1865, microfilm, Danville Public Library.

¹³³ William Sutherlin to Andrew Johnson, June 3, 1865, Sutherlin Papers, Duke.

In his appeal for amnesty, Sutherlin assured President Johnson that he had remained loyal to the Union until the matter of secession was beyond his control. To support his claims, Sutherlin asked his close friends, Levi Holbrook and Samuel Bryant, to send supporting letters to the President. Lieutenant Col. Thomas Barker of the Union army, who was stationed in Danville after the war, also recommended that the President grant amnesty to Sutherlin.¹³⁴

Holbrook, a Northerner, confirmed Sutherlin's Union position prior to the war and reported that Sutherlin's intervention enabled him to live peacefully in Danville during the war, as Sutherlin had blocked an order that called for Holbrook's departure from Danville. "Mr. Sutherlin on hearing of it went to the parties and informed them without my knowledge, that when they compelled me to leave, they would have to send him also and that they would not send him alive. After this I had no further trouble in Danville and have lived with my friend Mr. Sutherlin in his house during the war, where I am now receiving all the kindness a child could show a parent." Holbrook was convinced that Sutherlin should receive an official pardon and complete amnesty.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Ibid. Levi Holbrook to Andrew Johnson, June 3, 1865; Samuel S. Bryant to Andrew Johnson, June 3, 1865; Thomas E. Barker to Andrew Johnson, June 3, 1865, ibid.

As Danville had not borne the brunt of any battles on her territory, reconstructing her economy was easier than in towns that had been gutted by fire or looted by enemy troops. Freedmen initially presented few problems for their former masters. The Freedmen's Bureau was the target of much animosity in many areas, but not in Danville. On Christmas Day, 1865, fire consumed the building that contained the Bureau. Sutherlin, who was at this time attending business in New Orleans, owned this structure. The report that he received stated that the fire "resulted from sheer carelessness--two drunken negroes up stairs & let the fire roll down on there bed clothes." Fortunately, Sutherlin was financially able to sustain such a loss.¹³⁶

Far from resenting the status of the newly freed Negroes, one Danville citizen sought channels through which to improve their lot. I. Clark journeyed to Boston to enlist aid and advice in establishing churches and schools for former slaves. He also hoped to change the opinion of many Northerners who believed that former masters still treated Negroes poorly. En route to Boston, Clark visited with Holbrook, who reported Clark's ideas to Sutherlin. "He said he had about 200 slaves and 4500 acres of land that the

¹³⁵ Levi Holbrook to Andrew Johnson, June 3, 1865, *ibid.*

¹³⁶ William B. Payne to William Sutherlin, Dec. 26, 1865, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

darkies were cultivating the land were slaves; that he wanted to give up his white congregation and preach to the negroes. He said he wanted to educate those who had been his slaves and prepare them for a better world."¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Levi Holbrook to William Sutherlin, May 31, 1866, ibid.

Chapter IV

LATER LIFE

The opening months of 1866 found Southerners still struggling to rebuild fortunes lost in the war. People from all over Virginia wrote Sutherlin to relate their forlorn financial state. Each told a different story, but all closed their letters with requests for loans. Apparently, trade in Danville was stagnant, and Sutherlin passed the winter months in New Orleans conducting business. Letters to Sutherlin described the town as dull; many writers solicited his aid in finding employment in New Orleans or other Southern cities. However, others did not find the town so boring. Returning soldiers caught the "marrying fever" which swept through Danville, and they began struggling to build fortunes of their own.¹³⁸

Sutherlin's business interests in Virginia soon prospered anew. He received word from his Halifax farm that all was well. Workers were sowing bushels of oats, repairing fences, and constructing buildings. Hands were sowing clover, and his wheat was the finest in the area. Hoping to avoid Northern markets, Sutherlin spent much of his time in

¹³⁸ M. E. Carter to William Sutherlin, Jan. 10 1866; J. M. Hines to William Sutherlin, Jan. 22, 1866; A. S. Bryant to William Sutherlin, Feb. 18, 1866, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

New Orleans and was unusually interested in business affairs in Cuba. Reports from Cuba stated that "Business here, I regret to say is not very promising at present our market has been entirely flooded with Northern Produce and until the present supply is reduced nothing can be done save in good leaf land."¹³⁹

An associate in Richmond sent Sutherlin copies of "Cuban Pictures" and information on Mexican immigration. Sutherlin also desired a copy of Island of Cuba, which a friend was unable to procure.¹⁴⁰

At this time, Sutherlin began to diversify further his business interests. The Sutherlin and Wren bonded warehouse in New Orleans commissioned the schooner "Revere" for transacting business. After firing a drunken captain, the firm successfully began trading in new commodities such as molasses and cigars--the molasses to be used in the firm's distillery opening in June, 1866. A warehouse agent reported to Sutherlin that he could "rest assured of a very handsome revenue from it. We expect to turn out about 500 gallons of whiskey daily. We calculate that it will fully pay for itself in forty days and make money at a like rate

¹³⁹ William B. Payne to William Sutherlin, Mar. 11, 1866; Johnathan A. Belvin to William Sutherlin, Mar. 24, 1866, ibid.

¹⁴⁰ William D. Coleman to William Sutherlin, June 20, 1866, ibid.

thereafter."¹⁴¹

Sutherlin personally abhorred indulgence in alcohol, but believed in its medicinal qualities. In fact, later that month, he received notice from Halifax County that a friend had acquired a barrel of Gibson and Sons' best rye whiskey. This was supposedly a superior brand and Sutherlin was invited to inspect it.¹⁴²

Sutherlin actively involved himself in the educational pursuits of young white people of his town, by serving as president of the Board of Trustees of the Danville Female College. Sutherlin strongly believed that education and hard work were the two most important rungs on the ladder of success. These pursuits should be attended to before matters of politics. This is perhaps why Sutherlin never acted upon suggestions that he run in 1866 for governor of Virginia.¹⁴³

In the past, Sutherlin had enjoyed the respect of all Danville citizens; yet in 1866, a scandal, originally involving only his brother and his nephew, E. M. Pace, threatened his reputation. What began as a misunderstanding

¹⁴¹ C. M. Givens to William Sutherlin, May 28, 1866, ibid.

¹⁴² Henry J. Bonner to William Sutherlin, June 26, 1866, ibid.

¹⁴³ Hagan, Danville, 75; John M. Sutherlin to William Sutherlin, Sept. 4, 1866, ibid.

between John Sutherlin and his nephew escalated into a mud-slinging battle in the press that involved other members of the family as well. Pace and his father (who was married to Sutherlin's youngest sister Paulinia) were associated with the firm of T. J. Talbott & Co. In October, 1866, they charged that the Warren & Sutherlin firm had cheated them out of tobacco. Pace stated that Sutherlin knew that he could prove this, and thus avoided travelling to Virginia to answer the charges. Over the next few days the two parties passed unfriendly letters containing irrational accusations, and Pace threatened to publish letters defaming Sutherlin's character throughout the entire South.¹⁴⁴

At this point, Sutherlin requested the advice of his wise and older brother. The Major counselled him to stop all correspondence to Pace pending a law suit declared against Warren and Sutherlin. Pace then began communicating with the Major. He accused him of unnecessary interference and warned him to stay out of the affair, as it only involved his brother. This possibly could have ended the elder Sutherlin's role in the affair. Yet, on October 26, Pace issued a large handbill which read: "During my recent visit to Richmond, one John P. Hodnett posted in the streets

¹⁴⁴ William Sutherlin to E. M. Pace, Oct. 1866, *ibid.*; General Records; E. M. Pace to William Sutherlin, Oct. 13, 1866, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

of Danville, a placard for the purpose ostensibly of denouncing my character, but really is subservience to the cowardly promptings of Major W.T. Sutherlin." Hodnett was the son of Sutherlin's other sister, Narcissa.¹⁴⁵

Thus, Pace had asked Sutherlin not to involve himself, but he had publicly slandered the Major's character. Who could expect him to remain a bystander now? The scandal festered into November, when a panel of third parties issued its settlement. The third clause of this agreement later exonerated Sutherlin of any wrongdoing and restored his good name to the public. "There being no evidence that Wm. T. Sutherlin has done anything in this affair to offend or give just cause of complaint to E. M. Pace or any other persons full reparation should be made to him by an unqualified retraxit of the language of the placards published by E.M. Pace and his friends." This agreement restored Sutherlin's reputation in the eyes of his fellow Danvillians.¹⁴⁶

In fact, the Pace affair may have even elevated Sutherlin's status in the community. He received numerous letters of commendation, such as the following: "It is a repetition of the old story of the viper stinging the bosom

¹⁴⁵ William Sutherlin to E. M. Pace, Oct. 1866; E. M. Pace to William Sutherlin, Oct. 10, 1866; Handbill written by E. M. Pace, Oct. 1866, *ibid.*; General Records.

¹⁴⁶ Thomas J. Patrick and L. W. Shumaker, "Settlement of Pace-Sutherlin Affair," Oct., 1866, *ibid.*

that warmed it into life for now something of the obligation which the family owes you for their respectability and position in society, but I could not have believed that any member of it would have proved so utterly destitute of every sentiment of gratitude and manliness in courageously resenting and resisting the assault. There is nothing more to do except to play the bully yourself in search of revenge. That I think would injure you, and justly." The family dispute was even compared to feuds such as the famous Lancaster-York war in England, but after the announcement of the settlement, the feud quickly subsided.¹⁴⁷

Sutherlin's successful ventures in farming prompted him to assume the presidency of the Virginia State Agricultural Society, from 1866 to 1868. As president, Sutherlin addressed the State Agricultural Convention on several occasions. He often spoke on the topic of his successful employment of Negro labor on his farms. Sutherlin ran his farms as he would any business. He paid his blacks on a regular scale and practiced subsistence farming. In this way he encountered no outside interference, and his well-paid hands were content to work for him. Sutherlin employed a capable overseer to act as manager; his laborers were under a contract to perform certain duties for their

¹⁴⁷ Julius A. Gray to William Sutherlin, Mar. 24, 1867; John H. Gilmer to William Sutherlin, Mar. 27, 1867, *ibid.*

wages. Sutherlin became convinced that black labor paved the road to prosperity for the struggling postwar South. He believed that "no race was more valuable than the Negro; for his docility, tractability and affectionate disposition rendered him just the material desirable and necessary."¹⁴⁸

Negro labor alone would not lift the South from its war-ravaged state, however. Gone were the days when planters could watch their blacks perform all manual labor. White men must now toil alongside black to rebuild the South and make her again the proud and successful section she was before the war.¹⁴⁹

Of course, not all war veterans were physically able to conduct business as usual. In the Civil War the South lost 258,000 men either in battle or from disease, and many others were incapacitated. Early in 1867, a long-lost relative told Sutherlin of his financial situation. He complained that the war had devastated his family. "William got his write arm Broke in the Battle of georgia he can use his hand some he cant shut it peces of bone came out of his arm." He continued that he had no money and no help; and

¹⁴⁸ Memorial, 26; Richmond Dispatch, Nov. 23, 1866; William Sutherlin, "Address Before Agricultural Convention," Nov. 22, 1866, Richmond, Va.; discussed in Alruthus Ambush Taylor, The Negro in the Reconstruction of Virginia, (Lancaster, Pa., 1926), 74-75.

¹⁴⁹ Taylor, The Negro, 75.

since Sutherlin was the wealthiest man in Danville, he surely could lend his cousin some money so that he could start over as the South was doing.¹⁵⁰

Some areas did not fare as well as Danville in the aftermath of the war. The President of Randolph Macon College informed Sutherlin that Yankee troops and blacks had inflicted \$10,000 damage on the school grounds. Others wrote requesting capital to repair churches ravaged in recent months. Danville was revamping one of her churches as well, but not because of war damage. The Methodist Church on Wilson Street was now too small to accommodate its growing congregation. Church members decided to erect a larger structure but were unable to agree on its new location. One faction believed the church should remain downtown, whereupon it purchased a nearby lot and constructed the Lynn Street Church. Others, including Major Sutherlin, wished to relocate to the west end of town. Displaying his deep devotion to the Church, Sutherlin purchased the site of the present day Main Street Methodist Church and work began on their new home.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ James Barnett to William Sutherlin, Feb. 4, 1867, Sutherlin Papers, UNC.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Johnson to William Sutherlin, Feb. 13, 1867; J. D. Blackwell to William Sutherlin, Mar. 12, 1867, *ibid.* Hairston, A Brief History, 53.

The war may have ended in 1865, but mutual friendship was not yet established. Despite the success some planters were having rebuilding their farms, others doubted the future of the South. Many planters still feared the North's domination and mistrusted commercial transactions with Yankee businessmen. One associate confided to Sutherlin that he believed "a great revolution is approaching with accelerating speed and power. A terrible financial crisis is, I also think, not more than two years ahead, waylaying the road this nation is travelling. A sweeping confiscation of the South is impending. The days of Robisprim and Marat are I fear not far away. When they come then for Canada and Cuba! or better hell than here and southward."¹⁵²

Sutherlin's success in business and agriculture earned him respect and influence among his fellow Virginians. Many of his business partners appealed to him to use his influence to help break the yoke that Northern manufacturers still had on Southern commerce. One solution that many merchants discussed was the strengthening of Virginia's own ports. If these cities were enlarged and modernized, foreign merchants would trade directly with Southern companies. This would eliminate many Northern middlemen who conducted their trade in the harbors of New York and

¹⁵² A. F. Harvie to William Sutherlin, Jan. 18, 1867, A. G. Haley to William Sutherlin, Mar. 9, 1867, ibid.

Boston.¹⁵³

Another benefit of improving Virginia's ports would be increased funds for internal improvements, which could be used to build roads and canals leading to these trade centers. Sutherlin received numerous requests to make public statements to stir those in power to decisive action. One merchant wrote that the South had "been forging the chains of our slavery for the last 27 years. We have been in literary, commercial, mechanical and political bondage to the North for the last 27 years." Measures had to be taken immediately to alleviate the degraded situation of Southern businessmen.¹⁵⁴

In March, 1867, the Mechanics Association of Danville invited Sutherlin to speak on the mechanical profession. Sutherlin gladly cooperated and delivered a lengthy, and enlightening oration. The main topic was the structuring of society into classes. He explained why mechanics and other manual laborers were members of the lower social classes. Such levels were necessary, but nothing could prevent mobility within the classes. In fact, his own life depicted such a transition between social levels. Sutherlin's parents had not been particularly wealthy, and he did not

¹⁵³ E. Dodson to William Sutherlin, Jan. 11, 1867, ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

receive the benefits of a higher education. Instead, he owed his success to diligent work and strict adherence to his goals.¹⁵⁵

Cautioning against being ashamed of the mechanical professions, Sutherlin provided the examples of Socrates, Paul and Benjamin Franklin as great men who had performed manual labor. Their accomplishments were the results of "sobriety, industry and intellect." He also cited President Andrew Jackson as one who rose from humble beginnings to the highest office in the land. All goals were attainable if one truly wanted to reach them.

The Major stated that history had stereotyped professions in the past, but it was not necessary to grant these labels validity. Young men from wealthy families traditionally entered the professions of law, medicine or sales and scorned such trades as smiths and carpenters. Sutherlin then asked his audience: "Who looks more like a man, such as God made in his own likeness--he who stands out in the open sunlight and with healthy, ruddy countenance beaded with the sweat of the land, and well knit sinewy frame, hurls his good axe into the stubborn forest tree, or he who with feeble frame, the inheritance of a hot-house

¹⁵⁵ William Sutherlin, "Address Before Mechanics Association of Danville," Mar. 11, 1867, Danville, Va., Virginia State Library, Richmond, Va. 1-6.

childhood, stands in the shade behind the merchants counter, and smilingly measures off for some fair customer, ten yards of calico, which he positively assures 'will wash?'"

In order to earn the respect of others, mechanics must first learn to revere the profession themselves. Sutherlin pointed out that law and medicine had commonly been referred to as "gentlemen's" professions. A gentleman, in his terms, was "a man of integrity and moral worth, who shows by his course to others, and his care of himself, that he values what is honest and true and lovely and of good report, both in himself and them." Thus, nothing prevented a man in the mechanical professions from being a gentleman. However, to uphold the reputation of a gentleman, one must frequent neither brothels nor billiard rooms or overindulge in alcohol. If one lowered himself to these standards, he deserved to remain with the lower classes.

Next, Sutherlin turned his attention to current affairs. He reminded his listeners that the South could no longer rely on slave labor. It was not dishonorable to work, and those who lived in the past would forever remain in the back seat of a progressive society. "They who lie down on roses to dream, will wake up to find that thorns have pierced them," warned Sutherlin. Only through hard work could one gain financial reward. Initially, one must

make sacrifices and endure the hardships associated with the arduous road to the top. "If you go slowly, by patient toil you will reach the summit."

He further emphasized that agriculture was the way of improvement for the South. Mechanics had an integral role in the healing process as well. Their duty was to invent more efficient technology to increase productivity. He also spoke of the Northern stranglehold from which the South must escape. He reiterated that Virginia need not depend on any outsider for her success. Her soil was rich and abounded in natural resources, and Virginia's citizens must apply their energies not to politics but to Virginia's financial prosperity.

One idea that Sutherlin proposed concerned increasing Virginia's population. He encouraged immigration schemes to replace labor lost with Lincoln's freeing of the slaves: "We want an intelligent class of immigrants who will come with their families. and bring capital sufficient to purchase and stock farms, and who will help to make up an industrious and moral population."

The state government should issue pamphlets describing all of the virtues of living in Virginia to lure European immigrants to settle here, rather than in Northern states. In the long run, another advantage of an increased

population would be funding for internal improvements. If Virginia refurbished her cities, the federal government would help finance railroads and other improvements to link their cities. Sutherlin's enthusiasm was boundless as he spoke of the exciting possibilities for his native state.

Sutherlin concluded his talk by stressing the importance of education for mechanics. Echoing the fact that Southern colleges catered to the wealthy, Sutherlin cried for program changes in Virginia's educational institutions. Courses at Southern schools centered around the arts, and Sutherlin wished to see Virginia change this, thereby leading the South in establishing mechanical and agricultural schools. Scientific training was necessary if the South hoped to become self-sufficient and free of the burdens of Northern market controls.

He urged Virginia to appropriate available funds in establishing a centrally located college to instruct Virginia's young farmers in innovative agricultural methods. A farm should adjoin the main campus so that students could begin applying their knowledge in practical farming methods. The curriculum would not abandon traditional courses, but would apply them to Virginia's particular problem. "We would not give up science for the plough, but plough scientifically."

These educational changes would not only benefit Virginia's farmers but would usher in improvements in other areas as well. Once Virginia displayed signs of self-aggrandizement, the federal government would show her more respect. Money for new railroads and canals would follow, and Virginia would soon regain her supremacy among her fellow states.

Sutherlin had rebounded quickly from inconveniences that accompanied the Civil War. While he was not pleased with the outcome of the war, he did not begrudge the North her victory. Vengeance was not a constructive attitude. Opposing the policies that the North imposed upon the South would not change their content. His opinions on slavery and other war-related issues may have remained the same, but Sutherlin no longer publicly expressed these sentiments.¹⁵⁶

A few years after the hostilities ended, Sutherlin joined several prominent southern citizens, including General Lee, in a statement of their attitude to their former enemy. "Whatever opinions may have prevailed in the past in regard to African Slavery or the right of a State to secede from the Union, we believe we express the unanimous judgment of the Southern people when we declare that they consider that those questions were decided by the war, and

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 8-27 passim.

that it is their intentions, in good faith, to abide by that decision. At the close of the war, the Southern people laid down their arms and sought to resume their former realations to the Government of the United States." Even though he accepted the fact that slavery had ended, Sutherlin still valued the labor of the free Negroes and fervently urged his associates to appreciate their labor as well.¹⁵⁷

As Sutherlin had successfully appealed to President Johnson for amnesty, his citizenship was secure. The restoration of Virginia to the Union, however, was another matter. Radical Republicans in Congress were attempting to secure the franchise for blacks. Many Southerners resented the efforts to include clauses providing for black suffrage in the new constitutions for Southern states.

In October, 1867, Virginians called a convention to draft a new constitution. This meeting, however, was shrouded in controversy before it even began. Many conservative whites hesitated to discuss a constitution that would most likely enfranchise blacks, and when a vote was taken to call this convention, many boycotted the polls. Thus, with almost 90% of the Negro population voting, the radicals secured a victory.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Robert E. Lee to W. S. Rosecrans, Aug. 26, 1865, Letterbook of Robert Edward Lee, R. E. Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

The Virginia convention met in December, 1868, to discuss Virginia's proposed constitution. Conservatives also gathered at this time to prepare their attack on the Radical Republicans. Alexander H. H. Stuart, a leader of Virginia Whigs, called for a meeting to be held in his hometown, Staunton, on Christmas Day, 1868. The men who gathered there mainly objected to two of the Republican ideas: Negro suffrage and the denial of the right to hold public office to anyone who had participated in the Confederate cause. They were especially resentful of Republican leaders John Curtiss Underwood and James W. Hunnicutt, who were active in the convention but who were not native Virginians.¹⁵⁹

Hoping to rally support, Stuart drafted a letter which denounced actions of the convention and stated that "almost everyone worthy of public trust will be disfranchised, not only as to office, but in regard to suffrage; and the political powers of the State will pass into the hands of strangers and adventurers."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ Allen W. Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925 (Charlottesville, Va., 1968), 6.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁶⁰ Jack P. Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, 1867-1879 (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1976), 68.

Writing under the pseudonym "Senex," Stuart caught the attention of Sutherlin, who held similar views. Stuart encountered difficulties in publishing his letter, but Sutherlin enlisted the aid of his friends in the publishing business, and "Senex" went to print on Christmas Day.¹⁶¹

Following the publication of his letter, Stuart arranged for another meeting of Conservatives. On December 31, they formed a "Committee of Nine" which would travel to Washington to discuss their ideas with the newly elected President, Ulysses S. Grant. Sutherlin was a member of this committee. These men told federal officials that Virginia would accept the Underwood Constitution, as it came to be called, if Congress would allow them to take one vote on the Constitution and a separate vote on its negro suffrage clause. Grant agreed to their proposal and scheduled a vote for July 6, 1869.¹⁶²

Thus, once again Sutherlin played a significant role in determining the future of Virginia politics. The activities of the Committee of Nine were the antithesis of the Radical

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 68; Alexander Robertson, Alexander Hugh Holmes Stuart (Richmond, Va., 1925), 269-70; Moger, Virginia, 9; Richmond Dispatch, Dec. 25, 1868.

¹⁶² Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, 69; Moger, Virginia, 9; James A. Bear (ed), "Henry A. Wise and the Campaign of 1873: Some Letters from the Papers of James Lawson Kemper," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LXII (1954), 320.

Republicans. From this split grew the Conservative Party, active in Virginia politics until 1883, when it evolved into the Democratic Party.

With the advent of the Conservative Party, Sutherlin grew increasingly active in politics. In 1869, he enthusiastically supported Gilbert Walker in the gubernatorial election. Equating Republican rule with black rule, Virginia Conservatives worked hard to insure their candidate's victory. The race against Republican candidate, H. H. Wells, was at first very tight. But financiers such as Sutherlin made monetary contributions to bolster Walker's campaign, and Walker won the election. Consequently, Virginia enjoyed a relatively peaceful reconstruction period under white conservatives.¹⁶³

The postwar years found Sutherlin more active in statewide politics. Yet he did not neglect his other obligations. Even with of the political uncertainty associated with Reconstruction, all was not grim in Virginia. In November, 1869, the State Agricultural Society staged an exhibition to display innovative agricultural methods and technology. The Society employed the slogan, "There's Life in the Old Land Yet," and encouraged everyone to participate. In honor of the fair, Sutherlin, still the

¹⁶³ Maddex, The Virginia Conservatives, 80; Moger, Virginia, 11.

society's president, presented an address on the merits of Virginia agriculture.

He reiterated many of the sentiments he had proclaimed in his address before the Danville Mechanics Association two years earlier, but centered his theme more on the benefits of an annual agricultural exhibition. Again, stressing hard work and persistence as the path to rejuvenation, Sutherlin added: "A still greater good is accomplished by annually bringing together the wisdom, patriotism, energy and skill of the State in grand mass meeting for consultation and mutual improvement, when the men of science, the mechanic and the farmer, can meet here in free and untrammelled intercourse and work together for the common good."

Sutherlin impressed upon his audience all of Virginia's attributes and explained the benefits of living in such a wonderful state. Virginia had much to offer its citizens and they should put her resources to their best advantage. "Providence has been most lavish in this bounties in bestowing on Virginia a genial climate, a fertile soil, boundless forests, and water-power sufficient to turn all the spindles of a world, these gifts bring blessings to us not when we are sluggards, but when we are diligent to turn them to our own profit and use."

He cautioned against relying on others to utilize these resources. If someone failed to make a profit, the blame would rest solely on his own shoulders. Southerners could not view the North as the reason for their state of poverty. Their own bad management in the past was also a contributing factor. Citizens should be proud of their heritage, and relate it to their children, but the time had come to look forward to new methods to ensure their liberty and happiness.¹⁶⁴

Sutherlin not only preached this advice to native Virginians, he related his opinion to Northerners as well. In May, 1871, editors from a Northern based-newspaper stopped in Danville on their tour of Southern cities. Sutherlin was among the city dignitaries who greeted and visited with them. He praised Danville's industries, especially her tobacco market, and even invited the guests to settle in Virginia. Noting that Virginia's climate was superior to that of Northern areas, Sutherlin welcomed immigration from Yankee states. He pointed out that their "experience. . . .energy [and] capital" could only benefit Virginia and help her to surpass all other states in

¹⁶⁴ "Address of William T. Sutherlin, President of the State Agriculture Society," in Ralph M. Brown, "Agriculture in Virginia, 1850-1875," Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

productivity and profitability.¹⁶⁵

Companies who recognized Sutherlin's speaking talent negotiated with him, and he subsequently entered into many advertising contracts. With his reputation as a successful planter firmly established, Sutherlin was a persuasive spokesman for agricultural products. Testimonials such as this one for tobacco fertilizer were used in advertising campaigns for southern firms: "I have used your tobacco Fertilizer four years, experimenting with Peruvian guano and a large number of manufactured manures at the same time, and it gives me pleasure to state that your Tobacco Fertilizer has given better satisfaction than any used, for both bright and dark tobacco. I have also found it very valuable as a permanent improver of the soil."¹⁶⁶

Sutherlin diversified his interests further when he became a trustee of the University Publishing Company. This firm published books such as McGuffey's Reader and other works used in Virginia schools. As a trustee, Sutherlin recommended his close friend Robert Withers as an agent for the firm in Virginia.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Danville Register, May 30, 1871.

¹⁶⁶ William Sutherlin to William Gilham, Mar. 2, 1871, Sutherlin Papers, Duke.

¹⁶⁷ Circular from University Publishing Company to County Superintendents and Social Trustees of Virginia, ibid. William Sutherlin to E. J. Harvie, Oct. 26, 1871, Harvie

The year 1871 brought personal joy to the Sutherlin household. On November 22, their daughter, Jane Lindsey married Francis Smith of Alexandria. Smith taught at the Virginia Military Institute, so the couple lived fairly close by and Sutherlin was not deprived of the company of his only child.¹⁶⁸

Citizens throughout the state knew Sutherlin as a vivacious promoter of Virginia's welfare, but it was not until 1871 that he became formally involved in state politics. On December 5 of that year, Sutherlin began a term in Virginia's House of Delegates. One of the first orders of business was the establishment of a Committee on Finance which would settle questions on the public debt and distribute federal funds allocated to Virginia. Sutherlin was one of twenty-four members on this joint committee. Feeling as he did about the education of Virginia's youth, Sutherlin spent most of his energy devising a plan for distributing funds provided for in the Morrill Act. This act channelled funds for Sutherlin's pet project--an agricultural college.¹⁶⁹

Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

¹⁶⁸ General Records; interview with Mrs. Ellie F. Holton, Dec. 20, 1984.

¹⁶⁹ House Journal and Documents, 1871-1872, Virginia State Library, 124.

Each state received an amount of land-scrip proportional to its number of U. S. Congressional Representatives. The proceeds from its sale were to be used for the establishment of agricultural and mechanical colleges, providing greater opportunities for higher education. When the Virginia legislature opened discussion on the distribution of her funds, it unleashed a storm of controversy centering around the location of the new institution. The University of Virginia and the Virginia Military Institute each had friends in the legislature who argued that their school should be the recipient of these federal funds.¹⁷⁰

Sutherlin argued vehemently against this proposal, stating that it would violate the terms of the Morrill Act. These schools were already established, and their avowed purpose was not to promote agriculture and mechanical arts. If the legislature allotted available funds to these institutions, scientific study would remain subservient to the arts.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Frederick Rudolph, The American College and University: A History (New York, 1962), 252; Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 24, 1872.

¹⁷¹ William Sutherlin, "Address Before the Virginia House of Delegates," Jan. 24, 1872, in Duncan Lyle Kinnear, The First 100 Years: A History of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Blacksburg, Va., 1972), 34.

Further pleading the cause of a separate institution, Sutherlin cited examples of other states that had received funds from the Morrill Act. He even pointed out that Congress was investigating states which had misused their funds. On January 24, 1872, Sutherlin delivered an impassioned plea to his fellow delegates for distributing the land-scrip. In this discourse he repeated many of the points made in earlier speeches outlining the benefits of a mechanical education. If this plan for a new college passed, Sutherlin warned against sectional rivalry in determining the site of this school. He reminded his associates that this institution would benefit all Virginians.¹⁷²

Sutherlin's persistence was its own reward. The state agreed to establish a separate institution for the study of agriculture and the mechanical arts. This school would not neglect the arts, as they were an integral part of a well-rounded education. Instead, they would only supplement a more technical curriculum than could be found in other Virginia colleges. Sutherlin then served on a House committee to outline the purpose and the curriculum of Virginia's new institute of higher learning. The House of Delegates approved Sutherlin's measures on March 19, 1872,

¹⁷² Richmond Dispatch, Jan. 24, 1872.

and the concept of the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College at Blacksburg became a reality.¹⁷³

The southwest Virginia community which housed the Preston-Olin Institute purchased the land-scrip at ninety-five cents an acre and immediately began planning for the new addition to their town. To supervise this organization, the Governor appointed a Board of Trustees which met throughout the summer, preparing the college for its opening in the fall. Sutherlin served on this committee, thereby directing the new institution in its formative years.¹⁷⁴

October 21, 1872 was a jubilant day in the Sutherlin household. On this day, Janie Smith gave birth to a daughter, Janie Sutherlin Smith. The Smiths' familial pattern mirrored that of the Sutherlins as their other daughter, Ella, died at an early age in 1876. Sutherlin doted on his only grandchild and spent as much time as possible with her, especially after her mother's untimely death in 1876.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Kinnear, The First 100 Years, 52; "Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College," Educational Journal of Virginia, III (1872), 382-83; Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, Its History and Organization (1872), Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

¹⁷⁴ House of Delegates Journal 1872-3 (1873), 5. Kinnear, The First 100 Years, 45.

Since the Civil War, railroads played a significant role in the economy of Danville. The line running southward through Danville was a major means of transporting supplies during the war. Afterwards it was a shipping route for tobacco. The immediate postwar years were ones of neglect for the Richmond-Danville Railroad. Yankee troops had occupied the rail lines, which were in dire need of repair. However, Southerners busied themselves with the rebuilding of their personal property, and very few funds were available to improve the state of the railroad. Once again, Sutherlin rescued the town. Knowing that the railroad was of vital importance to Danville's economy, Sutherlin intervened to thwart takeover efforts by the federal government. He contributed large sums of money to the restoration of the road which was crucial to his livelihood as well as Danville's.¹⁷⁶

As a proponent of internal improvements, Sutherlin instigated the construction of two new rail lines that ran through Danville. In 1873, the governor granted a charter for the Danville and New River Railroad. Sutherlin served as a Director for this road until 1879 when, on August 20, the stockholders unanimously elected him president. This

¹⁷⁵ General Records.

¹⁷⁶ Memorial, 28

line worked closely with another of Sutherlin's interests, the Richmond and Danville, in extending tracks to Martinsville. Other lines, particularly those from neighboring North Carolina, wanted to gain this territory as a part of their road. Yet the directors were persistent, and the Danville line soon stretched to Martinsville.¹⁷⁷

Sutherlin was influential in the building of still another Danville line, the Milton and Sutherlin. This was a small narrow-gauge line which ran between the two communities. The Major owned a mill at Sutherlin, which is perhaps why he supervised the construction of this new road. Serving as its president as well, Sutherlin managed the welfare of the convicts who built the line, providing them with food, clothing and some pay. Completed in 1878, the railroad joined the Richmond and Danville and the Atlantic and Danville and operated for the next sixteen years. Sutherlin's efforts in its construction did not pass unnoticed. The wood-burning engine that pulled the daily train took the name of Sutherlin's granddaughter and was affectionately known as "Little Janie."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ Pollock, Sketch Book, 76-79; "Minutes, 1875-1879, of Danville New River Railroad," Stockholders Meeting, Aug. 20, 1879, Martinsville, Va., Southern Railway Archives, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

¹⁷⁸ "Recollections of Henry Power, Onnie Milloway and C. A. Trevilian," Danville Then and Now (Danville, Va., 1966), 5.

Sutherlin's interest in education was not confined solely to agriculture and mechanics. In 1880, five years after the close of the Danville Female College, the Virginia Board of Education met and decided to replace this institution with a new Methodist school for women. In May, 1883, Sutherlin began serving on the Board of Trustees of the Danville College for Young Ladies. This forerunner of Stratford College instructed ladies in music, art, and foreign languages as well as traditional English, math and science.¹⁷⁹

The first decade after the war had found Sutherlin dividing his time between state and local interests. However, the opening years of the 1880's afforded him the opportunity of combining the two. During the Reconstruction era, Democrats peacefully ruled Virginia; but with the controversy over the public debt intensifying, factions arose in local and state political circles. Democrats who favored adjusting the state debt broke away from traditional members of their party and joined with black Republicans to form the Readjuster Party.

¹⁷⁹ Alvin L. Hall The History of Stratford College (Danville, Va.), 1974, 18-19; Thomas Whitehead, Virginia: A Handbook, Its History, Climate, Mineral Wealth, Educational, Agricultural and Industrial Advantages (Richmond, Va., 1893), 154.

Under the leadership of Gen. William Mahone, this faction, known as the Coalition Party, won a majority in Danville's 1882 local elections. Negroes and carpetbaggers serving as policemen and council members now controlled Danville. Although the majority of the populace of Danville was black, whites nevertheless resented this scandalous break from previous governments. However, conservative Democrats, including Sutherlin, were in no position to alleviate the situation.

Since they had no political leverage, a group of Danville's conservative businessmen drafted a letter. The "Danville Circular" described government by the coalition party. It pointed out that blacks outnumbered whites in Danville, but white citizens paid a greater proportion of taxes. If the Negroes were running the town, they should support their efforts with their tax money. The circular further described conditions under black rule by citing examples of the degradation and deplorable situation Danville was now facing. In November, 1883, reaction to this circular erupted into violence. A group of Readjusters met and denounced the contents of the circular. This prompted a retaliatory meeting of concerned Democrats who then reaffirmed the stance taken in their letter. During this second meeting a disturbance outside resulted in the "Danville Riot."

Racial tension was heightened due to the upcoming election; and when whites and blacks exchanged menacing words, fighting erupted. Shots were fired, and four blacks died from their wounds. Police investigated these murders but received conflicting accounts of the incident, with answers to their questions depending on which race they questioned.

The city council summoned a committee of forty citizens to question witnesses of both races and to compile a report on the incident. Sutherlin chaired this committee. The group studied the situation and on November 12 presented its findings. They concluded that the town quickly settled down after the riot, and voters were free to visit the polls on November 6. No racist agitation prevented anyone from voting. To further verify their findings, Sutherlin requested the commander of the army unit that monitored the polls to confirm that no violence occurred on election day. The presence of troops may have eased tensions and allowed voters to be less inhibited when voting, but the riot did have its effects on election results. Reaction against Negro rule manifested itself at the polls, with the Democratic party regaining all official positions in Danville. News of the trouble in Danville quickly spread throughout the state. This news, combined with anti-Mahone

feelings, allowed the Democrats to dominate once again.¹⁸⁰

With the Democratic party again in power, Sutherlin's political involvement increased. In the later years of his life, he served on the Democratic State Executive Committee. Like most large Virginia businessmen, Sutherlin supported the Democratic party with his time and money. As they tried to wrench control from the Republicans in the late 1880's, Sutherlin travelled around the state campaigning for Democratic candidates who were involved in close races. Yet Sutherlin's failing health soon forced him to curtail his political activities.¹⁸¹

He did not retire completely from the public life. In July, 1903, Sutherlin planned a speaking engagement in Bedford County. While speaking to a friend about his proposed trip, he remarked that his health had improved. However, on the night of July 20, Sutherlin suffered an attack of angina pectoris. Doctors at first believed his problem was indigestion for it soon passed, and Sutherlin resumed normal activities the next day. However, that night he was stricken again and around 2 a.m., doctors summoned his family.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Pollock, Sketch Book, 85-86, 92-99.

¹⁸¹ Memorial, 28; Danville Register, Nov. 2, 1889, as cited in "Danville History, 1880-1900," typescript in Danville Public Library.

Sutherlin's wife and doctor both expressed hope that he would respond to treatment, but Sutherlin himself remarked that he knew he was dying. His suffering was brief; at 3 a.m. on July 22, Sutherlin died. Danville had surely lost one of her most devoted citizens. Sutherlin loved his town, and in all of his endeavors, strove to preserve her best interests.

In the days that followed his death, Sutherlin's family received telegrams of condolences from all over the state. Mayor Harry Wooding formed a committee to make final arrangements for the burial of his departed friend. At 5:30 p.m., July 24, Sutherlin's funeral was held before a large crowd. Numerous citizens presented resolutions on his death--everyone referred to Sutherlin's impeccable character and morals and to his love for his family and for Danville. A most fitting tribute was presented in a poem prepared by Duval Porter.¹⁸³

William Thomas Sutherlin

He is gone! Th' imposing presence no more
 Shall move among us: The giant mind,
 That could the future as the past explore,
 Must live forever: Death has no power to bind

¹⁸² Memorial, 42-43.

¹⁸³ Memorial, 32, 43-45, 149; Richmond Dispatch, July 23, 1893;

The immortal past: Upon a brighter shore
'Tis kindled afresh to shine forever more

His vision was prophetic, he foresaw
The coming event ere the shadow came;
Seem'd to know by instinct th' inexorable law
that would fulfill itself and put to shame
The idle fancies of all who prophesied,
Or merely guessed, but his were justified.

His city mourns the loss of such a son,
The most illustrious in her annals found;
The triumphs he has for her commence won
Shall speak for him, though silent in the ground:
In trumpet tongues throughout the coming years
Will Danville claim this mighty son of hers.

He was the poor man's friend, who better knows
That this is true than he to whom was given
The boon to know him well. He did disclose
A heart of tenderness to such as driven
By cruel fate their miseries to plead,
And find in him a friend in all their need.

Alas!! No more shall trusting friend invite
The counsel wise he was so free to give,
No more the fond wife in whom he did delight,

Nor lovely grandchild for whom he seemed to live,
Hear his voice again until they meet once more
Beyond the veil upon that blissful shore.

Sutherlin was interred next to his daughter in the family plot at Green Hill Cemetery in Danville. The inscription on his tomb appropriately read: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth yea, saith the Spirit that they may rest from their Labors, and their works do follow them."

Mrs. Sutherlin continued living at their home and conducted some of her husband's business affairs until her death in 1911. On December 18, 1895, his granddaughter, Janie, married Edward Barrett, an Alabama newspaper publisher. Friends of the family recalled seeing Mrs. Sutherlin, always dressed in black, walking solemnly around her yard with her great danes. The loss of such an active and energetic part of her life was doubtless even harder to bear after her granddaughter moved south to Alabama. Her grief was compounded when, in November, 1904, her granddaughter died, leaving an infant child, Janie Sutherlin Barrett. Mrs. Sutherlin passed away on January 13, 1911.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ General Records; interview with Mrs. Ellie F. Holton, Dec. 20, 1984.

A monument to the Sutherlin family stands in the center of their burial plot and fondly remembers the Major. "As a man and citizen he walked in his Integrity, upright, trustworthy. unselfishly, consecrated to the good of his Country, as a Christian and benefactor he had an abiding trust in his God and Saviour with a sympathetic heart and generous hand for needy and distressed. He was the strength and comfort of his home."

Truly, Sutherlin was the strength and comfort to all who met him. His contributions to the welfare of Danville's citizens can never be measured. As a promoter of numerous industries and educational institutions and as a civic leader, Sutherlin can justly be remembered as the Patriarch of Danville.

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WILLIAM THOMAS SUTHERLIN: PATRIARCH OF DANVILLE

by

Karen L. Taylor

(ABSTRACT)

William Thomas Sutherlin was born on April 7, 1822 in Pittsylvania County, Virginia. He worked in tobacco on his father's farm until 1843. He then moved to Danville and embarked on a career in tobacco manufacturing. Sutherlin's ventures in the tobacco industry allowed him to become the second wealthiest man in the state of Virginia.

In 1849, Sutherlin married Jane Erwin Patrick of Greensboro, N. C. Seven years later the couple moved to their newly built country manor which has been preserved as a museum today.

Sutherlin generously supported numerous industries in his hometown and constantly strove to protect the interests of his fellow Danvillians.

In 1851, he began his illustrious career as a public servant. He served on the Danville Council from 1851-1855 and as Danville's mayor from 1855 to 1861. The year 1861 found Sutherlin expanding his political interests. He was one of Pittsylvania County's two delegates to the Virginia State Convention of that year.