CHAPTER ONE

Sectional Differences

LONG before the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States in November 1860, tensions between the eastern and western portions of Virginia threatened the cohesiveness of the large state.

The differences dated back to the earliest days of Virginia. Before the Declaration of Independence, Members of the Continental Congress considered separating the western portion of Virginia from the eastern portion, including a proposal for a new state, to include those counties west of the Allegheny Mountains. The proposed State of Vandalia would have included nearly all of what is today West Virginia as far east as the boundary with Maryland, with a capital at Point Pleasant. After the signing of the Declaration, delegates to the Continental Congress considered establishing the State of Westsylvania, including lands west of the Alleghenies. The boundaries were the same as Vandalia, but included a part of Maryland and a section of Pennsylvania extending to about 50 miles north of Pittsburgh. Ultimately, the Continental Congress rejected this plan. These counties remained part of Virginia until the events of 1863.[1]

1 Richard Ellsworth Fast, *The History and Government of West Virginia* (Morgantown, WV: The Acme Publishing Co., 1901), 84-85.

Northwestern Virginia is much different in geography from the rest of Virginia. The Blue Ridge mountain chain separates northwestern Virginia from the eastern part of the state. Eastern Virginia is mostly level or rolling land, rising from the ocean or the Chesapeake Bay. By contrast, western Virginia rises rolling and hilly, with tall mountains marking the dividing line. Rivers in the northwest empty into the Ohio River while eastern rivers flow through the Tidewater region and ultimately empty into the Chesapeake Bay or the Atlantic Ocean. People in northwestern Virginia tended to align themselves with Pennsylvania and Ohio in political, financial and cultural matters, and not with the eastern part of the state: Pittsburgh is 60 miles from Wheeling, while Richmond is 320 miles away. These differences caused tension between the eastern and western portions of the state for decades prior to Lincoln's election.

Waitman T. Willey, then a United States Senator representing West Virginia, wrote in 1866: "Who carries anything from west of the Alleghenies to eastern Virginia to sell? Who brings anything from East Virginia to West Virginia to sell? There are and have been almost literally no business and no intercourse between the two sections for twenty-five years, excepting what was connected with matters of revenue and legislation at Richmond. There is no State in the Union, which has been admitted ten years ago, of which the people of East Virginia know less than they do of West Virginia; and excepting the capital of the State, the people of West Virginia are equally unfamiliar with East Virginia."[2]

"Now while the boundary lines of Virginia held us with Eastern Virginia," declared the editor of the *Morgantown Star* in 1861, "our intercourse has been principally with the people of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio; and we know but little of the people of Eastern and the [Shenandoah] Valley of Virginia from personal intercourse, and they know so little of us that they never have properly appreciated our interests."[3]

"The interests of West Virginia, however, with less than four per cent of her population slave, were those of a northern state," wrote James Morton Callahan, an early West Virginia historian. "Her sons continued to attend schools in free states rather than the schools across the Blue Ridge. Her markets were in Pittsburgh, Baltimore and the Mississippi River towns rather than Norfolk. Her geographic conditions allied her interests with those of

2 Ibid., 86-87.

3 Quoted in the September 9, 1861 issue of the *Wheeling Intelligencer*.

Pennsylvania and Ohio and her industries were those which called for white rather than slave labor. Her natural destiny and future loyalty to the Union were forecasted by [Sen. Daniel] Webster in his speech at the laying of the corner stone of the addition to the capital at Washington (in 1851). 'And ye men of Western Virginia, who occupy the slope from the Alleghenies to the Ohio and Kentucky,' said he, 'what benefit do you propose to yourself by disunion? If you secede what do you secede from and what do you secede to? Do you look for the current of the Ohio to change and bring you and your commerce to the waters of Eastern rivers? What man can suppose that you would remain a part and parcel of Virginia a month after Virginia had ceased to be a part of the United States?"[4]

"The present-day West Virginia in 1860 had a white population of nearly 380,000, a Negro-slave population of approximately 18,000, and almost 3,000 persons of color," observed one authority.[5] The 1860 census indicated that there were 490,865 slaves in Virginia, constituting 31% of the state's entire population.[6] Berkeley and Jefferson Counties, in what became the eastern panhandle of West Virginia, lay to the east of the Allegheny Mountains and relied on slave labor to work the plantations that drove their economies. The mountains served as a physical dividing line between the plantation economy of the east and the more commercial and industrial economy of northwestern Virginia. The entire northern and western areas of Virginia bordered on free soil, not slave states.

Ironically, the dominance of the eastern portion of the state traced its roots to the slave economy. The east depended on slaves, "the possession of which could be guaranteed and secured only by giving to masters a voice in the government adequate to the protection of their interests," wrote Henry Dering of Morgantown in western Virginia to future U.S. Senator Waitman T. Willey in March 1861. "Talk about Northern oppression, talk about our rights being stolen from us by the North; it's all stuff and dwindles into nothing when compared, to our situation in Western Virginia. The truth is the slavery

4 James Morton Callahan, *Semi-Centennial History of West Virginia* (Charleston, WV: The Semi-Centennial Commission of West Virginia, 1913), 139-140, quoting "Mr. Webster's Speech," *National Intelligencer*, July 5, 1851.

5 Richard Orr Curry, "The Virginia Background for the History of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era in West Virginia: An Analytical Commentary," *West Virginia History* 20 (July 1989), 215-246.

6 1860 Census results, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

oligarchy, are impudent boastful and tyrannical. It is the nature of the institution to make men so; and tho I am far from being an abolitionist, yet if they persist, in their course, the day may come when all Western Virginia will rise up, in her might and throw off the Shackles, which thro this very Divine institution, as they call it, has been pressing us down."[7]

The ethnic makeup of the white population also differed. The eastern portion of Virginia consisted largely of English stock descended from the original settlers of the region. By contrast, the northwestern region had significant numbers of Scotch-Irish, Welsh, and German immigrants who came in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and later as part of the large exodus of the 1840's. Further, migrants from other American states tended to settle in those areas that offered the best economic opportunity, which was found in the northwestern portion of the state and not the east.[8]

Northwestern Virginians were a perpetual minority in the Commonwealth's politics, if for no other reason than they had little in common with the wealthy slaveholding plantation owners of the Tidewater region who controlled the entire state from the state capital at Richmond. Voting restrictions also favored the east by limiting the franchise to male landowners. As one historian observed, when the 1830 constitution was drafted, "it was felt to be so partial to the 'eastern aristocrats' that every voting delegate from the west opposed it; and when submitted to the people it was condemned in the west by an impressive majority."[9]

Religion also played a role in these events. Ministers, missionaries, and laymen of the Methodist-Episcopal Church played an important role in the push for both emancipation of the slaves and statehood for northwestern Virginia. "I am certain in saying that the loyal status of the people of [northwestern Virginia] may be attributed more than to any other cause perhaps than to those Christian ministers traveling throughout these mountains denouncing in the early days of the rebellion from their pulpits the heresy of secession and caused the people to resist and place their lives in their hands,"

7 Henry Deering to Waitman T. Willey, March 16, 1861, Waitman T. Willey Papers, West Virginia & Regional History Collection, West Virginia University Libraries, Morgantown, West Virginia ("WVU").

8 Richard Orr Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), 119.

9 James Garfield Randall, *Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln*, 2d ed. (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1951), 434-436.

wrote Chester D. Hubbard, the first West Virginian elected to Congress, to Lincoln in 1864. "But the ministers stood as a breakwater, holding back the tide of rebellion, before the soldiers of the Republic caused the rebels to flee,"[10] Hubbard wrote to Lincoln recommending a Methodist minister, Reverend James Drummond of Wheeling, for a presidential appointment.

In 1851, a new Virginia constitution took effect. Sections 22 and 23 of the 1851 constitution provided:

> Sec. 22. Taxation shall be equal and uniform throughout the commonwealth, and all property other than slaves shall be taxed in proportion to its value, which shall be ascertained in such manner as may be prescribed by law.
>
> Sec. 23. Every slave who has attained the age of twelve years shall be assessed with a tax equal to and not exceeding that assessed on land of the value of three hundred dollars. Slaves under that age shall not be subject to taxation . . .[11]

Those two clauses imposed a limit on the taxable value of slaves that worked to the favor of slaveholders in the eastern part of the state, but which provided no limitations on the taxable value of any other property. This provision ended up subsidizing slaveholders at the expense of those who did not own slaves. Since there were relatively few slaves in the western portion of the state, the low taxing of slaves was very unpopular in that section of Virginia.

In May 1861, James Paxton told the First Wheeling Convention that the west had suffered "political inferiority" and "unjust, oppressive, and unequal taxation," referring specifically to the taxation of slaves.[12] Granville Hall, another delegate to the convention, complained that "a slave worth . . . $1600 to $1800 was taxed the same as $300 value of land."[13]

10 Chester D. Hubbard to Abraham Lincoln, November 25, 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter referred to as "Lincoln Papers").

11 1850 Constitution of Virginia, in Francis Newton Thorpe, *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters, and Other Organic Laws of the States, Territories and Colonies Now or Heretofore Forming the United States of America* (Washington, DC: U.S. Govt. Printing Office, 1909), 3829-3852.

12 Virgil A. Lewis, State Archivist, comp., *How West Virginia was Made: Proceedings of the First Convention of the People of Northwestern Virginia at Wheeling, May 13, 14 and 15, 1861, and the Journal of the Second Convention of the People of Northwestern Virginia at Wheeling, which Assembled, June 11, 1861* (Charleston, WV: News-Mail Co., 1909), 87.

13 Granville Davisson Hall, *The Rending of Virginia. A History* (Chicago: Mayer & Miller, 1902), 62.

Reflecting upon the disparate treatment of slaves imposed by the 1851 constitution, the *Wheeling Intelligencer* ran an editorial in December 1860 that foreshadowed events to come the next year. "We have been treated and regarded as a separate people," wrote editor Archibald W. Campbell in making an argument in support of separating the western portion of the Commonwealth of Virginia from the eastern portion. "And such indeed we are. There is no affinity between Eastern and Western Virginia. There never was, and while geography and climate holds sway there never can be."[14]

This schism became increasingly obvious as the secession crisis of 1861 unfolded.

14 Editorial, *Wheeling Intelligencer*, December 25, 1860.