Enemies of the State: Methodists, Secession, and the Civil War in Western Virginia, 1845-1872

DISSERTATION

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By

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Abstract

Situated on the contested border between the North and South, western Virginia is an ideal case for analyzing how ministerial leaders inspired disaffected citizens. Western Virginians, relegated to the fringe of a state political structure dominated by eastern Virginia’s slaveholding oligarchy, believed that their political system had failed them. They felt powerless to institute the political and economic reforms necessary to develop their region in the image of free-soil Ohio and Pennsylvania. Unable to seek redress through their political leaders, westerners turned to the traveling ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) to voice their discontent.

MEC ministers actively defended western interests and cloaked them in a moral legitimacy that broadened their appeal to previously apathetic, isolated residents. Their ministry drew a fierce response from their opponent, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). The MEC repelled these attacks and by 1861 far outpaced the MECS in members and political influence and boasted a following larger than any political party in the region. When conservative political leaders abandoned their offices and embraced the Confederacy upon the outbreak of the Civil War, MEC itinerants filled the void in political leadership, held western Virginia in the Union, and championed its statehood. In the process, they transformed their organization from a religio-political force outside the body politic into a pillar of the new state’s government.
Dedication

Dedicated to Robert Foulds, Nancy Foulds, Katie Foulds, and Beth Joseph
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Introduction:  
Methodists and Political Crisis in Western Virginia

On the thirtieth anniversary of the secession crisis that led to the Civil War, Charles Smith, editor of the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, commemorated one of the most dramatic periods in American history. Smith focused pointedly on the “people of Western Virginia,” who “stood true as steel to the old flag” when “the crash of a slaveholder’s rebellion broke upon the country.” Western Virginians refused to be “dragged into secession” by eastern Virginia and were rewarded two years later with the creation of the “new and loyal” state of West Virginia. Smith reserved special praise in his narrative for the ministers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. “Had it not been for the adherence of the Methodism of Western Virginia to the Northern Church . . . the story of that State, from 1861 to 1865, would have been vastly different. They had much to do with making it what it was and is.” He concluded regretfully that “the world will never know what it cost the Methodist fathers . . . in endurance and toil to bring these things to pass.”

Smith’s tale, while celebratory, underscores the connection between Methodist leaders and grassroots political mobilization during the Civil War era.

When an 1844 dispute over slavery divided the Methodist Episcopal Church into antagonistic sectional organizations, border regions like western Virginia became

\[1\] Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 19, 1891.
denominational battle grounds. Both the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) considered western Virginia to be under their jurisdiction and commenced a vicious battle for church membership and property. The MEC and MECS sought to win converts and defend their position on slavery by immersing themselves in western Virginia’s political culture. By the onset of the secession crisis, MEC and MECS ministers wielded substantial influence, which they used to shape their followers’ political loyalties. The MEC became a potent unionist force while the MECS emerged as a defender of southern rights and the Confederate cause.

Northern and southern Methodist clergymen, utilizing the organizational structure of their churches and their publishing houses, transformed themselves into political leaders and connected northern and southern partisans throughout western Virginia’s rugged terrain. When the Civil War began in April 1861, MEC ministers continued to support the unionist cause and were pivotal to the formation of the state of West Virginia in 1863. The MECS, on the other hand, supported the Confederate Army’s operations in western Virginia and sought to disrupt the statehood movement whenever possible.

Since 1980, perhaps in response to the rise of the evangelical right, historians have become increasingly interested in how antebellum religious leaders entered politics and fanned the flames of sectionalism.² In Broken Churches, Broken Nation, C.C. Goen asserted that the MEC was “the most extensive national institution in antebellum America

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² An important earlier work was Donald Mathews’ Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845 (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1965). Mathews probes the causes and results of the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church schism, which centered on slavery. While Mathews concludes that the schism represented only one of many events contributing to sectional antagonisms in the years preceding the Civil War, his book laid the groundwork for future scholarship on the intersection of Methodism and politics in the antebellum and Civil War eras. An even earlier work is William Sweet’s The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1912). Though dated, Sweet’s book remains a mine of information about Methodist periodicals, their stance on the slavery issue, and the MEC’s missionary efforts to slaves.
other than the Federal Government.” The MEC’s national importance ensured that its division would shape the development of sectional passions. Goen argues that the Methodist schism broke one of the major bonds of national unity. It brought religious discourse between the North and South to a halt and led the sections to embrace increasingly distorted views of one another. Goen further states that the constitutional anxieties that pressed southern Methodists to split from the Methodist Episcopal Church were similar to those preoccupying antebellum politicians. Southern Methodists declared that the General Conference, the MEC’s national governing body, had no right to interfere with ministers’ and members’ slaveholding rights. Goen’s analysis of the relationship of the Methodist schism to antebellum American politics is essential. He demonstrates the national character of the Methodist church and reveals that the questions that led to its dissolution were similar to those rending the United States as a whole.

Mitchell Snay expanded upon Goen’s conclusions in his 1993 study *Gospel of Disunion*. Snay argues that “nowhere outside the realm of politics can the growth of Southern separatism be seen so clearly as in the religious sphere.” Religious leaders exerted “a decisive influence in developing Southern identity.” Snay reveals that southern Methodists saw their separation from the MEC as crucial to maintaining their doctrinal integrity on slavery. The MEC, by seeking to ban slaveholding among church bishops, had departed from its traditional position of non-interference. This conviction was strikingly similar to secessionists’ belief that they were preserving the legacy of the

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Constitution by forming the Confederacy. Snay’s most fascinating revelation is the extent to which southern clergymen marshaled support for secession. Southern pastors attached the stamp of divine providence to secession and the Confederate cause. They heralded the South as the New Israel and the legitimate heir of the providential American Revolution. They professed that it was the South’s destiny to carve a new nation based on its divinely-ordained social order. Southern pastors were equally crucial to maintaining Confederate morale after the Civil War began.

Richard Carwardine’s *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* adds northern clergymen to the picture. He reveals that their relationship with sectional politics was far more complex than that of their southern counterparts. While many MEC preachers worked to develop anti-slavery and eventually pro-Union sentiments among their flocks, other northern Methodists were wary of politicizing their pulpits. In a 2000 article, Carwardine further complicates the relationship of Methodist leaders to sectional politics by providing a brief glimpse into how divisions between the MEC and MECS played out in western Virginia, Kentucky, North Texas, Missouri, and Tennessee. He

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8 Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 181-210. In “Religion and the Collapse of the American Union,” in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Sout and Charles R. Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74-88, Eugene Genovese, like Snay, argues that Southern clergymen saw the war as nothing less than a battle between the followers of Christ and the Anti-Christ. Genovese also joins Snay in stressing that Southern clergymen situated themselves as the guardians of the purity of their social order in opposition to what they saw as the North’s infatuation with heterodoxy and “isms.” He asserts that southern clergymen attached this stigma to the North as a whole, rather than just abolitionists. In “Church, Honor, and Secession,” in Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Sout and Charles R. Wilson, eds., *Religion and the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 89-109, Bertram Wyatt-Brown builds upon Snay’s argument. He asserts that despite southern clerics’ willingness to dismember their affiliation with the North over the slavery issue, they still saw the preservation of the Union as a religious duty and a matter of honor. They argued that truly honorable men would maintain their loyalty to a Union that, unlike the Methodist Church, had yet to actively repudiate slavery. However, the southern clergy’s embrace of honor eventually led them to endorse secession and war as an act of self-defense necessary to the maintenance of their liberty and honor after Lincoln’s call for Federal troops.
suggests that northern and southern Methodist clergymen operating in these border regions helped shape residents’ loyalties to either the Union or the Confederacy. While impressionistic, Carwardine’s article was the first modern reference to Methodist leaders’ place in the sectional crisis in the Border States.10

Goen, Snay, and Carwardine demonstrate the influence sectional Methodist leaders had on the growth of sectionalism within their own regions during the antebellum and Civil War eras.11 However, except for Carwardine’s brief mention of the topic, historians have yet to take an in-depth look at Border State regions such as western Virginia, where the MEC and MECS met face-to-face prior to the Civil War. The Border States were politically and socially fractured during the late antebellum era. Torn between the North and South, many residents looked to the traveling preachers of the northern and southern branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church to connect them with like-minded residents throughout the region. The MEC’s grassroots support of unionism and West Virginia statehood and the MECS’ dedication to secession and southern nationalism adds a new dimension to the intersection of religion and sectionalism. It also contributes to scholarship concerned with how Border State residents experienced the secession crisis and the outbreak of the Civil War as well as the factors that shaped their political loyalties.

10 Richard Carwardine, “Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the Civil War,” *Church History* Volume 69, Number 3 (September 2000). A discussion on the relationship of eastern Virginian Methodist leaders with the secession crisis can be found in, Charles F. Irons, “Reluctant Protestant Confederates: The Religious Roots of Conditional Unionism,” in Peter Wallenstein and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, eds., *Virginia’s Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 72-86.

11 This project is concerned primary with the impact of the Methodist Episcopal Church schism on western Virginia politics. However, the authors noted above also include the Baptist and Presbyterian schisms in their analyses. The Baptists split in 1845 over similar differences regarding slavery, as did the Presbyterian Church in 1837. Chapter two will explain why these schisms had minimal impact on political developments in western Virginia.
In *Reluctant Confederates*, Daniel Crofts analyzes the origins and eventual demise of unionism in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. Crofts argues that party affiliation and economic orientation were crucial to the establishment of unionist and secessionist sentiments. Border State Whigs feared the deleterious effect southern secession would have on their economy and denounced the formation of the Confederacy as a suicidal and irrational response to a misunderstanding of northern intentions regarding slavery. These positions helped unionism become a potent political force in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee even after the formation of the Confederacy. However, the surrender of Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s call for troops to suppress the southern rebellion forced some border unionists to capitulate to secession in the name of southern honor and regional unity. Nonetheless, Crofts reveals that Upper South unionists constituted a far more powerful force than previously acknowledged.\(^{12}\)

Edward Ayers’ *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* builds upon Crofts’ work by illustrating how everyday citizens in the borderlands understood and participated in the sectional debates occurring around them. Steeped within his larger Valley of the Shadow Project, Ayers analyzes two Shenandoah Valley counties: Franklin County, Pennsylvania and Augusta County, Virginia. While Ayers concludes that slavery and sectional loyalty determined the political course taken by Franklin and Augusta County residents, his work is particularly fascinating for demonstrating how similar valley residents on opposite sides of the Mason-Dixon line were politically, culturally, and economically. The

presence or absence of slavery was the sole factor capable of so quickly turning Franklin and Augusta County residents against each other.\textsuperscript{13}

Both Crofts and Ayers depict the factors that molded unionism and secessionism in the Border States on the eve of the Civil War. However, missing from both works is an assessment of the role religious affiliation and religious leadership played in developing and maintaining political loyalties. Crofts does not address the fact that in western Virginia religious affiliation was more likely to dictate residents’ future unionism or secessionism than their previous political affiliation. The absence of religious leadership is also glaring in Ayers’ work. He spends little time considering how religious networks, publishing houses, and ministerial or lay leaders shaped political loyalties. He never mentions whether the MEC or MECS, which both operated in the Shenandoah Valley, established a spiritual and political presence in Augusta and Franklin Counties. This omission is glaring in light of the significant religio-political event that occurred in Augusta County in the midst of the secession crisis. As Augusta residents debated their future relation to the Union, the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was meeting in Augusta to discuss whether it should sever its connection to the increasingly antislavery MEC. The Baltimore Conference eventually withdrew from the MEC and became an ardent supporter of secession. Ayers, however,

does not to assess the impact this politically-charged religious event had upon Augusta politics during the secession crisis.14

More recent scholarship by Stanley Harrold and Adam Arenson place the Border State experience during the sectional crisis in a national context. In Border War, Harrold argues that violent antebellum border clashes over fugitive slaves impacted significantly the developing sectional controversy. While agreeing with Ayers that the Border North and Border South were in many ways similar, northerners’ and southerners’ contrasting responses to fugitive slave cases polarized them. Harrold states that many whites in the Lower North saw the capture and return of fugitive slaves as a war against freedom, and were willing to violently prevent slave owners from retrieving their property. Residents of the Border South, on the other hand, believed that northerners had invaded their land, endangered their property rights, and insulted their honor. Comparing the situation to the Cold War Domino Theory, Harrold argues that increasing northern assistance of fugitive slaves made it seem as if the Border South’s slavery system was in peril. Furthermore, many Deep South leaders believed it was only a matter of time before the conflict plaguing the border lands engulfed them as well. This anxiety further cemented the Lower South’s support for secession. On the other hand, many Border South slaveholders, already stinging from the loss of their property, believed that secession would further endanger slavery by turning the lower North into a hostile nation. This

14Baltimore Conference ministers chose to separate from the MEC after the MEC’s 1860 General Conference passed a new advisory rule on slaveholding. The rule condemned members who owned slaves but did not actively call for their dismissal from the Church. This minor schism will be discussed in detail in chapter four. For an account of the Baltimore Conference’s separation from the MEC, see John S. Martin, Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Now of the Methodist Episcopal Church South), 1862-1865 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University). Both the Staunton Spectator and the Staunton Republican Vindicator, which are included in the Valley of the Shadow Project, covered the Baltimore Conference’s meeting in extensive detail in March 1861. This makes Ayers’ omission even more surprising.
conviction led many slaveholders in Maryland, western Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri to remain loyal to the Union.\footnote{Stanley Harrold, \textit{Border War: Fighting Over Slavery Before the Civil War} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).}

Arenson’s \textit{The Great Heart of the Republic} adds the West to the analytical picture while illustrating the importance of the Border States to the outbreak of the Civil War. Arenson argues that the national sectional crisis was a three-way, rather than two-way conflict. In the mid-nineteenth Century, the North, South, and West engaged in a vicious cultural civil war over whose vision would dominate the development of the western frontier. Southerners viewed the region as fertile ground for the expansion of slavery while northerners envisioned a west dominated by free labor. Westerners, on the other hand, believed that a federally-financed transcontinental railroad would enable their region to dominate the United States. Situated at the nexus of these three regions, St. Louis became the arena where pro-slavery, free labor, and western expansion met and grappled for control of the national agenda.\footnote{Adam Arenson, \textit{The Great Heart of the Republic: St. Louis and the Cultural Civil War} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).}

Numerous parallels can be found between Harrold’s and Arenson’s work and this project. While Harrold describes a border war based on fugitive slaves, this project focuses on a border war waged by rival sectional Methodist organizations and their fiercely loyal followers. Much like the border wars Harrold analyzes, the MEC’s and MECS’ battle for the souls and minds of western Virginians established clear religious-political fault-lines that emerged during the secession crisis, shaped political loyalties, and directly contributed to the fratricidal violence that scarred the region during the war.
The Methodist border wars in western Virginia also took on dimensions similar to the cultural wars Arenson discovered in St. Louis. Northern and southern Methodists did not just seek to win converts, but also to ensure that western Virginia’s development reflected their sectional vision, either northern or southern. Northern Methodists envisioned a western Virginia dotted with large churches and tax-supported schools and sustained by a diversified commercial industry supported by a well-developed transportation infrastructure. MECS leaders, on the other hand, demanded that their followers maintain their allegiance to the slaveholding South. Southern Methodists denounced their opponents as abolitionist agitators seeking to force northern-influenced culture on an unwilling populace. Similar to the situation in St. Louis, the fierce battles waged by northern and southern Methodists in western Virginia represented a microcosm of the forces dividing the United States.

Religious leaders’ ability to shape residents’ loyalties and mobilize them politically is also absent from the historiography of Virginia sectionalism, the secession crisis in western Virginia and the West Virginia statehood movement. Charles Ambler’s *Sectionalism in Virginia* is the foundational assessment of the tensions that divided eastern and western Virginia from 1776 to 1861.17 According to Ambler, the separation of eastern and western Virginia during the Civil War was inevitable. Western frontiersmen had long chafed under the control of an eastern oligarchy concerned only with the protection and perpetuation of slavery.18 Unable to secure an equal voice in the

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18 The place of slavery in Virginia sectionalism has been ably recounted by a number of historians. In *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-32* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), Alison Freehling states that western Virginian politicians saw the Virginia slavery
Virginia General Assembly, the west was powerless to develop its nascent commercial economy and establish much-needed institutions like public secondary schools. As a result, western Virginians were forced to watch as their northern neighbors’ economic and social development far outpaced their own. Ambler concludes that when eastern Virginia cast its lot with the Confederacy in 1861, resentful westerners refused to follow. No significant study of western Virginia politics has challenged Ambler’s assertion that western demands for legislative reapportionment, the expansion of white male suffrage, more equitable taxation, and the establishment of tax-supported schools, as well as the west’s halted infrastructure development and increasingly northern orientation, were the crucial factors driving Virginia sectionalism.  

Despite its significance, Ambler’s work is flawed in a number of ways. First, it presents an idealized portrait of antebellum western Virginia. Ambler accepts with little reservation the idea that western Virginia was made up predominantly of union-loving yeoman democrats, despite much contrary evidence. Believing that an overwhelming debates that occurred in the wake of Nat Turner’s revolt as a perfect opportunity to free their region from political vassalage by abolishing slavery in Virginia. While by no means abolitionists, western proponents of emancipation unabashedly blamed eastern Virginia’s single-minded protection of the institution for the west’s unequal position in state governance. Patricia Elizabeth Prickett-Hicken moves beyond the Virginia slavery debates to assess the nascent antislavery movement that took root in western Virginia and the state as a whole in “Gentle Agitator: Samuel M. Janney and the Antislavery Movement in Virginia, 1842-1857,” The Journal of Southern History, 37 (May 1971), 159-90. William Gleason Bean’s “The Ruffner Pamphlet of 1846: An Antislavery Aspect of Virginia Sectionalism,” Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 61 (July 1953), 260-82, explores the impact of the Ruffner Pamphlet, the most famous antislavery pamphlet published in antebellum western Virginia, on the development of sectional animosities in the decade and a half preceding the Civil War. Richard Grady Lowe’s Republicans and Reconstruction in Virginia, 1856-1870 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), evaluates the Republican Party’s efforts to establish a political beachhead in western Virginia. He asserts that the young party sought to win converts in the west by downplaying antislavery in favor of actively supporting western demands for legislative reapportionment and economic development.

Ambler, rightly seen as the father of West Virginia political history, was also a pioneer in the history of education in the region. His sprawling A History of Education in West Virginia: From Early Colonial Times to 1949 (Huntington, West Virginia: Standard Printing & Pub. Co., 1951), despite being over 60 years old, remains the best survey ever published of the lethargic development of public schools in West Virginia.
majority of westerners were unionist, Ambler’s top-down study spends little time assessing the social factors that influenced westerners’ political loyalties or the tools they used to mobilize politically.20 Particularly frustrating, given Ambler’s otherwise suburb analytical skills, was his decision not to assess the West Virginia statehood movement.21

Ambler’s appraisal of the extent of unionism and secessionism in western Virginia generally went unchallenged until the publication of Richard Curry’s A House Divided. Curry concludes that the majority of western Virginia was pro-Union but dismisses Ambler’s portrayal of a universally unionist region as having “no basis in fact.”22 Curry develops this point through a demonstration of the extent of secessionism as well as copperhead opposition to both the Lincoln Administration’s handling of the Civil War and West Virginia statehood. Curry’s book also broke new ground by showing the extent to which political developments in western Virginia influenced or were influenced by military contingencies during the Civil War.23 While revealing the complex origins of unionism and secession, Curry similarly neglects to assess the social factors that undergirded westerners’ political loyalties. While dealing extensively with the West Virginia statehood movement and the first West Virginia Constitutional Convention,

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20 An exception to this general scholarly tendency can be found in Ambler’s “The Cleavage Between Eastern and Western Virginia,” American Historical Review Vol. 15, No. 4 (July 1910), 762-780. In this article, Ambler briefly suggests that the intense battles between the MEC and MECS in antebellum western Virginia influenced the course of the secession crisis and the West Virginia statehood movement. However, Ambler does not explore this important point in any significant detail.

21 Ambler’s belief in the pervasive nature of unionism in western Virginia was accepted with little reservation by George Ellis Moore in A Banner in the Hills: West Virginia’s Statehood (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963).


23 Two of the best military history surveys of West Virginia’s Civil War experience are Boyd B. Stutler’s West Virginia in the Civil War (Charleston: Education Foundation Inc., 1963), and Mark Snell’s West Virginia and the Civil War: Mountaineers Are Always Free (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2011).
Curry ignores the fact that Methodist leaders constituted fifteen percent of the convention’s membership.

Since *A House Divided*, historians have focused less on the extent of unionist and secessionist sentiments in western Virginia and more upon their origins. In “The New Dominion and the Old,” John Alexander Williams challenges Ambler’s depiction of a predominantly yeoman western Virginia by arguing that the region contained a hereditary elite similar to eastern Virginia’s. These elite used their control of the west’s county court system and their economic power as large landowners to develop a nearly unchallenged hegemony by 1861. They also halted the west’s political, economic, and social development by using their influence to suppress any reformist challenges to their power. Most importantly, the western elite supported secession strenuously by using its considerable patronage to persuade many westerners to rally behind the Confederacy and to oppose West Virginia statehood. Williams’ lengthy article is pertinent to this study because of his brief mention of MEC circuit riders in his analysis of western politics. Williams suggests that Methodist circuit riders may have constituted a “challenge from below” to the courthouse cliques and circuit-riding lawyers that dominated the face-to-face politics of western Virginia. However, he concludes incorrectly that there is not enough evidence to assess the extent to which the MEC’s traveling preachers challenged the western elite’s dominance.24

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In *Clash of Loyalties*, John Shaffer adds a new dimension to Williams’ discussion of the dynamics influencing secessionist sentiment. Focusing on Barbour County, (West) Virginia, Shaffer argues that the overwhelming factor influencing residents’ allegiance was family place of origin. Third-generation Virginians, according to Shaffer, were the most likely to become secessionists. Those possessing less concrete ancestral ties to the Old Dominion generally became unionists. While provocative, Shaffer’s argument rests more upon correlation than causation. While he demonstrates that secessionists defended secession through appeals to their Virginian heritage, he fails to account for the fact that unionists relied upon similar arguments. Western Virginia unionists denounced secessionists as little more than a disaffected minority seeking to hijack Virginia for the Confederacy. Even if one accepts Shaffer’s case for the paramount importance of birthplace, it does not explain how unionists or secessionists were able to mobilize politically, nor does it illuminate the social networks they relied upon to coordinate political action.25

Shaffer’s work is also relevant to this study because of his attempt to downplay the significance of the MEC and MECS to Virginia sectionalism, secession, and the formation of West Virginia. Shaffer argues that religious affiliation meant little as westerners assessed where their loyalties lay during the secession crisis. To support this claim, he argues that one of the two Methodist ministers serving in Barbour upon the outbreak of the Civil War was an ardent Confederate. Shaffer also asserts that a number of self-identified Methodists in Barbour County embraced the Confederacy upon the outbreak of the Civil War. Both of these assertions are misleading. Despite his careful

analysis of Barbour County, Shaffer misses the fact that the secessionist Methodist minister he mentions was a member of the MECS, while the Methodist laypeople he refers to constituted that ministers’ flock.26

This dissertation contributes to the historiography of Methodism’s relationship with sectional politics, the Border State experience during the Civil War Era, and the wartime formation of the state of West Virginia. It demonstrates that the sectional branches of the Methodist Episcopal Church were central to the politics of Virginia sectionalism, secession, and the formation of West Virginia. By 1845, severe social, economic, and political divisions were tearing Virginia apart. Western Virginians were stymied in all their attempts to effect dynamic change in Virginia society. Eastern slaveholding planters, fearful that increased western political and economic power posed a threat to slavery, blocked the creation of public schools, economic development through internal improvements, and maintained an undemocratic system of government that unfairly taxed the West and denied the region an equal voice in the state’s governance.

By the early 1850s, western grievances found a new voice and leadership in the

26 Shaffer’s misreading of the sectional Methodist Churches’ influence in Barbour is compounded by a sloppy use of membership statistics. Shaffer relies almost entirely on census returns when downplaying the entwinement of Methodism and politics in western Virginia. Shaffer argues that the MECS maintained no presence in Barbour County and that the active support for secession espoused by numerous self-identified Methodists proves that religious affiliation had little impact on one’s political loyalties. This was a serious error. The United States Census lumped both the MEC and MECS together under the common heading “Methodist” until 1890. Had Shaffer utilized the original MEC and MECS membership statistics in his analysis, he would have realized that both organizations were present in Barbour. Furthermore, he would have caught that fact that Dr. Abraham Hershman, a virulent secessionist later arrested by the Union Army, was in fact a member of the MECS. The membership statistics Shaffer would have needed to compile an accurate analysis of the MEC and MECS’ strength in Barbour County are readily available at the West Virginia Collection, where he did a great deal of his research: Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church: Western Virginia Conference Records (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), while opponents of the western reformist agenda threw their support to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS).

Western Virginia, already a denominational battleground as a result of the 1844 Methodist Schism, was enveloped by a cultural war in the 1850s as the MEC and MECS sought to win converts and shape the region in their sectional vision. MEC ministers looked to mold western Virginia in a northern image by calling for the establishment of a state-supported system of common schools, industrial and infrastructure development, a revision of Virginia’s Constitution to ensure the West a more equitable voice in state governance, equal taxation, and the abolition of the oral voting system that allowed elite westerners to maintain their dominance of local politics and to smother western reformism. MEC ministers kept the issues dividing the east and west before the people and ensured that sectional tensions remained high throughout the 1850s. The MEC’s strident support of western reform and its willingness to infuse western political grievances with a new moral legitimacy explains the readiness with which western Virginians threw off the shackles of eastern rule in 1861.27

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27 Numerous historians have attempted to portray the 1850s as a period of sectional reconciliation in Virginia. They posit that eastern Virginians, increasing anxious about the course of the national sectional crisis, attempted to conciliate western Virginians with a number concessions, including a reapportionment of the Virginia House of Delegates, and the establishment of universal white male suffrage. However, these arguments make western Virginia’s adamant rejection of secession in 1861 appear incongruous, or at best the result of latent hostilities within the state during the preceding decade. The MEC’s central place in western Virginia’s political culture and its appeals to western political interests instead shows that sectional tensions were kept well-enflamed in both the secular and religious spheres in the 1850s. Charles Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 300-338, Richard Curry, A House Divided, 13-28, Otis K. Rice, West Virginia: A History (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 99-101, William Link Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 26, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, ““It is Old Virginia and We Must Have It”: Overcoming Regionalism in Civil War Virginia,” in Edward Ayers, Gary Gallagher and Andrew Torget, eds., Crucible of the Civil War: Virginia From Secession to Commemoration (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 58-79, all ascribe to this point of view.
The MECS responded to the MEC’s religio-political crusade by defending eastern Virginia, the western elite, and the slavery system. They denounced the MEC as incendiary abolitionists seeking to destroy Virginia’s social institutions and stability. MECS ministers stressed that western Virginia’s rightful place was with the South and pledged to purge all elements of Yankee influence, particularly the MEC, from the region. The MECS’ crusade was actively supported by western Virginia’s landed courthouse elite, who applauded the organization’s efforts to “southernize” western Virginia. These elite, often at the MECS’ instigation, utilized their control of the region’s county court system to indict many MEC ministers for spreading incendiary doctrines.

MEC and MECS ministers’ active engagement with sectional politics ensured they became pivotal forces during the secession crisis. When the western elite abandoned their offices and embraced the Confederacy, MEC itinerants filled the void in political leadership and became ardent grassroots activists. They organized Union Clubs, delivered public addresses, distributed pamphlets, and excluded secessionist sympathizers from their fellowship. They relied upon their periodicals, and particularly their traveling ministers, to connect isolated unionist enclaves throughout western Virginia’s rugged terrain. Ultimately they were key recruiters and scouts for the Union army. MEC ministers were joined in their unionist crusade by the ministers and members of the Methodist Protestant Church (MPC). The MPC, far weaker than the MEC and MECS in terms of membership, avoided involvement with the fractious cultural and political wars waged by the sectional Methodist Churches. However, when issues of sectional politics were supplanted by the question of loyalty to the United States Government, MPC ministers became devoted unionists. Much like their MEC allies, MPC ministers relied on
their influence and communication networks to demand that their followers remain loyal to the Union.

The MEC’s and MPC’s immersion in Civil War politics made their churches, ministers, and lay membership frequent targets of secessionist leaders, the MECS, and the guerilla bands that terrorized western Virginia during the Civil War. Seen by southern partisans as chief spokesmen for the prerogatives of the abolitionist North, unionist Methodists lived under the constant threat of violence in the first year of the Civil War. Nonetheless, MEC and MPC leaders refused to abandon the Federal Government and continued to frustrate their opposition by organizing and leading unionist communities deep within secessionist territory.

The MECS supported southern secession as vigorously as MEC leaders supported the Union. Working in tandem with the secessionist western elite, MECS leaders defended the Confederate cause on public podiums and through the many periodicals they distributed among their membership. The organization’s annual meetings became crucial venues for discussing secessionist political strategy. MECS ministers frequently served as army recruiters and in many cases enlisted for the conflict as soldiers. A small number even rose to the ranks of the officer class. Other MECS leaders assisted the Confederate Army’s operations in western Virginia by serving as spies and information conduits. The MECS’s secessionist efforts were supplemented by the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which withdrew from the MEC in March 1861. The independent Baltimore Conference defended secession as vigorously as the MECS. However, as the Civil War dragged on, these organizations’ unrelenting support for the Confederacy, as well as their complicity in a number of attacks on unionist
neighborhoods and MEC and MPC churches, resulted in a unionist-led campaign of terror against their preachers and lay membership. By 1863, the MECS existed only in name in western Virginia, its leaders scattered throughout the unoccupied Confederacy. The Baltimore Conference, on the other hand, was better able to shelter itself from these reprisals and remained a fervent supporter of the Confederacy until the end of the Civil War in 1865.

    The impact of religious leadership on the political decision-making of western residents was made clear when the results of Virginia’s secession referendum became public. Despite passing Virginia as a whole, the referendum was firmly defeated in western Virginia. Every MECS-dominated county voted for secession while all but two MEC-dominated counties went for the Union. The primary factor influencing western Virginians to align with either the Union or the Confederacy was not the value of their farmland, the extent to which their county was developed industrially, or the percentage of the population that was enslaved. Nor did previous political affiliation carry the same weight as religious affiliation. The factors separating unionist and secessionist counties in western Virginia were not rooted in politics and economics, but rather in religion.

    After the passage of the secession ordinance, the MEC’s and MPC’s newfound political power and prestige ensured that they became central figures in the West Virginia statehood movement from 1861 to 1863. At the 1861 West Virginia Constitutional Convention Methodist ministers comprised fifteen percent of the delegates in attendance. They seized upon this opportunity to implement the northern-influenced reforms they had fought for throughout the previous decade: a more democratic governmental structure, free public schools, state-sponsored investment in infrastructure development, the
abolition of slavery, and the dismantling of the county court system that routinely ignored westerners’ political interests and persecuted MEC leaders. At the grassroots level, MEC ministers repelled the MECS’ endeavors to obstruct West Virginia’s statehood by delivering speeches, publishing pro-statehood pamphlets and newspaper editorials, and forming vigilance committees to protect voters from intimidation during the statehood referendum. When the United States Congress made West Virginia’s admission contingent on residents’ acceptance of gradual emancipation, Methodist leaders again stepped into the breach. They presented their followers with a clear choice: a free soil West Virginia or a return to political vassalage under eastern Virginia at the close of the Civil War. The MEC’s central role in the wartime formation of West Virginia is emphasized by the composition of the state’s legislature at its first session in 1863. MEC ministers constituted twenty percent of the Senate and fourteen percent of the representatives in the House of Delegates. Overall, nineteen of the twenty members of the Senate and twenty-two of the fifty members of the House of Delegates were members of the MEC. An MEC minister, J. M. Phelps, served as the first President of the West Virginia State Senate.

Methodist leaders’ engagement with sectional Virginia politics, the secession crisis, and the formation of West Virginia demonstrates the crucial importance of religious leaders and organizations to grassroots political mobilization in the Appalachian borderlands. The arduous nature of the circuit riding profession ensured that MEC and MECS ministers were best equipped to penetrate the isolated hills and valleys inhabited by western Virginians. They established religious communication networks and spheres of influence that were unmatched by antebellum political leaders. These ministers went
beyond providing spiritual guidance: doubling as doctors, teachers, merchants, and purveyors of political information, they provided services essential to western Virginia’s developing pre-industrial society. In western Virginia’s rugged terrain the most familiar outside face to residents was the itinerant Methodist minister who visited them monthly. MEC or MECS ministers carried their interpretation of the nation’s politics to westerners and connected them with like-minded residents throughout the region. They provided the organizational tools necessary for socially-isolated westerners to mobilize in the fragmented political terrain of the Border States.

The MEC’s and MECS’ battle for the souls of western Virginia Methodists explains the violence that plagued the region during the Civil War. The fractious cultural war waged by the MEC and MECS deeply divided previously peaceful neighbors along rigid social and political fault-lines. Once harmonious neighborhoods were torn apart as western residents chose sides in a contest they saw as a definitive battle between two mutually exclusive ways of life. When the secession crisis rocked the United States, northern and southern Methodist leaders and their followers saw the event as the culmination of their battle to shape western Virginia in their sectional vision. The MEC and MECS both believed that western Virginia’s course in the crisis would determine which of their agendas would ultimately prevail. Even after western Virginia rejected the ordinance, northern and southern Methodists continued their campaigns of terror and counter-terror, convinced that their opponent was a traitor to their region, their nation, and their god. Driven by these ideals, MEC and MECS leaders justified the social ostracism, property destruction, assault, and murder that became endemic to the region during the Civil War.
Finally, the key role of the Methodist Churches in the gradual emergence of a war-born American state, whether as supporters or opponents, has important implications for a wider analysis of extra-political associations, civil mobilization, and state formation. Western Virginia was a crossroads of northern and southern culture in the mid-nineteenth century. Abutting the industrial North and the plantation South, western Virginians were pulled in divergent political, economic, and cultural directions by highly politicized and antagonistic religious organizations in the decades preceding the American Civil War. These intensely religious populations sought political power in an effort to define themselves and shape their region’s future. The religiously infused political activism of West Virginia offers a means to better comprehend similar religio-political alignments in the United States and abroad from the nineteenth century to the present.
Chapter 1:  
The Contours of Virginia Sectionalism, 1776-1851: West versus East

The sectional tensions that resulted in the formation of the state of West Virginia during the Civil War were rooted in the mid-eighteenth century settlement of western Virginia. Eastern Virginians expected the settlement of western Virginia to be marked by a gradual but firm establishment of their social, political, and economic customs across the mountains. Yet western settlement did not conform to this pattern. While a great many easterners did cast their fortunes in the west, the region’s population was predominantly made up of non-Virginians, few of whom were attached to the values of the east’s slaveholding gentry.28 Easterners, feeling increasingly alienated from the west geographically, socially, and psychologically, came to see the “wild Irish in the frontier west of Virginia” as “a people apart” who constituted a threat to the essence of what was “True Virginia.”29

In the early 1730s, the first white settlers began to stream across the Blue Ridge Mountains into what is now West Virginia. The Virginian, German, Scotch-Irish and Swiss settlers seeking a new life in Virginia’s rugged western backcountry were


29 Philyaw, *Virginia’s Western Visions*, 123.
encouraged to migrate by Virginia’s leadership, who saw western settlements as a crucial buffer for the colony’s valuable Piedmont plantations against French and Native American attacks. The majority these travelers were not members of the Virginia elite, but recent immigrants from Europe or former indentured servants. Arriving in groups of as many as a dozen families, pioneers established scattered communities in present-day West Virginia’s eastern panhandle, as well as in the fertile Greenbrier Valley. By 1753 nearly fifty families made their home in the Greenbrier Valley.\(^{30}\)

Native Americans living in the western backcountry resented these unwanted intruders. With the onset of the Seven Years War in 1756, Natives, particularly the Shawnee, launched a concerted campaign to wipe out the fledging settlements. Typical was an attack launched against a small force led by John Mercer on April 18, 1756. That morning, Mercer led fifty men into the woods around Fort Edwards to track down missing horses. The party was attacked within sight of the fort by a party of Shawnee, who killed Mercer and fifteen of his men. By the end of the war, the entire Greenbrier settlement had been wiped out. Only a few scattered enclaves survived in the eastern panhandle. However, when the Treaties of Hard Labor and Stanwix reopened the western backcountry, migrants once again flooded the region.\(^{31}\) By 1774, stable communities were established in the Greenbrier Valley, as well as in the Monongahela and Kanawha valleys. The Tygart Valley, located near the Monongahela, was especially attractive for


\(^{31}\) Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 11-63. In the Treaty of Stanwix, the Cherokee repudiated their claims to most of the territory included in present-day West Virginia. This agreement was crucial to reopening settlement of the western backcountry.
its game, wild fruit, and fertile river bottomlands. The unrelenting wave of settlement once again generated tensions with Natives, and resulted in Lord Dunmore’s War, which included the climactic 1774 Battle of Point Pleasant. The battle occurred on October 10, 1774 and resulted in the deaths of 46 Virginia soldiers and an unknown (though larger) number of Natives. In the aftermath of the battle native forces under the leadership of Cornstalk sued for peace. The resulting Treaty of Camp Charlotte ordered Natives to vacate their hunting grounds in present-day West Virginia. Nonetheless, the treaty did not end settlers’ need for strong defenses and the western backcountry remained a dangerous place until the Treaty of Greenville was signed in 1795.

Contrary to popular legend, western frontiersmen sought to get the pioneer period behind them as quickly as possible. Settlers first constructed a log cabin which more often than not lacked windows. They filled the cracks between logs with grass or mud, materials which also constituted the cabin’s chimney. Early settlers subsisted primarily upon venison, bear meat, turkey, and smaller game. In the spring, they planted corn and wheat. These staples were complemented by whatever wild fruits, nuts, berries, and greens the pioneer’s wife was able to gather. When possible, western families attempted, often in vain, to transport their agricultural goods to eastern towns by flatboat. These families used whatever profit they gained from these transactions to purchase luxuries such as salt, pepper, chocolate, ginger, coffee, shoe buckles, ink pots, and silk handkerchiefs. Settlers, when unable to travel long distances to purchase these goods or

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sell their produce, often relied on the itinerant merchants that traversed western Virginia’s streams by canoe and who accepted farm products as payment.

With the early arrival of Baptist missionaries in 1743, religious fellowship became a common element of frontier life. However, logrolling, corn-shucking, molasses making, and quilting parties also became essential facets of frontier socialization. Like their counterparts in eastern Virginia, westerners enjoyed court days, where men from around the county gathered as spectators or litigants in civil and criminal cases. Court Days were also marked by a variety of athletic competitions in which men demonstrated their masculine prowess through contests of marksmanship, tomahawk throwing, and wrestling.\(^{35}\) By the 1790s western settlers, as marked by their cabins, crops, and social lives, had carved out a stable existence in the western backcountry.

Eastern Virginians were disconcerted by the diverse population taking root across the Blue Ridge Mountains. Far from emulating the English-bred Anglican eastern slaveholding gentry, the settlers that made up early western Virginia society were a diverse mixture of ethnic and religious groups with little attachment to slavery. Eastern leaders unsurprisingly had no desire to share political power with western settlers they deemed inferior. Nowhere was this tendency clearer than in the composition of the state’s bicameral General Assembly. Virginia’s 1776 state constitution guaranteed the west only four seats in the 24-member Senate while the section’s representation in the House of Delegates was equally small. Representation in these legislative bodies was defined upon a mixed basis that counted both whites and blacks, ensuring that slaveholders maintained a lop-sided control over state politics. Equally indicative of eastern elitism, suffrage was

guaranteed only to substantial freeholders while local governance was restricted to unelected county courts. In the short term, the west’s limited presence in the state legislature was understandable. In 1776 the east’s white population far outnumbered the west’s. What angered future western reformers was that the 1776 Constitution contained no provisions for amendment, thereby ignoring future legislative reapportionments based upon changes in the distribution of Virginia’s population.

By the turn of the nineteenth Century, westerners’ frustration with their inferior position in state politics crystallized into three interrelated reform movements. The first was the educational reform movement, which originated in Thomas Jefferson’s failed plan for the establishment of a state system of common schools in 1779. Westerners’ inability to convince the eastern-dominated legislature to establish a uniform plan for public schools bolstered their second major demand: a revision of Virginia’s state constitution and an expansion of white male suffrage. Between 1800 and 1850, westerners stridently demanded a white-basis reapportionment of the state legislature that would account for their region’s exponential population growth, which by 1850 made western Virginia the most populous part of the state. A more equitable apportionment of the state legislature would not only enable westerners to implement their plans for public education, but would also allow the region to accomplish its third goal—the construction of internal improvements capable of tying the economically-diversifying west to eastern and northern markets.

Western reformers faced many obstacles. Especially problematic was the stubbornness of eastern legislators, who feared that a western-dominated state government would threaten the perpetuity of slavery in the state. Opposition also came from westerners themselves, particularly the landed and court house elite that had little reason to affront their eastern political allies by supporting westerners’ demands for public schools, legislative reapportionment, expanded suffrage, and the construction of internal improvements. Another impediment was the second party system that swept Virginia in the 1830s and 1840s. When Whigs and Democrats appropriated western reformist platforms for their own partisan purposes, educational, political, and economic reform were drowned in the sea of party politics.

The contours of Virginia sectionalism have been ably recounted in a number of important monographs and essays over the previous fifty years. However, a synthesis combining these works has not been attempted since Charles Ambler’s seminal Sectionalism in Virginia. Further, most studies of Virginia sectionalism focus primarily upon constitutional revision and internal improvements at the expense of educational reform and the western political elite. This chapter overcomes these limitations by presenting Virginia sectionalism in a new way. While political reform, economic reform, and the intransigence of eastern and western political oligarchies will be examined, they are presented as part of the larger story of educational reform in western Virginia. The establishment of a free public school system was the first reform issue embraced by western Virginians as well as the most frequently defeated. While the crusade for legislative reapportionment and suffrage expansion met with some success by 1851, public education remained in a blighted state. This chapter also serves as a prelude to the
vicious denominational battles waged by northern and southern Methodists in 1850s western Virginia. Northern Methodists’ ability to win converts by defending the western reformist agenda and southern Methodists’ appeal to Virginia’s leaders, both eastern and western, were rooted in the sectional battles that defined Virginian politics between 1776 and 1851.

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At the West Virginia Constitutional Convention, Methodist minister Gordon Battle zealously made his case for the necessity of a state-funded public school system. Every year, Battelle declared, “The people have been leaving West Virginia in droves,” because “elsewhere they could educate their children, and here they could not do it.” State-funded public schools would not just encourage settlement in the new state of West Virginia, they were also “vital to the welfare of the whole people of the State” because they provided “for the highest interests of the children.” The use of tax dollars to fund “merely material facilities like expensive public buildings,” could wait until after West Virginian children were provided with the tools necessary to becoming responsible and productive citizens.38

Battelle’s impassioned plea for the creation of a tax-supported public school system was preceded by decades of educational reform agitation in western Virginia. Nearly fifty years before Battelle was born, Thomas Jefferson presented to the 1779 Virginia General Assembly the first proposal for tax-supported public schools in Virginia’s history. Jefferson’s comprehensive plan called for each of Virginia’s counties

to be divided into districts, which would be responsible for constructing a public school within their bounds. Every child in the district would be guaranteed three years of public schooling paid for by public taxation. Children showing the most promise would then be permitted to continue their education at the public’s expense. To ensure these schools were staffed by the highest quality teachers, Jefferson’s plan also called for the creation of academies dedicated to training public school teachers. Despite Jefferson’s repeated assertions that common schools were essential to the formation of an enlightened body politic, the Virginia legislature rejected his plan.\textsuperscript{39} Jefferson’s failure foreshadowed over 80 years of frustration for educational reformers.

For the next fifteen years, parents seeking to provide their children with a rudimentary education relied upon “Old Field Schools.” These schools, held in unused buildings located in abandoned fields, were led by itinerant instructors contracted by local parents to teach for a set number of months.\textsuperscript{40} In 1796, agitation from educational reformers resulted in the General Assembly’s passage of the Aldermanic Law. The Aldermanic Law was non-binding and permitted county courts to hold elections for aldermen, who were responsible for dividing their county into districts. These districts, subject to the alderman’s oversight, could then form a system of tax-supported common schools. The Aldermanic System, for a number of reasons, proved to be a failure. The first major problem was a lack of able administration as well as the absence of a common school fund to supplement taxes paid by county citizens. Another problem was the intransigence of the county courts, made up of “persons of affluence,” who refused to “be

\textsuperscript{39} Rice, \textit{Allegheny Frontier}, 214.
\textsuperscript{40} Rice, \textit{Allegheny Frontier}, 211-212.
saddled with the costs of educating the poor.” By 1800, the weakness of the Aldermanic law and the tacit and overt opposition of western Virginia’s county courts ensured that education remained in an undeveloped state.

The Virginia Legislature returned to educational reform when it established the Virginia Literary Fund in 1810. Influenced by similar legislation passed in neighboring northern states, the fund assisted parents unable to afford the cost of their children’s education by providing them with monies to supply teachers and textbooks. The fund’s coffers were supplemented primarily by revenue generated from the confiscation and sale of abandoned or forfeited lands. A state board of commissioners presided over the Literary Fund and selected a commissioner for each of Virginia’s counties. These commissioners were charged with determining the number of poor children eligible for the funds as well as the amount they should receive. The Literary Fund, like the Aldermanic system, was also a failure. Many western Virginian parents were unwilling to accept Literary Fund money since doing so required them to admit they were unable to educate their children on their own. Barring this hindrance, a lack of centralized state supervision, a common problem in Virginia’s attempts to initiate school systems in the early nineteenth Century, resulted in funds being expended on grossly unqualified teachers, poorly-constructed schools, and inferior classroom texts. Summarizing the quality of teachers under the Literary Fund, one westerner remarked that “as a rule, the teacher possessed but little education. Sometimes the one person in the community having the most knowledge was employed as instructor. He was regarded fully competent

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42 John C. McEldowney, History of Wetzel County, West Virginia (1901), 159.
if he . . . could read and write.” Teachers paid for with Literary Fund money were “judged primarily for their ability to keep strict discipline and get respect from pupils,” skills which stemmed from brawn rather than intelligence.

The Literary Fund program was also doomed by an overall lack of funds. In most cases, county allotments were completely inadequate to pay for the number of indigent children in need of aid. Pendleton County school commissioner James Boggs spoke for many of his colleagues in the mid-1830s when he reported that his county’s “school funds are insufficient to educate all the poor of the county, even if competent teachers could be obtained.” The University of Virginia also sapped the Literary Fund’s coffers. In 1818, the Virginia General Assembly passed an act “Appropriating Part of the Revenue of the Literary Fund for Other Purposes.” This act called for $15,000 to be withdrawn annually from the Literary Fund and transmitted to the University. This act outraged proponents of the Literary Fund and western Virginia’s developing middle class, who felt that Virginia’s state government was dedicated only to supporting the top and bottom ranks of society. An Ohio County petition to the Virginia legislature complained that “by the establishment of the University and the fund for the Primary schools the richest and the poorest seem to have received a full share of your aid and support—but the middle classes, those constituting the bone and nerve of a community seem alone to have been neglected.” Most westerners, however, focused their anger at

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45 Hu Maxwell, *History of Pendleton County, West Virginia* (Franklin, WV: Self-Published, 1910), 125-126.
47 *Ohio County Legislative Petitions*, December 8, 1825 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
the University’s appropriation of Literary Fund monies: “A splendid university . . . has been endowed, accessible only to the sons of the wealthy planters of the eastern part of the state and of the southern states. I have only heard of two students attending it from the Northwest.” Westerners lamented that “the resources of the Literary Fund intended for all . . . has been . . . frittered away in the endowment of an institution whose tendencies are essentially aristocratic, and beneficial only to the very rich.” What remained of the Literary Fund’s monies after the University’s appropriation were then “scattered somewhat in the manner that an ostentatious nabob would scatter small change among a promiscuous crowd of paupers and cry out, ‘catch who can.’”

When the returns from the 1840 Census were made public, the arrested state of public education in western Virginia became too much for residents to bear. The census revealed that more than ten percent of Virginia’s residents above the age of 20 could neither read nor write. In contrast, northern states such as Massachusetts possessed an illiteracy rate of only one in one hundred sixty-one. This embarrassing revelation inspired many westerners to demand that the legislature take action. Even some eastern leaders took notice. In an 1840 address, Virginia Governor David Campbell described the

49 Charles Ambler, Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell Book and Stationary Company, 1913), 219; Thomas C. Hunt, “Sectionalism, Slavery, and Schooling in Antebellum Virginia,” West Virginia History 46 (1985): 125-36. Hunt notes that of East’s total white population of 269,000 whites in 1850, 29,808 could not read or write. Of the West’s total white population of 271,000, 28,924 were unable to read or write.
50 Lawrence Cremin, American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876 (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) and Carl Kaestle, Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983) both argue that the antebellum era was marked by a national movement for free common schools. Educational reformers such as Horace Mann fervently believed that the perpetuation of the republic depended upon intelligent and engaged citizens in possession of a common intellectual background. Mann urged the creation of a universal system of free common schools that would provide children of all backgrounds with a common education that would prepare them for lives as responsible republican citizens.
problem as “of appalling magnitude” and expressed alarm at “the number likely to remain uninstructed and to grow up without good perception of their duties, religious, social, and political.” He urged the General Assembly to increase drastically the Literary Fund’s coffers while providing for the establishment of 8,000 new tax-supported schools. Campbell’s pleas convinced the 1840-1841 session of the General Assembly to instruct its Committee on Schools and Colleges to present recommendations at its next session for a more efficient common school system. Western educational reformers saw the legislature’s action as a fresh opportunity to press their cause.

Enos W. Newton emerged as the leader of the revitalized educational reform movement. Newton, a dedicated member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and editor of the Kanawha Republic, demanded that westerners voice their “universal dissatisfaction with the utter want of any system of common schools” and “secure to the rising generation the means of a proper education.” He warned that “until a general, uniform, and practicable system of education shall be devised and set in motion on a stable foundation, with ample provision by taxation and otherwise to sustain it” Virginia’s illiteracy rates would continue to grow. Newton’s agitation, as well as a number of public meetings held throughout the first half of 1841, led to a regional educational convention in Clarksburg, Harrison County, in September 1841.

52 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 225. He argued that his proposal would receive special support from western farmers “whose inconsiderable incomes will not admit of their taking upon themselves the whole charge of their children’s education, but who are yet able and might be relied upon cheerfully to contribute to the support of a judicious and comprehensive system.” Edgar Knight, A Documentary History of Education in the South before 1860 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 87-88.
54 Kanawha Republican, December 1, 1841.
55 Kanawha Republican, July 23, 1842.
The Clarksburg Convention was the most important educational reform assembly ever held in antebellum western Virginia. It met on September 8, 1841, the vast majority of its 114 delegates hailing from western Virginia.56 The meeting began with a blistering speech from Disciples of Christ Minister Alexander Campbell, who assaulted the Literary Fund’s many deficiencies. “We do not want poor schools for poor scholars, or gratuitous instructions for paupers; but we want schools for all at the expense of all.” Campbell criticized the fact that parents had to admit their poverty to receive funds. “Experience has everywhere proved—that . . . few of the worthy poor, who most deserve education, will accept it under such humiliating conditions.”57 Other delegates lamented that “no provision is made for ascertaining the qualifications of teachers as to acquirements, capacity to teach, and moral character.” “The great wonder,” according to the convention’s membership, was “that the present system has been suffered by an enlightened legislature to remain so long.”58

After considering a number of plans, the Clarksburg Convention approved a memorial outlining its goals for public education.59 According to the memorial, the “deficiencies of our common school system” and “the condition of our people in the point of intelligence” necessitated the immediate establishment of a system of tax-supported public schools.60 It demanded that each county, regardless of population, be divided into school districts and provided with good schoolhouses. These district schools and their
teachers would be “supported by a tax on property,” as well as the Literary Fund. The Clarksburg Memorial demanded that the Literary Fund’s coffers be increased not only through state taxation, but also by accepting Virginia’s share of the Federal Land Fund. Delegates also called for the creation of a state superintendent of schools charged with monitoring how each district utilized its funds. Before adjourning on September 9, the convention ordered that its plan be submitted to the Virginia General Assembly for consideration as well as to a second education convention scheduled to meet in Richmond the following December.

The Clarksburg Convention blamed the undemocratic nature of Virginia’s government for the lethargic pace of educational reform. Educational reformers stressed that the blighted state of education was a direct result not only of the poorly-maintained Literary Fund, but of the unequal political position of the west. Western educational reformers argued that suffrage restrictions and the east’s bloated majority in the state legislature caused the sluggish development of common schools. A public meeting held in Tridelphia, Ohio County, resolved that by reserving political power in the hands of the east, “the present Constitution of Virginia . . . does not represent the public sentiment, the expanded wants and the means of relative improvement which are necessary to preserve to Virginia her equal position among the States,” particularly “the great task of devising a system of Public Education.” Another westerner lamented the “falling off in the number of those who have received the benefits of education.” “I begin to despair of any valuable action of the subject by the legislature until . . . the free white population of

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61 The Federal Land Fund’s applicability to educational reform will be discussed in further detail below.

62 Richmond *Enquirer*, September 1, 1846.
the west have its just weight in the councils of government."63 The Clarksburg
Convention also assaulted the eastern planter elite’s dominance of state politics. Eastern
control of the General Assembly, which submerged “the supremacy of the popular will,”
was “daily becoming odious,” and must eventually yield to “resistless attacks.”64 Eastern
conservatives, obsessively protective of their slave property, had for too long hurled
“negative abstractions around the constitution. . . . limiting the energy and actions of the
central power and saying what it shall not do.” Instead, “it should be the object of the
state. . . at the earliest opportunity” to extend “the right of suffrage to all.”65 Only then
would everyday westerners have the power to force the legislature to act.

The Clarksburg Convention similarly attacked western Virginia’s county courts,
whose opposition to public school taxes all but killed the Aldermanic system in the
1790s. The convention’s memorial bitterly remonstrated that “We build our gorgeous
courthouses to sit in solemn mockery of judgment upon the ignorant and unfortunate
victims, whose criminal fate might have been evaded but for the neglect of society and
the expenditure of our public monies in the wrong direction.” The western elite must
“choose to unite in the common purpose of education, it is but right they should pay a
higher tax for their protection and the preservation of the republic than others. Morally
and politically a higher accountability rests upon them.”66

Educational reformers’ blending of educational and political reform was
influenced by nearly four decades of western agitation. In addition to the expansion of
suffrage to all white males, western political reformers demanded constitutional revisions

63 Kanawha Republican, May 21, 1841.
that would reapportion the Virginia legislature to account for the west’s growing white population. These reforms would enable westerners to develop a system of public schools and to harness the legislative power necessary to develop the region’s commercial economy through the construction of internal improvements and the establishment of banking facilities. Eastern planters, on the other hand, viewed reformers as “as advocates of ‘mobocracy’” who “wanted political power only in order to abolish slavery by the imposition of heavy taxes on slaves or even direct emancipation.” An overview of the political reform movement demonstrates why educational reformers saw constitutional revision as crucial to the success of their cause.

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Between 1790 and 1810 the west’s white population nearly doubled from 55,873 to 105,469. As newcomers streamed into the region to farm or raise livestock, they were frustrated by their new home’s lack of navigable rivers and turnpikes, which made it exceedingly difficult to transport their crops or animals to eastern or northern markets. Landless laborers who flocked to the west’s developing towns in search of work were similarly annoyed by Virginia’s franchise restrictions. Commercially-minded westerners added the establishment of western banks to an expanding agenda that included reapportionment, the expansion of suffrage, and increased subsidies for internal improvements.

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68 Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970 (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, n/d), 1790 and 1810 Census Data.
Western legislators knew that a fundamental restructuring of Virginia’s constitution was crucial to accomplish their goals. Between 1810 and 1813 they introduced legislation calling for a constitutional convention ten times. While these demands were sustained on two occasions by the House, they were killed in the Senate. Reform proposals introduced in 1814 and 1815 met similar fates.\textsuperscript{70} These disappointments resulted in the calling of the 1816 Staunton Convention.\textsuperscript{71} The convention’s memorial denounced the fact that Virginia’s government was “in the hands of a minority . . . inhabiting a particular section of the state.”\textsuperscript{72} Constitutional revision was essential to securing to “every part of the state” a voice in governance “proportioned to its white population.”\textsuperscript{73} Delegates also demanded that the constitution be “further to be amended, so as to define therein the right of suffrage and establish it upon a just and equitable basis.”\textsuperscript{74} The memorial was adopted decisively.\textsuperscript{75}

Western Virginians responded enthusiastically to the Staunton Convention. A mass meeting in Wood County expressed its undivided support for the convention’s actions and complained that “pernicious to the general interests” of western Virginians, state political power remained “in the hands of a minority, inhabiting a particular section of the state.”\textsuperscript{76} In response to the Staunton Convention’s memorial, the House of

\textsuperscript{70} Richard Curry, \textit{A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), 14. Because the General Assembly was unwilling to charter new banking institutions, there was a substantial money shortage in the early nineteenth-century west. This made it nearly impossible for entrepreneurs in the region to establish a foothold in the developing market economy. At the start of the War of 1812, there was not a single bank operating in western Virginia.

\textsuperscript{71} Rice, \textit{Allegheny Frontier}, 326-329.

\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Farmer’s Repository}, September 11, 1816.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Farmer’s Repository}, September 11, 1816.

\textsuperscript{74} \textit{Farmer’s Repository}, September 11, 1816.

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Farmer’s Repository}, September 11, 1816.

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Wood County Legislative Petitions}, November 20, 1816, (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
Delegates approved a bill calling for a referendum on a proposed constitutional convention, which was once again killed in the Senate. However, aware of the necessity of appeasing the increasingly discontented western population, moderate legislators convinced conservative easterners to support the chartering of two new western banks, the Northwestern Bank of Virginia at Wheeling and a second in Winchester, located in the Valley of Virginia.77 Eastern Virginia’s effort to conciliate westerners on the banking issue was a success and over the proceeding decades demands for new banks gradually disappeared from the western reform agenda. However, the General Assembly’s action also foreshadowed what became eastern Virginian policy when dealing with western political discontent. By approving new western banks, the east purposefully addressed only one of the many symptoms the west’s unequal position in state governance rather than its cause. Seeing through this strategy, western reformers refused to abandon their crusade. Between 1816 and 1828 they assaulted the Virginia General Assembly with a flurry of petitions calling for a state constitutional convention. Public meetings throughout the region also lent their support.78

Western political agitation finally pressed the General Assembly to act. In 1828, the legislature approved a constitutional convention referendum. When the referendum was submitted to the people, it was approved by a majority of 21,896 – 16,646. Most eastern voters disapproved of the convention, but nearly unanimous support in the Valley and western Virginia turned the tide.79 The constitutional convention convened on October 5, 1829. While James Madison, James Monroe, and John Marshall were among

77 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 329.
78 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 366.
79 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 367.
those in attendance, a new class of eastern conservatives, particularly Abel Upshur and Benjamin Watkins Leigh, dominated the proceedings. Upshur and Leigh saw the convention’s western delegates as a motley collection of rabble-rousing frontiersmen whose dedication to Virginia’s preeminent interests, particularly slavery, was questionable. Leigh mocked westerners at the start of the convention, asking “what real share, so far as mind is concerned, could the peasantry of the West be supposed to take in the affairs of the State?” Leigh’s sentiments reflected eastern Virginians’ egotism as well as their determination to maintain their lopsided control of the state’s government. Upshur’s and Leigh’s efforts were aided by the apportionment of the 1829-1830 Convention, which was determined by the counting the state’s white and slave populations.

On the convention floor Upshur articulated what became an article of faith among eastern conservatives. As slaveholders, easterners possessed an inherent right to “Constitutional guarantees,” namely their dominance of Virginia’s government, to protect their “peculiar property against unjust taxation and fanatical assault.” Upshur and his fellow conservatives were convinced that if the white basis of representation was adopted, westerners would smother eastern slaveholders in taxes that would “forever render this sort of property precarious and insecure.” Increased taxation of easterners’ slave property would become the “ready source” of funds to construct the west’s much-

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80 Philyaw, *Virginia’s Western Visions*, 146.
83 *Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention of 1829-1830*, 76.
needed “roads and canals.” Taxation would be only the first step. Upshur and Leigh were convinced that once westerners took control of Virginia’s government, they would use their majority to abolish slavery. Conservatives utilized similar arguments to oppose universal white male suffrage, which John Randolph, Virginia’s erstwhile aristocrat, defined as nothing short of “rank Jacobinsim.” If suffrage expansion was approved, non-slaveholding voters would “in less than twenty years” introduce legislation “into the House . . . for the emancipation of every slave in Virginia.” Randolph promised that slaveholders would never submit to such “vassalage.”

Alexander Campbell and Phillip Doddridge spoke for most western reformers when they stressed that they had no desire to abolish slavery. Equal political rights would simply allow the west to construct the transportation improvements necessary to connecting the region to outside markets and freeing itself from the shackles of economic stagnation. Reformers also vigorously defended universal suffrage. Given the fact that 22 of the 24 states had already passed universal suffrage provisions, it was humiliating that at least 31,000 taxpaying Virginians were denied the right to vote because they did not possess the requisite amount of land. One did not have to own a substantial amount of property to vote. Long residence, nativity, military service and the payment of taxes were all signs of a long-term investment in the state.

With the battle-lines clearly set, the convention’s reformist and conservative contingents engaged in a vicious three-week debate over suffrage and representation.
Seeking to end the stalemate between eastern conservatives and western reformers, moderate William F. Gordon introduced a compromise package. Relying once again upon the mixed basis, the compromise would reapportion General Assembly based upon population changes since 1776. Reapportionment could again be opened to discussion in 1841 if two-thirds of the General Assembly approved. With almost all western delegates voting in the negative, the Gordon Plan passed by a majority of 55 - 41. After defeating the white basis, conservatives used their majority to squash any expansion of white male suffrage. Satisfied with their victory, eastern delegates then passed the amended constitution by a vote of 55 - 40.89

Western Virginians were outraged by the convention’s actions.90 Phillip Doddridge woefully remarked to his constituents upon returning home that the new constitution was “a political compact for the slavery of us and our children,” which ensured perpetual western “political vassalage under the yoke of that Eastern oligarchy.”91 A meeting held at the Wheeling county courthouse similarly damned the “determination of the minority who now wield the power, to secure and perpetuate the same in their own hands, in utter disregard of the bill of rights and of the principles of justice.” The meeting closed by denouncing Leigh’s claim “that the free laborers of the West, are, in any sense, on a level with the slaves of the East, or the peasantry of Europe.”92 An editorial in the Wheeling Compiler similarly expressed “unfeigned sorrow” that “the grievances under which we have so long groaned, and of which we

89 Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 169.
90 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 374.
91 Alison Goodyear Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-32 (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 79.
92 Wheeling Compiler, December 23, 1829.
have so long complained . . . are continued, and riveted upon us more firmly than ever.”

According to the Compiler, the new constitution was a “MONSTER.”93 Many westerners
suggested a division of the state, a proposition supported by easterners seeking to “get
clear of this disaffected population.”94 In the end cooler heads prevailed as moderates
urged “the friends of reform” not to “be disheartened by the failure of so considerable a
part of their plans. . . . No American legislature can long ignore the voice of a majority
of the people, contending for the first and most important of republican principles.”95

Notwithstanding western outrage, the new constitution was ratified by a firm
majority of 26,055 to 15,566. No county within the bounds of present-day West Virginia
 favored ratification. However, the referendum’s results did reveal a growing fissure
among western reformers that had important implications for the future of Virginia
sectionalism. Until 1830, the Valley of Virginia and the counties comprising present-day
West Virginia generally worked together to secure universal white male suffrage, the
white basis of representation, and appropriations for internal improvements. However,
the Valley deserted the rest of the west during the referendum by casting a firm majority
in favor of the new constitution. With a growing slave population, most Valley residents
were contented with a reapportionment based upon updated mixed population figures.
Their long-term interests protected, the Valley’s political leaders abandoned western
Virginia and moved further into eastern Virginia’s proslavery orbit.96 The Valley’s
defection from the reformist camp shifted the battle lines of sectionalism in Virginia.

93 Wheeling Compiler, January 27, 1830.
94 Winchester Republican, December 3, 1830.
95 Wheeling Gazette, April 24, 1830.
96 Curry, A House Divided, 20.
Until 1861, the geographic contours of Virginia sectionalism generally conformed to the present-day boundaries of Virginia and West Virginia.97

While the outcome of the constitutional convention stifled the western political reform movement, it was revitalized by the results of the 1840 Census. The census revealed that the west’s total white population had grown over the previous decade to 204,774, accounting for 29 percent of the total white population then living in the state.98 However, the region’s representation in the Virginia Legislature in no way reflected this demographic reality. Armed with this evidence of their region’s insulting political position, western reformers resumed their calls for a constitutional convention.99 A meeting held in Charleston, Kanawha County, in 1841 assured easterners “that their slave property may be safe without retaining in the hands of a minority all the power to make all laws for the government of the state.”100 Indeed, “the partial disenfranchisement of the west” and the sectional strife it generated was a “source of more danger to the east than can possibly arise from their equal participation in government.”101 “Periodical and gradual reapportionments alone can cement that confidence and union” essential to the maintenance of slavery in Virginia.102

The Charleston meeting was followed by a torrent of western conventions and mass meetings. Western agitators resolved to “set to work at once to reform our forgotten constitution; to introduce vigorously a system of popular Education” and to “carry out to

97 Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 172.
98 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 22.
100 “The Inequality of Representation in the General Assembly of West Virginia: A Memorial to the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Virginia, adopted at full meeting of the citizens of Kanawha,” West Virginia History 25, 286.
101 “The Inequality of Representation in the General Assembly of West Virginia,” 292.
102 “The Inequality of Representation in the General Assembly of West Virginia,” 296.
completion, the works of Internal Improvement.” When these goals were accomplished Virginia would “be placed in the high road to prosperity, and will again assume its commanding position among her sister states that she once held, and to which her natural resources justly entitle her.”

A mass meeting held in Lewisburg, Greenbrier County, expressed its agreement when it unanimously resolved that the Virginia Legislature should immediately “make provision [for] calling a state convention to alter and amend the present constitution.”

Eastern-managed legislative apportionment generated far too many “sources of jealously, and conflicts of opinion and interest, dangerous to the peace, harmony, and prosperity of the State.” An 1842 meeting in Kanawha County concurred that “the prosperity, interests and honor of the West are as mere dust of the balance” to eastern legislators. “The people of the west of all parties are well convinced that it is high time that our legislature should cease to be controlled by the political juntos of any party at Richmond.”

This western militancy unsettled eastern conservatives. One nervous eastern legislator expressed his hope that “our western brethren, while they assert their rights with firmness—will resort to no violent and revolutionary expedients.”

The eastern-dominated Virginia Legislature did not share the west’s enthusiasm for political change. Between 1843 and 1849 numerous bills were introduced calling for a new constitutional convention, all of which were defeated. Mass meetings, editorials, pamphlets, and even a constitutional convention failed produce the expansion of white power.

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103 Kanawha Republican, November 6, 1844.
104 Kanawha Republican, August 13, 1842.
105 Kanawha Republican, October 15, 1842.
106 Kanawha Republican, August 6, 1842.
107 Kanawha Republican, August 6, 1842. Another easterner remarked that “We trust that our Western friends . . . will adopt a wise, unimpassioned, and conciliatory language, and will recollect the danger which we ran during the last State Convention of dividing the State, upon this much agitated question,” Richmond Enquirer, July 12, 1842.
male suffrage and legislative reapportionment that westerners felt was essential to their region’s future prosperity. While the storm of partisan politics that surrounded the 1844 Presidential Election briefly stifled western political reformers in the mid-1840s, they reemerged in 1846. United with educational reformers and proponents of internal improvements, western political agitators resolved to make a final thrust for a second constitutional convention.

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Educational reformers did not just wed their cause to political reform. Westerners believed that internal improvements, particularly the construction of roads, canals, and railroads, were vital to their economic development and to the cause of education. These improvements would not only better connect western farmers and manufacturers to northern and eastern markets, but also make a district school system more feasible by linking isolated neighborhoods. Delegates at the Clarksburg Convention recognized this connection and suggested that some of the “funds for the education system should . . . be devoted to works of improvement, more especially to those country roads which will reach every portion of the State and unite them in social and commercial intercourse. . . . The soul and the soil will then be cultivated.”

Clarksburg reformers portrayed internal improvements and education as complimentary issues. The achievement of one would speed the success in the other. Other westerners remarked that “In some portions . . . of the state education of any kind is not possible . . . . no successful effort for it can ever be made until neighborhoods shall be brought closer together.”

Another suggested that better transportation would lead to “a careful and steady support of Education” especially

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109 Kanawha Republican, December 10, 1845.
since “roads are amongst the very surest and best of all the practical reformers of our social condition.”

The entwinement of education and internal improvements continued at the Richmond Education Convention in December 1841. The Richmond Convention represented the culmination of the 1841 educational movement and included representatives from the Clarksburg Convention as well as delegates from the valley and the east. Held in the hall of the House of Delegates, the Richmond Convention included a number of prominent Virginians, including Thomas Ritchie, the editor of the Richmond Enquirer. Throughout the convention, Ritchie used the Enquirer to advocate for both educational reform and internal improvements, combining the two as complimentary interests: “Education, like other great interests—to wit; agriculture, manufactures, and commerce” must receive “legislative aid” to accomplish “what cannot very well be done by the application of individual means.” Ritchie believed that educational reform and internal improvements were essential to modernizing Virginia and placing it on equal footing with its sister states. The Richmond Convention, though large in size, did little to build upon the Clarksburg Convention’s work. After the convention sent its memorial to the Legislature, educational reformers braced for the legislature’s response.

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110 Richmond Enquirer, October 3, 1845.
111 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 185.
112 Richmond Enquirer, November 12, 1841.
113 Richmond Enquirer, December 18, 1841 and December 23, 1841. The Richmond Convention’s Memorial proposed a free common school system generally similar to that approved by the Clarksburg Convention (see footnote 21). The Richmond Convention, displaying less bias toward the University of Virginia than the western-led Clarksburg Convention, called on the university and the east’s private academies and colleges to support public secondary education by producing more teachers. The convention even suggested that students be allowed to attend the University for free if as they pledged to spend a few years after graduation teaching in Virginia’s schools.
114 Kanawha Republican, December 18, 1841.
In late December, the House of Delegates’ committee on public schools introduced a district school plan to the legislature based on the Clarksburg and Richmond Conventions’ proposals. The committee’s bill outlined a district system of free common schools paid for by local property taxes coupled with each district’s share of their county’s annual Literary Fund appropriation. Districts would be administered by three trustees, two elected by residents and one appointed by each county’s board of education. A full-time state superintendent would preside over the actions of the county boards and the trustees.\textsuperscript{115} The committee’s plan easily passed the House of Delegates by late March, but failed on a tie-vote in the Senate a few days later. Reformers were shocked that a “measure which we believe to be of more importance than all others put together” was “\textit{defeated by a tie vote}.”\textsuperscript{116} Westerners were also infuriated by “the want of interest manifested in this subject by the members of the Legislature.” Indeed, when one proponent of common schools “made a luminous, eloquent, and powerful speech, vast numbers deserted their seats . . . The ability and eloquence of the orator could not compensate for the want of attraction on this subject.” Such “icy indifference” was “more fatal even than rancorous hostility.”\textsuperscript{117} Thomas Ritchie demanded that reformers “tell your representatives, in language not to be misunderstood nor evaded, that something must be done” for “the multitudes of our Commonwealth’s children, who are now utterly destitute of the first elements of Education.”\textsuperscript{118} Educational reformers heeded Ritchie’s

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\textsuperscript{115} William Arthur Maddox, \textit{The Free School Idea in Virginia Before the Civil War} (New York: Teacher’s College, Columbia University, 1918), 137.
\textsuperscript{116} Kanawha \textit{Republican}, April 16, 1842.
\textsuperscript{117} Kanawha \textit{Republican}, December 24, 1842.
\textsuperscript{118} Richmond \textit{Enquirer}, July 5, 1842.
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call, and for the next three years pressed the legislature to again consider the establishment of a district school system.

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While educational reformers ultimately failed in their 1841 campaign for the establishment of a district school system in Virginia, their combination of educational reform with internal improvements is instructive. Between 1800 and 1840, western Virginia’s white population grew exponentially as the region’s economy diversified. The west’s economic development generated a concerted campaign for the construction of internal improvements necessary to assuring the region prosperity akin to free soil Ohio and Pennsylvania. A summary of the gradual development of western Virginia agriculture and manufacturing between 1800 and 1850 demonstrates the extent to which western demands for internal improvements were undergirded by the economic changes occurring in the region.

Agriculture dominated the economic life of early nineteenth Century western Virginia. Western corn was frequently distilled into whiskey to facilitate easier transportation while the region’s wheat usually found its way to the region’s developing flour mills.119 While market-oriented yeoman farmers made up the bulk of western Virginia’s agricultural labor force, the region did contain many large landholders. In the Greenbrier and Kanawha Valleys, as well as in the eastern panhandle of present-day West Virginia, large farms staffed by slave laborers dotted the landscape. However, these farms were generally exceptional.120 In western Virginia’s southern counties, more than

119 Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 58. Westerners grew a variety of other crops including oats, rye, buckwheat, potatoes, beans, squash, and pumpkins.
ninety percent of family heads were farmers. Farmers in southern western Virginia generally eked out a subsistence-based existence as the dearth of good roads and market towns precluded any attempts to produce for market. In contrast to their southern neighbors, farmers in the northern parts of western Virginia, benefitting from relatively better transportation systems, became increasingly market-oriented.\textsuperscript{121} Stock farming was also a central part of the western Virginia economy and was particularly lucrative in the South Branch and Greenbrier Valleys.\textsuperscript{122} Each spring, South Branch cattlemen drove large herds to their mountain pastures, where they spent the summer grazing before being driven to market. The completion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to Wheeling in 1852 increased the importance of cattle-raising in western Virginia by making the transportation of cattle to northern markets significantly easier. New zones of cattle production emerged and small villages like Harrison County’s Lost Creek became premier railroad cattle towns.\textsuperscript{123}

Western Virginia’s manufacturing sphere also developed in spite of a lack of transportation facilities.\textsuperscript{124} Given the extensive cultivation of wheat in western Virginia, flour mills were among the early manufactories established in the region.\textsuperscript{125} Developing first in the region’s eastern panhandle, flour mills soon spread to the Monongahela Valley and the northern panhandle. By 1825, flour mills in Wellsburg, Brooke County, were annually floating roughly 30,000 to 40,000 barrels of flour down the Ohio River to markets in New Orleans. Other important milling centers were located in Wheeling, West

\textsuperscript{121} Shade, \textit{Democratizing the Old Dominion}, 47.
\textsuperscript{123} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 81.
\textsuperscript{124} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 82.
\textsuperscript{125} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 82.
Liberty, Martinsburg, and Morgantown. Flour mills were important sources of social interaction in western Virginia’s rugged terrain. Residents from throughout the region traveled to the flour mills not only to ground their wheat, but also to share gossip and news.

The Kanawha Valley’s salt industry was of even greater consequence to the western economy. The salt industry can be traced to Joe Ruffner, who began the first salt production operation in western Virginia in 1797. By 1800, Ruffner was producing about 150 bushels of salt a day, which he sold for eight to ten cents a pound. However, it was Ruffner’s younger brother Tobias who transformed the business into a lucrative industry. Tobias Ruffner correctly believed that a vast saline reservoir existed deep beneath Kanawha Valley’s rock strata. Utilizing iron drill bits and horse rather than manpower, Tobias Ruffner successfully drilled to a new depth of 410 feet and tapped brine so rich that it yielded one bushel of salt for every 45 gallons harvested. Tobias Ruffner’s success drew many entrepreneurs to the Kanawha Valley and salt furnaces spread along either side of the Kanawha River for ten miles north of Charleston. By 1815, 52 furnaces were in operation and producing roughly 2,500 to 3,000 bushels of salt a day—a far cry from Joe Ruffner’s humble operation. By 1846, the Kanawha Salines were annually yielding 3,224,786 bushels of salt.

The salt industry transformed the Kanawha Valley’s social structure by introducing slavery to the region. In 1830, Kanawha County contained 1,717 slaves,

126 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 321-322.  
127 Mary Hurst, Social History of Logan County, West Virginia, 1765-1923 (MA Thesis: Columbia University, 1928), 18.  
128 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 310.  
129 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 311.  
130 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 312.
which accounted for 18 percent of the county’s population. By 1850, Kanawha County possessed a slave population of 3,140, or 26 percent of its overall population. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Kanawha possessed the third highest proportion of slaves in all of present-day West Virginia, trailing behind only Jefferson and Berkeley Counties, located in the eastern panhandle.\(^{131}\) The salt industry led to the establishment of a new aristocracy in the Kanawha Valley. Prior to the emergence of the salt industry, the majority of the region’s elite were drawn from large landowners and members of the county court. Salt production created a “nouveau riche” of salt barons, led by the Ruffner family, who along with the county’s landowning and courthouse elite wielded a firm control over local politics. The salt industry also diversified the region’s non-elite white population as artisans, mechanics, and merchants were drawn to the expanding economic opportunities heralded by salt. A land previously dominated by yeomen farmers and land speculators soon included a variety of landless laborers employed in making barrels, cutting timber, mining coal for the salt furnaces, or constructing the flatboats that carried Kanawha salt out of the region.\(^{132}\)

Iron production constituted another important facet of western Virginia’s manufacturing sphere. The largest antebellum ironworks was the Jackson Iron Works located on the Cheat River. This operation’s success, along with the region’s nascent flour milling enterprises, turned Morgantown into a significant commercial center. Iron production also developed in the eastern panhandle, particularly Hampshire County. The Bloomery Furnace, completed in 1833, became the third-largest iron manufacturer in

\(^{131}\) Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, *Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970* (Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, n/d), 1830, 1850, and 1860 Census Data.  
western Virginia. Relying upon the nearby Capon River to carry its products to market, the furnace remained in operation until the Civil War.\textsuperscript{133} Wheeling, however, became western Virginia’s paramount iron producer before the Civil War. By 1835 the city contained four foundries and four steam engines, which cemented its status as the most important commercial center in western Virginia and the third largest in Virginia as a whole.\textsuperscript{134}

Coal mining developed more gradually in the antebellum era, generally serving as a fuel source for the salt and iron industries. By 1846, the Kanawha Salines were annually using roughly 6 million bushels of coal harvested by local landowners who opened small mines on their lands. While some landowners envisioned coal as a future source of great profit, low rivers and a lack of good overland roads made it nearly impossible to send coal to northern markets. Before the Civil War, mined coal was generally consumed within western Virginia.\textsuperscript{135}

Western Virginia’s promising agricultural and manufacturing development was hampered by a lack of good transportation facilities. While the National Road, which connected Wheeling with the east coast, and the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike both served westerners by the late 1840s, these improvements paled in comparison to the infrastructure development programs initiated in many northern states and even in eastern Virginia.\textsuperscript{136} The Virginia legislature’s neglect of western transportation development was best evidenced by the State’s Board of Public Works. Established in 1816, the Board was

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\textsuperscript{133} Hu Maxwell and H.L. Swisher, \textit{History of Hampshire County West Virginia: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present} (Morgantown, WV: A. Brown Boughner, Printer, 1897), 534.
\textsuperscript{134} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 83-84.
\textsuperscript{136} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 87-89.
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charged with the duty of determining where internal improvement projects should be attempted as well as the amount of funds that would be dedicated to them. One of the first projects undertaken by the Board was the James River and Kanawha River canal. When completed the canal would connect the Kanawha River with the James River, thereby establishing a single waterway connecting the Ohio River (into which the Kanawha flowed) and eastern Virginia. However, legislative indifference, combined with a lack of funds, resulted in a continuous series of delays that doomed the project to failure. Despite the fact that work on the canal began in the 1820s, it remained uncompleted in 1861.\textsuperscript{137} Western frustration only increased when the east refused to permit the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to build a line across the central portion of western Virginia. Though the legislature eventually relented and allowed the railroad to establish a western terminus in Wheeling, it continually refused calls for connections to be built between Wheeling, Clarksburg, and Parkersburg. When the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was finally opened to Wheeling 1852, much of western Virginia was unable to benefit.\textsuperscript{138} This halted infrastructure development constantly reminded westerners of the economic disadvantages they faced because of Virginia’s undemocratic constitution.

Through public meetings, legislative petitions, and the pages of sympathetic newspapers such as the Kanawha \textit{Republican}, western Virginians demanded that eastern Virginia devote greater attention to western development. One resident remarked that “Very few States have said and written more and affected less on the subject of Internal Improvements than the Old Dominion.” Plans for internal improvements simply could not “escape the assaults of” eastern Virginians, “who draw their knowledge from the

\textsuperscript{137} Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 132.  
\textsuperscript{138} Rice, \textit{Allegheny Frontier}, 339.
capacious storehouses of . . . self-interest.”139 Westerners also attacked the eastern belief that the taxes necessary to the construction of internal improvements would come primarily from slaveholders’ pockets. An “Internal Improvement Meeting” in the Greenbrier Valley countered this argument by reminding easterners that westerners had for years paid taxes to support eastern internal improvements. Despite eastern assertions that westerners were “disposed to impose heavy taxes upon the property of the Eastern people, to make improvements for their own benefit,” the fact remained that “a fair proportion of the money vested in the internal improvements by the State, has not been expended on the West side of the Blue Ridge.”140 The west expected to be rewarded for its previous support of the east’s infrastructure development. In the weeks following the Lewisburg assembly, meetings in Kanawha, Logan, and Cabell counties passed similar resolutions.

Internal improvement meetings received hearty support from E.W. Newton and his Kanawha Republican. Newton bitterly remarked that the west “has long been regarded by the east with a cold, jealous, indifference to her interests, the means of education and internal improvement have been totally withheld.” Given eastern Virginia’s disregard for western interests, how could “the people of the west be willing . . . to continue their political connection with their eastern bretheren?”141 Newton demanded that his readers “not let the subject rest, till the whole state shall be properly aroused, till the people in all sections shall see that the prosperity, honor and glory of the state depend on the early completion of her works that have been so long permitted to

139 Kanawha Republican, December 25, 1844.
140 Kanawha Republican, June 4, 1844.
141 Kanawha Republican, June 2, 1844.
falter and languish.” A resident of the Kanawha Valley echoed these demands, stressing that “the State must put forth that effective effort for the completion of the J.R. and Ka. Improvement to the Ohio” and that the “Kanawha Valley must look to the Baltimore and Ohio Rail Road Company for an outlet to the Atlantic. The appeal should be made to the next legislature. The Western members must do their duty, in this respect.”

The Virginia legislature evinced little support for western demands. When a bill calling for a renewed financial commitment to the James River and Kanawha Canal was introduced in 1845, it was defeated in the House of Delegates. Newton saw the defeat as yet another example of “that body being incapable of appreciating any measure to advance the general prosperity and welfare of the people.” Had Virginia become “too destitute of enterprise and public spirit to protect, to foster and to advance the interests and welfare of our own people?” This “degradation, too intolerable to be endured,” should not “be allowed to persist.” Newton’s rhetoric did little to sway the eastern-dominated legislature, particularly as the 1844 Presidential Election submerged Virginia in the sea of party politics. AsVirginians debated the virtues of the Whig and Democratic Parties’ positions on Texas and the tariff, reformers stressed that the real question should be “Why is it that we of the South cannot get along as well as do the Yankees?”

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142 Kanawha Republican, June 11, 1844.
143 Kanawha Republican, June 4, 1844.
144 Kanawha Republican, July 2, 1844.
145 Kanawha Republican, August 13, 1844.
146 Kanawha Republican, August 20, 1844.
The partisan battles waged by the Whigs and Democrats in antebellum Virginia provide a third lens through which educational reform and Virginia sectionalism can be understood. As was the case with political reform and internal improvements, the battle for tax-supported public schools in western Virginia became intertwined with party politics. However, while political reform and internal improvements tended to complement calls for educational reform, party politics halted the movement as both Whigs and Democrats attempted to appropriate the issue to their own advantage. Despite the fact educational reformers eventually pushed the legislature to pass a common school plan in 1846, the bill clearly bore the scars of partisan rancor.

Following the Virginia Senate’s defeat of district schools in 1842, proponents of educational reform kept the issue before the people. Cries for reform, according to E.W. Newton, came from every quarter: “Through the press, and from the pulpit, through the primary assemblies” and especially through “the voice of sixty thousand whites adults who can neither read nor write.”\footnote{Kanawha Republican, August 5, 1843.} Education reform was simply a matter of justice: “The poor man pays taxes, renders military and civil service is subject to fines. . . and I say, he should have his children educated as of right, free of charge.” “The rich and poor should be placed on precisely the same equal footing. There should be no distinction between the children of a republic.”\footnote{Kanawha Republican, March 14, 1844.} Newton urged his readers to “hold primary meetings about this momentous, this mighty concern . . . meet in your neighborhoods. . . petition the Legislature—knock at its doors; shake them down, until you are heard.”\footnote{Kanawha Republican, March 14, 1844.} Westerners responded to Newton’s call. Between December 1844 and December 1845, reformers
assaulted the legislature with calls for the establishment of a free common school system. They also continued to tie their grievances to demands for political reform and internal improvements: “state policy . . . our schemes of internal improvement . . . are all deeply and intimately connected with the popular virtue and intelligence.” To keep pace with the prosperous states to its north and west, Virginia must immediately “amend the Constitution . . . [revise] the whole system of primary schools,” and “[promote] such internal improvements, especially the James River concerns, which the public interests demand.” As educational reform again gained traction Whig and Democrat leaders, seeking to exploit the issue to their advantage, entered the educational reform debate.

Whigs and Democrats sought vigorously to appeal to Virginia’s voters. While the Democrats were generally more successful electorally, contests between the two parties were always close between 1836 and 1852. Winners and losers were usually separated by only a few percentage points. During the era of the second party system, voter turnout in Virginia also dramatically increased. Internal improvements, a national bank, and tariffs were important issues to Virginians and they made sure their voices were heard at the polls. In present-day West Virginia, the manufacturing towns of Wheeling and Charleston were the crux of the Whig Party’s strength. These developing cities were so strongly Whig that Democrats were frequently unable to produce a viable opponent. In contrast, the Democratic Party tended to do better in the more isolated and rural sections of western Virginia, particularly its southern counties as well as those bordering the Ohio River. Democratic counties were also marked by higher rates of illiteracy and

150 Richmond Enquirer, January 24, 1843.
151 Richmond Enquirer, December 3, 1844.
152 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 108.
slaveholding (with the notable exception of Kanawha). Occupationally, the majority of both parties’ memberships were farmers, but Whigs tended to own smaller holdings situated on better land.

Whigs and Democrats differed primarily in their approach to the market and transportation revolutions sweeping the mid-nineteenth Century United States. Virginia’s Whigs embraced the cosmopolitan economic and social developments that commercialization heralded. Democrats, on the other hand, spoke for those seeking to maintain a traditional agrarian republic in the face of rapid economic, political, and social change. Democrats also firmly rejected Whigs’ desire to use state and federal government power to speed Virginia’s economic and social modernization. Of the many issues debated by Virginia’s Whigs and Democrats, the question of whether or not to accept Virginia’s share of the Federal Land Fund, particularly due to its relation to educational reform, generated a substantial degree of controversy.

In the 1830s, Congress passed a bill distributing to the states the surplus Federal funds accrued from the sale of public lands and the tariff. State legislatures needed only to accept the offer to receive their allotted share. Whigs zealously called on Virginia’s government to accept its allocation in order to provide the necessary base for funding works of internal improvements and a system of public schools. Democrats, however, saw the fund as a serious threat to state sovereignty. Thomas Ritchie spoke for many members of his party when he called the fund “a tariff bill in disguise” that heralded “the final destruction of the sovereignty and respectability of the states in a mad scramble for

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153 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 122-153.
154 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 122- 153.
funds.” Democrats stressed that since a substantial portion of the Land Fund came from tariff revenues, acceptance of the fund was tantamount to acceptance of the tariff, which benefitted northern manufacturers at the expense of southern agriculturalists. Democrats sought to dissuade “the friends of Education, and of internal improvements” from “eagerly expecting assistance from . . . the proceeds of the sales of public lands.” “By accepting these bounties” Virginia would diminish its “dignity and importance,” and “become subsidiary to the Federal Government.” Democrats were adamantly “opposed on principle to the usurpations of the Federal Government . . . . Men may die, but principles are immortal.”

Whigs rested their opposition on the charge of Democratic Party hypocrisy. While refusing, on constitutional principle, to accept the Land Fund for the purposes of educational reform and the construction of internal improvements, the Democratic and eastern-controlled General Assembly failed to approve the taxation necessary to fund such developments. “We, in Virginia, have been clamoring for the last fifteen or twenty years about State Rights and State sovereignties” denying “the Federal Government the right to interfere with our domestic concerns for the purpose of Internal Improvements or Education.” Yet “we take care not to exercise the right ourselves for any valuable purpose.” When the Land Fund bill was brought before the legislature for approval, a Democratic majority refused by a vote of 77-62 to accept Virginia’s share. Whigs were outraged: “We could not have supposed, and certainly did not imagine, that any legislative body in the world would have been capable of so excessive and refined a

156 *Richmond Enquirer*, December 7, 1841.
157 *Richmond Enquirer*, March 16, 1841.
158 *Richmond Enquirer*, November 2, 1841.
stupidity.”159 “This magnificent fund” could have been an “easy mode to accomplish. . . a renovation of the State, by calling into exercise new energies, and bringing into existence powers now dormant or lost.”160 Instead the funds would remain unused. Another Whig disdainfully concluded that the Democrat-controlled “House of Delegates preferred that this money shall continue to lie idle, rather than let the poor children get the benefit of it.”161

The Democrats’ and Whigs’ appropriation of educational reform smeared the cause with a political tar brush. Before the Whig Party attempted to portray the Land Fund as a necessary means to funding common schools, reformers could extol their cause as being above petty party politics. Educational reform now had to surmount the obstacle of being associated with a Whig program disdained by conservative Virginians. The Democrats’ rejection of the Land Fund also put them at cross purposes with educational reform and the construction of internal improvements. Democrats could not introduce new taxation for education or internal improvements without facing the obvious charge that acceptance of the fund would have precluded such measures.

Whigs’ and Democrats’ contrasting views of the limits of federal and state government power also framed their debates over whether education should be compulsory and subject to centralized state control. Whigs desired a state-controlled system of education while Democrats believed that such an arrangement took too much authority away from localities: “Entire maintenance by Government, of a system of Common Schools . . . . This plan is a very good one, under the sway of an absolute

159 Kanawha Republican, March 11, 1843
160 Richmond Enquirer, April 4, 1845.
161 Winchester Republican, February 24, 1846.
monarch.”

Centralization also blended with debates over whether district schools should be compulsory. Whigs in favor of compulsory education argued that, “The people, without distinction of classes, should be required, not left, to provide for universal elementary education . . . . It is insisted that there is a real, abiding obligation upon the State to make some such general provision.”

Democrats responded that western Virginians were opposed to having “even advantageous novelties forced upon them.” Democrats’ belief in limited government dictated their view of compulsory education in the same manner it shaped their opposition to using the Land Fund to support public schools. Whig arguments that a compulsory system of education was essential to Virginia’s long-term prosperity fell on deaf ears among their opponents.

Within this partisan tumult the 1845 Richmond Convention began the final concerted campaign for educational reform in antebellum Virginia. The convention met in the hall of the House of Delegates and consisted of 113 delegates from 51 Virginia

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162 Richmond Enquirer, April 3, 1846.
163 Richmond Enquirer, February 22, 1842. In Pillars of the Republic, Kaestle argues that Whigs were more likely than Democrats to embrace state centralization and compulsory attendance when discussing public education.
164 Richmond Enquirer, November 14, 1845.
165 Educational reformers occasionally found support from unlikely sources. George Fitzhugh, one of Virginia’s most prominent pro-slavery writers and a bitter critic of the free-soil North, fiercely defended educational reform. Fitzhugh portrayed common schools as a potential bulwark of slavery against “abolitionists [who] taunt us with the ignorance of our poor white citizens. This is a stigma on the South that should be wiped out.” Indeed, the establishment of a free school system would rebut abolitionists’ assertions that the slavery system operated to the detriment of poorer whites. Fitzhugh assured his readers that common schools posed no threat to slavery, especially since poor whites were crucial to maintaining the security of slavery: “The poor, too, ask no charity, when they demand universal education. They constitute our militia and our police. They secure men in possession of a kind of property which they could not hold a day but for the supervision and protection of the poor.” See Knight, A Documentary History of Education in the South before 1860, 161.
166 Many western leaders criticized the negative effect party politics had on education. One lamented that “our Legislators find so much more profitable and pleasant employment in organizing and conducting political parties, discussing federal relations and passing resolutions. . . . that but little time, if any, is left for the important topic connected with the education of our children.” Richmond Enquirer, January 24, 1843. Another demanded that the “arbitrary landmarks of party, for once, be dissolved; and let the question come, light or no light, and see if we may not soon boast of a system of education equal to that which has made New England what she is, the intellectual garden of the world.” Richmond Enquirer, October 27, 1843.
While the convention’s delegates broadly supported educational reform, they divided sharply over what kind of school system should be created. The Democrats and Whigs who made up the convention’s membership fiercely debated the merits of a compulsory school system, the increased taxes necessary to fund it, and the extent to which the state government should direct its operation. The convention’s proceedings eventually became so divisive that the body issued two separate memorials to the Legislature. The majority report reflected the views held by Democrats while the minority report evinced a clear Whig bias.

The majority report directly assaulted overt state involvement in public education. It argued that “the relation of parent and child is so sacred, that, under a free Government, no authoritative interference with the mode of the child’s education should be contemplated.” Despite calling on the legislature to “furnish every practicable facility for promoting the thorough education of their children” the majority report represented the awkward position Democrats assumed on educational reform. While supporting the movement in spirit, Democrats refused to support the devices—increased public taxation, compulsory attendance, the construction of internal improvements, and state supervision—that were essential to its success. Seeking to avoid supporting increased taxation, the majority report advocated continued reliance upon the Literary Fund. Counties could hold a referendum on whether or not to establish a tax-supported district

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169 Richmond *Enquirer*, October 21, 1845.
170 Richmond *Enquirer*, December 16, 1845.
171 Richmond *Enquirer*, December 16, 1845.
school system, yet, reflective of Democratic conservatism, a 2/3 majority was necessary for the district system to take effect.\footnote{172 Maddox, The Free School Idea in Virginia Before the Civil War, 150.}

The minority report took a more radical approach. It called for a compulsory district system and state regulation of schools, curriculum and teachers through regular standardized examinations and inspections. The report demanded that the state drastically enlarge funding for schools through increased state and local taxation. The minority report also hammered the Literary Fund’s inadequacies. The fund damaged poor children’s “standing among their comrades, and their self-respect, and frequently prevents their parents from accepting a boon which they think is coupled with odious distinctions.” The minority report’s plan, “by placing all classes upon one level, is more conducive to that equality of feeling which is peculiarly appropriate to our republican institutions, and will be instrumental in elevating the masses of society to that condition which will enable them to appreciate the blessings and share in the burdens of a free Government.” Before adjourning, the convention’s delegates instructed that both reports be transmitted to the legislature for consideration.\footnote{173 Richmond Enquirer, December 16, 1845. Maddox, The Free School Idea in Virginia Before the Civil War, 151. The minority report called for an enlarged school fund that, unlike the Literary Fund, would fund the education of all Virginian children.}

The Virginia House of delegates delayed action until early March 1846. The House’s plan for public schools, referred to as the “Twin Acts,” reflected the Democratic Party’s aversion to overt state involvement in education. The first of the two acts, “An Act to Amend the Present Primary School System,” was the only obligatory part of the legislation. It stated that no county could establish district schools without a 2/3 majority approval in a county referendum. Furthermore, at any point a county could hold a
referendum on whether to continue the district system, with a 2/3 majority once again required to keep the schools in operation. This provision reflected the Democrat-controlled legislature’s underlying opposition to centralized tax-supported schools by allowing a minority vote to defeat the plan.\textsuperscript{174} The second bill, “An Act for the Establishment of a District System,” dealt with technical considerations. It stated that if 2/3 of county voters approved, new taxes could be raised to support the operation of schools, with the county courts responsible for levying the taxes and distributing the proceeds. Each school district would be required to elect two trustees. A third trustee would be selected by the county board of commissioners, which would be staffed by the same individuals charged with the task of distributing each county’s allotment of the Literary Fund. Trustees would choose school sites, ensure the quality of teachers, and convince wary parents of the importance of their children’s education. The Whig party’s calls for a state superintendent, an enlarged state school fund, and the use of the Federal Land Fund as a revenue source for common schools were all ignored.\textsuperscript{175}

Despite the Richmond \textit{Enquirer}’s belief that the bill “furnishes at least a good foundation to build upon,” western reformers were dissatisfied with its limitations.\textsuperscript{176} The fact that the new district school plan would be supervised by a committee no more powerful than that which existed under the Literary Fund led many to believe that public schools would be plagued by a continued dearth of quality teachers. Reformers also feared that the new system’s limited funding positioned it for failure. Most insulting was the Democratic legislature’s inclusion of the 2/3 clause in the bill, which seemed little

\begin{footnotes}
\item[174] Ambler, \textit{A History of Education in West Virginia}, 54-57.
\item[175] Shade, \textit{Democratizing the Old Dominion}, 189-190; Ambler, \textit{A History of Education in West Virginia}, 54-57.
\item[176] Richmond \textit{Enquirer}, March 16, 1846.
\end{footnotes}
more than a ploy to ensure the defeat of district schools. Nonetheless, proponents of
district schools resolved to make the most of the bill.

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Between the passage of the “Twin Acts” and the Civil War, three counties in
present-day West Virginia approved the district school plan. Jefferson County, located in
the eastern panhandle of present-day West Virginia, approved the plan by a firm majority
in 1847. Ohio County, the epicenter of western reform, passed the plan one year later. Efforts to establish district schools in other western counties, however, revealed the limits
of the “Twin Acts.” District schools were blocked in both Cabell and Wayne counties by
a minority of residents opposed to the system. Marshall and Brooke Counties, which held
referendums in 1853 and 1855 respectively, posted majorities in favor of district schools,
but fell short of the 2/3 necessary to implement the system. Mason County voters
endorsed district schools in 1857, but members of the elite-dominated county court challenged the returns as fraudulent and the proposed system was scrapped.

The county elite also figured prominently into the district schools debate in
Kanawha County. On April 23, 1847, Kanawha’s voters approved district schools by a
vote of 680 to 251. Nonetheless, the new system was opposed from the beginning by
conservatives, large land holders, salt magnates, and other members of the elite. These
“powerful elements” refused to “accept the results of the poll” and successfully pushed
for another election, where the new system was again upheld by Kanawha’s residents.
Refusing to let the issue lie, Kanawha’s elite continued their campaign to “[load] the
cause of public schools with misrepresentation.” “The requisite amount of taxation” was

177 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 232.
“magnified,” while “the object and character of the schools themselves” was “distorted.” Relying on their control of county politics, Kanawha’s elite eventually pushed through a law that significantly lowered the amount of school taxes that could be collected. This measure collapsed Kanawha’s district schools in the half-decade preceding the Civil War.

The county elite’s central place in the defeat of district schools in Kanawha County points to a final aspect of western Virginia politics that is crucial to understanding the region’s failure to secure political, economic, and social reform. Throughout the antebellum era, western reformers dealt not only with intransigent eastern legislators, but also with hereditary western elite opposed to educational reform, suffrage expansion, and taxation for infrastructure development. Since the late eighteenth century, these elite dominated local politics in western Virginia. Describing a preaching tour through Harrison County in 1788, Francis Asbury commented that “great land holders” were already demonstrating “the aristocracy of wealth by lording it over their poorer neighbors, and by securing to themselves all the offices of profit or honor.”

The importance of the county elite to antebellum western Virginia politics was first uncovered by John Alexander Williams. Williams persuasively argues that western Virginia’s political system was dominated by local oligarchies whose vast speculative landholdings enabled them to extend their influence across the region. Beginning in the

179 Richmond Enquirer, May 19, 1846.

180 Rice, Allegheny Frontier, 231-232. Kanawha County’s salt magnates opposed the district school plan as well. The center of opposition to district schools from 1847 to 1854 was the upper Kanawha River region, home to the majority of the county’s salt-works. John Dickinson and Joel Shrewsbury, two of the county’s leading salt-producers, led the fight against district schools and refused to pay their firm’s school tax of $350.82. Debate over whether corporations should be taxed for the purposes of education continued through the 1861 West Virginia Constitutional Convention.

1780s, resident land agents, lawyers, and surveyors, most of whom relied upon the patronage of eastern planters, acquired significant amounts of land by manipulating Virginia’s convoluted land law system. These landholders’ connection to the eastern elite was cemented when the 1837 Virginia Legislature declared forfeit all landholdings that had been returned for back-taxes. In a clear nod to the western courthouse elite, the legislature transferred the point of condemnation and sale from Richmond to whatever circuit court included the condemned land within its bounds. The direct access to local information about the value and availability of delinquent lands enjoyed by the region’s lawyers, judges, and sheriffs allowed them to further expand their holdings. By virtue of their control of the county court system and the massive wealth generated by their speculative landholdings, the western elite dominated politics. Based in the county seat, these elite extended their influence into backwoods judicial circuits via the circuit-riding lawyers that served as their ambassadors. Former West Virginia governor William McCorkle remarked in his memoirs that these lawyers “knew the condition, financial, social, political and personal of almost every man in his circuit . . . knew the lines and the corners of the land surveys,” and were “the confidant of a vast number of people.”

Westerners resented the elite for their dominance of local politics. Justices of the Peace, sheriffs, and members of the county court owed their offices to eastern leaders rather than western Virginians. Seeking to fortify the loyalty of the western elite, the eastern-dominated government generally eschewed its duty to appoint county officials,

184 Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 333.
185 William McCorkle, *Recollections of Fifty Years of West Virginia* (New York: 1928), 333.
charitably leaving the matter to the discretion of local leaders. When a member of the county court died or retired, his colleagues chose the replacement. The result was a western tapestry of self-perpetuating hereditary oligarchies clothed with executive, legislative, and judicial power, particularly the ability to lay county taxes and appoint individuals to a wide variety of county offices. The most lucrative position was that of sheriff, which county court members took turns filling.

The Jackson family, whose influence spread from Morgantown to Clarksburg, typified the process by which the landed courthouse elite fomented its power. John J. Jackson began his career as a humble circuit-riding lawyer, but gradually developed enough political connections to be welcomed into the fold of the Wood County courthouse elite. He eventually served as prosecutor in Wood County from 1826 to 1852 and concurrently in Ritchie County from 1842 to 1852. While serving as prosecutor Jackson amassed a substantial amount of land though insider information. Renting this land to tenants in Wood and Ritchie Counties, he developed vast webs of patronage that he translated into six terms in the Virginia General Assembly. Jackson, like most members of the courthouse elite also used his position to secure local offices for family members such as Thomas Jackson. Before he became “Stonewall,” Jackson was appointed constable in Lewis County at the age of 17.

Owing its patronage to eastern legislatures and satisfied with the economic and political power it wielded, the western elite lent little support to reformers’ demands for constitutional revision or educational reform. Indeed, fully capable of educating their

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children through private tutors, the elite had little desire to be taxed solely for the benefit of the poor. The elite’s lack of concern for the interests of western Virginia as a whole was not lost on residents. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, westerners protested the undemocratic power county courts wielded. An Ohio County petition to the General Assembly argued that western Virginia’s blighted development had its “origin in the present local situation of the courts,” whose membership was “imbued with the prerogative of perpetuating their own existence without the intervention of the people” and who were “wholly irresponsible to them for the all important power of taxation and appropriation.”

A Hampshire County petition similarly complained that the “rich land and slave holder is enjoying the advantages of government . . . [and] the poor man is taxed . . . because he is poor.” Commenting on the complicity of the courthouse elite in the failure of common schools in western Virginia, journeyman lawyer Francis Pierpont damned them as “an exclusive class, with different feelings and aspirations entirely. They are opposed to free schools, free voting, free speech. They are the aristocracy!”

Methodist circuit rider John W. Reger described the west’s courthouse leaders as a “broken down aristocracy” whose patronage power ensured that they “had a following.” Indeed, Virginia’s oral voting system undergirded the elite’s power by allowing them to control the votes of westerners who relied upon them for their livelihood. Reformers repeatedly decried the fact that “thousands of men have voted

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189 Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 344.
190 *Ohio County Legislative Petitions*, December 6, 1822, (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
191 *Hampshire County Legislative Petitions*, December 10, 1823, (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
192 *Point Pleasant Weekly Register*, February 12, 1863.
every year contrary to their convictions in order to make their peace or secure the good will of those who had them in some way and in some degree in their power.”  

The complicity of the western elite in the failure of common schools made them a target for political reformers throughout the late 1840s.

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Following the controversial “Twin Acts,” the major strands of western discontent came together in a concerted movement for a new constitutional convention. Outraged westerners demanded nothing less than a reapportioned Virginia Legislature, universal white male suffrage, legislative subsidies for infrastructure development, and the establishment of a state-supported system of common schools. Reflecting their frustration with the aristocratic courthouse elite, reformers also called for the county courts and the sheriff’s office to be opened to popular election. The legislature’s repeated failure to institute tax-supported district schools showed that a “State Convention to reform the State Constitution” was necessary for the diffusion of “the blessings of universal education in every nook and corner of Virginia.” Constitutional revision was also integral to internal improvements. Westerners, once in possession of their rightful share of state power, would raise the funds necessary “to bring the distant portions of the State together, to develop her latent resources and harmonize the feelings and interests of all sections of the State.”

Western demands for political reform once again became intertwined with the politics of slavery. In an 1847 pamphlet, Henry Ruffner, a Presbyterian minister and

194 Hall, Rending of Virginia, 70.
195 Richmond Enquirer, August 11, 1846.
196 Richmond Enquirer, December 8, 1846.
President of Washington College directly tied political reform to his demands for a free soil western Virginia. Originating in a lecture he delivered at the Franklin Society and Library Company in Lexington, Virginia, Ruffner’s pamphlet generated a firestorm of controversy by proposing a gradual emancipation plan banning the future importation of slaves into western Virginia and freeing all slaves born in the region after a certain date.\(^{197}\) Ruffner hoped that the end of slavery in western Virginia and a revision of the constitution that guaranteed equal representation and expanded suffrage rights would blunt sectionalism and rebuild relations between the two regions. To quell eastern fears that the west might use its new powers in the legislature to attack slavery, Ruffner also proposed the passage of a constitutional amendment banning the Virginia Legislature from considering any emancipation measures in the future.\(^{198}\) Ruffner’s pamphlet, rather than being received by Virginians as a rational proposal for healing relations between eastern and western Virginia, was instead interpreted by pro-slavery politicians as a direct assault on their slaveholding rights. The reaction against Ruffner forced him to resign from the Presidency of Washington College in 1848.

Ruffner’s arguments reflected those embraced by western political and educational reformers. Ruffner believed that “slavery drives free laborers—farmers, mechanics . . . out of the country, and fills their places with negroes.” Thus “no branch of industry flourishes, or can flourish among us, so long as slavery is established by law.”\(^{199}\) The opposite was true of free soil Ohio and Pennsylvania, where “all the tokens of


\(^{198}\) Ruffner, *Address to the People of West Virginia*, 5-6

\(^{199}\) Ruffner, *Address to the People of West Virginia*, 17.
prosperity. . . a dense and increasing population, thriving villages, towns, and cities, a neat and productive agriculture, growing manufactures and active commerce” were apparent. ²²⁰ Lacking equal representation in state governance, “West Virginia has suffered for her dependence on an Eastern Legislature” concerned only with perpetuating slavery. ²⁰¹ Suffrage expansion and a legislative reapportionment on a white basis were necessary to ensure western Virginia would “be no longer subject to the disadvantage of having all measures affecting her interest, acted upon by a Legislature deliberating in the heart of East Virginia.” ²⁰²

Ruffner also tied his vision for a free soil western Virginia to educational reform. As a delegate to the Clarksburg Convention of 1841, Ruffner presented one of the two plans for tax-supported public schools considered by the assembly. Ruffner’s long career as the President of Washington College gave him the experience to understand the crucial importance of public education and the complicity of slavery in its blighted state.

“Slavery exerts a most pernicious influence on the cause of education . . . by keeping the white population thinly scattered and poor.” A planter-dominated legislature unwilling to institute the taxes necessary to support public education all but ensured that Virginia’s people “are not, and cannot be, half as well accommodated with schools, as in the free States.” ²⁰³ Despite the controversy surrounding it, Ruffner’s pamphlet circulated widely in western Virginia.

Eastern conservatives resisted western demands for a constitutional convention. Nonetheless, the drastic expansion of the west’s white population placed eastern planters

²²⁰ Ruffner, Address to the People of West Virginia, 12.
²⁰¹ Ruffner, Address to the People of West Virginia, 7.
²⁰² Ruffner, Address to the People of West Virginia, 10.
²⁰³ Ruffner, Address to the People of West Virginia, 30.
in an increasingly awkward position. By 1850, the white population of present-day West Virginia was nearly equal to that of Virginia’s Tidewater and Piedmont regions combined, yet the region possessed less seats in the General Assembly than either the Tidewater or the Piedmont. Eastern slaveholders could only defend their continued unwillingness to call a new convention on the dangerous ground that slave property deserved a greater voice in state governance.  

By 1849 a number of developments finally convinced easterners to support a constitutional convention. The first important factor was the Richmond Enquirer’s and Richmond Whig’s endorsement of a constitutional convention. Reflecting the sentiments of a growing number of easterners, these papers realized that as the national sectional crisis intensified in the wake of the Mexican War, Virginia needed to put its own sectional battles in the past. Virginia could hardly defend its constitutional rights as a slaveholding state when it denied an equitable political voice to nearly 300,000 disaffected white residents. In his 1849 address to the legislature, Governor John B. Floyd similarly remarked that reform was “inevitable,” and that “nothing short of a thorough constitutional reform will satisfy the demands of the people. . . the sooner this is accomplished the better for all the interests of the commonwealth.”  

Easterners could not deny the fact that most other states had revised their constitutions over the previous decades. Suffrage expansion, legislative reapportionment, the establishment of common schools, and popular election of local officials were issues neighboring states had already

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settled. Reformers convincingly argued that Virginia would become an embarrassment to the union if it did not follow suit.

The most important factor compelling eastern conservatives to support constitutional revision was self-interest. They hoped that their control of the state legislature would enable them to pass a constitutional referendum bill that included a clause organizing the proposed constitutional convention on the mixed basis, thereby ensuring that they would dominate the proceedings. In 1849, the Virginia Legislature passed just such a bill. If voters approved, the convention would be apportioned on the mixed basis. The east would receive 76 delegates and the west 59. Backed by the mixed basis, conservative easterners would assent to limited political concessions, including an extension of the franchise and the popular election of local judges, while avoiding legislative reapportionment and the establishment of a costly public school system. While all Valley counties and all but two eastern counties posted majorities in favor of the convention, 29 of 43 western counties expressed their dissatisfaction by rejecting the referendum in favor of a white-basis convention. When the referendum passed anyway, western Virginia acquiesced and chose a slate of delegates.

The convention’s delegates took their seats in October 1850. After setting up a number of special committees, western delegates were able to force the convention’s adjournment until January 6, 1851, when data from the recently completed 1850 census would be available. Western reformers hoped to utilize the census’ population numbers to

206 Lewis, Coal, Iron, and Slaves, 216.
208 Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 258.
209 Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 258.
bolster their demands for a reapportionment of the legislature. When the convention reassembled in January, western residents followed the proceedings with great interest, aware that the future prosperity of their section hinged on its results. Henry Dering, a Morgantown resident, wrote to western delegate Waitman Willey: “We are all anxious to learn, all about the action of the Convention. We feel like watching every movement and holding our representatives to a strict accountability for all they think and say and do.”

The first issues tackled by the convention were legislative reapportionment and suffrage expansion. These issues, more than any other, represented the clear sectional divide between the east and west. Whigs and Democrats crossed party lines to debate the proposals as sections, rather than as parties. Reformers fiercely assaulted the mixed basis of representation and freehold suffrage as “unrepublican relics” of the past better suited to an “aristocratic, absolute, monarchical union.” Constitutional reform was a battle of “liberty against mammon and the right of the people against the right of money.” Western delegate George Summers urged the east “to do what is right now and thereby cement the affections of your western brethren.” The west would no longer “consent to put the reins of government in the hands of a minority of the people for the purpose of protecting slaves or any other species of property.” He begged eastern

210 Henry Dering to Waitman Willey, October 23, 1851, Charles Ambler Collection Box 10, Folder 12 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
211 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 264-265.
213 Elizabeth Cometti and Festus M. Summers, eds., The Thirty-Fifth State: A Documentary History of West Virginia (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1966), 257.
conservatives “not to consign a majority of your white population, to political inferiority, because they have not as large an interest as owners in this property, as you have.”

Channeling the spirits of Benjamin Leigh and Abel Upshur, opponents of reapportionment and expanded suffrage argued that slaveholders had a greater interest in governance than non-slaveholders. Since eastern planters paid roughly 2/3 of the property taxes collected in the state, their argument did carry a degree of force. While avoiding referring to westerners as peasants, conservatives believed that Virginia’s government was designed to protect their peculiar property. Their “majority in interest” superseded “the new doctrine that mere numbers are to possess the power of this government.”

Judge Scott, another eastern conservative, warned that if reformers’ “doctrines are carried out, next comes anarchy and finally licentiousness.” “How long is the patience of the good people of this commonwealth to be abused by this eternal demand on the part of western Virginia that we should commit the destinies of this commonwealth to a majority of mere numbers?”

Scott’s speech made clear that westerners would have to find a way to convince eastern conservatives that their slave property would in no way be threatened by a western-dominated state legislature. This was a daunting task, and by the end of January many westerners opined to Willey that if the “slave power” of eastern Virginia continued to deny “that equality which ought to exist between the different sections of the same State,” there would “arise a hostility to the peculiar institution, which will in the

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214 Cometti and Summers, eds., The Thirty-Fifth State, 258. Reformers did enjoy some eastern support at the convention. Ironically, future Virginia governor and fire-eater Henry Wise emerged as a fierce defender of western rights: “Give us a united people with one affection one interest... Give me for the people of Virginia free and universal education; give me free and equal suffrage.” Isaiah Woodward, “Delegates Faulkner, Brown and Wise And the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850 and 1851,” West Virginia History 25 (1964):132.


end make Virginia free state, and give a blow to slavery . . . from which it will never recover.”

These sentiments may have inspired Willey and his reformist colleagues to become more aggressive. Rather than appeal to republicanism they instead warned that the east’s continued denial of western political equality constituted the greatest threat to slavery. In an emotional speech, Willey asked, “Can it be expected that men will ardently and cordially support negro slavery when by so doing they are virtually cherishing the property which is making slaves of themselves?” “You will compel us to assume an attitude of antagonism towards you, or toward the slave, and like the man driven to the wall, we shall be forced to destroy our assailants to save our own liberty.” Another reformer promised that if slaves were made “the foundation of power” planters would soon “array the free men, the white men of this state” against them.

Reformist aggression eventually convinced eastern conservatives to give way. The House of Delegates would be reapportioned on the white basis, with the west receiving 82 delegates and the east receiving 68. The Senate, however, would continue to be apportioned on the mixed basis. The resulting western outrage led to the inclusion of a clause that would allow Senate reapportionment to be considered again in 1865. Until then the mixed apportionment of the Senate assured the east veto power over any bills that might originate in the western-dominated house. After passing the reapportionment

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217 George S. Ray to Waitman Willey, January 22, 1851, Charles Ambler Collection Box 10, Folder 12 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
220 Curry, A House Divided, 22-23.
bill, the expansion of suffrage to all taxpaying white males above the age of 21 was approved without a roll call vote. The convention also provided for the direct election of the governor, county court judges, county officials, and the state Board of Public Works.  

Reformers did not rest on their victory. They soon turned their attention toward internal improvements and educational reform. Westerners demanded the inclusion of some kind of constitutional provision guaranteeing that the state legislature would complete the long-delayed James River and Kanawha canal and begin construction on a number of new railroad lines connecting the west with eastern and northern markets. Conservatives, resentful of their previous losses, rejected the “boundless wants of the West for internal improvements and the enormous costs necessary for their construction.”  

Though George Summers sought to assure easterners that they would not be “plundered of their money to construct works in the west,” and that internal improvements would serve “the interests and honor of the whole state,” his appeals were of little consequence.  

In the decade following the convention, the Virginia legislature approved a number of internal improvement projects in the Valley and the southwest while ignoring the counties comprising present-day West Virginia. The most important improvement the west received in the 1850s, the completion of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to Wheeling, came from northern and not eastern capital.  

Educational reform was also defeated at the convention. While delegates generally agreed that the Literary Fund should serve as the basis for a state-funded school
system, conservatives balked when Whig delegates reintroduced the prospect of utilizing the federal Land Fund as a revenue source. Western Democrats, many of whom represented members of the western elite, refused to discard party principle. Stymied on the Land Fund issue, Whig delegates turned toward calling for constitutional provisions guaranteeing a compulsory educational system, higher property taxes for district schools, and an enhanced educational bureaucracy. Believing that these innovations stank of “agrarianism” and “legislative robbery,” Democrats refused to support their passage. While more than 75 percent of Whig delegates, including a significant number of eastern Whigs, supported educational reform, the 90 percent of Democrats that opposed it ensured that the issue went down in defeat.  

Before the convention concluded its work, eastern delegates managed to insert one final protection of slavery into the new constitution. Seeking to shelter their property from any new taxation measures that may be passed by the western-dominated House of Delegates, easterners grafted a tax provision into the new constitution that stated that slaves above the age of 12, regardless of their market value, would only be assessed for tax purposes at a worth of $300. Slaves under the age of 12 would not be taxed at all. Western delegates fiercely opposed the measure, but were unable to swing the vote. The tax debate was the last major issue to come before the convention. After its passage, delegates approved the new document and ordered its submission to the people. The constitution was subsequently adopted by a majority of 75,784 to 11,063.

225 Richmond Whig, July 19, 1851 and August 3, 1851.  
226 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 282.  
227 Rice, West Virginia: A History, 98.
Despite its passage, “no person in Virginia seemed to be satisfied with the constitution as a fixed fact.”\(^{228}\) Much like the Compromise of 1850, the new Virginia Constitution failed to address the underlying tensions dividing western and eastern Virginia. Despite receiving the white basis in the House of Delegates, western legislators were continually hamstrung in the 1850s by an eastern-dominated Senate that refused to approve appropriations for internal improvements or common schools. While the east did endorse the extension of the James and Kanawha Canal into the Valley, it never completed the line to the Kanawha River. Deprived of canals and railroads and saddled with bad roads and un-navigable rivers, the Kanawha region continued to resent the hindrance of its economic growth.\(^ {229}\)

Slavery also continued to drive a wedge between the east and west. While a few western delegates concurred in the convention’s passage of a tax shelter for slaves, they came to regret their decision as the 1850s wore on. As slave prices exploded during the 1850s, western farmers paid full assessments on their cattle, sheep, and land while planters continued to pay taxes on their slaves that represented only a fraction of their actual value. Such blatantly unfair taxation made clear which region Virginia’s new constitution was truly designed to protect. More equitable taxation, reapportionment of the Senate, internal improvements, and educational reform became the paramount issues for western reformers in the 1850s.

The new constitution also failed to break the western elite’s stranglehold on local politics. Despite opening the county courts to popular election, oral voting ensured that

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\(^{229}\) Curry, A House Divided, 23; Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 319; Williams, West Virginia: A History, 4.
the same hereditary oligarchy that dominated political affairs over the previous thirty years remained in power. Commenting on this state of affairs in the 1850s, the Wheeling *Intelligencer* disdainfully remarked that to “secure the good will of those who had them in some way and in some degree in their power,” many westerners continued to vote against their better interests. Western Virginian politics thus preserved the “influence of the landlord over the tenant,’ or in other words made the tenant a slave to vote as he was told.”

As western residents reflected on fifty years of sectional warfare, they could congratulate themselves on a number of accomplishments. After decades of agitation, westerners finally secured the white basis in the House of Delegates as well as suffrage for all tax-paying white males. However, the retention of the mixed-basis in the Senate and the tax shelter provided for slaves made clear that eastern planters would remain primarily concerned with protecting their slaveholding interests at the west’s expense. Internal improvements and educational reform also continued to languish in the west while the Valley and east benefitted from good roads and ample access to markets. Unwilling to abandon their battle with the western elite and the east, western reformers embraced a new breed of political leaders in the decade before the Civil War.

When a mid-1840s rupture within the Methodist Church split the organization into northern and southern branches, border regions like western Virginia became denominational battle-grounds. Northern and southern-affiliated Methodist ministers, both of whom considered western Virginia to be their rightful territory, engaged in a

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231 Hall, *Rending of Virginia*, 70.
vicious and often violent battle for domination. Cloaked with a moral, rather than political authority, these men thrust themselves into western Virginia’s contentious political sphere in an effort to build their influence, win converts, and assure the long-term prosperity of their church. Northern Methodists eventually emerged as fierce defenders western reformism while southern Methodists spoke for the prerogatives of the eastern and western elite. Framing the political battles of the previous fifty years in a moral and religious light, Methodists leaders added a new and exciting dimension to the contours of Virginia sectionalism in the 1850s.
Chapter 2: “Shriek! Ye Rampant Abolitionists!”:
Methodists Battle for the Hearts and Minds of Western Virginians, 1845-1860

In September 1855, Methodist circuit rider Levi Parke found himself in a precarious position. Appointed to preach in Gilmer County by the Western Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Parke soon attracted the odium of the county government. Brought to the attention of authorities by Parke’s denominational antagonists, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the focus of the controversy was Parke’s circulation of his conference’s newspaper, the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate. The county court pronounced the newspaper incendiary and issued an indictment against Parke that forced him to flee the county. He spent the remainder of the year in nearby Barbour County, fearful that a hangman’s rope would spell his end if he returned to Gilmer.²³²

Parke’s ordeal symbolizes how religion and politics became enmeshed in late-antebellum western Virginia. While by no means a radical abolition newspaper, the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate did contain a substantial number of articles and editorials that blamed slavery and eastern slaveholders’ control of Virginia’s government for the inferior political and economic position occupied by western Virginians. The paper frequently demanded that westerners take a more active hand in politics to defend their

²³² Levi Parke to Waitman Willey, July 4, 1856, Charles Ambler Collection (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 10 Folder 12.
political and economic interests. In circulating this medium of protest on his circuit, Parke politicized his duties as an itinerant minister.

This episode also attests to the fierce denominational battles between the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS), which plagued western Virginia in the decades preceding the Civil War. Between 1845 and 1861 the MEC and MECS sought to shape western Virginia’s contentious political culture in their sectional vision. They engaged in a fierce competition for spiritual and political dominance, contests sometimes referred to as the Border Wars. These Border Wars occasionally turned violent, and it was common to see churches flanked by armed guards during services.

The MEC sought to win converts and deflect attention from its inherently anti-slavery doctrines by immersing itself in the sectional politics that divided eastern and western Virginia throughout the nineteenth century. Its ministers called on westerners to cultivate closer relations with the free-soil North in order to emulate the region’s commercial development. They hammered eastern Virginia’s dedication to and protection of slavery as a central reason for western Virginia’s halted economic development. Only after the west took a more active interest in defending its political rights, the MEC’s leaders argued, would it be able to embark on the path to industrial development necessary to its commercial viability. The MEC’s efforts elicited a fierce reaction from the MECS, whose ministers and members attempted to maintain westerners’ loyalties to eastern Virginia and the South by smearing the MEC as an incendiary force of northern abolitionists seeking to destroy Virginia’s social institutions and stability. The Methodist

Protestant Church (MPC), far weaker than these sectional organizations in western
Virginia, attempted to remain politically neutral.

Despite the politicized battles waged by the MEC and MECS in western Virginia, historians have consistently portrayed the 1850s as a period of relative peace between the east and the west. Citing the ratification of the 1851 Virginia Constitution, which redressed some of the west’s political grievances with the east, they argue that the decade before the Civil War witnessed a loosening of tensions between the sections. 234 This argument makes western Virginia’s adamant rejection of secession in 1861 appear incongruous, or at best the result of latent hostilities within the state during the preceding decade. The MEC’s central place in western Virginia’s political culture and its appeals to western political interests instead shows that sectional tensions were kept well-enflamed in both the secular and religious spheres in the 1850s. The MEC’s appropriation of western political grievances and the MECS’ outraged reaction to their efforts established rigid social and political divisions among western Virginians that clearly emerged during the secession crisis in 1861.

The MEC’s active support of educational reform, political reform and the construction of internal improvements, issues central to the west’s political grievances with the east, enabled the organization and its leaders to broaden their appeal to western Virginians and increase their recruitment of new members. As MEC ministers preached their politicized message they established extensive communication networks throughout

the region and assumed influential positions in western communities. Their frequent rhetorical attacks on the hereditary western elite that worked in tandem with eastern legislators to stymie the west’s development further increased their influence. At the same time, the MECS’ fervent defense of eastern Virginia, the western elite, and southern rights enabled the organization to build its own set of powerful connections with Virginia’s leaders. MPC ministers, despite generally eschewing politics, nonetheless found means to increase their standing and influence among western Virginians, particularly in the region’s interior counties.

The interaction between Methodism and sectionalism in western Virginia reveals not only the power of politics to shape the nature and diffusion of religious messages but also of religion to shape the expectations of citizens toward their state and its government. Indeed, the MEC’s and MECS’s battle for the hearts and minds of western Virginians demonstrates the multifaceted ways religious leaders assumed political prominence and shaped the political decision-making of Border State residents.

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As easterners and westerners contended for control of Virginia’s government in the first half of the nineteenth Century, the Methodist Episcopal Church was spreading its influence across western Virginia. Beginning with Freeborn Garrettson, who in 1776 preached the first Methodist sermon in western Virginia, the church gradually established enough of a presence to justify the formation of the Berkeley Circuit in 1778. In 1785, western Virginia’s first Methodist Church, Rehoboth, was constructed in Monroe County. In the years following the Rehoboth Church’s formation, multiple new circuits were established as Methodist ministers followed settlers fanning into the western
backcountry. By 1790, the Ohio, Clarksburg, and Kanawha Circuits were all in operation.\textsuperscript{235}

The life of the Methodist circuit rider in western Virginia was a hard one. In the church’s early years, ministers such as Peter Cartwright, who was assigned to the Kanawha Circuit, often covered more than 300 miles of rugged terrain as they fulfilled their preaching responsibilities.\textsuperscript{236} They preached wherever they could gain an audience, whether at a cross-road, school house, or residence.\textsuperscript{237} Before leaving their preaching appointment, they arranged for the formation of a class led by a lay member of the church. These classes conducted services until the circuit-rider again made his appearance, and ensured that strict discipline and adherence to Methodist dogma was maintained by church members.\textsuperscript{238} The circuit rider, by organizing classes wherever he traveled, enabled his church to expand its influence at a far greater rate than competitors while at the same time connecting residents throughout the region. Presbyterians and Episcopalians, who confined their operations to western towns, and Baptists, who relied upon local preachers, could not match the Methodist circuit-riders’ ability to spread their brand of faith to every corner of the region.

Early Methodist Churches in western Virginia reflected the rugged terrain and lack of transportation that defined their frontier environment. While most early services were held in school houses or private homes, some Methodist communities were able to

\textsuperscript{235} Harvey Harmer, \textit{Some Early History of Methodism in West Virginia} (Clarksburg: 1949), 2-6. Mrs. Ray E. Ritchie, \textit{A Brief History of Methodism in Ravenswood, West Virginia} (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 5.
\textsuperscript{236} John L. Rolfe, \textit{The Planting of Methodism in Wood and Adjacent Counties} (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 15.
\textsuperscript{237} Hurst, \textit{Social History of Logan County, West Virginia}, 23.
\textsuperscript{238} R.L. Thompson, \textit{Webster County: History and Folklore, From Earliest Times to the Present} (Webster Springs, WV: Start Printers, 1942), 87.
marshal the funds necessary to purchase a meeting house. Generally made of logs, these buildings provided little protection against the elements and frequently lacked stoves or chimneys.\textsuperscript{239} Describing the condition of a church he ministered to early in his preaching career James L. Clark, a future member of the Western Virginia Conference, recalled that “It was an old frame, twenty by thirty feet, built for a bark shed for a tannery, the vats of which still surrounded the building—if such it could be called.” The building lacked windows and seating was comprised of “split poles which were laid across some sills, which were placed length-wise of the building.” On the building’s dirt floor, which was frequently covered with straw, Clark “preached the unsearchable riches of Christ to the hungry souls, who came through the rain and mud to this rude temple, dedicated, for the time being, to the worship of God.”\textsuperscript{240}

Despite the rough conditions endured by early ministers and their flocks, Methodism’s popularity increased exponentially in western Virginia. As early as 1788, Francis Asbury preached to crowds of more than 700 people in Clarksburg. When Lorenzo Dow made a speaking trip through western Virginia in the 1830s, the lack of buildings capable of accommodating the crowds he drew forced him to preach outdoors.\textsuperscript{241} In this atmosphere, camp meetings and quarterly conferences became great social events for westerners. Camp meetings were “looked forward to with unusual interest. Men, women, and children attended them from a distance of ten to twenty miles,

\textsuperscript{239} W.C. Snodgrass, \textit{A Brief History of Methodism in Kingwood and Vicinity from the Earliest Times to March, 1874} (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
\textsuperscript{240} Lowther, \textit{History of Ritchie County}, 406.
\textsuperscript{241} Haymond, \textit{History of Harrison County West Virginia}, 280-281.
and mountains rang for days, even weeks, with their songs, sermons, and prayers.”  

These gatherings fulfilled an essential social need among western Virginians. Frequently isolated from one another by a lack of reliable transportation, religious fellowship allowed westerners to transcend geographic barriers, even if only for a few days. Camp meetings also served to tie Methodist communities from throughout the region together, a factor of great consequence during the secession crisis and the Civil War. Furthermore, while barred from holding political office, Methodism’s popularity enabled ministers to develop vast communication networks that extended their influence throughout the region. Much like the circuit-riding lawyers that radiated out from western Virginia’s county seats, Methodist ministers could call their followers by name and ask them about their farms or families wherever they traveled. This influence allowed Methodist leaders to become as well known and well connected as the west’s hereditary elite.

By 1820, the MEC was on the fast track to becoming the dominant church organization in western Virginia and the United States as a whole. Since its formation in 1784, the organization grew exponentially and adopted from scratch a governing structure similar to that of the United States Government.  

*George W. Atkinson, History of Kanawha County, From Its Organization in 1789 Until the Present Time; Embracing Accounts of Early Settlements, and Thrilling Adventures with the Indians, Derived From History and Aged Citizens, Also, Biographical Sketches of a Large Number of the Early Settlers of the Great Kanawha Valley (Charleston, WV: West Virginia Journal, 1876), 207.*

*The Methodist Episcopal Church’s main governing body, the delegated General Conference, was analogous to the Federal Government of the United States. The General Conference met every four years, its membership elected by Annual Conferences throughout the United States. The General Conference was the central government of the Church and all major policy issues, such lay representation and slavery, were decided by this body. The Annual Conferences can best be thought of as analogous to state governments. They met yearly and were made up of representatives elected by quarterly conferences, which were comparable to county governments. Quarterly conferences presided over the circuits that Methodist ministers traveled throughout the year, which can best be seen as similar to town governments. Circuits could be as long as one hundred miles and were made up of a number of specific appointments the circuit-riding preacher was expected to minister to at least twice a year. Each of the appointments consisted of one*
church was not without its problems. Since the 1790s, a substantial number of Methodist ministers and lay people called for a more democratic ecclesiastical government. They specifically demanded that lay delegates be elected to the MEC’s Annual and General Conferences, thereby providing non-clergymen with a voice in church government. The situation came to a head at the 1828 General Conference, when the MEC refused to give in to their demands. In the wake of this failure, reformers withdrew from the Church to form the Methodist Protestant Church (MPC) in 1830.244

Western Virginians affiliated with the MPC were part of the Pittsburgh Annual Conference until 1855, when the rapid growth of the church in the region resulted in the creation of a separate Western Virginia Annual Conference.245 Between 1855 and 1861, Methodist Protestant ministers carried their message throughout western Virginia. They portrayed their church as a champion of democracy, stressing that “if you are a Christian, you are equal in rights with any other Christian in Christ’s Kingdom.”246 The MPC’s message proved appealing to many western Virginians and by 1861 the church had 7,701 adherents, an increase of 4,139 from its membership in 1855. The organization was most

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244 Emory S. Bucke, ed., The History of American Methodism Volume One (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 636-680. Reformers also demanded that Annual Conference ministers and lay members be allowed to elect their own presiding elders, rather than having this decision made for them at the General Conference level. Upon its formation in 1830, the MPC ensured that this reform was carried out as well. The MPC’s constitution secured lay membership at the Quarterly, Annual, and General Conference level. To further emphasize its democratic governing structure, the organization almost named itself the Methodist Representative Church. The MPC contained Annual Conferences in all or parts of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio.

245 In The Methodist Protestant Church in West Virginia (Baltimore: Stockton Press, 1926), 18, I.A. Barnes states that the Methodist Protestant Church first established a foothold in western Virginia in 1830 with the Hacker’s Creek Church in Lewis County.

246 Methodist Protestant Sentinel, August 8, 1860.
numerous in the Monongahela River Valley, in the area around Clarksburg, and in western Virginia’s interior counties.\textsuperscript{247}

The MPC’s mass exodus did not bring an end to the Methodist Episcopal Church’s troubles. After 1830 the focus of contention moved from church governance to slavery. When the 1844 General Conference prevented Georgia’s James Osgood Andrew from continuing his duties as Bishop as long as he owned the slaves he inherited from his recent marriage, the majority of southern Methodists in attendance walked out of the conference in protest. A year later they formed the MECS in Louisville, Kentucky. In the wake of the southern Methodist walkout, the delegates remaining at the General Conference approved a plan of separation that divided the church into northern and southern General Conferences separated by a precarious geographic line running through the Border States. Annual Conferences and churches bordering this line could decide for themselves which organization to join. Church property would then be equitably divided between the sectional General Conferences.\textsuperscript{248}

The plan of separation’s boundary line cut directly through western Virginia.\textsuperscript{249} The majority of Methodists in north and central western Virginia voted to remain with the

\textsuperscript{247} See Methodist Protestant Church West Virginia Annual Conference, \textit{Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876} (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University) for a full account of the MPC’s membership statistics in western Virginia from 1855 to 1861.\textsuperscript{248} Some of the best accounts of the tumultuous General Conference of 1844 can be found in Donald Mathews, \textit{Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845} (Westport Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1965), C. C. Goen, \textit{Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War} (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), Mitchell Snay \textit{Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Carwardine \textit{Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America}, and United Methodist Church, \textit{Travelers on the Long Road: Encyclopedia of West Virginia United Methodism} (Charleston, WV: The Commission and the Conference, 1999), 161.\textsuperscript{249} Interestingly enough, the clearest description of the often ambiguous Plan of Separation’s geographical division of the MEC and MECS can be found on page 287 of Ambler’s \textit{Sectionalism in Virginia}. The plan of separation’s boundary line cut due west from Lynchburg, Virginia across western Virginia, passing through Pocahontas, Nicholas, Kanawha and Wayne Counties. Nonetheless, churches in counties as far
MEC while most Methodists in southwestern Virginia elected to align with the MECS. When substantial minorities in each section protested the majority’s decision, the MEC and the MECS seized on this opposition to justify sending ministers into the disputed regions, leading to bitter contests for church members and property.  

The MEC issued the opening salvo in this developing border war when it approved the creation of a Western Virginia Annual Conference (NWVC) in 1848. The NWVC’s boundary corresponded roughly with that of present-day West Virginia and included upon its formation 12,520 members, 105 churches, and 51 itinerant ministers. The NWVC grew rapidly and within twelve years contained 24,507 members, with particular strength in the Monongahela River Valley, the counties bordering the Ohio River and in the north-central region of present-day West Virginia. The church also maintained its membership in the region’s interior counties and established a foothold in the heavily slaveholding Greenbrier Valley. The MECS fired back at its 1850 General Conference when it approved the formation of its own Western Virginia Conference (SWVC). The SWVC also generally corresponded with the boundaries of present-day North as Wood declared their loyalty to the MECS while churches as far South as Wyoming County affirmed their adherence to the MEC.  

Carwardine, Evangelicals and Politics, 246. Similar disputes occurred in Kentucky, Missouri, and North Texas. The Border Wars in these regions, while outside of the purview of this dissertation, have yet to be dealt with in detail by historians of the Methodist schism or of those states.  

Between 1845 and 1848 the MEC received numerous petitions from ministers working in western Virginia calling for the establishment of a Western Virginia Annual Conference. One minister pled, “We must do this work, or the South will do it for us. There must be a Western Virginia Conference. Wallace Smeltzer, Methodism on the Headwaters of the Ohio: The History of the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Church (Nashville: The Parthenon Press, 1951), 161.  

United Methodist Church, Travelers on the Long Road, 161-162.  

After the 1844 schism, the northern branch of the Methodist Church continued to call itself the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC), while the southern branch took the name the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS). For the sake of simplicity, the MECS-affiliated Western Virginia Conference will be referred to as the southern Western Virginia Conference, or SWVC, while the MEC-affiliated Western Virginia Conference will be referred to as the northern Western Virginia Conference, or NWVC. Occasionally, this chapter refers to northern and southern Methodists. I do not mean Methodists from
West Virginia and at its inception boasted 4,293 members, 53 churches and 24 itinerant ministers. The SWVC competed most vigorously with the NWVC in counties that boasted a relatively high proportion of slaves such as Kanawha, Mason, Harrison and Cabell and was the dominant church in both the Greenbrier Valley and south-central western Virginia. By 1860 the organization increased its membership to 10,823, testifying to the popularity, even in western Virginia, of a church dedicated to southern values.  

Newspapers were key weapons in the NWVC’s and SWVC’s battle for denominational supremacy. The NWVC relied on both the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate and the Cincinnati-based Western Christian Advocate to spread its message to westerners while the Parkersburg, Virginia-based Southern Methodist Itinerant and the Nashville Christian Advocate vigorously supported the SWVC. These periodicals circulated throughout the region and included articles pertaining to religious issues, politics, science, and world events.  

Their importance was highlighted by the SWVC’s inaugural meeting. “The misrepresentations of our position and claims as a Church, will require time and labor to correct,” a goal “which cannot be accomplished without a general northern states or Methodists from southern states. Instead, I am referring to Methodists in western Virginia that adhered to either the northern branch of the Church (MEC) or the southern branch of the Church (MECS). Finally, it should be noted that the northern and southern Western Virginia Conferences were separate yet parallel organizations, competing with one another for dominance throughout western Virginia.

254 United Methodist Church, Travelers on the Long Road, 161-162.
255 In The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 125-130, Nathan Hatch argues that the MEC’s periodicals were central to the dissemination of its populist message in the early Republic. These papers remained central facets of the NWVC’s, SWVC’s, and MPC’s ministries in antebellum western Virginia. Throughout the 1850s, it was common practice for Methodist ministers in western Virginia to carry large bundles of the newspaper with them to their charges, which they distributed to members, probationers, and curious listeners. After the laity was given a chance to peruse their copy of the paper, they were encouraged to purchase a subscription, with the ministers receiving a commission for their efforts. This process is described in detail in Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858).
circulation of the periodicals of our church.” The NWVC similarly resolved that it “is a marked advantage” to have a “paper of general circulation within our Conference bounds, as we are thereby able to reach more directly the minds of our people.”

The NWVC’s and SWVC’s periodicals identified slavery as the defining wedge separating the sectional Methodist organizations as they competed for souls and church property. The NWVC was opposed to slavery, but because it operated in a slave state, the organization was forced to temper its criticism of the institution. Rather than attack slavery morally or call for its immediate abolition, the NWVC pragmatically assailed the institution for denying western Virginians commercial prosperity and political equality. Throughout the 1850s, the NWVC took great pains to distance itself from issues of race and slavery. When confronted with the charge that their church was an emissary of northern abolitionists and their vision of racial equality, NWVC ministers like Wesley Smith responded that his church “prefers no claim to interfere with the affairs of

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256 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 1850 Meeting, n/p.

257 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in Wheeling, Virginia, March 13, 1861 (Wheeling: Campbell & M'Dermot, 1861), 22-23.

258 Overall, slaves constituted 5 percent of western Virginia’s population. A distinct minority of westerners held slaves, particularly those involved in the Kanawha Valley’s lucrative salt industry as well as those living in the fertile agricultural counties of Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hardy, Jefferson, Berkeley and Monroe. Yet for all intents and purposes the institution was not strongly tied to western Virginia. The majority of western Virginians resented slaveholders and believed that the East’s protection of the system was the paramount reason they were unable to obtain the internal improvements necessary to their industrial growth. However, few westerners actually called for governmental interference with slavery. Westerners strictly believed that the government possessed no right to interfere with a citizen’s relation to their personal property and were aware of that fact that given their unequal political relationship with the east, criticism of the slavery system and calls for its removal would derail their efforts to achieve political parity with eastern Virginia. Richard Curry provides an excellent discussion of western Virginians’ attitudes toward slavery on pages 13-27 and 90-100 of A House Divided. William Shade also describes the West’s approach to slavery in Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824-1861 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 35-50. Data regarding the distribution of slaves in western Virginia was taken from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970, Study Number 3.

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Caesar.” Other NWVC ministers maintained that “If Slavery is ever abolished . . . it must be the work of the people of the slave States,” and not that of northern coercion.\(^{260}\) Northern Methodist leaders, aware that they were operating in a slave state with stringent laws against overt anti-slavery activism, tread a careful course in their criticism of the institution.

The NWVC’s moderation strained its relationship with its parent organization. Throughout the 1850s, radically anti-slavery northern annual conferences zealously pressed the MEC to make non-slaveholding a condition of membership, questioning the propriety of operating a branch of the church in a slaveholding region like western Virginia. Anti-slavery Methodists in the North pointed to the NWVC and other border conferences, which allowed slaveholders to become church members, as an embarrassment to the MEC’s anti-slavery dogma. New York’s Black River Annual Conference called on the 1856 General Conference to cease “the creation of any new conferences in the slaveholding territory without the institution of a rule making non-slaveholding a condition of church membership.” It also called on the MEC to suspend sending missionary funds to the NWVC.\(^{261}\) A leading Black River Conference minister further complained that “facts are coming to light daily that show the rottenness of the Border Conferences. These Conferences are steeped to the eyes in slave-holding and all its kindred abominations. The Methodist preachers themselves are, to a large extent, involved in the iniquity, not simply by winking at the evil, but by actually owning and

\(^{259}\) Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, November 13, 1855.
\(^{260}\) Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, March 10, 1857.
\(^{261}\) Western *Christian Advocate*, June 14, 1855.
breeding slaves.”\textsuperscript{262} Other northern ministers were dismayed with the NWVC’s willingness to look “complacently on, content to bear a mere formal testimony against [slavery], not as a religious, a moral, a church question, but a bare civil institution.”\textsuperscript{263}

NWVC ministers sought to legitimize their work in western Virginia to the MEC by portraying their annual conference as a means to maintaining peaceful relations between the North and the South. As the sectional crisis intensified in the 1850s, the NWVC cast itself as a conference of the border, an adhesive force that kept slaveholders and non-slaveholders under a common religious banner. NWVC leader Moses Tichenell reflected this belief when he asserted that “Ultra Abolition . . . and ultra pro-slavery . . . we regard as . . . co-laborers in the same work of destruction [of the Union].” He promised that “Methodists in Western Virginia will never, no never, yield to this . . . we are persuaded that all good Methodists will firmly stand on the middle ground.”\textsuperscript{264}

NWVC ministers who shared Tichenell’s moderation frequently blamed the North’s increasingly anti-slavery orientation for slowing progress toward gradual emancipation in the Border States. One minister argued that the time was “not far ahead when emancipation” was to “take place, in some form, in the border slave states.” Unfortunately, “ultra movements in the north threw in a barrier.”\textsuperscript{265}

Western Virginians looked upon radical abolitionists with disdain. They firmly believed that the government possessed no right to interfere with a citizen’s relation to their personal property. While they blamed slavery for slowing industrial growth and preventing their region from achieving political parity with the east, they had little

\textsuperscript{262} Reprinted in the \textit{Southern Methodist Itinerant}, July 15, 1858.
\textsuperscript{263} Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, October 9, 1855.
\textsuperscript{264} Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, November 29, 1853.
\textsuperscript{265} Western \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 30, 1854.
sympathy for slaves themselves and believed that continued agitation against the institution would only further entrench their unequal position in state politics. “Justice,” an NWVC member, symbolized this stance when he explained that “We are here surrounded by institutions over which we have no control, and upon which we are not disposed to make war.”\footnote{266}

While the NWVC defended its stance on slavery from attacks by its fellow northern annual conferences, the SWVC labeled the organization as a hotbed of abolitionist incendiaries. Unlike the NWVC, which sought to portray itself as a middle ground church of the borderlands, the SWVC defined its conference as an organization dedicated to Virginia’s interests and those of the South as a whole. It actively defended slavery from both a political and scriptural basis: “We believe that negro slavery, its existence and extension, is right.” African-Americans constituted “an inferior and debased race, whose natural normal condition is that of subserviency to the superior.” In language familiar to many pro-slavery politicians, the SWVC emphasized that the “great fountain of history and celestial light, affords conclusive demonstration of the Divine recognition . . . of the white man having the rightful property in the negro race.”\footnote{267}

The SWVC’s firm pro-slavery position was punctuated by its defense of the slave-trade. When the MECS separated from the MEC in 1845, it retained the section of the MEC’s discipline that condemned the Atlantic slave trade as well as slave trafficking.

\footnote{266}{Western Christian Advocate, March 31, 1858. NWVC minister Gordon Battelle also argued that introducing a rule barring slaveholders from membership in the MEC would do little to actually effect emancipation. He asked what would “be gained” by changing the rule. “Will it emancipate a single slave? Not one. Will their condition be in the least ameliorated by the operation? Not in the least.” Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 11, 1859.}

\footnote{267}{Southern Methodist Itinerant, November 16, 1859. In the Richmond Christian Advocate, April 20, 1858, another SWVC minister pressed this point, stating that the SWVC differed from the NWVC only in that “we sanction slavery. . . . The holding of slaves involves no measure of guilt or sin, and is no disqualification for any ecclesiastical office, however high and holy.”}
within the borders of the United States. Throughout the 1850s, and perhaps in response to the demands of southern political leaders for a resumption of the Atlantic slave trade, many southern Methodists called for the MECS to strike this rule from its Discipline.²⁶⁸ The Alabama Conference took the first step toward this goal when it passed at its 1857 meeting a number of resolutions calling for the removal of the slave trading ban. Within a few months, the SWVC resolved by a vote of 35 to 2 to concur with the Alabama Conference’s resolutions. It further requested that the MECS “expunge from the ‘General Rules’” the prohibition upon the “buying and selling of men, women and children, with an intention to enslave them.”²⁶⁹ Despite the relative paucity of slaves and their economic unimportance in western Virginia, SWVC leaders fervently defended slavery and slaveholders’ rights.

The SWVC’s proslavery leaders were not oblivious to the fact that western Virginians resented slaveholders and the east’s defense of the institution. One SWVC minister admitted that, “the people of Western Virginia are not sound upon the question of slavery,” and that “there may be some grounds to suspect them of a want of loyalty to the great interests of the South so deeply involved in this issue.” Indeed, “the fact that Northern preachers, and presses representing a thorough Abolition organization” were “countenanced at all” was seen by this minister as “an unfavorable symptom,” of westerners’ political and social loyalties.²⁷⁰ Confronted with these realities, SWVC leaders B.F. Sedwick, Samuel Kelley and William Kennedy hoped that their moral

²⁶⁸ The demands of southern Congressmen for a reestablishment of the African slave trade generated spirited discussion throughout the border lands in the late 1850s. Edward Ayers discusses the impact the issue had in Augusta County, in the Valley of Virginia, in In the Presence of Mine Enemies, 29.
²⁶⁹ Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford, 1857 Meeting, n/p.
²⁷⁰ Southern Methodist Itinerant, May 15, 1856.
defense of slavery and the slave trade would induce western Virginians to identify their future with the social and economic interests of the South. They sought to purge western Virginia of the NWVC’s northern influence by marshalling support for southern doctrines and southern rights. Kennedy believed that western Virginians “are honestly Southern men in principle” and that “if we could succeed in having a full development of all the facts in the case brought to light . . . we believe they would forsake the Northern ranks en masse.” Sedwick expressed similar optimism when he pledged that “The day is coming when the people will have Southern Methodism or none.” The SWVC’s persistent efforts ensured that “pro-slavery opinions” in western Virginia would be “one hundred per cent above what they were” and continue “growing daily with the people.”

The SWVC sought to “southernize” western Virginia by smearing the NWVC and its followers as abolitionist enemies of the state. They warned westerners that the NWVC’s goal was “ultimately to root out slavery,” and thus demolish the social system that supposedly defined both eastern and western Virginia society. The SWVC asked westerners whether “religious fanatics [were] more dangerous than political abolitionists? Is not a secret foe more to be dreaded than an openly avowed enemy?” “Can the Garrisons, Tappans, and Fred Douglasses of the North do as much injury to the South” as northern Methodists “who enter our families as honored ministers of Christ, and covertly instill into the minds of our children the principles of abolitionism.” SWVC leaders scoffed at the NWVC’s denial that it was “an abolition body” and concluded that there

271 Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 1, 1856.
272 Southern Methodist Itinerant, February 1, 1857.
273 Southern Methodist Itinerant, July 15, 1857.
274 Nashville Christian Advocate, June 12, 1856.
275 Richmond Christian Advocate, July 17, 1856.
was “no doubt [that] vast members of the [northern] Church in Western Virginia have been misled” by these claims.\textsuperscript{276} Local churches sounded similar alarms. An SWVC church in Clarksburg, Harrison County, firmly opposed what it saw as the NWVC’s “religious” and “political fanaticism in Church or State” and resolved to use its “influence to suppress it.”\textsuperscript{277} Another SWVC member was outraged that “northern presses and orators” had “transcended the rules of propriety in promulgating dogmas which endangered the peace and prosperity of Southern citizens.”\textsuperscript{278}

The SWVC’s propaganda campaign put the NWVC on the defensive. Rev. H.Z. Adams bemoaned that “Beside the ordinary opposition, we have to contend with those who, when met in the street, will cordially greet us with the endearing appellation of "brother" and in a trice will publically declare that we are enemies to our country and our God.”\textsuperscript{279} For Adams, break-ins and desecrations of his church were the most frequent result of the SWVC’s rhetorical attacks. Other NWVC leaders declared that the SWVC was carrying “on a kind of guerilla warfare against us, breaking open our churches, proselyting our members, and trying to misrepresent us, and make us odious in the eyes of the community, by calling us abolitionists.”\textsuperscript{280} Rather than back down before these tactics, NWVC leaders marshaled their resources to refute the SWVC’s charges.

Rev. Wesley Smith rebutted the SWVC’s assertions by arguing that they were merely bluster designed to discredit the more moderate and politically progressive NWVC. “It is a singular fact that all the fuss that is made in this country about slavery

\textsuperscript{276} Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 15, 1856.
\textsuperscript{277} Clarksburg Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Records, 1856-1886 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), n/p.
\textsuperscript{278} Southern Methodist Itinerant, October 15, 1856.
\textsuperscript{279} Western Christian Advocate, January 8, 1851.
\textsuperscript{280} Western Christian Advocate, February 25, 1852.
and its blessings is by those who never owned a slave in all their lives.”

In 1854, Smith engaged in a speaking tour directly inspired by an inflammatory speech made by the SWVC’s Rev. Samuel Kelly in Harrison County. Kelly argued that the NWVC had “arrayed itself against the general government of the United States,” and that its “avowed object . . . in the slave States was to disseminate abolition doctrines, and oppose the laws of those States.”

Smith resolved to defend his church from what he saw as intolerable slanders. In language that would become increasingly common among NWVC ministers by the late 1850s, Smith thundered that if Kelley had his way, the continued agitation of the slavery issue would result in the “dissolution of the American Union.” Smith reassured his listeners that the NWVC was the antidote to the SWVC’s sectional vitriol. By maintaining a moderate middle-ground, “the Methodist Episcopal church shall exist on slave territory to the end of time, and . . . shall aid in persevering the integrity of the Union,” against the SWVC’s disguised secessionist efforts.

Smith’s speaking tour won him accolades from both western Virginians and his annual conference. Numerous towns and NWVC churches passed resolutions thanking Smith for “his able vindication . . . of our Church against the attacks of her opponents in the bounds of this Conference.” In 1857, the NWVC published Smith’s addresses in pamphlet form and urged its ministers to distribute them among their charges.

The NWVC and SWVC’s protracted war for denominational supremacy in western Virginia moved beyond the pen and podium as they battled for the control of

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281 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, November 3, 1857 and November 2, 1858.
282 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 11, 1854.
283 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 11, 1854.
284 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), 333.
church properties they once shared. Conflicts over who possessed the right to a church quickly and sometimes violently turned Methodists against each other and contributed to the tensions that brought relations between the sectional churches to a boil by 1861.

Western Virginia Methodists did not simply see these property disputes in economic terms. They were a battle between two sectional ideals. Which would dominate western Virginia society? These polarizing jurisdictional clashes demonstrated how a people who once joined in religious fellowship could within a few years accuse each other of being incendiary abolitionists or the blind servants of slaveholding secessionists.\(^{285}\)

Located on the Ohio River, Parkersburg was the first western Virginia town to experience the bitter fruits of the Methodist schism. One year after the MEC adopted its Plan of Separation, the Parkersburg Methodist Church organized a vote to determine its sectional affiliation that resulted in a twenty-person majority for the MECS. Though the Parkersburg Church was slated to be handed over to the southern Church, northern Methodists protested that because the property had been paid for by members who desired to maintain their membership with the MEC, it should remain in the northern Church’s hands.\(^{286}\) For the next twelve years this territorial dispute degenerated into a vicious series of claims and counter-claims. Fighting to win back what they considered their rightful property, northern Methodist leaders complained that their efforts were

\(^{285}\) Morgantown, located in Monongalia County, was able to avoid these vicious battles. When the SWVC formed in 1850, the Morgantown Church resolved that “we are satisfied with and wish to remain in the Church to which we belong” and further resolved “That we regard the formation of a Conference in Western Virginia by the M E Church South as” an “affliction and will oppose all efforts that may be made to create divisions amongst us.” Throughout the 1850s, Morgantown remained firmly aligned with the NWVC. This resolution can be found in *Morgantown Methodist Episcopal Church Records* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), n/p.

\(^{286}\) The final vote tallied 82 votes for the MEC and 102 for the MECS. A discussion of the events surrounding this vote can be found in John L. Rolfe, *The Planting of Methodism in Wood and Adjacent Counties* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 19-20.
hamstrung by the opposition of the western elite, men of “wealth and position and influence,” who controlled the county’s courts and consistently upheld the southern church’s claims. They also blamed the conservative newspapers of the city, particularly the Parkersburg News and the Southern Methodist Itinerant, for engaging in “continuous . . . libelous attacks on the Methodist Episcopal Church,” in order to turn the county’s population against them and ensure the Parkersburg Church remained in the southern church’s hands.

The NWVC was finally able in 1857 to bring its case to a Virginia circuit court, which decided in its favor. Though the SWVC stridently opposed the decision, the organization surrendered the property. Over the next two years, southern Methodists worshipped first in the Parkersburg City Hall and later in a warehouse, before finally moving to a new church building they dubbed the “Old South Church,” in 1859. Despite their acquiescence, SWVC members saw the loss of their church as illegitimate. Their “wrath,” according to NWVC members, knew “no bounds.” At one point, the NWVC attempted to heal relations with the SWVC by offering to share the church. Responding to what he felt was a condescending overture, one SWVC member sneered that he would rather take his sons “out in the street and hang them.”

The property disputes that rocked Charleston, Kanawha County, demonstrate just how vicious these contests could become when rival Methodists simply ignored the Plan of Separation. In the wake of the 1844 schism, the Charleston Methodist Church

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287 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, March 22, 1859.
288 John W. Reger Papers (Buckhannon, WV: United Methodist Archives, West Virginia Wesleyan University), Box 1, Folder 14, n/p.
289 Rolfe, Planting of Methodism in Wood and Adjacent Counties, 20.
290 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, March 22, 1859.
resolved by a firm majority to remain within the MEC. Methodists seeking to align with the MECS, however, disregarded this vote and, as described by one bitter NWVC minister, “informally, illegally . . . and in various instances by mob violence, wrestled” the church “out of the hands of” the NWVC.\footnote{Western Christian Advocate, April 7, 1848.} With city officials supposedly looking the other way, this southern Methodist minority somehow managed to take control of the church, change its locks, and nail down its windows. To ensure that their congregations were not annoyed during services, southern Methodists commonly placed armed guards outside of “their” churches during services.\footnote{Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia, 289.}

These case studies demonstrate the extent to which the Methodist Episcopal Church schism fractured relations between western Virginia Methodists. Yet despite, or perhaps because of the intensity of these contests, Methodism grew exponentially in western Virginia between 1845 and 1861. On the eve of the Civil War, the NWVC, SWVC, and MPC comprised 61 percent of all professing Christians in western Virginia and 15 percent of the region’s population.\footnote{Baptists comprised 18 percent, Presbyterians 9.5 percent, the United Brethren 4 percent, and Episcopalians 2.5 percent of western Virginia’s Christian population. They were followed by Catholics, the Disciples of Christ, and a wide variety of smaller sects that made up the remaining 3 percent of the Christian population. This data was taken from the Inter-University Consortium For Political Science Research, 1860 Census Data, Study Number 3.} This number is especially remarkable considering the fact that in 1860 Methodists comprised only 5 percent of the population of the United States as a whole.\footnote{National Methodist Church data was gleaned from David Hempton, Methodism: Empire of the Spirit (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 212.} These numbers also do not account for the many Christians who did not join the Methodist Church but attended its weekly meetings, listened to the politicized sermons delivered by its ministers, and read the periodicals they
distributed. The rapid growth of these three branches of Methodism reveals the vibrancy of western Virginia’s sectional religious cultures as each church doubled its membership over the 1850s.

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The NWVC and SWVC’s dominance of western Virginia’s religious landscape owed to their immersion in the region’s political culture between 1850 and 1861. The NWVC zealously supported political and social issues important to western Virginians, particularly educational and political reform and economic development. Seeking to win members, deflect attention from their uncomfortable position on slavery, and contribute to the progressive development of the region, NWVC ministers purposefully took up the rhetoric employed by western reformers since the turn of the century. As NWVC leaders politicized their pulpits, the SWVC worked to halt the organization’s northern-influenced designs. It cast itself as a dedicated defender of eastern Virginia’s interests and those of the western political elite. The NWVC and SWVC grafted a new moral legitimacy onto the arguments embraced by eastern and western sectionalists. Whether defending or attacking the west’s free-soil aspirations, the NWVC’s and SWVC’s blending of spirituality and politics appealed to westerners on both sides of the debate and made them a popular and powerful religio-political force.

295 The church properties owned by the three branches of the Methodist Church in 1860 were capable of accommodating over forty percent of western Virginia’s population.

296 The statistics used to compile this data can be found in Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford and Methodist Protestant Church West Virginia Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
Educational reform, specifically the creation of a state-supported system of common schools, was an issue of central importance to western Virginians.297 NWVC minister Gordon Battelle emerged as a passionate defender of common school reform in western Virginia and dedicated himself to the cause throughout the 1850s. Born in 1814 in Washington County, Ohio, Battelle was educated at Marietta College in Ohio and at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, where he earned a Master of Arts degree.298 Battelle came to western Virginia in the late 1830s. One year after his arrival he played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Methodist Church’s first educational institution in the region, the Asbury Academy in Parkersburg, Wood County. When the school opened its doors in 1840, Battelle was appointed the first Superintendent. He served in this position until 1843, when he was appointed the President of the Northwestern Virginia Academy at Clarksburg, Harrison County. Battelle remained President of the academy until 1852. Like other NWVC clergymen, he saw educational reform as central to his church’s reformist vision. The establishment of a state-supported public school system was critical to molding western Virginia in the image of northern neighbors Ohio and Pennsylvania. Notably, Battelle did not call for a sectarian Methodist education, but rather for an ecumenical one. “Nothing should be done or attempted . . . with a view of promoting sectarian ends or designs. Our efforts should be enlarged and liberal.”299

297 See chapter one for a more detailed discussion of western Virginia’s antebellum educational reform movement.
298 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Fairmont, Virginia, March 18, 1863 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1863), 8-11.
299 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), 66.
Battelle depended upon the organizational structure of his church to further educational reform. He saw the cause as an excellent means to expand his church’s reach by supporting an issue that was dear to the hearts of many western Virginians. At the NWVC’s 1849 meeting, Battelle argued that “in common school instruction, in respect either to its amount or its character, there is a prevailing deficiency,” and called on his fellow ministers to “preach and lecture on the claims of general education” to “visit schools, and encourage by our counsels, their organization” and finally through “public and private intercourse with society” to “exert our influence in aid of this cause.”

Battelle’s demand for pastoral activism was taken to heart by his colleagues. In 1853, Rev. Gideon Martin showed that he had “not forgotten the cause of education” by delivering “an excellent lecture on the subject” in Kanawha County. NWVC itinerant Richard Woodyard went further by tying the sorry state of education and literacy in western Virginia to the dominance of state politics by the eastern planter elite. Woodyard argued in one sermon that eastern planters “having power and occupying places of authority; tremble at the extension of knowledge among their subjects” in western Virginia. Only “to education may the suffering and oppressed look for deliverance, and security, for through this means the minds of men are prepared to take a more extended view of the wants and of the social and political relation which [they] sustain to each other.” Woodyard emphasized that educational reform would provide westerners with the

300 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), 64-65.
301 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 15, 1853.
critical tools necessary to shirk the “influence” of the “political demagogues, and greedy aspirants for office,” who ignored the region’s social and political ambitions.  

Battelle and the NWVC were equally devoted to developing western Virginia’s nascent academy system. As a traveling minister, Battelle personally observed the degree to which western Virginians were denied the privilege of extending their education beyond the elementary level, if even that could be attained. As late as 1826, the west did not contain a single academy, while northern neighbors such as western Pennsylvania had already established four. By 1850, northwestern Virginians could look only to the MEC-sponsored Asbury Academy and Northwestern Virginia Academy to provide their children with an education beyond the secondary level. Nonetheless, these institutions still suffered from a general lack of funding, as the eastern-dominated legislature refused to approve numerous proposals made by academy leaders to bolster their coffers.  

Lacking the means to attain the secondary education requisite for admission, westerners were virtually shut out of eastern colleges, particularly the University of Virginia: Of the 112 Virginians attending the University of Virginia during the 1840s, only 12 came from the west.  

Battelle believed this disparity could only be remedied by establishing a fund dedicated to the support of western academies. His agitation was crucial to the creation in 1851 of the “Educational Fund of Western Virginia,” which was approved by the NWVC with “the view of promoting the interests of academic education within the limits of this
The fund was to be managed by six trustees, three of whom were to be NWVC ministers and the other three lay members of the conference. Agents were also appointed to travel throughout the state to raise money. On May 27, 1852, the Educational Fund was incorporated by the Virginia General Assembly, leading one NWVC itinerant to exclaim that “the cause of education is . . . receiving a new impulse.” The minister’s enthusiasm was not misplaced as the educational fund spurred the creation of the Morgantown Seminary, the Fairmont Male and Female Seminary, and the Wellsburg Seminary within the next eight years. Monies from the fund were also invested in the further development of the Northwestern Virginia Academy. As early as 1856, Methodists boasted of the many academies “which through the influence of Methodism have sprung into existence within the last five years” and which were “in a highly prosperous state.” In 1858, the NWVC again reported with satisfaction that “A Gracious Providence still smiles upon” the funds’ “efforts to dispense . . . the benefits of enlightened piety and liberal culture.”

In a matter of years the NWVC did more to develop western Virginia’s educational institutions than Virginia’s state government had in the previous fifty. The NWVC’s ecumenical approach to educational reform contributed to its developing image

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305 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, *Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857* (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), 124-125.
306 Nathan Goff, Charles Lewis, Walter Ebert, Moses Tichenell, Alexander Martin and Samuel R. Dawson were chosen as the educational fund’s first trustees while J. Dolliver was made the first agent. Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, *Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857* (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), 124-125.
308 *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate*, February 12, 1856.
309 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, *Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Charleston, Kanawha County, Virginia, April 15, 1858* (Wheeling: Wheeling Daily Intelligencer Job Office, 1858), 14.
as a defender of western interests and further entrenched the organization in western Virginia’s political culture. By actively supporting educational development, ministers such as Gordon Battelle built new connections throughout the region and established themselves as stewards of not only of the souls of western Virginians, but of their educations as well. NWVC leaders’ immersion in educational reform allowed them to develop the influence they relied upon to defend the union during the secession crisis.

The SWVC never committed itself to the common school effort and at points actually expressed hostility toward the movement. When it came to the education of children in western Virginia, the SWVC made no mention of free common schools, but did occasionally praise weekly Sabbath schools as a means “well adopted to indoctrinate the mind, and bring the youth of our country under the permanent and salutatory influence of our holy religion.” The SWVC’s leaders did little to improve their conference’s public image of ambivalence. SWVC leader B.F. Sedwick went so far as to mock the NWVC’s efforts to bring education to areas that were “destitute of any sort of schools.” He criticized the northern church for “spending some $2,000 annually” in developing “such hopeless places,” before declaring, “for goodness sake let them have them. . . . Our Church succeeds best among the wealthy and intelligent.” SWVC minister Dr. Sasnett expressed similar disdain when he asserted that common schools would “destroy the necessary distinctions in society.”

310 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford, 1857 Meeting, n/p.
311 Southern Methodist Itinerant, August 24, 1859.
Advocate cited these remarks as “another sign of the horns of the peculiar institution—to keep the poor whites on the same floor with the negroes.”

The sole example of SWVC support for education was its attempt to encourage patronage for its seminary, Marshall College. Located in Huntington, Cabell County, the school was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly in 1837. Throughout the 1850s, the SWVC pledged to “recommend this school to the favorable consideration of our people, and give our influence in securing its permanent establishment as a school of high grade.” By the end of the decade the SWVC was a central source of subscription funds for the academy and exerted a firm control over the choice of teachers and curricula. However, unlike the NWVC, the SWVC never attempted to create any kind of educational fund for the institution and Marshall College frequently suffered from a lack of revenue. Aware of this situation, the SWVC called in 1859 for greater fundraising efforts, making clear that “unless the preachers agitate, and keep the claims of our educational enterprises prominently before the world . . . it cannot be expected that our people will become awakened to a proper appreciation of its importance.” The sorry state of Marshall Academy in comparison to NWVC institutions such as the Northwestern Virginia Academy and the Fairmount Male and Female Seminary attests the SWVC’s inability to keep pace with the NWVC in matters of common school or academy development. Indeed, while the NWVC’s academies remained in operation

312 Western Christian Advocate, March 23, 1859.
313 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford, 1852 Meeting, n/p.
314 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford, 1859 Meeting, n/p.
throughout the Civil War, Marshall College was closed due to financial difficulties for most of the 1860s.

The NWVC and SWVC’s approaches to educational reform reflected the continuities of antebellum Virginia politics. The SWVC’s ambivalence if not outright hostility toward educational reform reflected the western elite’s and eastern Virginia’s intransigent position on the issue throughout the nineteenth century. The NWVC, on the other hand, persistently supported educational reform and increased its appeal among western Virginians by portraying itself as dedicated to their interests. The NWVC’s fervent support of educational reform and the success of its efforts were surely one of the reasons it was able to command attention when its leaders spoke on behalf of the union in 1861.

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The denominational battles between the NWVC and SWVC often moved beyond education and even more overtly into the political realm. NWVC ministers, many of them life-long residents of western Virginia, were well aware of the political and economic fissures that dictated relations between western and eastern Virginia throughout the nineteenth century. They understood the inescapable fact that Virginia was divided into two societies: the East, a slave society, and the West, a society with slaves.
riding lawyers and large land owners. Frequently dependent upon the political patronage of eastern politicians, these elite brought their hereditary influence to bear against the social and political causes embraced by western Virginia’s rising generation of political and religious leaders. Relying on their control of the county court system and the region’s conservative newspapers, as well as the patronage they doled out to poorer westerners to control the region’s oral voting system, these men maintained a stranglehold on western politics.\textsuperscript{316}

NWVC ministers actively defended westerners’ political grievances. They called for constitutional reform, the construction of internal improvements, and an end to the elite’s iron grip on western politics. Methodist leaders hoped their reformist demands would inspire westerners to develop their region in the image of the free soil North. They defended their immersion in the secular political realm from detractors by arguing that it was a minister’s responsibility to be thoroughly acquainted with politics and that it was his “privilege, on all political questions . . . to express his opinion” and “not only to use his influence as a citizen, but the weight of his character as a minister in deciding political questions.”\textsuperscript{317}

Methodist reformers’ paramount target was the 1851 Virginia Constitution and its retention of the mixed basis of representation in the Virginia Senate. One NWVC minister asserted that “Politically, the inequality of [western] representation, compared with the eastern portion of the state” maintained by the constitution, “the curse of slavery without profits” was a bane upon western Virginia. He stressed that westerners were “not

\textsuperscript{316} John A. Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old: Antebellum and Statehood Politics As the Background of West Virginia’s ‘Bourbon Democracy,’” \textit{West Virginia History} 33 (July 1972): 317-407. The western elite later spearheaded the secessionist movement in western Virginia.

\textsuperscript{317} Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, November 25, 1856.
occupying that position in the commonwealth to which they may justly aspire,” and must find the means “to commence vigorously a system of economical and educational improvement.” Throughout the 1850s, the NWVC continued to press for constitutional reform. They walked a fine line as they did so. Rather than directly attack slavery morally, they pragmatically argued that the east’s protection of the institution was the core reason for the west’s political vassalage. One minister stressed that “the people of Western Virginia” should be “much offended by the persistence of the delegates of the eastern part” of the state at the 1851 Constitutional Convention “to retain the representation basis, so that negro owners could manage things their own way.” Expressing his belief that the west’s interests lay with Ohio and Pennsylvania, rather than eastern Virginia, he complained that “the people of Western Virginia never had many slaves, and many don’t want them; and they don’t like the idea that the negroes shall have so much voice in legislation.” The minister concluded by expressing his belief that “The people are ripe for the reform, and I have not the least doubt but that the Old Dominion will be a free State in ten years,” if westerners were given an equitable voice in their governance.\footnote{Western Christian Advocate, October 25, 1848.}

\footnote{Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, September 13, 1859.}

Nowhere is evidence of the NWVC’s support of western political interests more abundant than in its calls for the internal improvements necessary to develop the west’s agricultural and manufacturing economy. Throughout the 1850s, ministers and prominent laymen demanded that westerners to take a more active hand in defense of their economic interests. They called for the increased northern immigration and investment necessary to the region’s commercial development. One NWVC minister made clear that “Coal, iron
and salt are abundant; and timber of every kind and for every necessary purpose abounds in our wide-spreading forests. . . . nothing is wanting but capital and energy to develop these resources and make Western Virginia the important part of the State.” He urged that “men from the North,” and particularly their investment capital, were necessary to achieving these goals. He also reassured his readers that although “politicians croak, and petty editors warn the people to look out for ‘northern conspiracies against their liberties;’” westerners should not be afraid to induce northerners and their assets to settle within their borders.320 “If the uncultivated parts of our country were colonized by men of wealth and enterprise, she would soon ‘rejoice and blossom as the rose.’”321

NWVC minister Wesley Smith became the most prominent booster for the west’s economic development. Born in Ireland, Smith and his family moved to western Virginia in 1823. Smith’s itinerancy and his 1854 speaking tour established him as a well-known figure in western Virginia and increased his appeal and influence among residents. Smith used his developing influence to demand that western Methodists and their associates enter politics to defend their political and economic interests. “The time has come when the members and friends of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Western Virginia must take more interest in the selection of the men who are to legislate for the people.” Westerners needed to jettison the western elite and instead “nominate for office men who are intelligent” and of “enlarged views.” Testifying to his church’s potential as a religio-political force, Smith stated flatly that “The Methodists and their friends have the numerical strength to control any election” in northwestern Virginia.322

320 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 18, 1857.
321 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 18, 1857.
322 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 13, 1857.
Smith persistently portrayed slavery as “an incubus upon all the material and moral enterprises of the people,” and laid the blame for its deleterious effects squarely at the feet of the SWVC and the eastern and western elite. Criticizing the western elite’s intransigence and the propaganda efforts against his church spear-headed by the SWVC, Smith stated sarcastically that “I had supposed in my simplicity that agriculture and the mechanic arts, and general education, were also Southern institutions.” However, “it seems . . . that these are nothing in the estimation of these friends of the South in comparison with the destruction of [northern] Methodism and the extension of slavery in Western Virginia.” The “abuse” of those calling for northern investment in the western economy by the conservative “political press . . . has driven out thousands of our best citizens, men of capital and enterprise, to seek a home where they can live in peace . . . and thus Virginia, with more natural advantages than any other State in the Union, is falling back every year.” Western Virginia’s “mountains are full of iron ore and coal; and if these and other elements of wealth are ever developed, it must be by talent and capital from the free States.”

However, so long as Virginia was dominated by politicians who smeared those calling for a closer economic relationship with the North as abolitionists, the region’s economic potential would continue to dwindle. H. H. M., an NWVC member inspired by Smith’s rhetoric, opined that “Western Virginia has just slavery enough to give her the name, and all its entailments, without any of its advantages . . . . Let her declare for emancipation, and the free, hardy sons of the North and East will

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323 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 8, 1859.
324 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, March 22, 1859.
take possession of her forests, mines, rivers and fields, and all will be made to bud and blossom as the rose.”

The NWVC’s increasing politicization elicited fierce attacks from the SWVC and the west’s conservative political press. The SWVC’s self-appointed mission “as the advocate of . . . Southern rights” dedicated to “turning back the invaders of our territory” guided its endeavors to discredit the NWVC. The SWVC downplayed the conflicts between eastern and western Virginia, reassuring their followers that “the Blue Ridge is no longer a . . . line of jealousies between the East and West. The questions which have hitherto affected the separate parts, are now exploded and Virginians are annually becoming more and more one people in sentiment and sympathy.” SWVC itinerants portrayed the NWVC’s membership as treasonous enemies of the state seeking to disrupt this developing sectional amity, and asked how “those who are laboring assiduously to disaffect the citizens of the west” could “set up their claims to State loyalty?” As the NWVC’s membership continued to grow, leading southern Methodists were amazed “that Southern men, Virginians, will receive these abolition harangues, and affiliate with abolitionists under Southern skies and on Southern soil.” Fearing that its position in the west was slipping, the SWVC became even more strident in its attacks.

William Kennedy, editor of the *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, directed his church’s increasing fury at Wesley Smith, whom he rightly saw as the NWVC’s leading political agitator. He argued that Smith and his brethren’s reform efforts were an

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325 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, July 21, 1857.
326 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, *Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford*, 1858 Meeting, n/p.
327 *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, November 2, 1857.
328 *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, December 15, 1857.
329 *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, February 1, 1859.
abolitionist conspiracy and a direct assault on the cherished traditions and political
stability of the Old Dominion. Kennedy seethed that Smith, “A Northern Methodist
preacher . . . has the audacity and boldness to exhort his people to rally to the polls on
election day, and vote against any and all men who are Southern in sentiment, and dare to
express themselves in opposition to the abolition tendencies of Northern Methodism.” He
urged his fellow southern Methodists to “keep it before the people that . . . these Northern
Methodist preachers . . . are thus arranging themselves into a political party, trying to
ensnare their people . . . against the institutions of Virginia.” 330 S.C. Shaw, another
prominent SWVC minister, insisted that his followers be vigilant against Smith’s
“political dictation,” which was “endeavoring to rally the members of their church into
political conflicts, to gain Civil power in the State.” 331

The SWVC also condemned what it believed was the NWVC’s plot to detach the
west from the east. Kennedy reflected his brethren’s conviction that the NWVC sought
nothing less than “to so disaffect the west toward the east, as to bring about a separation
or dissolution of the State, and then unite their marshaled forces to make a free State of
the west.” He explained that this was “why the reporters to their papers speak in such
glowing terms of the lands in Western Virginia, and are regularly holding out such strong
inducements to their brethren of the free States, to come and settle in those healthy hills
and fertile valleys.” Kennedy alluded to the violent clashes then occurring between pro-
and anti-slavery forces in Kansas to convince his readers of the danger the NWVC posed.
He stated that the editor of the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate was only waiting for “the
proper time to act,” and when it came, civil conflict and “the scat of Kansas’ bloody

330 Southern Methodist Itinerant, November 16, 1857.
331 Southern Methodist Itinerant, October 1, 1858.
strife” would “be transferred to Western Virginia.” Southern Methodist laymen were equally direct in their attacks on the NWVC. Henry Westwood exclaimed, “Get this political dogma out of your church . . . and get separated from these northern affiliations and the opposition will cease.” Westwood went on to ask “what church, which through her preacher [Wesley Smith] has boasted of her power and purpose to control the civil elections in this free country, has . . . right to complain of political opposition.”

The NWVC and its leaders refused to be overawed and fiercely defended their church from Kennedy and the SWVC’s claims. They increasingly directed their attacks on the western elite, whom they felt were covertly sponsoring the SWVC’s propaganda efforts. Indeed, Moses Tichenell recounted that the NWVC’s defense of western grievances “gave some of our would-be ‘upper-tens’ great offense.” These “court-house cliques” joined forces with the SWVC and “initiated a crusade against Methodists.”

“Lawyers banded together and affirmed that no one ought to plead the case of a Methodist.” Opponents “of Methodists were to be found in all directions---the principles [sic] speakers were Col. A., Major B., Capt. C.” In another editorial, Tichenell claimed that “pro-slavery politicians and preachers have gone too far” and warned northern Methodists and western Virginians as a whole to beware of the “crack-brained politicians that are in so much trouble about getting rid of the ‘preachers.’”

Wesley Smith carried Tichenell’s claims of an elite-led conspiracy to what Smith saw as its logical conclusion. The SWVC, the western elite, and eastern Virginia were

332 Southern Methodist Itinerant, February 1, 1858.
333 Southern Methodist Itinerant, February 1, 1859.
334 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, January 5, 1858.
335 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, December 9, 1856 and September 1, 1857.
agents of southern fire-eaters seeking to ensnare the west in their secessionist designs. Smith argued that “It is my firm conviction that this continued stirring up of sectional strife, which is the principle business of Southern preachers, from their bishops and editors down, is calculated not only to ruin souls, but to effect ultimately the dissolution of the Union.” The SWVC’s secessionist efforts were made more dangerous by the western elite, “ambitious, or ignorant, or misguided men” who “are laboring to array the people of these two geographical divisions of our common country in deadly hostility against each other.” Smith urged his followers to “maintain your present ground,” against these attacks. The perpetuity of the Union depended upon “the firmness of the ministers and members of the M.E. Church in the slaveholding States.” “We are the Spartan band placed here by the Ruler of nations to guard the Thermopolae of American Liberty.”

A Methodist layman echoed Smith’s concerns when discussing a recent SWVC meeting. He recounted that Dr. Taylor, “a bitter sectionalist,” was in attendance and urged the creation of a “purely sectional literature, free from all northern heresies” in order “to make the South really independent.” He concluded his letter by reflecting that “There were times when the conference looked more like a disunionist political meeting than anything else. Every reflecting man who witnessed their proceedings must have been convinced that their every movement was directed by the most ultra political leaders of the South, who are using them as tools to prepare their people for a dissolution of the Union.”

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336 NWVC ministers’ use of this argument was likely influenced by northerners’ growing belief that a conspiracy orchestrated by the “Slave Power” sought to control the national government in order to advance the interests of southern slaveholders. For a detailed discussion of the “slave power conspiracy,” see Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

337 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, November 3, 1857.

338 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, October 25, 1859.
Smith and Tichenell continued to disparage the SWVC’s supposed secessionist proclivities as the national sectional crisis intensified in the late 1850s. Tichenell argued that in light of the recent calls by southern commercial conventions for the reinstitution of the African slave trade, the SWVC’s 1857 defense of the trade proved that they existed only “to pander to the dictum of excited politicians.” He hammered the SWVC’s “zeal to please their political masters” as well as its attempts to silence the NWVC as another example of westerners’ “liberty of conscience” being trampled upon by “border ruffians.” Smith similarly lamented how in many parts of western Virginia, “The Bible and the Constitution [are] trampled in the dust, the people . . . disgraced by a set of clerical politicians, nine-tenths of whom are from other States, sent in here as the agents of the cotton planters.”

There is strong evidence to support the NWVC’s claims that the west’s political and social elite were arrayed against them. Gideon Camden, a western judge and staunch supporter of the South, saw much to fear in the NWVC’s influence. Camden expressed the anxieties of many of his colleagues when he stated that “Situated as we are on the borders of two free States . . . we have a mixed population, many coming from the free states bringing with them in many cases strong anti-slavery feelings.” He further explained to Virginia Senator R.M.T. Hunter that “We have the Northern Methodist church to encounter. . . . their associating with the Northern Conferences and getting their religious papers from the free states tends to create among them an anti-slavery feeling.”

339 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 6, 1858.
340 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 8, 1859.
341 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 5, 1859.
which Camden saw as a danger to the west’s political stability. Western Virginia’s conservative political press echoed Camden’s fears. An editorial in the pro-southern Kanawha Valley Star castigated the NWVC as an “abolitionist, anti-slavery, anti-South, and anti-Virginia institution,” that was “more of a political than a religious organization.” Camden and the western elite, aware that the NWVC would never willingly cease their political agitation, soon brought their control of western Virginia’s court system to bear against the church.

By 1860 county-courts throughout the region had banned or were in the process of banning the circulation of the NWVC’s periodicals. NWVC itinerant Levi Parke described how both the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate and the Western Christian Advocate were “burnt in the streets of Glennville, [Gilmer County] without any notice to me or a member of our Church. . . . to convince the world that we were a band of Abolitionists.” Similar burnings occurred throughout Gilmer while at other post-offices NWVC members were barred from taking their newspapers. County courts in Raleigh, Nicholas, Wood, and Fayette Counties issued indictments against the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate’s editors and county postmasters were instructed to intercept and burn any copies they came across. Men found distributing the paper were to be arrested on the spot. One southern Methodist gleefully recounted from Raleigh that the NWVC’s “‘organ’ had a hearing before one of the magistrates of this county yesterday, and the evidence being deemed conclusive, was condemned to be burned.” Delighting in this decision, he exclaimed, “This vile sheet has been permitted to scatter its incendiary

343 Kanawha Valley Star, October 20, 1857.
344 Levi Parke to Waitman Willey, September 26, 1855, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 10, Folder 12.
doctrines, and assaults upon the South and her institutions over the Western portion of the State long enough . . . Roar! Shriek, ye rampant Abolitionists!“

These demonstrations illustrate that while the NWVC appealed to a great number of westerners, they were also opposed by a dedicated contingent of men willing to use the rule of law to suppress the organization’s message. Seeing the NWVC’s increasing grassroots political influence as a threat to their domination of western politics, they marshaled their forces to blot out the organization’s influence. Discussing these developments in his memoirs, NWVC minister J.W. Reger recalled that “The Slave power has always been aggressive both in Church and State, and never scrupulous as to the methods employed or means used to effect and carry out its purposes.” Indeed, “although the pro-slavery element was greatly in the minority in North West Virginia . . . when backed up and sustained by the slave-laws of the state, and encouraged . . . by the Slave-holding autocrats” they “became a power for evil.” With these advantages at their disposal, the NWVC “was made to bear the brunt of their fury.”

Many NWVC leaders felt increasingly powerless in the face of these attacks. Reger lamented that “we are in perilous times . . . there is a mighty struggle in the political world, and proscription for religion’s sake is one of the prominent figures of that excitement.” Reger’s dire relation of the NWVC’s position was supported by other accounts of the violence its ministers and members faced. One itinerant wrote from Nicholas County that “Some of our houses of worship have had the windows beaten out, one of the stoves taken and cast into the water, and our parsonage burned with fire. . . .

345 Southern Methodist Itinerant, January 25, 1860.
346 John W. Reger Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, 16.
347 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, September 30, 1856.
Last Thursday night . . . one of the enemy’s rank . . . who lay in ambush, cast a stone violently at us.”348 NWVC camp meetings were also targeted by the organization’s enemies. An NWVC circuit rider discussed how at one meeting “Jugs of whiskey were smuggled in and about” and “shrill noises were made” while others threw “stones into the congregation and against the tents.”349

The southern religious press refused to condemn these attacks and in some cases even encouraged them. The editor of the Nashville *Christian Advocate* wrote that “We hope that [the South] will always be calm and sustain a Christian spirit,” towards the NWVC. Nonetheless, “it will be impossible for the Southern Church to restrain Southern people when they consider that incendiaries are in their very midst. . . . We always regret to hear of mobs, violence and bloodshed, but we have warned our Northern brethren long since that their persistence in sending abolition preachers into the South,” would lead to violence.350 The editor of the Richmond *Christian Advocate* similarly stated that if the NWVC refused to recant the “the abolitionized Methodism of the North . . . they will excite a storm of opposition frightful to contemplate.”351 The *Southern Methodist Itinerant* urged “every true Southern man [to] consider himself a committee of one, to ascertain who are guilty” of incendiary activity “and report them accordingly. . . . One thing is certain, if a yankee from the North, should be caught peddling” the *Advocate* “through the country he would be helped to a full suit of tar and feathers.”352

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348 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, November 14, 1854.
349 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, October 19, 1858.
350 Nashville *Christian Advocate*, August 19, 1856.
351 Richmond *Christian Advocate*, December 18, 1856.
352 *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, February 8, 1860.
Moses Tichenell, like most of his brethren, was infuriated by the southern church’s defense of these assaults. He thundered that “these outrages were committed through the agency of these servants of South Carolina cotton planters upon peaceable, unoffending citizens, for choosing to exercise a right sacredly guaranteed them by the Constitution of the United States.” He encouraged his followers to rebut the “political prejudices” raised against their church and condemned the western elite as “reckless . . . office holders . . . who dread the moral influence of both the ministers and members of the M.E. Church, and labor to create excitement against her.” He presciently warned that “The time is not far distant when those who array themselves against the M.E. Church in Western Virginia, in high places as well as low, will learn to respect those that they affect to despise.” He counseled northern Methodists to remain optimistic, reminding them that “If our Southern friends were not conscious of the hopelessness of their cause,” they would not stoop to such attacks.

Despite attempts to crush its growth, the NWVC was unquestionably the dominant church in western Virginia by 1860—it’s membership more than doubling that of the SWVC. Despite the invectives flung at them, NWVC ministers’ politicized messages spoke to westerners who felt their aspirations were neglected by both eastern Virginia and the courthouse elite that dominated county politics. Their passionate support of educational reform, political reform, and the construction of internal improvements portrayed their church as dedicated to the west’s economic and political ambitions. Their fierce defense of the Union and their identification of the SWVC as the pawn of fire-

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353 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 8, 1859.
354 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 27, 1857 and July 27, 1858.
355 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 6, 1858.
eating disunionists also endeared them to residents concerned by the increasingly bitter national battle over the future of slavery. Preaching these messages as they traveled throughout western Virginia in the 1850s, Methodist itinerants such as Gordon Battelle, Wesley Smith, Moses Tichenell, and J.W. Reger forged connections with both members and non-members that established them as influential leaders in western communities.

NWVC ministers’ immersion in the region’s political culture made some of them celebrities of sorts in western Virginia. J.W. Reger humorously described how “The people in this country have asked me a great many questions about this good brother [Wesley] Smith—who he is, and where he is from, and how he looks? To the first question I answer, he is an ‘Irishman’ . . . and to the third, that his beauty will never kill him.” In Harrison County residents thanked Smith “for the powerful address to which we have just listened” that defended “the present position of” the NWVC “and unmasked the unrighteous conduct of B. F. Sedwick,” an SWVC minister. In Ritchie County, residents hearing of Smith’s political exploits demanded in a letter to the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate that “We want Brother W. Smith to come.”

Gordon Battelle’s defense of educational reform and his tireless efforts to develop a western academy system allowed him to build an equal, if not greater level of popularity. After his death in 1862 an obituary in the Wheeling Intelligencer described Battelle as “devoted heart and soul to the interests of Western Virginia.” With his passing the region “lost in him perhaps the ablest and more earnest friend she had.” A meeting in Upshur County called “to offer a tribute of respect to the memory of Gordon Battelle”

356 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 12, 1856.
357 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 10, 1857.
358 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 26, 1859.
359 Reprinted in the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 19, 1862.
similarly remembered him as “eminently useful,” remarking “that he exerted an influence for the good of his race more valuable than all the treasures of the earth, and more durable than a monument of brass.” Moses Tichenell’s zealous defense of western political interests and his attacks on the western elite ensured that he was similarly remembered for his dedication to the “best interests of the Church, but also the country at large.” John W. Reger was likewise described as “a man of strong personality” who “left his impress upon both church and state as few men in West Virginia have done.” With the onset of the secession crisis in 1861, these men utilized their accumulated influence to urge their followers to remain loyal to the Union.

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MPC leaders paid close attention to battles waged between the NWVC and SWVC and sought to differentiate their organization by avoiding the slavery issue. The MPC was numerically the weakest branch of Methodism in western Virginia and saw nothing to gain by taking part in the fractious battles between northern and southern Methodists. Rather, as emphasized by the first set of resolutions adopted by the MPC’s Western Virginia Conference at its inaugural meeting in 1855, the church pledged that it would neither “directly or indirectly interfere” with slavery in western Virginia. MPC leaders such as Peter Laishley and Dennis Dorsey took great pride in their organization’s neutral position, boasting that “the soil of [western Virginia] is genial to Methodist

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360 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 26, 1862.
361 Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840-1940), 28.
362 Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 57.
363 Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876, 1855 Meeting, 4.
Protestantism . . . it knows no geographical line, no North, no South."\textsuperscript{364} This stance was also espoused by the MPC’s lay membership. One member remarked that having “conversed with many” of his fellow congregants” on the subject of slavery,” he was convinced that “they stood opposed to human bondage, but did not want the subject agitated.”\textsuperscript{365} The MPC was the perfect home for westerners seeking to avoid the fractious sectional politics of the 1850s.

Despite the MPC’s neutrality, the intense rhetorical battles between northern and southern Methodists occasionally haunted Methodist Protestant preachers. In the mid-1850s MPC minister John Scott gave a sermon that included “remarks which were construed by some as directly applying to slavery.” Scott’s sermon was quickly “denounced by some hot-headed persons as seditious, and there was strong talk of having me arrested as a seditious person.”\textsuperscript{366} Only the timely intervention of some influential friends saved him from a prison cell. MPC circuit rider John McCormick similarly learned from his travels in western Virginia that “it was not best for a person to speak what they think” on subjects such as slavery “even when there is no harm in that which is said.” McCormick referred to an uncomfortable situation that stemmed from one member of the congregation “making wrong impressions on the minds of certain individuals from a sermon that I preached at my quarterly meeting on Sabbath.” The woman’s insinuations stuck, and McCormick recalled being interrogated by a woman named Sarah Picket a few

\textsuperscript{364} Western Methodist Protestant, January 7, 1857.
\textsuperscript{365} Western Methodist Protestant, July 22, 1857.
\textsuperscript{366} John Scott, \textit{Recollections of Fifty Years in the Ministry} (Pittsburgh: Methodist Board of Publication, 1898), 142.
days later, who “was very forward in her conversations” and pressed him to make clear his feelings on “abolitionism.”

The tribulations experienced by John Scott and John McCormick underscored the MPC’s reluctance to engage with the sectional politics embraced by the NWVC and SWVC. There is also little evidence that the MPC pressed for the establishment of free common schools or academies in western Virginia. However, the MPC did exhibit a clear northern bent by actively encouraging the patronage of Madison College, an MPC institution in Pennsylvania. At the same time it refused to promote Lynchburg College in Lynchburg, Virginia, which was under the patronage of the Virginia Conference of the MPC. The MPC justified its neglect of Lynchburg College by pointing to the institution’s support of a military department, which the MPC considered “inappropriate” when “connected with a Christian college.” The MPC’s northern orientation is also clear in its sponsorship of the Ohio-based Western Methodist Protestant rather than the Baltimore-based Methodist Protestant, despite the Baltimore paper’s frequent solicitations to the conference for support.

While evidence exists that MPC ministers discussed politics on a regular basis with their congregants, the organization’s records contain few references to Virginia’s sectional politics. Despite the MPC’s avoidance of the major political and denominational issues plaguing 1850s western Virginia, its leaders nonetheless managed to build reservoirs of influence. MPC ministers became community leaders in the west not

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367 John McCormick Diary (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), n/p.
368 Methodist Protestant Church West Virginia Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876, 1857 Meeting, 16.
369 Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876. See 1855 through 1861 meetings.
through political involvement, but rather by providing services that were essential in western Virginia’s developing pre-industrial society. Ministers such as Dr. Peter Laishley and Dr. Dennis Dorsey became influential men in western Virginia by ministering to the souls, health, and material needs of their fellow church members.

Dennis Dorsey came from a family with deep roots in the region; the first members of the Dorsey family settled in the Monongahela River Valley of western Virginia in the early 1770s. Dorsey’s father was a central player in the reform battles of 1828 that eventually led to the formation of the MPC in 1830. From then on the family established an influential presence in their community that was clearly perceptible by the time Dennis Dorsey began his duties as a traveling minister. However, Dorsey was not only a minister. He was also a lawyer, merchant and surgeon; a jack-of-all trades who interacted in a variety of ways with the residents of the Monongahela River Valley in the 1840s and 1850s. Dorsey also supported the cause of education in the Monongahela region. In the 1850s, he paid for the construction of a school house in Morgantown, Monongalia County that bore his name and stood for many years after his death.

Dr. Peter T. Laishley also established deep roots in western Virginia. Laishley was born in Southampton, England, in 1798. Upon arriving in the United States at the age of 18, he worked at a bell foundry in Richmond before deciding to study medicine. He united with the MPC in 1834 and became a traveling preacher soon after. As an itinerant minister, Laishley traveled throughout western Virginia ministering to Methodist Protestants in the region’s interior counties, as well as in Marion, Upshur, Barbour, and Harrison Counties. When not riding circuit, Laishley ran both a medical practice and a

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dry goods store in Monongalia County and was known to frequently discuss politics with his parishioners. Describing a trip through Barbour County, Laishley recalled talking with his flock “about Fillmore and Buchanan up to the very minute of commencing services.” Laishley’s associates attested to his influence, recalling that “his ability as a preacher and organizer put him at the front ranks of the Church,” and that his “force and eloquence” made him incredibly popular. These attributes put Laishley at the front ranks of western Virginia’s unionist forces in 1861. While the MPC avoided the political issues embraced by the NWVC, preachers like Dennis Dorsey and Peter Laishley found alternative ways to build influence among their flocks. They relied upon this influence in their later attempts to maintain their followers’ loyalty to the Federal Government.

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While by no means as widespread or numerous as the sectional branches of the Methodist Church, the ministers of the United Brethren in Christ and the Baptist Church also left their mark on western Virginia’s society and culture. While the community influence they developed was usually local, some Baptist and United Brethren ministers did emerge as passionate supporters of unionism or secessionism in 1861. The United Brethren traced their origins to a 1766 revival in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. At the meeting, German preacher William Otterbein was so impressed by a sermon given by Martin Boehm that after services, he embraced Boehm, exclaiming, “We are brethren.”

While not directly seeking to establish a new denomination, Otterbein’s and Boehm’s

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371 The Peter T. Laishley Papers, 1809-1915 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), contain a great deal of information on both of these men.
372 Western Methodist Protestant, January 7, 1857.
373 Barnes, The Methodist Protestant Church in West Virginia, 123-124.
spiritual partnership spurred an evangelical movement among Pennsylvania’s German population. By 1800, Boehm’s and Otterbein’s followers coalesced into the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, adopting in the process a governing structure almost identical to the Methodist Episcopal Church’s. Appealing primarily to German immigrants and Americans of German extraction, the church established a presence in western Virginia by the 1830s. In 1857, the church’s membership growth in the region merited the establishment of the Parkersburg Annual Conference of the United Brethren Church. The Brethren’s western Virginia membership was most numerous in the counties bordering the Ohio River, as well as in the interior counties of Barbour, Braxton and Upshur. In these areas, the United Brethren church spread their influence among Germans and eventually among non-Germans as well. In 1861, the church boasted 2,137 members in western Virginia, making it the sixth largest religious denomination in the region.

The United Brethren were most remarkable for being the only openly abolitionist church operating in antebellum western Virginia. While the NWVC was latently anti-

375 Like the Methodist Church, the United Brethren’s main governing body was the delegated General Conference. The United Brethren’s General Conference met every four years and was composed of delegates chosen by annual conferences throughout the United States. The United Brethren’s Parkersburg Annual Conference differed from the sectional Methodist Churches’ Western Virginia Annual Conferences only in that the Parkersburg Conference did not group its quarterly conferences into districts administered by a Presiding Elder. See footnote five for a detailed description of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s governing structure.
377 *Evangelical Church of the United Brethren in Christ, Parkersburg Annual Conference, Minutes of the Parkersburg Conference of the United Brethren Church, 1858-1867* (Buckhannon, WV: United Methodist Archives, West Virginia Wesleyan University), 1860 Meeting, n/p. The Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest religious denomination in western Virginia, followed by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Protestant Church. The Baptist church was the fourth largest, and the Presbyterian Church the fifth largest religious denominations in western Virginia. As a result of the dearth of records relating to the Presbyterian Church, as well as its confinement to western Virginia’s towns, it has been largely excluded from this study. Scattered evidence of the Presbyterian Church’s political involvement in the Civil War will be discussed in chapter four.
slavery, only the United Brethren forbade slaveholders from joining their ranks.\textsuperscript{378} Church members were barred from purchasing grain produced by slaves and many church leaders even advocated prohibiting members from purchasing any goods whatsoever whose production could be traced to coerced labor.\textsuperscript{379} United Brethren leaders such as Jacob Bachtel also zealously supported abolitionist and Republican politicians. In 1856, the church’s ministers placed themselves in danger by supporting Republican Presidential candidate John C. Fremont. In an address given after Fremont’s defeat, Bachtel denounced the victor and gave his guarantee that “If opportunity affords,” President-elect James Buchanan “will be a traitor to his country before his term of office expires.”\textsuperscript{380}

The openly abolitionist and Republican leanings of the United Brethren’s ministerial leadership naturally drew the odium of Virginian authorities. The United Brethren’s organ, the \textit{Religious Telescope}, was frequently seized and burned by Virginia’s county courts in a manner all too familiar to NWVC leaders. Discussing these public burnings, an eyewitness recounted that “the Religious Telescope was at once adjudged by the enemies of the Church, to be anti-slavery,” and was burned in a number of counties.\textsuperscript{381} In Glenville, Gilmer County, “Mr. Herdon, postmaster . . . . opened and inspected [the Religious Telescope] and found [it] to contain abolition sentiments.” As a result, he “refused to deliver them as addressed and has publicly burnt them in the presence of a magistrate.”\textsuperscript{382} The postmaster subsequently called for indictments to be

\textsuperscript{378} \textit{Pittsburgh Christian Advocate}, April 12, 1859.
\textsuperscript{379} \textit{Pittsburgh Christian Advocate}, July 14, 1853.
\textsuperscript{380} Cox, \textit{History of the West Virginia Annual Conference: Church of the United Brethren in Christ}, 39.
\textsuperscript{381} Cox, \textit{History of the West Virginia Annual Conference: Church of the United Brethren in Christ}, 67-68.
\textsuperscript{382} \textit{Mountain Messenger and Baptist Recorder}, July 26, 1854.
issued against United Brethren Church members found circulating the paper. These incidents led one member of the church to conclude that “at no time, even in Dark Ages, was there a more ungodly thrust made against Christianity.”

The United Brethren’s position grew even direr after John Brown’s raid at Harper’s Ferry. In the months that followed, “Every influence that could be employed was arrayed against” the Brethren “and false reports were being circulated all over the Conference territory, in which it was affirmed that the United Brethren preachers were abolitionists and were censoring the authorities for steps being taken to bring Mr. Brown to justice.” Mob law soon threatened the church. Seeking to defend itself, the 1860 Parkersburg Annual Conference meeting issued a stern resolution declaring that it did not support Brown’s cause and that “we as a Conference . . . are satisfied that the authorities of Virginia did right in bringing him and his co-adjutors to immediate punishment, and as citizens and a conference we feel bound to protect our honor against such infamous assaults.” Nonetheless, this resolution did little to improve the Brethren’s image in the eyes of Virginia’s authorities.

Despite the United Brethren’s tribulations, the organization’s strict anti-slavery views, the ability of its circuit riders to penetrate isolated western neighborhoods, and its popularity among Germans allowed the church to gradually expand its membership in western Virginia. Between 1858 and 1861, the Brethren increased their membership by

383 Cox, History of the West Virginia Annual Conference: Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 67-68.
384 The impact Brown’s raid had upon the NWVC’s position in western Virginia will be discussed in chapter three.
385 Cox, History of the West Virginia Annual Conference: Church of the United Brethren in Christ, 63.
386 Evangelical Church of the United Brethren in Christ, Parkersburg Annual Conference, Minutes of the Parkersburg Conference of the United Brethren Church, 1858-1867, 1860 Meeting, n/p.
387 The increasing importance of German immigrants in western Virginia’s antebellum and Civil War political culture is discussed in Kenneth Fones-Wolf and Ronald L. Lewis, eds., Transnational West
64 percent. They grew at a particularly remarkable rate in Mason, Jackson, and Wood counties. Leading preachers such as Jacob Bachtel became well-known figures among westerners and by 1861 a number of United Brethren Churches formed along the Ohio River were named in his honor. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Bachtel and his brethren used their influence to demand their followers’ loyalty to the Federal Government. Their unionist influence was significant enough that they were actively hunted by Confederate forces operating in western Virginia throughout the war.

Though hamstrung by both a consistent lack of periodicals and an ineffective organizational structure, some Baptist ministers also became community leaders in 1850s western Virginia. Their political influence during the secession crisis, however, was nearly always local rather than regional. The dominant branch of the Baptist Church in western Virginia was the Regular Baptists, who by 1861 had roughly 7,000 members in the region.\(^{388}\) The church was most numerous in the Greenbrier region, the Monongahela Valley, and the Kanawha and Guyandotte Valleys.\(^{389}\) The Baptist Church was also the majority denomination in Gilmer, Cabell, and Wayne Counties, making it the only non-Methodist organization to exert such numerical strength at the county level.

Western Virginia Baptists were divided into a number of “associations,” which were in some ways similar to the annual conferences of the Methodist Churches. However, these associations differed from annual conferences in a number of important


\(^{389}\) While the MEC, MECS, and MPC each adopted forms of Arminian theology, western Virginia Baptists were Calvinists. Western Baptists generally were generally “mild Calvinists,” and accepted notions such as general atonement, that strict Baptists rejected. Nonetheless, Otis K. Rice argues in Allegheny Frontier, 281, that Baptists’ Calvinistic beliefs likely made it harder for them to compete with Methodists, whose arminian views were more palatable to western Virginians.

\(^{389}\) Truett Rogers, West Virginia Baptist History, The Early Years, 1770-1865 (Terra Alta, WV: Headline Books, 1990), 37.
ways. First, they were generally much smaller—while the Western Virginia Annual Conferences of the sectional Methodist Churches covered most of present day West Virginia, the Baptist Church operated no less than seven associations in the region. Baptist associations also differed from Methodist annual conferences in the extent of their authority. The Western Virginia Annual Conferences exercised full control over western Virginia’s Methodist churches. The conferences’ stances on issues such as slavery, education, and temperance were expected to be reflected by local churches. Baptist associations, on the other hand, exerted little direct control over local Baptist churches, whose autonomy remained supreme. With no constitutional provision requiring these churches to submit to the authority of the local association, tensions over temperance, missionary work, Free Masonry and other issues generated a constant string of disagreements between local Baptist churches and their regional association. As a result, Baptist leaders seeking to coordinate any kind of regional grassroots political activism were unable to use these associations’ organizational structures to their benefit.

Making matters worse, local Baptist churches often fractured over small internal issues. The most obvious cause of local division was the Baptist Church’s efforts to regulate its members’ worldly affairs. Indeed, if one church member brought a lawsuit against another, the church’s minister and leading members, rather than county authorities, were expected to resolve the problem. Naturally this intrusion into members’ temporal affairs created far more divisions than it resolved.\(^\text{390}\) Methodists, on the other hand, dealt with only two seriously divisive issues—slavery and church representation. NWVC members finding fault with their conference over these matters could easily find

a new home in either the SWVC or MPC. Baptists lacked this means of maintaining institutional stability.\footnote{See Rogers, \textit{West Virginia Baptist History, The Early Years}, 1770-1865, 18-21, for a detailed description of the disagreements that commonly divided western Virginia’s Baptist Churches. Another major difference between Baptists and Methodists in western Virginia was the lack of circuit-riders employed by the Baptists. As previously noted, Methodist itinerants were able to build their influence in western Virginia as a result of the itinerancy, which allowed them to cultivate a wide range of relations with westerners. This was not the case with Baptists, who often employed permanent preachers in their churches. While both the American Baptist Missionary Society and the Southern Baptist Convention sent missionary preachers to fill vacancies in western Virginia churches, these positions were usually not permanent and those selected to fill such positions were often sent to a different state within a few years. See Rogers, \textit{West Virginia Baptist History, The Early Years}, 1770-1865, 114-115, for a more detailed discussion of Baptist missionary preachers.}

Baptists also suffered from a dearth of well-circulated church periodicals. Between 1848 and 1860, three Baptist newspapers were founded in western Virginia, yet none of them managed to survive for more than a handful of years. Beginning in 1848, western Virginian Baptists patronized the \textit{Baptist Recorder}, which was published in Fairmont, Marion County. Five years after its formation, however, the \textit{Recorder} ceased publication due to financial difficulties. The following year the \textit{Recorder’s} editors, in tandem with a new set of benefactors, began publication of the \textit{Mountain Messenger and Baptist Recorder}, in Morgantown, Monongalia County. Like the Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate} and the \textit{Southern Methodist Itinerant}, the \textit{Mountain Messenger} strove to keep its readers apprised of national issues and happenings within their church. It also occasionally delved into the political realm. An 1857 editorial criticized the paucity of internal improvements in western Virginia by comparing the region with the state of Ohio. It focused upon “two things of great prominence which were profoundly humiliating to a Virginian,” particularly “the numerous \textit{Railroads and School Houses} of Ohio. Take a modern map of the Buckeye State, and you will find it completely
chequered [sic] with Railroads. Turn from it to Virginia, and what a contrast!” The paper denounced the General Assembly as a lethargic body made up of men who “are supposed to be statesmen” before calling on its readers to take a more active interest in their region’s economic development. Nonetheless, by 1860, the Mountain Messenger ceased publication as well, leaving western Baptists to rely solely upon the Parkersburg, Wood County-based Northwestern Virginia Baptist. Since few issues survive, it is hard to tell whether the newspaper politicized its pages, but by 1861 the Northwestern Virginia Baptist had also ceased publication. This left western Virginian Baptists leaders without a single newspaper source capable of helping them to galvanize their followers either for or against the Union upon the outbreak of the Civil War.

Despite the many factors hampering Baptists’ influence in western Virginia, some of its ministers were able to become well-known local figures. Rev. Enoch Rector, a longtime Baptist preacher in western Virginia, is an excellent case study of how one Baptist minister rose to prominence. Rector was born in Fauquier County, in eastern Virginia, in 1804. He spent his early years engaged in real estate and the mercantile business before becoming a Baptist preacher in 1835. From then until his death Rector

392 Mountain Messenger and Baptist Recorder, July 22, 1857.
393 Sectionalism also divided western Virginian Baptists. Much like the Methodists, the Baptist Church experienced its own schism over slavery in 1845, resulting in the creation of the American Baptist Missionary Society and the Southern Baptist Convention, which were generally analogous to the MEC and MECS. While western Virginia Baptists generally received missionary aid from each of these organizations, there were clear sectional preferences among the seven associations operating in western Virginia. The Union, Judson, Parkersburg, Broad Run and Mt. Pisgah Associations, which covered the northwestern and north-central portions of present-day West Virginia, tended to operate more closely with the northern American Baptist Missionary Society. The more southerly Greenbrier and Teays Valley Associations cultivated better relations with the Southern Baptist Convention. This sectional split was evinced by the creation of the Northwestern Virginia Baptist Association in 1850, which was designed to bring western Virginia’s regional associations under a common banner. Both the Greenbrier and Teays Valley Associations notably excluded themselves from its membership, testifying to a clear sectional division between western Baptists. For a more detailed discussion of the 1845 Baptist Church schism, see Snay, Gospel of Disunion, 134-138. For a detailed discussion of sectional tensions between western Virginia Baptists, see, Rogers, West Virginia Baptist History, The Early Years, 1770-1865, 116.
served faithfully as the pastor of the Parkersburg Baptist Church from 1838-1841 and from 1848-1849 while simultaneously serving as pastor of the Mount Zion Baptist Church, also in Wood County, from 1838-1867. Rector established deep roots in the Wood County area and became well-known among his parishioners. Preaching in barns, fields, forests, and private homes, Rector organized fourteen new Baptist churches in western Virginia during his career as well as an additional four in Ohio. He also frequently devoted his efforts to politics and education. When Baptist preacher Joseph Bradley initiated a subscription campaign in 1835 to fund a Baptist academy in Pruntytown, Taylor County, Rector, whose poverty as a youth prevented him from enjoying a formal education, pledged his undivided support. Three years later, Rector donated 9,000 dollars, more than half of the funds necessary for the academy’s construction. In honor of his support, the academy was christened Rector College in November 1839, and boasted a wide-ranging curriculum.

Rector also immersed himself in politics. One of Rector’s sons recalled his father’s fervent support of the Republican Party, as well as the anti-slavery cause. Rector frequently admonished his followers that “If a man is a Republican and a Baptist his chances . . . are good for entrance into heaven; but if one is a Methodist and a Democrat there be grave doubt about his ever passing the gates.” Like Gordon Battelle and Wesley Smith, Rector’s engagement with politics and education built his influence and prestige among Wood County residents. While by no means capable of exerting the broad influence

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394 Rogers, *West Virginia Baptist History, The Early Years, 1770-1865*, 157-158.
395 Similar to the MECS’ Marshall College, Rector College experienced serious financial woes in the late 1840s and early 1850s. After a number of years of declining financial support, as well as a devastating fire, the school finally closed its doors in 1850.
396 The *Baptist Banner*, March 26, 1925.
regional influence commanded by Methodist leaders, Rector’s local prominence certainly contributed to his ability to effectively speak for the cause of Union in 1861.

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In 1845, northern and southern Methodists viewed their operations in western Virginia as pregnant with promise. The SWVC believed that western Virginia’s best interests lay with a continued allegiance to the South and the slaveholding system. Through its defense of slavery, the organization saw itself as an agent of the southernization of western Virginia, a region whose loyalty to the South was often in question. The NWVC, on the other hand, saw western Virginia as a region destined to join its northern neighbors as a free-soil economic powerhouse. The NWVC pointed to the region’s lack of good roads, schools, and industries and identified slavery as the root cause of these disabilities. Well aware of the mutually-exclusive nature of their northern and southern-inspired visions, the NWVC and SWVC engaged in a fierce rhetorical and sometimes physical battle to win the hearts and minds of westerners.

The politicized denominational battles that rocked 1850s western Virginia established political and social fault-lines that clearly emerged during the secession crisis. The SWVC’s fervent defense of eastern Virginia and the hereditary western elite established the organization as a voice for conservative Virginians and allowed it to build a significant following. Secessionist leaders Gideon Camden and R. M. T. Hunter remembered the SWVC’s defense of their political agenda during the 1861 secession crisis and utilized the church’s leaders to cultivate support for secession among their charges. The southern church became an essential social tool for Virginia’s secessionist leaders in their attempts to engraft a moral legitimacy on their decision to join the
southern confederacy. The MPC’s leadership, while sidestepping sectional Virginia politics, provided essential services to western Virginians as doctors, merchants and lawyers. The organization used these connections to establish wide spheres of influence in western Virginia. Prominent MPC laymen such as Francis Pierpont could rely upon his church’s influence to spread the unionist message in 1861. Baptist and United Brethren ministerial leaders, while lacking the tools to become a pan-regional force in the vein of the NWVC, SWVC, and even MPC, nonetheless built spheres of localized influence they utilized on behalf of the Union or the Confederacy during the secession crisis.

The NWVC’s pragmatic support of western political grievances bolstered their influence in the region and allowed the organization to become the dominant church in western Virginia by 1861. They appealed to westerners who resented the legislative intransigence of eastern politicians and the western elite, as well as the blighting effect their obstinacy had on western commercial development. NWVC leaders cast themselves as the defenders of the political, economic, and spiritual aspirations of the west. They later used this image to legitimate their 1861 arguments that following eastern Virginia into the Confederacy would only enhance the iniquities westerners faced. When the secession crisis hit western Virginia, the NWVC made clear that the time had finally come for westerners to take their future into their own hands.
Chapter 3: “You Might as Well Talk About a Holy Devil as a Pious Traitor”: Methodist and Unionism in Western Virginia, 1860-1863

On a cold February morning in 1863, the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church received a letter from United States Secretary of State William Seward. Seward expressed his and President Abraham Lincoln’s gratitude for the “pure religious and political sentiments” expressed by the Conference over the previous two years of the Civil War. He also thanked the Conference for repelling the SWVC’s secessionist efforts in the region. Seward’s letter attests to the NWVC’s emergence as a unionist force during the war. With the onset of the secession crisis and the Civil War, NWVC and MPC ministers were crucial to forging and maintaining unionist sentiment in western Virginia.

NWVC ministers became grassroots unionists, assumed political power, and held the west in the Union because of the influence they established in the decades prior to the Civil War. Methodist ministers were not the shadowy figures dismissed in previous studies of western Virginia; as itinerant circuit-riders they penetrated isolated areas and interacted with westerners in a manner that few political leaders could. Aside from spiritual guidance, NWVC ministers provided a variety of services essential to western Virginia’s developing pre-industrial society. Whether as political stump speakers, educators, doctors or merchants, Methodist ministers established social bonds that allowed them to build respect and influence in western communities. When the vast
majority of the west’s county officials sided with the Confederacy in 1861—despite the wishes of their constituents—these ministers grasped political leadership.

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The interval between John Brown’s Raid at Harper’s Ferry and the 1860 Presidential Election in Virginia was an important prelude to the secession crisis in western Virginia. In October 1859, John Brown and eleven associates failed to seize the Federal Armory at Harper’s Ferry, in present-day Jefferson County, West Virginia. Brown’s intention to use weapons confiscated from the armory to incite a slave insurrection generated both fear and outrage among Virginians. Town meetings were held throughout the state to condemn northern supporters of Brown’s scheme and call for enlarged efforts to protect slaveholders and their property. Jefferson County existed into 1860 in a state of near lockdown. Four United States Congressmen who came to the county seat to witness Brown’s hanging were arrested as suspicious persons. Even former Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise was detained as he entered the county. The renowned fire-eater was held until he could properly identify himself.397 In Wayne County, the town of Ceredo, a small free-labor colony, was nearly destroyed by residents who felt that the social experiment was an abolitionist conspiracy in disguise.398

The NWVC faced the brunt of this fury and paranoia. Its outspoken defense of western political issues and its inherently anti-slavery doctrines made it the target of

398 The “Ceredo Experiment,” was organized and led by New England abolitionist Eli Thayer. He planned to establish a free labor colony populated by northern emigrants in Wayne County, (West) Virginia in order to demonstrate the advantages of free over slave labor. Thayer’s colony was the victim of repeated verbal, written, and in a few cases violent attacks during its short existence. Nonetheless, it maintained a newspaper, the Ceredo *Crescent*, and survived into the first year of the Civil War before finally disbanding. The best analysis of the Ceredo colony’s rapid rise and fall can be found in Otis K. Rice, “Eli Thayer and the Friendly Invasion of Virginia” *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Nov. 1971): 575-596.
attacks by both the SWVC and Virginia politicians. NWVC periodicals were again subjected to public burnings as SWVC ministers and county officials renewed their crusade to drive the organization from the region. In Kanawha County, NWVC circuit-rider Rev. Greene was arrested by a constable for having “uttered seditious sentiments.” Mr. Hughes, a local resident, testified that he heard Greene, from a distance of roughly twenty yards, “‘muttering to himself’ that ‘the slaves must and ought to be free, and that he would walk up to his knees in blood to free them.’” The Kanawha Republican blamed the “the filthy gang of Southern Methodists,” as well as county leaders, for inciting the controversy. NWVC ministers similarly denounced the arrest as another example of the “league between the Southern Church and political demagogues to drive us from the land of our birth.” NWVC leaders believed that the source of their troubles was the “deep-seated rancor of this class of people, and of pro-slaveryists everywhere.” They hammered elite western politicians and the SWVC for continuing to play the politics of slavery, sectionalism and abolition rather than focus upon issues relevant to the west’s economic and political interests.

John Brown’s raid and the subsequent crusade waged against northern Methodists did not harm the church’s membership growth. They NWVC’s continued defense of western interests in the face of renewed assaults by the western elite may have even increased the organization’s appeal to moderately anti-slavery westerners. Over the course of the year, the NWVC gradually increased its membership from 22,011 to 22,504. By the spring of 1860, Rev. A.B. Rohrbaugh spoke for many when he reported from Spencer, Roane County that “Our Church, notwithstanding all the cry about the

399 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, January 31, 1860.
400 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, January 10, 1860.
insurrection at Harper’s Ferry . . . is doing well. While the NWVC survived the storm brought on by Brown’s raid, Abraham Lincoln’s election as President catalyzed an even greater crisis for the organization.

Both the national sectional crisis and the fractured relationship between eastern and western Virginia dominated the 1860 Presidential Election in the west. In many western counties, Abraham Lincoln, John C. Breckenridge, Stephen Douglas and John Bell all appeared on the ballot, providing voters with four distinct positions on the slavery issue. In the northern panhandle of western Virginia, supporters of Abraham Lincoln made headway by portraying the Republican Party as a defender of the west’s political and economic interests. Republican leader Francis Pierpont campaigned for Lincoln while carrying tax receipts showing the unfair advantages easterners enjoyed under a constitutional provision that taxed slave property, regardless of actual worth, at a flat value. Republicans in western Virginia also counted on newspaper organs to spread their message. Ohio County’s Wheeling *Intelligencer* and Brooke County’s Wellsburg *Herald*, located further north, were both strongly Republican. Benefitting from their sponsorship, Republicans staged successful public meetings throughout the northern panhandle and in Wood, Taylor, and Monongalia Counties.

Breckinridge and Douglas enjoyed substantial support in western Virginia as well. Most Democrat newspapers threw their support to Breckinridge while portraying Douglas as a Democratic pariah. Breckenridge’s appeal in western Virginia rested on his self-portrayal as a Jacksonian Democrat and his declaration that votes for either Lincoln or

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401 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, January 30, 1860.
403 Link, *Roots of Secession*, 204
Douglas were tantamount to votes for disunion. Breckenridge supporters frequently attacked Douglas for his opposition to Kansas’ admission as a slave state, claiming that his position emboldened northerners and intensified the national sectional crisis. Without a viable organ in the region to back their candidate, Douglas supporters were unable to fight back. Nonetheless, Douglas did appeal to Democrats living in western Virginia’s developing towns, particularly Morgantown and Parkersburg, while Breckenridge prevailed in the countryside.

John Bell also campaigned vigorously in western Virginia. Bell’s Constitutional Union Party like Breckenridge, characterized votes for his opponents as votes for disunion. The election of a sectional candidate, argued Bell’s supporters, would threaten seriously the future of the union and slavery. Bell’s platform enabled him to carry Virginia as a whole by a razor-thin margin of 156 votes. In western Virginia, John Breckenridge carried the day with a plurality of 43.5 percent of the vote. Bell trailed close behind with 41.7 percent. Douglas garnered 11.2 percent while Abraham Lincoln took 3.5 percent of the total. Of the 23 western Virginia counties that eventually approved secession, Bell carried 14 and Breckenridge 9. The vote in the 27 western counties that eventually rejected Virginia’s secession was even more striking. Overall, Breckenridge carried 15, Bell 9 and Douglas 2 of those counties. In Wood County, Breckenridge and Bell split the county with 832 votes each. Breckenridge even managed to carry western counties such as Ritchie, which later posted a 70 percent unionist majority during the 1861 secession referendum. These electoral statistics make clear that partisan affiliation

404 Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 332
in 1860 was not a reliable predictor of future unionism or secessionism. While Daniel Crofts has argued that prewar Whigs made up the bulk of unionists in the Upper South, it is clear that this was not the case in western Virginia. John Bell, the candidate with the strongest Whig credentials, polled far better in future secessionist counties than he did in future unionist counties. As will be demonstrated below, religious affiliation was the determinative factor shaping residents’ sectional loyalties during the secession crisis.

Lincoln’s election and South Carolina’s secession one month later set in motion a crisis that brought day-to-day life in western Virginia to a grinding halt. Monongalia County resident William Price described how “the whole country is now suffering under a kind of paralysis; every thing is at a stand. . . . Banks have suspended and trade has stopped.” The bonds of civil authority and order that held the region together were snapping. In Harrison County, “Political parties were dissolved, families were divided. . . . Intense excitement prevailed everywhere.” The “people were remanded to a state of nature and every man was to look out for himself.” As county officials began voicing their support for the Confederacy, the machinery of county government faltered and residents adhering to either the unionist or secessionist side increasingly feared for

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406 In Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), Daniel Crofts argues that Virginia unionists likely voted for Breckenridge because of their belief that the “danger” of secession “could be overcome by voting for familiar and trusted party nominees.” Edward Smith, a lifelong resident of West Virginia, recollected in his A History of Lewis County (Weston, WV: Self-Published, 1920), 287, that “the Breckenridge victory was not an approval of the states’ rights sentiments in the platform, nor a sign of devotion to the slaveocracy, but the result of the thoroughness of the Democratic organization in Lewis county—the people voted for the Democratic party because it was the party of Jackson.”


themselves and their families. One westerner recalled that the “civil organization of the State was rapidly disintegrating and assuming a military air” as “bands of armed men” traversed “the public highways.” Rather than wait in vain for the help of legal authorities, residents prepared to “to protect their lives and property by force of arms.” In the midst of this tumult, unionists and secessionists began to organize their efforts.

NWVC leaders were at the center of western Virginia’s nascent unionist movement. The editor of the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, aware of the dangers facing the Union, called on ministers to “review from the pulpit our national history,” and “the providence of God towards us in times past” to “enhance the value which we attach to the American confederacy.” In Roane County, the NWVC’s Rev. Rohrbrough proudly stated after mingling with his followers that “we are Union people here, and are down on anything like rashness.” Methodist minister R.A. Arthur contributed by publishing a pamphlet pleading for the maintenance of the Union. Rev. Richard Woodyard likewise dedicated his sermons to demanding that westerners remain loyal to the Federal government.

Unionist Methodists’ budding activism failed to prevent Virginia Governor John Letcher from calling for a February convention to discuss secession. Across western Virginia, candidates stumped vigorously for seats as delegates—their campaigns

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410 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, December 4, 1860.
411 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, January 1, 1861.
412 Woodyard was preaching unionist sermons as early as 1855. The Richard L. Woodyard Papers (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), contain an 1855 sermon delivered by Woodyard in which he discussed the tragic “consequences if we fail to do our duty and should be led away by selfish, and inconsistent motives, desiring to sacrificing one part of the country to another, and the interests of one section to those of another . . . dissolving the bonds which bind us together.”
413 Link, Roots of Secession, 224-226.
dominating public discourse. Fabricius Cather, a Taylor County resident, described the raucous debates that occurred between unionist candidate John S. Burdette and secessionist G. W. Hansbrough. Between January 15 and February 4 these men canvassed Taylor County, frequently speaking “all the afternoon.” Hansbrough, a virulent secessionist, was sometimes “hissed down by the Union men,” but remained steadfast in his support of southern rights. Burdette faced similar opposition during his candidacy, attesting to Taylor’s fractured political terrain. Cather, an unconditional unionist, was happy to note that Burdette eventually carried the election with a majority of 191 votes.

When the Virginia Convention commenced on February 13, the assembly’s 152 members tilted toward the unionist side. Western Virginia delegates Waitman Willey, John S. Carlile and George W. Summers joined unionists from the Valley of Virginia to denounce secession. They demanded that the convention recall the west’s inferior position in Virginia as they considered the South’s supposedly unequal position in the Union. In a March 16 speech, Willey asked how eastern Virginia could criticize the North’s denial of southern rights while refusing the west an equitable tax code and equal representation in the state’s Senate. Willey made clear that the east could not force the west into the Southern Confederacy. By early March, it appeared that the Richmond Convention would be unable to generate a secessionist majority and that Virginia would remain tenuously with the Union. Unconditional and conditional unionists would rule the

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414 Fabricius A Cather Civil War Diaries (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), January 28, 1861.
415 Fabricius A Cather Civil War Diaries, February 4, 1861.
417 Link, Roots of Secession, 237.
day so long as President Lincoln did not attempt to force the seceded southern states back into the Union. However, the failure of the Peace Conference in Washington D.C., and many Virginians’ belief that Lincoln’s March 4th inaugural address foreshadowed the use of force against the South, gradually turned the tide. By the end of the month, most eastern newspapers, as well as the west’s Kanawha Valley Star, South Branch Intelligencer, and Parkersburg News were fervently supporting secession. When word came that Lincoln intended to relieve Fort Sumter, anxious Virginians braced for the result.

News of the surrender of Fort Sumter and Lincoln’s subsequent call for 75,000 troops to suppress the southern rebellion sent shockwaves through Richmond. Western delegate George McPorter recalled that secessionists “ran howling through the streets.” After breaking down the door to the state house, “They tore down the stars and stripes and hoisted in its place the flag of the Confederate States.” Western unionists at the Convention were “hissed at and groaned at.” “The galleries were brought to bear on us whenever any man dared utter a sentiment for the Union. Some of us were spit upon,” and told that they “would be driven out at the point of the bayonet.” Willey painted a similarly vivid picture of the final days of the Richmond Convention. “During the progress of the bombardment of Fort Sumter, the excitement in Richmond and in the Convention was intense. Bonfires and illuminations blazed high in the streets and public squares; the national flag was torn from its place over the dome of the capitol and

418 Crofts, Reluctant Confederates, 121-128.
419 Link, Roots of Secession, 235
422 Hall, The Rending of Virginia, 182.
trampled under the feet of an infuriated mob.” The definitive moment came on April 17. That morning, virulent secessionist Henry Wise strode into the Convention Hall and took his seat among the delegates. He then drew “a large Virginia horse-pistol from his bosom,” and “proceeded to harangue the body in the most violent and denunciatory manner.” Wise “concluded by taking his watch from his pocket” and declaring that “Harper’s Ferry and its armory were in possession of Virginia soldiers,” and that it was now pointless to do anything but approve a secession ordinance. Wise’s theatrics sealed the fate of the convention’s unionist coalition. Hours after his speech, the assembly went into secret session and adopted a secession ordinance by a vote of 85-55. Of the 47 western delegates, 32 voted against the ordinance and 11 in favor, with four abstentions. The convention called for a referendum on the ordinance to be held on May 23. Within days of the vote, western unionists fled Richmond, fearful that they would become the victims of a lynch mob if they lingered.

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The NWVC and the MPC responded to these events by dedicating themselves to the unionist cause. Methodist ministers played key political roles in unionist western Virginia counties because of the vacuum in political leadership caused by the ordinance. Despite the fact that the secession referendum did not occur until the end of May, the majority of western county officials declared their loyalty to the Confederacy as soon as the convention passed the secession ordinance. These leaders were dedicated to intimidating or driving out unionists in their midst. Unionists, even when they constituted the majority of a county’s population, were left without viable leaders to coordinate their activities.

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efforts. NWVC minister Gordon Battelle lamented that, “The people here, save the little handful of secessionists,” were unionists, “but they lack a bold, prudent, and skillful leader.”

Rev. M.V.B. White complained of the prevalence of “notorious rebels in high places” and how “our leading politicians. . . . used their influence to inflame the passions of the people. Rev. John W. Reger similarly recalled that most “county offices . . . were filled by rebels.”

NWVC circuit rider Robert Hagar, stationed in Boone County, experienced firsthand the threats unionists faced from secessionist leaders. Since residents were expected to vote orally, many Boone County unionists feared the consequences of voting their conscience. Hagar described how secessionist leaders, in tandem with secessionist mobs, made clear that “any man who voted against secession should be hung forthwith.” Nonetheless, a group of 40 or 50 unionists went to the county courthouse on the day of the referendum to vote against secession. “When they got there they found a drunken secession mob and their hearts failed them.”

The predicament facing Boone County’s unionists was shared by many western Virginians. Across the west, residents chafed under the control of disloyal officials. Even as far North as Brooke County, located in the northern panhandle, residents sorrowfully declared that “as a general thing, the State officials, from the highest to the lowest, are to be looked upon with distrust.” In Upshur County, Marsha Sumner Phillips, a relative of United States Senator Charles Sumner, expressed her hope that “Our Secession County

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426 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, September 2, 1862; *John Reger Papers* (Buckhannon, WV: United Methodist Archives, West Virginia Wesleyan University), Box 1 Folders 14 and 20.
428 Wellsburg *Herald*, May 13, 1861.
Officers” would soon be “deposed” so that her county would “have good Union men in their place.”

In Roane County, secessionist leaders “committed great depredations upon the Union people,” laying “their plans to do the mischief, while under the influence of bad whiskey.” Fabricius Cather recounted how in Taylor County, unionists’ attempts to stage “a mass meeting” were “broken up by Disunionists” led by members of the county court.

A correspondent to the Morgantown Star warned of eastern Virginia’s plan to send “regiments and battalions of bullies and ruffians to intimidate our voters.” He called on westerners to resist this “degradation and oppression.”

A Harrison County resident similarly feared that Gideon Camden, a prominent secessionist lawyer from the county “has gone to Richmond . . . to consult with the Governor on the propriety of making arrests,” of prominent unionists in the county. South of Harrison, the “residence of Caleb Boggess, Union delegate from Lewis County, was burned by secessionists.”

In Pruntytown, the Mayor and “his unauthorized mob of about 100 men” took “possession of the bridge at Fetterman.” “Civil Union citizens” who resisted were “arrested.”

In Jackson County “The conspirators toiled incessantly. In their meshes they had caught all the lawyers of the county, the clerks of the courts, the sheriff, all the magistrates save four, and all but two of the constables.” Any man identified with the Union was “threatened with a coat of tar and feathers and a rail.”

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429 Marcia Louise Sumner Phillips Journal (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), September 30, 1861.
430 Fabricius A Cather Civil War Diaries, November 26, 1860.
431 Morgantown Star, May 24, 1861.
432 Hall, Rending of Virginia, 219.
433 John S. Burdette to Gibson Cramner, May 23, 1861, Gibson Lamb Cramner Papers (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 1, Folder 1.
434 Daniel Frost to Gibson Cramner, October 30, 1862, Gibson Lamb Cramner Papers, Box 1, Folder 1. In an undated letter to Cramner, prominent western unionist John S. Carlile recounted that “The usual black guardism was applied to” unionists “and all who upheld them. ‘Lincoln hireling, ‘Abolitionist’.
Into the breach stepped Methodist ministers. They assumed positions of political importance, a striking fact considering that none of them held political office before the secession crisis. Employed in the apostolic “travelling connection,” NWVC and MPC itinerants moved throughout western Virginia and cultivated a wide range of personal and professional contacts that allowed them to command respect and political influence when they defended the unionist cause in 1861. The careers of NWVC ministers Gordon Battelle, Wesley Smith, and Moses Tichenell, as well as MPC ministers Dennis B. Dorsey, Peter Laishley, and Benjamin Bailey, demonstrate how Methodist leaders became popular figures in western Virginia.

Dr. Gordon Battelle was the most well-known minister in western Virginia during the secession crisis. He spoke and wrote prolifically in support of the Federal Government. His popularity rested on the deep roots he established in western Virginia during his preaching career. From 1848 to 1861, Battelle rode circuit across the northern panhandle of western Virginia, in the Kanawha Valley, and in the Monongahela River Valley. He also spent extended periods of time in the major cities of Wheeling, Parkersburg, Charleston and Clarksburg, creating, in the words of prominent Charleston lawyer James Brown, “a reputation that will live long in the years to come.”435 Aside from his influence as a preacher, Battelle was a central figure in western Virginia’s educational institutions. He served as superintendent of Parkersburg’s Asbury Academy from 1840-1843 and was the President of Clarksburg’s Northwestern Virginia Academy

435 Gordon Battelle Papers (Buckhannon, WV: United Methodist Archives, West Virginia Wesleyan University), Folder 1, n/p.

‘Submisivist’ etc., etc., where [sic] the set phrases.” He similarly remembered being told by the by citizens of Pruntytown that “we would be hung if we did not stop the Union talk in which we indulged pretty freely.” When not intimidating their unionist neighbors, secessionist leaders warned residents that Union forces sought to overrun the county, “kill women and children, and free the negroes.” Marcia Louise Sumner Phillips Journal, September 17, 1861.
from 1843 to 1852. As discussed in chapter two, he was also instrumental in the creation of an Educational Fund in 1852, which raised money for the establishment of sorely-needed academies in the west. Battelle’s ardent support of educational reform demonstrates that he was not simply a preacher who made a semi-yearly visit to his preaching appointments; he was a central figure in western Virginia society. When he devoted himself to the unionist cause in 1861, westerners remembered him as a steward of their souls and of their education.

Rev. Wesley Smith was also a regular fixture in western Virginia prior to 1861. Born in Ireland, his family moved to western Virginia in 1823. During his career, Smith was stationed in Wheeling, Parkersburg, Clarksburg, Morgantown, and numerous other locations. In 1854 he engaged in a speaking tour that took him across western Virginia, defending the NWVC against SWVC charges that the northern church was an incendiary force threatening Virginia’s social institutions. Smith’s speeches, which also focused on western Virginia’s inequitable position in state politics, were combined into a pamphlet that was reprinted twice before the Civil War. When Smith spoke in favor of unionism in 1861, westerners remembered him as a defender of their political and economic interests.

436 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858), 149-151.
437 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Fairmont, Virginia, March 18, 1863 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1863), 8-11.
438 Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840-1940), 391.
439 The weekly issues of the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate between 1854 and 1855 contain numerous articles discussing these controversies.
Wesley Smith’s mentor Moses Tichenell similarly dedicated himself to defending the west’s political interests. Tichenell was born in Preston County (West) Virginia in 1807. In 1829 he was admitted on trial as an itinerant minister. During his long preaching career Tichenell was inextricably tied to the west’s educational and political interests. He spent a number of years as an agent for the Northwestern Virginia Academy and during that time preached frequently on the cause of education. Tichenell also immersed himself in western Virginia politics. Like his protégé, Tichenell publically labeled the SWVC as a disunionist force while denouncing eastern Virginia’s control over state politics and its deleterious effect upon western economic development.\footnote{440}

The MPC produced ministers who became community leaders as well. As discussed in chapter two, Dr. Dennis B. Dorsey and Peter T. Laishley became well-known figures in western Virginia because of the diverse secular and spiritual services they provided for their followers. Benjamin Bailey was another well-known Methodist Protestant minister in western Virginia. Born and raised in Taylor County, Bailey and his family were long-time Methodist Church members. When the MPC split from the MEC in 1830, Bailey canvassed Taylor County to raise funds for the construction of an MPC Church near Hacker’s Creek. Congregants named it the Bailey Church as an expression of gratitude for his monetary and spiritual support of the church.\footnote{441} By the time of the secession crisis, Bailey had been preaching in Taylor County for thirty years. His passionate unionism was not ignored by his followers.

\footnote{440} Tichenell’s attacks on the SWVC and the eastern-dominated state legislature are discussed in chapter two.
\footnote{441} I.A. Barnes, The Methodist Protestant Church in West Virginia (Baltimore: Stockton Press, 1926), 236.
These examples reveal that Methodist ministers were not the shadowy figures dismissed in previous studies of western Virginia. They were men whose travels, ministries, and educational and business ventures made them well-known figures. Those who went to an educational institution presided over by Battelle, witnessed a lecture by Smith or Tichenell, or benefitted from Dorsey’s, Laishley’s, and Bailey’s medical, legal, merchant, or financial services paid them attention when they stumped for the union in 1861. The nature of the apostolic itinerant connection, which moved Methodist ministers throughout western Virginia between 1848 and 1861, allowed these men to forge networks of communication they put to good use when political events called for it. Their shared membership in either the NWVC or MPC also provided them with an organizational framework to coordinate political efforts. When the secession crisis left many western Virginia counties without a solid unionist leadership, these men grasped political power.

Lay Methodist political leaders Waitman Willey and Francis Pierpont also depended upon the organizational framework of their church organizations to coordinate unionist activism. Willey spent most of his life in the Monongahela region of western Virginia and from an early age was a dedicated NWVC member. Throughout the 1850s, he worked closely with NWVC ministers Gordon Battelle and Levi Parke as temperance advocates. He also provided essential legal counsel to Rev. Andrew Jackson Lyda as

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442 Describing his father’s connection to the NWVC, Waitman P. Willey recalled that “He loved the simple and spontaneous usages of his adopted church—the Methodist Episcopal—and was always an honored and active member; possessing the genuine affection of its members and especially of its clergy.” After the Civil War, Willey was twice elected to the Methodist Episcopal Church’s General Conference as a lay delegate. Waitman P. Willey, An Inside View of the Formation of West Virginia, 187, 191.
he sought to win the Parkersburg Methodist Church from the SWVC.\textsuperscript{443} Willey recognized that Methodists’ “influence was felt by all” in western Virginia, a lesson he kept in mind during the secession crisis.\textsuperscript{444} While serving as a delegate at the Richmond Convention, Willey depended on his Methodist brethren to keep him updated on westerners’ political sentiments. Their ability to consult with residents throughout western Virginia and to shape their feelings about secession was imperative to Willey as he fought for the Union on the convention floor. In mid-March he received a letter from fellow Methodist leader Henry Derring who informed him that in Monongalia County, “Our people are intensely for Union, and rest assured, that 8/10ths of our people would vote against any ordinance of Secession, which yr body might pass.” Rev. William Shinn recounted to Willey his efforts to preach against secession by asking his following to consider “what interest” western Virginia had “in slavery?”\textsuperscript{445}

Francis Pierpont is best known for his political exploits during the Civil War. His zealous unionism eventually vaulted him to the governor’s office of the restored Virginia government.\textsuperscript{446} Throughout his life, Pierpont and his brother Zackwell were active members of the Methodist Protestant Church. Pierpont’s aid was crucial to the construction of a church in Fairmont County that became one of the largest MPC gathering places in the region while his brother Zackwell was central to the formation of MPC congregations in Ritchie and Doddridge Counties. Pierpont’s immersion in his church “became an effective medium through which he enlarged the circle of his friends

\textsuperscript{443} See chapter 2 for further discussion of these property disputes.
\textsuperscript{444} Samuel Woods to Waitman Willey, June 3, 1853, \textit{Charles Ambler Collection} (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 10, Folder 2.
\textsuperscript{445} William M. Shinn to Waitman Willey, July 23, 1861, \textit{Charles Ambler Collection}, Box 10 Folder 3.
\textsuperscript{446} The formation of the Restored Virginia Government is discussed in chapter five.
among the plain folk of his native hills.” Through his church contacts in Harrison, Lewis, and Monongalia Counties, Pierpont had political “strength little appreciated and understood.” He also established close connections with NWVC ministers such as Gordon Battelle. As students and roommates at Pennsylvania’s Allegheny College in the 1830s, Battelle and Pierpont forged a friendship that lasted until Battelle’s death in 1862. After the April passage of the secession ordinance, Battelle strategized with Pierpont about how best to coordinate their unionist efforts. In one letter, Battelle suggested calling “a meeting at some central point, say Clarksburg, immediately, to take the initiatory steps for a provisional Western state government,” in the event of the secession ordinance’s passage. Battelle, aware of Pierpont’s influence among Methodist Protestants advised him to let “the movement be carefully but firmly made in the interior counties” where Pierpont’s MPC connections were especially strong.

Methodist ministers devoted all of their energies to the unionist cause in 1861. Whether organizing or speaking at public meetings, forming union clubs, or publishing pamphlets or editorials in favor of the cause, they used their influence to maintain western Virginia for the Union. One of their first targets was the secession convention itself. Methodist ministers denounced the assembly as another example of eastern Virginia’s despotic rule over the west and its complete disregard for the region’s political interests. They portrayed its passage of the secession ordinance as illegitimate, or as Battelle put it, the product of a “traitorous, aristocrat Convention at Richmond,” aided in

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its efforts by a “drunken mob.”

Pointing to eastern Virginia’s attempted seizure of the Harper’s Ferry armory before the passage of a secession ordinance, another minister declared that “This great crime against the sovereign people of Virginia is attempted to be palliated by a pretended submission of the secession ordinance to the people for ratification. . . . In every case the people are mere tools in the hands of designing demagogues.” Westerners must resist “this high handed outrage . . . ignore the ordinance of secession passed by the Richmond Convention,” and “permit no vote to be taken on it.” Ministers also attacked the logic of secession itself, lambasting the notion that “any petty State can dissolve the Union at pleasure,” while arguing that the “glorious heritage of our fathers is too costly, and too valuable to be made the sport of every madman.”

Wesley Smith used slavery as a metaphor to condemn the convention’s actions. He argued that the assembly’s actions found “their most fitting illustration in the case of the master who of his mere pleasure transfers his slaves from one plantation to another.”

Why should the west remain aligned with easterners after they drove “from the seats where you had placed them . . . your own delegates, at the peril of their lives, for no other fault than that they truly reflected your will?” Deploring the convention’s passage of secession in secret session, Smith exclaimed, “Never before in Virginia were the people so carefully excluded from all inspection of the acts of their own servants. The people are shut out—the conspirators are within.”

As the secession crisis in western Virginia intensified, the NWVC and the MPC became stewards of their flocks’ political salvation. They demanded at assemblies

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449 Gordon Battelle to Francis Pierpont, April 23, 1861, Francis H. Pierpont Papers.
450 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 7, 1861.
451 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 7, 1861.
452 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 21, 1861.
throughout the region that westerners remain true to the Union and form a unified front against secession. At a May 1861 meeting in Mason County, Rev. J.M. Phelps presented resolutions that “provided for the organization of Union clubs, and for vigorous action by the Union men of the entire county.” Northeast of Mason, Rev. Moses Tichenell led a large public meeting in Marion County with such fire that he was later described as “one of the staunchest Union men in the State, and battling manfully for the Cause.”

Rev. S.E. Steele reported from Tyler County that “The Union feeling is gaining ground every day. . . . Traitors are trembling, some are leaving, and some are turning over.” In Upshur County, Rev. H. Wallace gave a rousing Union speech attended by “A great many of the French Creek people.”

In a speech in Monongalia County, Rev. Sinabaugh struck a similar chord. After a long sermon castigating secession as a foolish plot launched by despotic cotton planters, Sinabaugh expressed his readiness to “close the Bible and take up a Sharp’s rifle,” which resulted in “deafening applause,” from his audience.

At a meeting in Wheeling, Rev. Gideon Martin revealed that “he had a father in Eastern Virginia, whom he loved and honored, but if he saw him reach out his hand to dishonor the American flag, he would himself strike down the impious hand.”

Gordon Battelle and Wesley Smith spearheaded their brethren’s unionist efforts. Throughout the crisis, Battelle devoted his “eloquence, his logic, his pen, and all his energies to the preservation of the Union and liberty.” Confronting the Confederate claim that secession was a revolution against northern tyranny rather than a defense of

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453 Pittsburg Christian Advocate, May 14, 1861.
454 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 11, 1861.
455 Marcia Louise Sumner Phillips Journal, August 10, 1861.
456 Wheeling Intelligencer, April 24, 1861.
457 Western Christian Advocate, May 15, 1861.
458 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Fairmont, Virginia, March 18, 1863, 8-11.
slavery, Battelle scoffed that “It has been the merit of other attempted revolutions that their motive at least was a reaching upward and forward after liberty. It is the infamy of this that it is a reaching downward and backward after despotism.”

Wesley Smith was no less enthusiastic. At a May 9 meeting in Wheeling, he gave one of many passionate speeches supporting the unionist cause. Smith thundered that “the real question at issue in this great conflict,” was “whether the sun of civilization will go forward on the dial of time till it ushers in the millennial glory, or whether it shall go backward till it casts its shadow over this entire continent, and lands us in darkness worse than that of the middle ages.”

He later paid for his address to be printed, sending it to Methodist ministers across western Virginia to circulate among their charges.

Battelle and Smith frequently submitted unionist editorials to the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, confident that their ministerial colleagues would pass the newspaper throughout the region.

Battelle’s and Smith’s frequent letters to the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate demonstrate how critical the paper was to the NWVC’s unionist crusade. The political importance of the Advocate and its wide circulation in western Virginia was a central reason for its ban by Virginia’s county courts in 1860. During the war, the Advocate resumed its position as a political instrument and was essential to the NWVC’s battle

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459 Hall, Rending of Virginia, 613.
460 Western Christian Advocate, June 26, 1861.
461 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 25, 1861.
462 In The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 125-130, Nathan Hatch argued that Methodist periodicals were crucial to spreading their organization’s populist message in the early Republic. These papers remained central facets of all three of the Methodist organizations in antebellum western Virginia. Throughout the 1850s, it was a common practice for Methodist ministers in western Virginia to carry large bundles of the newspaper with them to their charges, which they distributed to probationers, members, and curious listeners. After the laity was given a chance to peruse the paper, they were encouraged to purchase a subscription, with the ministers themselves receiving a commission for their efforts. This process is described in detail in Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church For The Years 1848-1857 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1858).
against secession. Unionist Methodists regarded the Advocate as an indispensable tool in spreading their message and took every opportunity to use the periodical to update their brethren on the progress of their unionist efforts. An NWVC minister spoke for many of his colleagues when he asked that additional copies of the paper be sent to him to distribute among his charges since “Your paper is regarded as the most reliable in giving the news of the times.”463 Indeed, it was through the Advocate that Wesley Smith ordered westerners before the secession referendum to “Go to the polls, every man of you, on the 23d of May” to vote against the ordinance.464

Throughout the war, the Advocate kept readers abreast of political developments in the North and South and of military movements throughout western Virginia. During General George McClellan’s summer 1861 western Virginia campaign, the Advocate reported his movements as accurately as possible, as well as those of Confederate forces commanded by Henry A. Wise and John Floyd. After the famous “Philippi Races” in Barbour County, the Advocate provided a full account of the first land battle of the Civil War and the Federal victory that resulted. When regular military movements were supplanted by guerilla warfare, the paper alerted westerners to the presumed locations of the many guerilla bands that terrorized the dense forests and tight mountain passes that characterized the region.

Between 1861 and 1865 the Advocate teemed with unionist articles and editorials, making it at points difficult to distinguish whether the paper was secular or religious. NWVC leaders had long argued that eastern Virginia’s single-minded dedication to slavery came at the expense of the west’s economic and political interests. This position

463 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 25, 1861.
464 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 28, 1861.
expanded the NWVC’s influence and bolstered its arguments that following Virginia into secession would only worsen the inequities westerners faced. In perhaps one of its most forceful editorials, “To the People of Western Virginia,” the newspaper demanded that westerners “hold county and neighborhood Union meetings” and cast “a solid vote against the infamous Ordinance of Secession.” The editorial laid bare the arguments for western Virginia’s adherence to the Union, blending unionism with the political disabilities the west suffered throughout the nineteenth Century, asserting, “If [Eastern Virginia] will ‘secede’ from us, let her go; we can spare her. . . . She has built for us not one foot of railroad; she has neither built nor endowed for us a single school.”

The Advocate portrayed unionism as inextricably tied to western Virginia’s economic viability. “Western Virginia cannot sever the political, commercial and social ties which have for so long a time bound her to Pennsylvania and Ohio, and all to the Union. . . . Why should this cord now be broken, these reciprocal interests destroyed?” By remaining in the Union, western Virginia would become “partners with Pennsylvania in a thousand promises of future greatness, and in a thousand natural and national advantages.”

Methodist leaders argued stridently that remaining with the Union was in their church’s best interests as well. One minister exclaimed that a firm rejection of secession “gives promise of a glorious future for Methodism” in western Virginia. Despite the NWVC’s significant growth in the region over the previous fifteen years, the church would have been even more prosperous had its efforts not been “overshadowed by controversies between” the “North and South.” The minister was not above self-congratulation when illustrating this magnificent possibility, stating that “Western

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465 Pittsburg Christian Advocate, May 21, 1861.
466 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 18, 1861.
Virginia will be much indebted to Methodist ministers for her salvation from the horrors which a union with the Southern rebellion must have entailed. Her freedom is about achieved.\

Methodist leaders did not limit their unionist appeals to religious periodicals. They also utilized well-circulated secular papers such as the Wheeling *Intelligencer* to spread the message. One minister exclaimed through the *Intelligencer* that “‘the powers that be are ordained of God’; and no government on earth has received so many tokens of Divine favor and blessing as ours.” He demanded that “the voice of every clergyman from every pulpit in the land” be “raised to counsel and to urge every honest man who can to go forth to fight the battles of God, of his country and of humanity.”\(^468\) The erstwhile Wesley Smith similarly utilized the *Intelligencer* to plead for “Men of every faith in religion and every creed in politics” to cast aside “your minor differences” and “rally to the flag of your country” to “subjugate the foul spirit of treason and rebellion in our own State and in every other State in the Union.” He singled out “the members and friends of Methodism” and encouraged them to “use your influence with men” to “stand by and sustain the Constitution and the Government of your country in this hour of her peril.”\(^469\)

Methodist Protestants were equally dedicated grassroots activists. Reverends Dennis B. Dorsey and Peter T. Laishley organized a number of unionist meetings throughout the Monongahela region during the crisis, delivering zealous public speeches

\(^{467}\) Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, June 11, 1861.  
\(^{468}\) Wheeling *Intelligencer*, September 28, 1861.  
\(^{469}\) Wheeling *Intelligencer*, August 30, 1861.
that created “much interest and enthusiasm.”

Rev. Benjamin Bailey gave a number of affecting unionist speeches in Taylor County “with tears in his eyes imploring the people” to remain true to the Union. In Lewis County, where the proscription of unionists was particularly intense, MPC minister J.G. Vandervort led a number of secret meetings in shops and private homes in the tense month between the passage of the secession ordinance and the secession referendum. Vandervort was also among those called on to make the dangerous journey to Wheeling to request Federal troops to protect the county’s unionist majority from secessionist persecution. The MPC’s newfound politicization was not lost on its denominational rivals. NWVC minister J.B. Feather applauded Methodist Protestants’ demonstration of “their loyalty by taking strong and firm ground in support of the Federal Government.”

MPC ministers soon joined forces with NWVC ministers to fight for the cause. At a meeting in Morgantown, Dr. James Drummond and Rev. J.B. Blakeney of the NWVC, along with the MPC’s Dr. Dennis Dorsey, gave addresses to a large public meeting, encouraging “the people to cling to their Union sentiments.” For these men, differences regarding lay representation mattered little in the face of national crisis.

While nowhere near as powerful or influential as the sectional Methodist Churches, the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and some Baptist Church leaders

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\item \textsuperscript{470} Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Annual Conference, \textit{Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876} (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 1862 Session, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{471} John S. Burdette to Gibson Cramner, May 23, 1861, \textit{Gibson Lamb Cramner Papers}, Box 1 Folder 1.
\item \textsuperscript{472} Smith, \textit{History of Lewis County}, 299.
\item \textsuperscript{473} Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, May 16, 1863.
\item \textsuperscript{474} Pittsburg \textit{Christian Advocate}, June 11, 1861.
\end{itemize}}
also attempted to build support for the unionist cause.\textsuperscript{475} Like the NWVC and MPC, the United Brethren possessed an organizational structure that allowed them to coordinate their efforts across the region.\textsuperscript{476} While possessing only 2,000 members, they were an important social force in the Ohio River Counties of Jackson, Mason, Wood and Cabell. United Brethren leaders such as Jacob Bachtel “could not see how an old Whig could be disloyal” and used their influence to demand loyalty to the United States.\textsuperscript{477} Bachtel and his fellow ministers denounced “with flashing eyes, the whole Southern movement,” and labored to save westerners “from the dangerous heresy of secession.”\textsuperscript{478} Rev. Zebedee Warner recalled that Bachtel’s “authority and influence were supreme” and “was [sic] such that he saved to the church and Government the [sic] most of our people in Jackson County.”\textsuperscript{479} Bachtel’s resolute defense of the Union was an example to fellow ministers J.W. Miles and J.Z. Williams, who used their positions to preach for the cause of the Union. Appointed to Randolph County, Williams fought hard for the union in the

\textsuperscript{475} With memberships of roughly 7,000 and 2,000 respectively, the Baptists and United Brethren were the fifth and seventh largest religious organizations in western Virginia. The NWVC was the first, the SWVC the second, the Baltimore Conference the third, and the MPC the fourth largest religious organization in the region while the Presbyterian Church was the sixth. There is little evidence that the Presbyterian Church’s leaders actively fought for the unionist cause in 1861. However, as will be discussed in chapter four, some members of the church were avowed secessionists.

\textsuperscript{476} Like the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Evangelical Church of the United Brethren in Christ contained a hierarchical structure, with the delegated General Conference representing the seat of authority. The United Brethren also divided their church’s jurisdiction into Annual Conferences, which presided over the districts and circuits that itinerant ministers followed. The Parkersburg Annual Conference was the locus of the United Brethren’s operations in western Virginia. It included the west’s Ohio River counties, the Monongahela and Little Kanawha River regions, and interior counties such as Braxton, Randolph and Webster.


\textsuperscript{478} Warner, \textit{Life and Labors of Jacob Bachtel}, 131

\textsuperscript{479} Warner, \textit{Life and Labors of Jacob Bachtel}, 141-44.
A number of Baptist ministers also pledged their pulpits to the Union. However, unlike the United Brethren and the Methodists, they lacked the organizational structure necessary to coordinate their efforts across the region. The crux of power among nineteenth-century Baptists was the local church, making it difficult for unionist Baptists scattered throughout the west to work together. Baptists also lacked a well-circulated periodical in western Virginia. The last Baptist periodical published in the region was the *Northwestern Virginia Baptist*, which ceased operations in 1860. Baptist leaders’ political power was further eroded by internal divisions over whether or not it was appropriate for ministers to introduce politics into the pulpit. Nonetheless, some ministers were able to exert their influence at the local level. In Ritchie, Doddridge, Harrison and Tyler counties, Baptist minister James Woods was “an ardent advocate of the Union cause, and was pronounced in his views on the slavery question.”

In the Monongahela Valley, Baptist Preacher David Powell gave a number of pro-Union speeches in Taylor and Monongalia Counties. On May 4, he shared the podium with MPC minister Benjamin Bailey at a unionist mass-meeting that drew 2,500 residents. Powell’s politicization

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482 *Fabricius Cather Diary*, May 4, 1861.
drew the ire of some of his colleagues, resulting in an “exciting debate” with a colleague
who felt the “introduction of politics into religious matters” was not appropriate.483

In Wood County, Enoch Rector emerged as a potent force for unionism. As
discussed in chapter two, Rector was one of the best-known Baptist leaders in western
Virginia. While serving as the pastor of Parkersburg’s Mount Zion Church from 1838 to
1867, he was also integral to the formation of Rector College in Pruntytown, Taylor
County. Throughout the 1850s, he frequently blended politics with his ministry, and
openly expressed his support for the Whig and later Republican parties.484 Rector utilized
his position during the secession crisis to forcefully speak for the unionist cause. In an
open letter to the Parkersburg Association, Rector’s Mount Zion Church denounced the
“designing politicians [that] are striving to dissolve this Union and destroy that
government which was formed by the wisdom and patriotism” of the forefathers and
lamented that “our once happy country is to be drenched in blood . . . armed men are in
battle array, brother against brother, father against the son.” The church called on Baptists
to “gird on the whole armor of God” to “staunch the fiery darts of the adversary.”485

The most famous Baptist unionist was Rev. Joseph Andrew Jackson Lightburn.
Lightburn was born in 1824 in West Newton, Pennsylvania. At the age of 16, he moved
with his family to Lewis County, where he became a Baptist minister in the late 1850s.
Union General Jacob D. Cox described Lightburn as “naturally prominent among his
people.” When Lewis County’s leaders embraced the Confederacy, Lightburn’s
“knowledge of the country and of the people made him a fit selection to preserve the

483 Fabricius Cather Diary, August 24, 1861.
484 Baptist Banner, March 26, 1925.
485 First Baptist Church, Parkersburg Records (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West
Virginia University), n/p.
peace. Like David Powell, Lightburn used the connections he developed in Lewis County as a preacher to ensure that his county remained with the Union. Lightburn and fellow unionists, including the MPC’s J.G. Vandervort, held a number of secret meetings to contemplate means to undercut secessionist influence in Lewis. His central role in these proceedings later led to his election to the first and second Wheeling Conventions. These meetings, to be discussed in chapter five, inaugurated the separate statehood movement in western Virginia. Lightburn also worked feverishly to encourage enlistment in the Union army. In the summer of 1861, he successfully organized the 4th Virginia Regiment. He was later commissioned as the regiment’s colonel. While western Virginia Baptists never achieved the political prominence of NWVC and MPC ministers, Enoch Rector’s, David Powell’s and Joseph Lightburn’s exploits make clear that at the local level, Baptist preachers could supplement unionist Methodists’ regional efforts.

The NWVC and MPC moved beyond grassroots unionism by laboring to bolster enlistments in the Federal army. Throughout the war, the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate called on western Virginians to do their part for the United States by volunteering for the crusade against the Confederacy. In Wheeling, Rev. A.W. Gregg actively “engaged in recruiting,” eventually serving as chaplain for one of the units he organized. Gregg was later “taken prisoner by the rebels . . . on the waters of the Big Sandy River,” but was paroled and returned to his duties as a minister in 1862. Further north in Brooke

486 General Jacob D. Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 206-207.
487 Lightburn later served in the Restored Virginia Government’s House of Delegates, to be discussed in chapter five.
488 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, September 2, 1862. The August 28, 1862 issue of the Point Pleasant Register carried a full account of the rebel raid. Gregg was traveling with the 4th Virginia Regiment “in the recruiting service,” while the regiment, under the command of Major John Hall, searched for guerilla raiders. On the evening of the August 6, the regiment was surrounded and fired upon by a guerilla band.
County, Methodist Reverend Whitkins “delivered a most eloquent discourse . . . by request . . . about enlisting” that was “a model of its kind.” A Confederate sympathizer living in Barbour County sarcastically described Dennis Dorsey’s efforts to “to enlighten the people of Barbour county” who “had been ‘shamefully misled’” by secessionists “and to get volunteers.” In Mason County, Rev. Charles King was an effective recruiter and prided himself on the fact that the county “has furnished her full quota for the war by enlistment.”

In Upshur County, NWVC circuit rider H. D. Rice gave a rousing speech encouraging Union enlistments. Gazing at one point in his address at the United States flag placed near the podium, Rice emphasized the need for volunteers to ensure that “Forever paralyzed [would] be the arm of him who would pluck one star or one stripe from that glorious banner.” Marsha Phillips recounted in her diary that Rice’s “address was very appropriate and affecting, and many a manly breast heaved with emotions and many an eye was suffused with tears.”

In Taylor County, MPC minister Benjamin Bailey called on residents to join the Union Army. One of the first to respond to was Bailey’s son, who perished in battle. Bailey later tearfully gave his son’s funeral sermon, which was attended by residents from throughout the county.

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Hall was mortally wounded and captured alongside Gregg. The rest of the regiment either fled or was captured. After being paroled, Gregg was permitted by the rebels to travel “seven miles after a coffin” for Hall. Gregg was unfortunately unsuccessful in his task. Hall was the son of prominent Mason County lawyer John Hall, a conservative unionist who served as the president of the first session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention in 1861 and 1862.

489 Wellsburg Herald, June 14, 1861.
490 Unaddressed and unsigned 1861 letter to Samuel Woods from a Confederate sympathizer living in Philippi, Barbour County, Samuel Woods Family Papers (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 1, Folder 3.
491 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, November 4, 1862.
493 Fabricius A. Cather Civil War Diaries, September 6, 1861.
While NWVC and MPC ministers encouraged enlistment in the Union Army, Jacob Bachtel worked to discourage the formation of Confederate companies in Jackson County. Returning from the Parkersburg Annual Conference meeting in May 1861, Bachtel found Jackson County “in much confusion.” A substantial number of Jackson men, with the encouragement of county leaders, were “enlisting . . . for the war of ‘southern independence.’” Bachtel “combated their theories” by arguing that “they were heretical and dangerous.” These efforts often placed him in serious danger. While on his way to preach in Fairplain, Jackson County, Bachtel encountered a regiment of Confederate soldiers who immediately recognized the fiery unionist preacher. Seeking to put Bachtel in his place, they demanded he preach a sermon to them. He “readily consented” and proceeded to deliver a blistering sermon that “referred to the Civil War” and “its causes, and showed wherein the South was wrong . . . and what it would lead to if they persisted in what they were doing.” Bachtel somehow managed to escape with his life.

When not serving as recruiters, Methodist leaders found other means to support the Union Army. As itinerant ministers, NWVC leaders possessed invaluable knowledge of the best means to traverse western Virginia’s rugged mountainous terrain. This familiarity enabled Rev. J. L. Irwin, the presiding elder of the NWVC’s Clarksburg District, to serve as a guide for Federal forces as they moved through Barbour and Upshur Counties in the summer of 1861. NWVC leaders were also relied upon as scouts.

494 Warner, *Life and Labors of Jacob Bachtel*, 140-141
495 Cox, *History of the West Virginia Annual Conference*, 82-83.
in Kanawha County.\footnote{Irwin’s service as a Union Army guide was scornfully referred to by Isabella Woods in a letter to her husband, prominent western Virginia secessionist Samuel Woods. Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, July 30, 1861, Samuel Woods Family Papers (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 1, Folder 1.} Other NWVC leaders devoted themselves to improving the material conditions of Union soldiers. In October 1861, Gordon Battelle was appointed to visit Union camps around western Virginia. He was ordered to compile a detailed report of camp conditions and to provide the United States Government with information on whether food and supply levels were adequate.\footnote{Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Minutes of the Western Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held at Fairmont, Virginia, March 18, 1863 (Wheeling: Campbell and M’Dermot, 1863), 10.} The NWVC’s A. J. Lyda, Gideon Martin, James Drummond and many others became chaplains for the Union Army. Having worked to build and maintain unionist sentiment throughout western Virginia, they felt compelled to demonstrate their loyalty on the field of battle. Methodist circuit riders who did not serve as chaplains frequently added known Union Army encampments to their itinerary and preached to them between their regular appointments. In French Creek, Upshur County, NWVC minister H. Wallace took a break from his duties on the Buckhannon Circuit to preach to a large group of soldiers, who sat “in groups at their tent doors, listening to the sermon.” They were joined by “a great many of the French Creek” residents who lived nearby.\footnote{Marcia Louise Sumner Phillips Journal, August 10, 1861.}

No NWVC minister was more dedicated to the Union Army than Rev. John W. Reger. Reger was born in Buckhannon, Upshur County and spent most of his life in the area before becoming a circuit rider in 1838. Reger’s “intense loyalty to his church and his country” frequently “brought his life in peril.” He remained resolute and upon the outbreak of the Civil War, “at the request of the State,” organized the Seventh West
Unionist political leaders realized that a man like Reger, well-respected by Upshur County residents, could play a determinative role encouraging union enlistments there. After organizing the Seventh West Virginia, Reger was elected Chaplain of the unit and traveled with it for two years. He took his role as chaplain seriously and did all in his power to improve camp life for the soldiers under his care. Reger frequently purchased newspapers and books in order to give his soldiers all “such reading matter as may be interesting and profitable.” Naturally, Reger did not forget his spiritual duties, and ensured that there was always a ready supply of spiritual tracts to maintain the morale and morality of his company. Reger’s labors were so valued by his regiment that they passed a series of resolutions in early 1862 thanking him for his dedication. Reger’s pride was clear when he copied the resolutions in an April letter to the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate. They thanked the minister both for the reading material and for traveling to Kingwood, Morgantown, Parkersburg, and Grafton to solicit donations for the purchase of a tent in which to hold religious services. Reger’s efforts resulted in the collection of over 120 dollars and ensured the regiment would no longer be “deprived of the means of grace [that] tend greatly to demoralize.” Reger was eventually forced to retire from service due to an illness. After recovering he was appointed U.S. Chaplain and served until the close of the war at Grafton hospital, an asylum turned military hospital in Taylor County.

Reger and his ministerial colleagues frequently went beyond the pen, podium, and recruiting station to defend the west physically from secessionists. In May 1861,

\[499\] Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840-1940), 56-57.

\[500\] Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 22, 1862.

\[501\] Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 22, 1862.
Buckhannon, the county seat of unionist Upshur County, was invaded by a small force of Confederate soldiers. They tore down the United States flag flying above the courthouse, replaced it with a Confederate flag, and for the next few hours set about terrorizing the town’s residents. Shortly before evening, a band of unionists under Reger’s leadership arrived upon the scene, drove the secessionists from the town, and once again hoisted the United States flag above the courthouse.\(^{502}\) In nearby Preston County the MPC’s Charles Hooten briefly exchanged his ministerial duties to become a secessionist-hunter. In 1862, Hooten caught wind that his old denominational rival, Garrett J. Long of the SWVC and late of the Confederate Home Guards, was engaged in espionage actions in Preston County. Discerning his location, Hooten single-handedly subdued Long and arrested him. Long was later tried and found guilty of treason against the United States.\(^{503}\) In Marion County, Moses Tichenell proved his mettle by organizing and leading a band of unionists to drive out “secessionists” in the area who “contested the right of the people assembled to hold a meeting,” and attempted “by yells and other ruffian interruptions, and a fight with fists, and clubs, and stones,” to scatter the meeting’s attendees.\(^{504}\)

The NWVC and MPC’s unionist endeavors, particularly the exploits of men like Reger, Hooten, and Tichenell, made them the targets of violent assaults by western secessionists, whether SWVC members or the rebel guerilla bands that terrorized unionist neighborhoods throughout the war. The depredations committed by these armed ‘irregulars’ and the terror their actions generated turned guerilla leaders like Ben

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\(^{502}\) W.S. Cutright, *The History of Upshur County, West Virginia, From Its Earliest Exploration and Settlement to the Present Time* (n/p, n/d), 300.


\(^{504}\) *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate*, May 14, 1861.
Haymond and John Righter into infamous figures. Western unionist Henry Solomon White described the impromptu raising of a group of twenty men in Fairmont, Marion County when they heard that Righter and his men were “supposed to be in the neighborhood.” Unfortunately for the unionist band, they ultimately “had poor success.” A Mason County resident recounted how “true and firm supporters of the Union” were “seized by the rebel cut-throats” and “imprisoned in filthy loathsome dungeons, with scarcely clothing enough to cover them and food of the coarsest kind.”

Marsha Sumner Phillips described in her diary the fate that befell “two poor Buckhannon boys, Jenning and Kiddy, who were captured,” by a Confederate raiding party. After forcibly marching the boys for a number of days, the raiders realized that they were running low on supplies and would have to either release their prisoners or shoot them. The raiding party chose the latter course and the two boys were taken into the woods and “cruelly and remorselessly murdered, by those fiends in human shape.” Phillips also recounted the story of a man named Shaver, who along with three other union men was taken captive in the fall of 1861 by Ben Haymond’s band. Fortunately they were able to escape after their captors fell asleep on guard.

Personal vendettas often exploded into violence as a result of the unsettled conditions created by the Civil War. In other cases criminals took advantage of the distracted state of the region. Webster County, formed less than one year before the Civil War, lacked a stable county government and was plagued by violence during the war.

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505 Henry Solomon White Papers, 1861-1865 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), October 15, 1862 and April 15, 1862.
506 Point Pleasant Register, April 24, 1862.
507 Marcia Louise Sumner Phillips Journal, September 15, 1861.
508 Marcia Louise Sumner Phillips Journal, November 8, 1861.
November 1861, for example, Josiah Cowgar was shot and killed by an unidentified assailant who also wounded his son. As John Mason made his way home one evening, he was ambushed by a group of men near Webster Springs and murdered. Venturing to the blacksmith shop in December 1861, John Mace of Hacker Valley was killed by a group of men with whom he had had an undefined conflict before the war. In another instance, Garland Ferrell was traveling through the Guyandotte Valley after selling a drove of cattle. Before evening he was joined by a Dr. Hardsock. That night, as the men made camp and prepared supper near Straight Creek, Hardsock murdered Ferrell and made off with his money.  

NWVC and MPC ministers and members, particularly those who openly supported the Union, felt the brunt of this violence. The Civil War took the polarization between the NWVC and SWVC to new heights. Divisions that began with conflicts over church property and grew with the NWVC’s politicization of its message in the 1850s exploded during the Civil War. Equally convinced of the righteousness of their cause, northern and southern Methodists in western Virginia were more than willing to resort to violence to defend their respective nations. Rev. J.B. Feather lamented how in secessionist Nicholas County, southern Methodists “succeeded in driving some of our preachers from their fields of labor,” emphasizing that those who faced such persecution were “unanimously for the Union.” He concluded that had it not been for the intervention of the Federal Army, these men would likely have been killed.  

Northern Methodist preachers’ outspoken support for the Union resulted in them having “to defend

509 R.L. Thompson, *Webster County History and Folklore, From Earliest Times to the Present* (Webster Springs, WVA: Start Printers, 1942), 61-63.  
510 Pittsburg *Christian Advocate*, July 2, 1861.
themselves from the annoyances of armed rebels, who used all kinds of persecution” to
drive them from the region.⁵¹¹ Throughout the war, NWVC members and ministers,
“suffered for the cause which they espoused and defended.” “Methodist farmers” were
“exiled from home, their property wasted.” “Methodist merchants,” were “plundered of
all their goods, and forced to flee for their lives.”⁵¹² Secessionists understood the
influence Methodist unionists possessed and were willing to use violence to silence them.

Jacob Bachtel and his United Brethren were also victimized for their unionist
sentiments. Their church’s wartime loyalty made it the “object of . . . special hatred” of
the “agents of the slave-power,” who promised that “immediately after Virginia voted
herself out of the Union the ‘Brethren’ would have to leave the country or swing.”⁵¹³
Rev. Benjamin Stickley, who served for twenty years as a United Brethren preacher in
western Virginia, was arrested by Confederates for his open unionism and whisked to a
prison cell, where he died in the winter of 1864.⁵¹⁴ Outside of Glenville, Gilmer County,
local United Brethren preacher Henry Messenger was captured by a guerilla party and
sent to Andersonville prison, where he later perished. A Rev. Harper recounted how “by
taking to the woods with my horse, I barely escaped meeting a detachment of Jones’
raid.” In another instance he “would have run into a Confederate squad, but for the kind
act of an aged man” who “met me in the road and advised me to go back where I had
been staying and hide my horse and saddle in the woods.”⁵¹⁵

⁵¹¹ Pittsburg Christian Advocate, August 27, 1861.
⁵¹² Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 8, 1863.
⁵¹³ Warner, Life and Labors of Jacob Bachtel, 131
⁵¹⁴ A.W. Drury, History of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (Dayton, OH: Otterbein Press,
1924), n/p.
⁵¹⁵ Cox, History of the West Virginia Annual Conference, 93. Led by General John D. Imboden and General
William Jones, the spring 1863 guerilla raid was organized to attack the B&O Railroad at Oakland,
Maryland and Grafton, (West) Virginia in order to cut western Virginia off from the Federal Government.
The NWVC cited these exploits when defending their own violent reprisals against secessionists, particularly the SWVC. After cataloguing what he believed was a long history of persecution against his church, J.B. Feather argued that “It is not reasonable to suppose that our men, smarting under wrongs, intolerance and persecution, will be very mild or temperate in their feelings toward those whom they have come to regard as their natural and sworn enemies.”\(^{516}\) SWVC churches, seen by unionists as servants of western secessionists, were unceremoniously burned to the ground and their membership scattered during the war. The burning of SWVC property was especially common in Harrison, Wood, and Kanawha Counties, where tensions between the organizations were the most extreme before the war.\(^{517}\) By the end of the Civil War, the SWVC existed in name only in western Virginia. The SWVC’s secessionist efforts, and the resulting crusade launched against it by the NWVC, will be discussed in chapter four.

Methodist leaders were determined to repel the threat posed by secessionists and guerilla bands. In early September 1861, Moses Tichenell led a large meeting in Marion County to “determine the course of action necessary and best to be adopted to rid them of the rebels in the county.” He helped draft resolutions that railed against the “thefts, arsons, murderous assaults, and cold-blooded murders, perpetrated” by rebels “with a

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\(^{516}\) Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, September 17, 1861. Western residents shared Feather’s hatred for secessionists and particularly guerilla raiders. One Mason County resident warned that continued guerilla attacks would provoke “a war of extermination.” Point Pleasant Register, March 20, 1862.

\(^{517}\) Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 1866 Session, n/p.
cowardice and brutality unworthy of savages.” The resolutions directed that “self-protection, duty to ourselves, our families, society and our country demand” the suppression of the “fiendish raids that have been distracting and destroying the peace and security of the loyal citizens and their property in our county.”\textsuperscript{518} The NWVC’s Alfred Nay led another public meeting that resolved to “detect, divulge and arrest all combinations, cabals or plots” designed to “to weaken or destroy the present or future interests of the United States, and by their fatal operations disturb the public peace.”\textsuperscript{519}

Despite the multifaceted unionist efforts of NWVC and MPC ministers, the secession ordinance was passed by Virginia’s voters in May 1861. In western Virginia, however, the ordinance was rejected by a vote of 32,700 – 17, 101, with 27 of the counties that comprise present-day West Virginia voting against it and 23 voting in favor.\textsuperscript{520} The county-level secession vote in western Virginia demonstrates the clear connection between religious affiliation and secession. In 1861, Methodism was the dominant religious affiliation in all but three of western Virginia’s counties. Of the remaining 47 with which this study is concerned, the NWVC and the MPC dominated 23 while the SWVC and Independent Baltimore Conference dominated the other 19.\textsuperscript{521}

\textsuperscript{518} Wheeling \textit{Intelligencer}, September 12, 1861. The resolutions singled out female secessionists, stating that “when woman ignores her sex, and descends to evil, she is of all agencies the most mischievous, and ceases to be entitled to that consideration her sex might and should secure her.”

\textsuperscript{519} Clarksburg \textit{National Telegraph}, May 2, 1862.

\textsuperscript{520} Two sets of returns exist for Barbour County. The first lists a small secessionist majority, the second a much larger unionist majority. In \textit{A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia} (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964), Richard Curry chose to use the returns showing a secessionist majority. This decision was likely a mistake. John W. Shaffer reveals in \textit{Clash of Loyalties: A Border County in the Civil War} (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 191-193, that Union enlistments in Barbour far outpaced Confederate enlistments throughout the Civil War, which supports the idea that Barbour in fact voted unionist during the secession referendum. Curry’s analysis of the secessionist vote in western Virginia can be found on pages 142-147 of \textit{A House Divided}.

\textsuperscript{521} The Independent Baltimore Conference, as will be discussed in chapter four, emerged in 1861 as a powerful secessionist force. Jefferson, Berkeley, and Morgan Counties, located in the eastern panhandle of
19 counties under the control of the SWVC or Baltimore Conference posted majorities in favor of secession. Of the 23 counties dominated by the NWVC or the MPC, only Randolph and Roane cast majorities in favor of secession.\textsuperscript{522} What separated unionist counties from secessionist counties boasting comparable socioeconomic and political characteristics, was whether their residents worshipped under the direction of the northern or southern branch of the Methodist Church.\textsuperscript{523} At the county level, religion, rather than politics or economics, best indicated future unionism or secessionism.

Table 3.1: Sectional Methodist Churches in Western Virginia

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unionist Counties (25)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Secessionist Counties (22)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total NWVC Churches</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SWVC Churches</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total MPC Churches</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Baltimore Conference Churches</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

present-day West Virginia, were all led by the Baltimore Conference in 1860. However, unlike the case in Greenbrier, Hampshire, Hardy, Mercer, Monroe, Pendleton, and Pocahontas Counties, more research is needed to determine whether Methodists affiliated with the Baltimore Conference in these three counties maintained their affiliation after it split with the MEC in 1861.\textsuperscript{522} Randolph County was at best an outpost of the NWVC. The roughly two hundred members in Randolph were based almost entirely in or around the town of Beverly and possessed little influence. NWVC ministers in Randolph County did attempt to exert their influence in favor of unionism before their efforts were curtailed by the early arrival of a Confederate force in the weeks leading up to the secession vote. This series of events was described in the Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, July 22, 1862. The case of Roane County is harder to explain. In 1860, the NWVC and the MPC were the dominant churches in the county, but Roane still posted a majority of 64 percent in favor of secession. One possible explanation is that SWVC churches were spread more evenly throughout the county while the NWVC and MPC’s presence was confined to the county seat of Spencer.\textsuperscript{523} In \textit{Reluctant Confederates}, xvi-xvii, Daniel Crofts argues that pre-Civil War support for the Whig Party correlated with unionism in the Upper South during the secession crisis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unionist Counties (25)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Secessionist Counties (22)</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total NWVC Members</td>
<td>21,167</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>3,340</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>24,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total SWVC Members</td>
<td>3,635</td>
<td>11.7%</td>
<td>7,188</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>10,823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total MPC Members</td>
<td>6,334</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
<td>1,367</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>7,701</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Baltimore Conference Members</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>5,881</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>5,881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>31,136</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>17,776</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>48,912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860 Presidential Election:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Eligible Voters</td>
<td>42,306</td>
<td></td>
<td>20,136</td>
<td></td>
<td>62,442</td>
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<tr>
<td>John C. Breckenridge Vote</td>
<td>14,474</td>
<td>44.6%</td>
<td>5,894</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>20,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Bell Vote</td>
<td>11,968</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>6,849</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td>18,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Douglas Vote</td>
<td>4,233</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>848</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>5,081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Lincoln Vote</td>
<td>1,762</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>1,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Votes Cast</td>
<td>32,437</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>13,591</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>46,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secession Ordinance:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unionist Vote</td>
<td>29,135</td>
<td>81.6%</td>
<td>3,565</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>32,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secessionist Vote</td>
<td>6,567</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>10,534</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
<td>17,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Votes Cast</td>
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<td>100.0%</td>
<td>14,099</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>49,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860 White Population</td>
<td>221,095</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>110,164</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>331,259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860 Slave Population</td>
<td>5,567</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>7,100</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>12,667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860 Free Black Population</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>982</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>1,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of the Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enslaved</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Farm Value</td>
<td>2,903.13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,909.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Value of Manufacturing Establishments</td>
<td>112,460.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>105,904.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Value of Personal Property (By Household)</td>
<td>$737.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,018.54</td>
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Despite the passage of the secession ordinance, NWVC and MPC ministers maintained their dedication to the Federal Government. As the Civil War continued into 1862, these organizations became political instruments and worked to ensure their members remained loyal to the Union. The NWVC and MPC’s annual conferences became the nuclei of their political activities. While these meetings traditionally served the purpose of assigning ministers to circuits, resolving doctrinal disputes, and punishing violations of Church law, their function drastically changed during the war. Annual Conference meetings increasingly became venues where ministers and members discussed unionist strategies and coordinated political efforts for the following year. The disciplinary department of the conferences became a means of rooting out any members suspected of disloyalty to the United States government.

The MPC began its 1861 meeting by reaffirming “our loyalty and attachment to the great and good government of the United States.” The organization then turned to using its substantial communication networks to ensure that its members and friends remained loyal to the Union. By using its organizational structure to enforce loyalty among Church members, the MPC became an important political instrument during the Civil War. At its 1862 annual meeting the MPC employed John Howard, Magistrate of Preston County, to administer a loyalty oath to all members of the Conference. The MPC stated that any members refusing to take the oath or who were suspected of disloyalty to the United States government would be expelled from the church. This stricture also applied to those who simply attended their services. The conference secretary was ordered to “to write to each member of the Conference not present and inform him of the

524 Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Annual Conference, Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876, 1862 Meeting, 3-4.
obligation to take the oath of allegiance.” Those who refused to do so would have their names “erased by the secretary.” Ministers were also empowered to bring any member suspected of disloyalty to church trial. One of the first men to test the MPC’s new policy was R. S. Welch, a lay member of the church. When called upon by his minister to take the loyalty oath, Welch refused. The minister reported Welch at the MPC’s 1862 meeting and his name was swiftly “stricken from the list” of church members.

The MPC also used its annual meetings to better organize its ministers’ unionist efforts. In western Virginia’s rugged terrain, particularly the mountainous interior counties where the MPC was especially strong, the church provided the organizational sinews necessary for political activism. Throughout the war, the MPC ordered its ministers, regardless of where they were stationed, to use their position to “discuss from the pulpit . . . the present unhappy rebellion,” and to urge upon their followers the necessity of remaining loyal to the government. Ministers were ordered to read their congregations resolutions adopted by the Conference calling on all members to maintain their loyalty to the United States Government. To ensure compliance the MPC directed its ministers to provide detailed reports on their efforts for the following year’s meeting.

Considering the lengths to which the MPC went to avoid politics during the 1850s, the organization’s wartime activism is especially striking and illustrates the pivotal role a religious organization could play in coordinating grassroots political mobilization.

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525 Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Annual Conference, *Methodist Protestant Church, West Virginia Conference Journal, 1855-1876*, 1862 Meeting, 3-5.
The MPC frequently organized unionist rallies in whatever western town hosted their annual meetings. The best example of this strategy is the MPC’s 1862 meeting at Independence, Preston County. On the motion of Brother Simpson the Conference called for “the citizens of the village and community join with the conference tomorrow at 3 o’clock P.M. for a public meeting and an interchange of thought and feeling on the present state of the country.”528 A number of ministers were called upon to give speeches at the meeting. The conference later happily reported that the rally was rousing success.

The NWVC was no less thoroughly politicized during the war. The organization dedicated itself to supporting the Union and made a concerted effort to drive any members suspected of disloyalty out of their church. At its 1862 meeting, the NWVC passed a series of resolutions praising the Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate* for the “strong grounds” it took “in favor of the Constitution, the Union, and the enforcement of the laws.”529 It also resolved to take all measures necessary to ensuring the paper continued to be well-circulated throughout western Virginia. The church’s leaders then turned to the war itself, calling on its ministers, members and friends to do their “duty as loyal citizens to sustain and defend” the United States government. The conference also passed a series of resolutions in support of President Lincoln’s prosecution of the war and promised to aid the unionist cause and the “speedy overthrow and utter extermination” of the Confederacy “by all proper and lawful means.”530 The Conference closed by thanking “brethren of the Conference who have imperiled their lives . . . and that have nobly

529 *West Virginia Annual Conference Original Documents* (Buckhannon, WV: United Methodist Archives, West Virginia Wesleyan University), Box 1, 1862 Folder.
530 *West Virginia Annual Conference Original Documents*, Box 1, 1862 Folder.
defended the cause of our common country against tyranny and oppression,” while encouraging ministers to double their efforts over the ensuing year.\textsuperscript{531} The NWVC’s pledge was no mere bluster as throughout the war the organization ensured that people affiliated with their church remained firmly dedicated to the Union. Moses Tichenell zealously spoke for many of his colleagues when he demanded that the conference “Turn every ungodly sesesh out of the Church, unless they repent, for surely they have enough to repent of.”\textsuperscript{532} Wesley Smith also called for a purging of the disloyal, emphasizing that “You might as well talk about a holy devil as a pious traitor; it is a contradiction in terms.”\textsuperscript{533}

The impact of the Civil War can even be seen at the Quarterly Conference level. According to the Methodist Episcopal Church’s governing structure, Quarterly Conferences were charged with the duty of recommending Methodist exhorters to the Annual Conference, who would then decide whether these men would be licensed, on a trial basis, as itinerant ministers. Prior to the Civil War, Quarterly Conferences usually based their recommendations on evidence of the candidate’s good standing within the Church and their knowledge of the Methodist Church’s \textit{Discipline} and theological doctrines. After 1861, Quarterly Conferences dispensed with discussions of dogma in their recommendations and instead extolled their candidate as “a faithful minister of the Gospel and perfectly Loyal both to the M.E. Church and the Federal Government.”

Secession and Civil War brought new responsibilities to the NWVC; while continuing to

\textsuperscript{531} \textit{West Virginia Annual Conference Original Documents}, Box 1, 1862 Folder.
\textsuperscript{532} \textit{West Virginia Annual Conference Original Documents}, Box 1, 1862 Folder.
\textsuperscript{533} Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, May 28, 1861.
minister to the souls of their flocks, ministers also guaranteed that their followers would not be seduced by the corruptive influence of secessionism.534

The NWVC cemented its role as a political instrument by organizing a number of patriotic events designed to maintain western Virginians’ wartime morale. On May 28, 1862, the NWVC led a celebration marking the one year anniversary of Fairmont’s “redemption from the secessionist despotism of one year ago,” in which secessionist county leaders were scattered and the town registered a firm vote against the secession ordinance. The NWVC’s Dr. W. R. White spoke twice during the day. He gave a long sermon in the morning before returning to the podium with Dennis Dorsey in the afternoon to give animated unionist speeches. White’s address also included references to the new state constitution recently completed at Wheeling, to be discussed in chapter five, which secured the establishment of a free public school system in West Virginia. White portrayed this development as just one of the many fruits of western loyalty. Public schools would not only result in a “cultivated intellect,” but also “a thorough understanding of our republican and free institutions.” White’s support of education later resulted in his appointment as the first superintendent of schools in the new state.535

The NWVC also organized a number of July 4th celebrations in 1862. In Mannington, the NWVC held a town-wide “patriotic service,” marked by a succession of “political sermons.” After the preaching was completed, the local Methodist Sunday School marched through the city in a thirty-four child procession meant to symbolize the thirty-four states in the Union. After the procession, the crowd “retired to the grove in the upper part of the village, where Declaration of Independence” and “Washington’s

534 *Western Virginia Annual Conference Original Documents*, Box 1, 1862 Folder.
Farwell were read” by church leaders. The Fairmont NWVC Church also organized a large 4th of July celebration, which included another procession led by the town’s Sunday Schools. Afterward the town’s residents “retired to the grove for refreshment” provided by the “citizens of Fairmont and the Methodist Episcopal Church,” before listening to a number of pro-union speeches. Interestingly enough, only the NWVC took part in these proceedings. Because of “some prejudices in the other churches . . . they did not help.” The fractured state of Fairmont’s other denominations attests to the NWVC’s and MPC’s unique ability to maintain their unity and serve as a force of loyalty in wartime western Virginia.

As the Civil War dragged on, the NWVC increasingly portrayed itself as an essential force of reconstruction and reconciliation in the Border States and the South as a whole. The NWVC looked with pride upon what it saw as its central position in maintaining western Virginia for the Union and was confident that “Nothing but a reoccupation of the rebel States by the loyal Churches can save the South from utter barbarism and ruin.” The NWVC was well aware of the kinds of influence its circuit-riding ministers were able to build. Traveling throughout regions like western Virginia, itinerants were often the most familiar outside faces to isolated residents. These men and the periodicals they carried brought news of outside political events to backcountry residents while connecting them with like-minded residents throughout the region. The NWVC’s willingness to push into these neglected enclaves was the reason why “in the

536 Fairmont True Virginian, July 10, 1861.
537 Henry Solomon White Papers, July 4, 1862.
538 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 3, 1862.
rural districts no other Church is so strong and influential.” Using this influence, Unionist Methodists took an active hand in “establishing schools, repairing the waste places, and sending her ministers to occupy every open door of usefulness.” The NWVC believed that it was their organization’s duty to spread its brand of politicized religion and become an “efficient agent for disseminating Union sentiments” throughout the Border States and the South. If the church maintained its meddle and continued to push southward, NWVC leaders believed that in time the “southern mind” like that of western Virginia, would “be revolutionized.”

Western Virginia Methodists often pointed to Missouri’s wartime experience to bolster their argument that Methodism was vital to political, economic, and spiritual reconstruction. Missouri Methodists aligned with the MEC were frequent victims of violence at the hands of the MECS as well as political leaders during the secession crisis. Unionist Methodists were subjected to many “annoyances, such as riding on rails, notes of warning to leave,” and were “driven from their appointments by various methods,” which forced them to “worship under the protection of their own fire-arms.” MEC members in Missouri refused to give in to the pressure and remained dedicated to the Union, whatever the costs. Like their brethren in western Virginia, they spoke against secession, used their periodical, the Central Christian Advocate, to update brethren on their efforts, and maintained their organization’s loyalty to the Federal Government. By early 1862, the Central Christian Advocate boasted that Missouri was “recovered from

539 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 8, 1863
540 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 5, 1862.
541 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 5, 1862.
542 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 5, 1862.
543 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 7, 1861.
the rebellion,” and that “Methodism is about to enter upon an ever-brightening future,” thanks to its “outspoken loyalty.” Relating these accounts, the NWVC could glory in the fact that “The work of reconstruction has already commenced in Missouri,” made perhaps most clear by the defection of many loyal Missourians from the MECS to the MEC. Applauding this mass exodus, one NWVC minister remarked, “what better way, I would ask, can we at once show our loyalty to Methodism and to our country?”

When unionist western Virginia counties were left without viable political organizers in the wake of Virginia’s secession, Methodist ministers stepped to the forefront as spiritual and political leaders. Utilizing the communication networks and prestige they had carefully cultivated over the previous fifteen years, these men effectively marshaled support for the Union. Their efforts bore fruit as all but two western Virginia counties dominated by either the NWVC or the MPC ardently supported the Union.

The extent to which the NWVC and MPC became intertwined with the politics of secession reveals that western Virginia contained a vibrant and contentious religious culture throughout the 1860s. Religious organizations such as the NWVC and MPC were intensely politicized during the Civil War era and took an active hand in molding the spirituality and politics of their flocks. Their activities portray the secession crisis in western Virginia in an entirely new light. Unionism, rather than simply being a movement directed by politicians most westerners barely knew, instead emerges as a popular crusade led from the ground by NWVC and MPC ministers who had used their

544 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, March 11, 1862.
545 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 25, 1863.
ministry to build connections and develop relationships of influence with their parishioners. In western Virginia’s rough terrain, it was only fitting that itinerant Methodist ministers, dedicated to the apostolic “travelling connection,” became the most familiar outside faces to many western Virginians. When Virginia’s secession threatened to drag an unwilling western Virginia into the Confederacy, Methodists stepped to the fore. They reminded their flocks of the inequities they suffered under eastern Virginia for the previous half-century and pointed the way toward a future as the loyal and separate state of West Virginia.

While the NWVC and MPC looked with pride upon their pivotal role in maintaining western Virginia for the Union and placing it on the path to separate statehood, southern Methodists in the region enjoyed no such euphoria. Despite enjoying the support of a dedicated membership and the region’s political leaders at the start of the secession crisis, the SWVC was seriously fractured by the end of the Civil War. Indeed, while the NWVC and MPC’s unionist activism vaulted them to an unprecedented level of political influence, the SWVC’s secessionist endeavors ultimately brought their church to the brink of ruin.
Chapter 4: “There is No Middle Ground”: Southern Methodists and Secession in Western Virginia, 1860-1865

As autumn took hold of 1866 the Southern Western Virginia Conference’s (SWVC) ministers gathered to hold their first annual meeting in nearly five years. The SWVC’s membership, some recently returned from Union prison camps, others from safe havens behind Confederate lines, began their meeting by reading the concluding chapters of the Book of Revelation. This choice of text symbolized the SWVC’s belief that its Civil War experience reflected that of Christians suffering through the tribulations described in the Bible’s final book. With the war over, their scattered membership gradually returning, and their destroyed church buildings slowly being rebuilt, many SWVC leaders took solace in Revelation’s account of the formation of a New Jerusalem. They hoped that the war’s end would commence a new and more peaceful era for their organization as well. Indeed, hoping to put the past to rest, the conference resolved by a majority of 15 to 7 to petition their General Conference to formally change the name of their sectional Church from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to the Episcopal Methodist Church.546

546 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 1866 Meeting, n/p.
The Civil War inaugurated a four-year interlude of unprecedented trials and suffering for western Virginia’s southern Methodist population. The organization’s outspoken support of the Southern Confederacy catalyzed a fierce reaction from northern Methodists and western unionists as a whole. When the Confederate Army was driven from most of present-day West Virginia, the Northern Western Virginia Conference’s (NWVC) ministerial leadership and their unionist followers unleashed a brutal campaign to rid the region of the SWVC’s influence, which they saw as a wellspring of secessionism. Many SWVC ministers and prominent members were arrested while some were even killed. Congregations were scattered and southern Methodist Church buildings were burned to the ground. Zachariah Turner spoke for many of his southern Methodist brethren when he remarked that the SWVC survived the Civil War only by a miracle.\(^{547}\)

The crusade launched against the SWVC attested to the organization’s essential role as a secessionist political instrument during the secession crisis and the first year of the Civil War. Working in tandem with secessionist county officials, SWVC ministers and members doggedly supported the Confederate cause. Whether giving speeches, publishing editorials, or using their meetings to enshrine secession with a moral legitimacy, they worked to convince western Virginians that their best interests lay with the Confederacy. SWVC leaders urged that secession was the only means to prevent the region from being overrun by what they believed were mercenary abolitionist hoards bent on plunder, destruction, and the institution of racial equality. The SWVC’s efforts were supplemented in some areas of western Virginia by the Baltimore Conference, which

\(^{547}\) Carl E. Burrows, Robert B. Florian, David F. Mahony, *Melting Times: A History of West Virginia United Methodism* (Charleston, WV: Commission on Archives and History, West Virginia Conference, United Methodist Church, 1984), 189.
seceded from the MEC as a result of the northern church’s institution of a new rule on
slaveholding in 1860. Baltimore Conference ministers and members believed that the
new rule, which condemned but did not outlaw slaveholding among church members,
demonstrated that the MEC was falling prey to abolitionist influence. Casting themselves
as an independent Methodist organization, Baltimore Conference ministers readily
defended southern secession as ferociously as they defended their separation from the
MEC. In the Greenbrier Valley and in the western counties bordering the Valley of
Virginia, the Baltimore Conference remained a potent secessionist force until 1865.

After western Virginia’s firm rejection of Virginia’s secession ordinance, the
SWVC dedicated its energies to supporting the Confederate Army. Dozens of SWVC
ministers volunteered for the army as regular soldiers. Some reached the ranks of the
officer corps. Other SWVC leaders worked with Confederate Army officers such as
Henry Wise to track down and arrest unionist NWVC ministers and their followers.
Remembering the pitched battles they fought against their sectional opponents over the
previous decade, and blaming them for the rejection of the secession ordinance in western
Virginia, southern Methodist leaders pledged themselves to removing what they saw as
the scourge of politicized northern Methodism. SWVC leaders in some cases even
formed guerilla bands or led mobs to plunder the homes of unionist Methodists and force
them from the region. However, when the Confederate Army was finally driven from
most of western Virginia late 1861, the SWVC was left on its own. NWVC leaders and
unionists sensed their opponents’ vulnerability and organized a crusade to silence them
permanently. By 1865 the SWVC existed only in name in western Virginia.
Historians of Civil War western Virginia have given scant attention to how secessionists mobilized at the grassroots level in 1861. The SWVC’s dedicated support of secession and its leaders’ close association with secessionist politicians in western Virginia reveals the importance of religious affiliation in shaping political loyalties in Civil War-era western Virginia. SWVC ministers tapped the reservoirs of influence they developed as champions of southern rights in the 1850s to convince their followers that the time had finally arrived to break from the North once and for all. The SWVC’s ability to reach isolated westerners and spread the secessionist message demonstrates an important means by which westerners were convinced to become rebels. The SWVC’s eventual destruction should not obscure the fact that its secessionist activism constituted a real threat to NWVC unionism in the early days of the war.

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In the final weeks of the secession crisis, the Baltimore Conference emerged as an independent Methodist organization and a potent disunionist force. Since the 1844 Methodist schism, the conference remained tenuously aligned with the Methodist Episcopal Church, its membership spread across western Virginia, the Valley of Virginia, Maryland, eastern Pennsylvania, and parts of northern Virginia. The Baltimore Conference contained perhaps the most diverse membership of any Methodist annual conference in the United States: large slaveholders and yeoman farmers, merchants and professionals, rural citizens and city dwellers were all included under its banner.

Baltimore Conference ministers strove throughout the 1850s to keep their varied membership unified by refusing to engage in the sectional politics embraced by the NWVC and SWVC. They instead appealed to tradition and the long standing place of their organization in western Virginia, frequently reminding their parishioners that their parents and even grandparents first embraced Methodism under the Baltimore Conference. Baltimore Conference ministers maintained their moderate course by assuring their followers after the 1844 schism that although they remained with the MEC, they “disclaimed having the least sympathy with abolitionists” and were determined “not to hold connexion with any ecclesiastical body that made non-slaveholding a condition of membership in the Church.”\(^{549}\) As the national sectional crisis intensified throughout the 1850s, slaveholding members pressed the conference’s ministerial leadership to take a less equivocal stance on the slavery issue and demonstrate that they were truly “southern in feeling.”\(^{550}\) Fearful of alienating either its northern or southern members, the Baltimore Conference refused to declare a sectional allegiance.

The Baltimore Conference’s strained moderation did not prevent the organization from increasing its membership rolls. From 1845 until 1860, the conference included the counties comprising the eastern border and panhandle of present-day West Virginia. The Conference also established a noticeable presence in the Greenbrier Valley, as well as in Mercer, Monroe, and McDowell Counties. In 1861, the Baltimore Conference contained 8,882 members in western Virginia, an increase of 2,247 since 1850. The conference accounted for 17 percent of western Virginia’s Methodist population, placing it ahead of

\(^{549}\) Greenbrier Weekly Era, March 23, 1861.

the MPC, but behind the NWVC and SWVC. The conference’s leaders were confident that their organization would survive if not thrive so long as the MEC’s General Conference refrained from meddling with slaveholders’ membership rights.

Much to the chagrin of the Baltimore Conference, the MEC did just that at its 1860 General Conference meeting. Pressed by continued antislavery agitation, the MEC, despite the intense opposition of delegates such as Gordon Battelle, passed a new, albeit advisory rule on slavery. The advisory rule condemned slaveholding among church members but did not call for their exclusion from the church, nor did it bar slaveholders from seeking membership with the church in the future. Despite being strictly advisory, the new rule was a departure from the church’s previous stance on slavery—the 1844 schism stemmed only from the MEC’s refusal to allow a slaveholder to become a Church Bishop. Sixteen years later, the organization was controlled by leaders determined to condemn slaveholding by its membership as a whole. The new rule generated a fierce response from western Virginians aligned with the Baltimore Conference.

Responding to what they felt was a clear attack on the peculiar institution’s moral legitimacy, Baltimore Conference members throughout western Virginia called meetings to protest the MEC’s decision and to call for a separation from the church. Utilizing the very same rhetoric they would use to support southern secession less than a year later, they argued that the new rule was coercive and foreshadowed more radical policies on slavery. Across the Greenbrier Valley, the rancor the new rule created was “upheaving [sic] society to its very foundations.”\footnote{Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, July 24, 1860.} In Monroe County, a public meeting demanded that the Baltimore Conference “adopt measures for disconnecting the Conference from
the Methodist Episcopal Church, and inaugurating an independent Church.”  

A meeting at Rector’s Crossroads, similarly resolved that “we desire a severance of our connection with the General Conference” and called for “a convention of those who agree with us in sentiment.” Another meeting exclaimed that “we will, by every means in our power, resist the aggressions of abolitionism” and “will oppose any inquisition upon the motives underlying the relation of master and slave.” The meeting’s membership urged that to accomplish this goal, “an immediate separation from the Northern Conferences” was necessary, “as we believe the interests, if not the existence, of our Church in Virginia depends upon it.” Isaac Gibson, a Baltimore Conference minister, wrote pointedly to the Southern Methodist Itinerant to express his indignation with the new rule, which he denounced as a “measure which will induce a continuance of the agitation of the question of slavery.” He further asserted that “the Church violates the plain meaning of her high commission” by taking part in the “enterprises of political reform.” He pledged to “use my feeble powers to their full extent, to get our Conference clear of all connections with a Church which makes a political question the leading one in her councils.” For the next ten months western Virginian Baltimore Conference members debated the issues raised by Gibson and his followers.

NWVC leaders dismissed the Baltimore Conference’s opposition to the new rule as both irrational and dangerous to the social and political stability of the Border States. As the national sectional crisis intensified, one NWVC leader remarked that the Baltimore Conference “may find themselves unable to control and quell the angry spirit

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552 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 24, 1860.  
553 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 24, 1860.  
554 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 24, 1860.  
555 Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 13, 1861.
which they have evoked.” A Harrison County member affirmed that “if any one loves slavery so well that he cannot abide in a Church entertaining these doctrines, let him go into the Southern Church—he is fit meet for it.” Adopting the arguments embraced by unionists one year later, he argued that “The evils of divisions and secessions are too momentous to be done upon doubtful grounds—upon mere abstractions.” Indeed, had “a law, clear and without doubt, excluding all slaveholders been enacted, then the duty to secede might have been clear, though painful. But that was not done.”

Another NWVC minister censured the “few ultraists among the border who are not willing to submit to anything. Better let them go at once to the south, where they will find all things congenial to their notions, than for the whole border to rush headlong into anarchy and rebellion.”

The NWVC’s criticism of the Baltimore Conference evinced its willingness to submit to the new rule. Benjamin Ison spoke for many of his fellow ministers: “We could have wished that no change had been made in the Discipline,” but “we think it best to agree in it, or do nothing at least, that will promote strife or secession.” Rev. M. V. B. White similarly declared that “we regret that there was any action upon the question of slavery; but the General Conference, in its Pastoral Address, affirms that the New Chapter is simply a ‘declaration of principles,’ and ‘advice,’” Lay NWVC members reflected their leaders’ stances. One member wrote from South Wheeling that “the people in this charge, both in and out of the Church, are perfectly satisfied with the New

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556 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 24, 1860.
557 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 21, 1860.
558 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 10, 1860.
559 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 23, 1860.
560 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, November 6, 1860.
Chapter, understanding it as explained by brothers Drummond, Battelle, Hunter, etc. . . . One thing is very sure, this Conference never will be swallowed by the Church South.”

A meeting of NWVC laymen held in Mountain Cove, Fayette County, resolved that “we find nothing in the New Chapter calculated to produce distrust or excitement, and we believe there would have been none but for the exertions of misled or designing individuals.”

The SWVC and the MECS as a whole delighted in the discord created by these “designing individuals.” They unabashedly attempted to woo the Baltimore Conference’s disaffected membership to their organization. One SWVC minister remarked that the “controversy going on . . . as to the future position” of the Baltimore Conference would positively “elicit much light as to the future of their church usefulness,” presumably as an advocate of slavery and southern rights. The MECS’ Virginia Conference also saw promise in the Baltimore Conference’s alienation from the MEC and drafted “resolutions expressive of sympathy with our brethren of the Baltimore Conference . . . under the peculiar circumstances of trial in which they are now placed.”

Southern Methodists lauded the Baltimore Conference’s likely separation from the MEC, believing that it was only a matter of time before it joined the MECS. Southern Methodists thus made “considerable effort to foment the disturbance on [the] border” to entice the Baltimore Conference to join them. Despite the nearly decade and a half of tension between the churches, the Baltimore Conference’s leaders expressed their gratitude “that our brethren

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561 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, November 13, 1860.
562 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, January 15, 1861.
563 Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 13, 1860.
564 Nashville Christian Advocate, December 12, 1860.
565 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 24, 1860.
in the South have dropped their hostility to us. We are willing—more than willing—to be friends with them.”  

As northern and southern Methodists excitedly discussed its future course, the Baltimore Conference formally responded to the groundswell of discontent among its membership. In simultaneous ministerial and laymen’s meetings held in Staunton, Virginia in March 1861, the Baltimore Conference initiated its separation from the MEC. The laymen’s convention acted first. It firmly demanded that the Baltimore Conference sever its connection with the MEC and affirmed that it was “opposed to any inquisition into the motives underlying the relation of master and slave.” The meeting further resolved, in language very pertinent to the developing secession crisis, that the conference could not remain with the northern Methodist Church “except upon terms that would prove our ruin.”

The Baltimore Conference’s regular ministerial meeting was somewhat more divided than the laymen’s convention. Older ministers in particular begged their younger colleagues to think hard before severing their connection with a church organization that pre-dated the United States Constitution. Superannuate Rev. Phelps stressed that “it was necessary for the Baltimore Conference to continue their connection to the General Conference, for the purpose of converting them from abolitionism.” Rev. Alfred Griffith similarly argued that rather than secede, the Baltimore Conference should work within the MEC to repeal the new chapter. Griffith’s and Phelps’ moderation was ultimately submerged by the Conference’s secessionist majority, with Rev. N. Wilson emerging as

566 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 24, 1860.  
568 Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 20, 1861.
the predominant disunionist leader. In a long address, he castigated the new rule’s “odious nature and degrading character” and called for an immediate separation from the northern Church.\textsuperscript{569} Other pro-divisionists “pleaded the education of the southern conscience through generations of civil and religious recognition of the slavery institution” and denounced the new law as “the knife of excision.”\textsuperscript{570}

As the debate regarding the Baltimore Conference’s future intensified, its ministers embraced arguments similar to those made by western Virginia’s secular secessionists. The Baltimore Conference’s annual meeting occurred at the exact same time as the Secession Convention in Richmond, Virginia. Indeed, secessionist Baltimore Conference ministers meeting in Staunton, Virginia needed only to travel a little over one hundred miles eastward to find their fellow Virginians utilizing similar arguments to defend Virginia’s secession from the United States. Baltimore Conference ministers in favor of withdrawal from the MEC rehearsed arguments that they would again utilize to attach moral legitimacy to secession over the subsequent months. They argued that the MEC had fallen prey to radical influence, causing the church to neglect its constitutional duty to avoid legislating on slavery. Baltimore Conference ministers feared that the MEC, now under the sway of these radicals, might attempt to coerce the Baltimore Conference back into its ranks.

The Baltimore Conference’s pro-division leaders also adopted positions that mirrored those of secessionists who feared that Lincoln would appoint subversive

\textsuperscript{569} Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 20, 1861.
\textsuperscript{570} John S. Martin, Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Now of the Methodist Episcopal Church South), 1862-1865 (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library), 3-4.
abolitionists to postmaster positions throughout the South. N. Wilson resolutely criticized “the abolitionizing of all the MEC’s “church literature by the North,” and “their using all the funds of the Church in the circulation of the same” to the “injury and prejudice” of slaveholders. Another minister lamented that the MEC, by adopting the General Rule, “establishes its most infamous propositions as important principles of a Church creed.” His concerns would have made sense to southern secessionists who feared that Lincoln’s election made abolition Federal policy. Dr. Bond, a leading proponent of the conference’s secession, adopted a position similar to that of southern fire-eaters when he emphasized his willingness “to sacrifice anything but honor” to defend the slaveholding rights of church members. He made clear that the MEC’s new rule was only the beginning, and that to eradicate slavery entirely the MEC “must attempt coercion.” Bond even invoked the right of revolution as a precedent, arguing that “rebellions are conditions of transition. If they are not opposed they become permanent, and permanent rebellion is an established independence.” The degree to which the Baltimore Conference adopted the language of southern secessionists was not lost on prominent NWVC members. Reflecting on this rhetoric, one NWVC minister remarked that by circulating these sentiments in its church papers, “the last Baltimore Conference did much, I think to increase disunion sentiments.” He went on to claim that “Like the

571 These subversive agents would then circulate anti-slavery propaganda among the population.
572 *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, March 20, 1861.
573 Staunton *Republican Vindicator*, March 15, 1861. Other ministers appealed directly to the MEC’s Constitution, and argued that the “General Conference has, by its said action, violated the 1st restrictive rule which declares the General Conference shall not revoke, alter, or change our Articles of religion, nor establish any new standard or rule of doctrine contrary to our present existing and established standard of doctrine.” Greenbrier *Weekly Era*, March 23, 1861.
574 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, July 24, 1860.
preachers of the Church South, they wish to appear consistent and prove to the South that they are true to the South, that is, to the ‘peculiar institution.’”

Given the intensity of pro-division rhetoric, it should come as no surprise that the Baltimore Conference concluded its 1861 meeting by formally seceding from the MEC. The blame was placed squarely on the MEC, who “by its unconstitutional action, has sundered the ecclesiastical relations which have hitherto bound us together as one church.” The Baltimore Conference would “no longer submit to the jurisdiction of said General Conference, but hereby declare ourselves separate and independent of it.” These resolutions established the Independent Baltimore Conference, which maintained its autonomous status throughout the Civil War before formally aligning with the MECS in 1866. Most remarkably, the conference remained particularly strong in the Greenbrier Valley between 1861 and 1865. In 1863, 25 percent of the conference’s missionary donations came from Greenbrier, Monroe, or Pocahontas Counties. The Baltimore Conference’s relatively stable existence in the Greenbrier Valley not only evokes a sharp contrast with the SWVC’s wartime experience, but also reveals why grassroots secessionist sentiments remained strong in the area throughout the Civil War.

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575 *Western Christian Advocate*, June 12, 1861.
577 Throughout the Civil War, the Conference made clear that its independence was temporary. In 1862, the conference resolved that because of the unsettled conditions created by the Civil War “fixing the relations of our Church would be improper and premature, we claim it to be our privilege and duty to give utterance to our opinions and feelings.” At its 1864 meeting, the Conference indicated its future intention to join with the MECS by sending fraternal messengers to the MECS’ annual conference meetings “to express the reciprocal feelings and kindly sentiments of this Conference.” See Martin, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Now of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1862-1865)*, 28, 70-71.
While Baltimore Conference Methodists debated their future relationship with the MEC, western Virginians grappled with Virginia’s future in the Union. Between November 1860 and March 1861 westerners divided into three camps. The majority of westerners, led by the NWVC and MPC, were avowed unconditional unionists and accepted Lincoln’s election and the Federal Government’s authority under any circumstances. Other western Virginians qualified their unionism. Their continued loyalty to the Federal Government was predicated on Congress’ passage of measures protecting slaveholders’ property rights and the untrammeled extension of slavery into the western territories. They also demanded that the Federal Government not attempt to coerce the seceded southern states back into the Union. A third group of westerners, particularly the landed and courthouse elite that dominated western politics throughout the antebellum era, firmly declared their support for secession within weeks of Lincoln’s election and worked to build support for the Confederacy in their localities.

Pro-southern newspapers such as the Kanawha Valley Star reflected the position of many conditional unionists. While on the one hand demanding that its readers “resist, like men, the vile programme which the North holds up to us,” the paper also advised westerners to “look at this thing firmly and sternly in the face . . . it is not part of bravery and common sense to talk about disunion, and run away from the constitution—the very instrument that gave us our rights.” The paper concluded by exclaiming “Let us have our rights in the Union if we can—OUT OF IT IF WE MUST.” A mass meeting in Ellenboro, Ritchie County, evinced similar vacillation when it resolved that “while we deprecate disunion, as a great evil, yet we are of the opinion that this Union can only be

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579 Kanawha Valley Star, December 4, 1860.
preserved by constitutional provisions guaranteeing to the people of the South equal rights in the Union; and the strict enforcement of provisions protecting those rights.”580 A meeting in Jackson County was far more direct, warning that “any attempt which shall be made by the Federal Government, to coerce the Southern or slave States into subjection to the Federal Union, is manifestly despotic and oppressive, and must, and ought to be, and shall be resisted.”581

Even western Virginia’s traditionally free-soil northern panhandle was divided in sentiment. While the Republican Wheeling Intelligencer resolutely defended the Union, enough disunionists lived in the panhandle to support the publication of a pro-secession newspaper, the ironically named Wheeling Union. As early as February 1861, the Union urged westerners to “Beware of the plots of the Black Republicans (who are the real disunionists and originators of the present troubles) to entrap you under the pretence of working for the Union into working for them.” Seeking to appeal to the city’s working class element, the writer asserted that “The manufactories of the country are stopped; thousands are thrown out of employment, through the obstinacy and want of love for the Union of these same Black Republicans, who refuse to accept a speedy compromise of existing difficulties.”582 Another Ohio County resident directed his fury at the Intelligencer, which he believed was “opposed to getting our rights if it costs any thing to maintain them.”583

The SWVC’s ministers and members shared westerners’ conflicted views of secession. Unlike the fervently unionist NWVC and MPC, the SWVC’s ministerial

580 Parkersburg News, January 24, 1861.
581 Parkersburg News, January 31, 1861.
582 Wheeling Union, February 2, 1861.
583 Wheeling Union, February 3, 1861.
leaders were initially divided on secession. Some lamented the sorry state of the Union and hoped that means could be found to maintain it. Others firmly denounced Lincoln’s election as the last straw and called on their western followers to mobilize in defense of the South. One minister wrote three weeks after Lincoln’s election that “The great Union Tree which the fathers planted has been the pride of us all” but “fanatical children, while enjoying its shade and glory, have been digging away at its roots. With the election of a Republican president, the minister lamented, the tree’s “top root was struck and jarred, if not sundered” 584 Many SWVC ministers were far less conservative. One stridently argued that “We complain that the Northern States, thus controlled, are seeking to repudiate every constitutional duty, or provision in favor or in recognition of slavery—to work the extinction of slavery, and to secure the negro social and political equality with the white race.” It was an outrage that northerners “disregard and nullify even the laws of the Southern States” and that “Northern governors have actually refused to deliver up fugitives from justice.” He concluded that “If the Union and the peace of slavery cannot exist together, then the Union must go; for slavery can never go.” 585 A writer to the 

\textit{Southern Methodist Itinerant} stated pointedly that “the people of the South, and the religious people more . . . believe that the North has been for years waging a war against their institutions,” which was “fatal to the continuance of fellowship among the States.” 586

SWVC ministers, regardless of their opinion on secession, naturally blamed the NWVC’s free soil activism for the mounting crisis. They saw the 1860 election and the

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585 Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, December 5, 1860.  
586 \textit{Southern Methodist Itinerant}, December 12, 1860.
crisis it produced as the offspring of northern Methodists’ politicized preaching throughout the 1850s. Pointing to the fact that Pittsburgh and Western *Christian Advocates* were just “last year indicted by grand juries and prohibited, in certain localities south of the Ohio river” one SWVC member argued that “the real machinators of disunion” were these “Abolitionist editors and abolitionist lecturers and abolitionist preachers” who made up the NWVC’s ranks. He concluded by calling on northern Methodists to “cease your denunciations of slavery and slaveholders, if you wish to live in Union with them. . . . Your influence is great; you can do much in promoting a spirit of conciliation, concession, and compromise among your people.”

The SWVC’s leaders made clear that if Virginia seceded from the Union, the NWVC would have only itself to blame. As the Richmond Convention deliberated, SWVC ministers anxiously braced for the result.

The Richmond Convention was firmly under the control of unconditional and conditional unionists throughout its first six weeks. The Convention’s mood, however, began to change after Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4. Many western Virginians, including the SWVC and Baltimore Conference, saw in Lincoln’s inaugural address a clear refusal to compromise with the seceded states as well as a veiled threat to force them back into the union. This belief strengthened the hand of disunionists throughout western Virginia—especially the SWVC—who began to prepare their followers for what they increasingly believed was inevitable. Reporting from Roane County ten days after Lincoln’s inaugural, SWVC minister Samuel Hargiss firmly stated his circuit was a “unit in itself in support of the south; and resolve[d] to fight coercion:

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*Nashville Christian Advocate*, January 31, 1861.
Offences must come, but woe unto him by whom the offence cometh.”\(^{588}\) William Kennedy’s *Southern Methodist Itinerant* likewise saw Lincoln’s inaugural as a clear sign that reunion was impossible. Kennedy stressed that it was becoming “every day clearer that the people of the North hate slavery more than they love the Union,” a fact “which must soon bring every slaveholding State within the ranks of secession.” The paper counseled its readers that “To save the Union is impossible. The thing for Christian men and patriots to aim at now, is to save the country from war.” Kennedy nonetheless emphasized that if war should come, southern Methodists would have little to fear, for the South “is the invaded party, and her institutions are likely to gain strength from the conflict.”\(^{589}\)

SWVC leaders also extolled the southern cause by providing its followers with a prejudiced but also humorous comparison of the Union’s and Confederacy’s respective leaders. Analyzing Abraham Lincoln’s inaugural address “as a literary document,” the *Itinerant* found it wanting in many respects. Exclaiming that “it has never been our lot to see as bungling a piece of composition from the pen of any public man,” they condemned his address as “imperfect and vulgar in the extreme” and concluded that “Mr. Lincoln evidently knows nothing about style or grace in composition. He does not seem to understand the philosophy of language or even the meaning or power of words.” Lincoln’s speech-making abilities were no better, for “When he wishes to be clear, he becomes obscure; when he aims to be terse, he is but inelegant.” While castigating Lincoln’s capability as both a writer and speechmaker, the same writer lauded Confederate President Jefferson Davis as “a statesman, a scholar, and a soldier” who was

\(^{588}\) *Nashville Christian Advocate*, March 14, 1861.  
\(^{589}\) *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, March 13, 1861.
“eminently fitted by the grasp and character of his mind, his studies, his temperament and his unsullied integrity to be the organizer of a new administration.” It reserved equally syrupy praise for Alexander Stephens, describing him as “a brilliant orator, a chivalrous gentleman, [and] an acute and far-seeing statesman.”

It was clear to any SWVC member which sectional executive received their spiritual leaders’ stamp of approval.

The SWVC’s increasing support for Virginia’s secession was shared by western Virginia’s county leadership. By early April, a concerted effort was underway, led by the courthouse elite, to convince or force western Virginians to cast their lot with the Confederacy. In Kanawha County, one official promised that “If Virginia secedes and joins the Southern Confederacy, coal can be shipped from the Kanawha Valley into the Southern Confederacy free of duty.” Western Virginia would become to the Confederacy what New England was to the North. Capital would “seek investment in our coal property—and coal operations on a grand scale would speedily be commenced in this portion of the State.”

Victoria Teass, a Kanawha County resident, recounted how prominent westerner George Patten, heretofore “a staunch Union man,” now “spoke eloquently, calling on the sons of Virginia to rally around her flag.” In Hardy County, local leaders expressed their indignation with what they saw as the lethargy of the Richmond Convention by passing their own ordinance of secession. They declared that “the Commercial, Agricultural, and Manufacturing interests of Hardy County require immediate secession.” They warned that if the convention did not pass an ordinance of secession within the next ten days, they would instruct their delegate to “withdraw

590 Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 20, 1861.
591 Kanawha Valley Star, April 9, 1861.
592 Victoria Hansford Teass Diary (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 2-3.
forthwith from the Convention and declare that Hardy is, and has a right to be, a free and independent county, and that we no longer acknowledge ourselves a part of Virginia.”

Most humorously, they determined that the Republic of Hardy’s flag should include an ox above the motto “Cattle is King.” While Hardy’s leadership was confident enough of their county’s secessionist majority to resort to farcical theatrics, officials in less unified counties used the political and economic power they wielded to coerce residents to support secession.

County leaders relied upon their eminent positions as lawyers, judges and businessmen, as well as the patronage these positions entailed, to swing western Virginians to support the Confederacy. This strategy worked especially well in the Kanawha Valley, where many poor laborers had been “Dependent all their lives upon the owners and proprietors” of the region’s developing salt industry. Kanawha’s leading salt magnates promised their employees that “If you will volunteer [for] the army of the South, we will support your families until your return” and when “peace and prosperity reign amongst us, you shall again return to your families and . . . your wages shall be paid as before.”

A western unionist condemned the courthouse elite’s ability “by means of the prestige of the bar and bench” to “overawe the loyal public sentiment that prevails . . . by terrorized appeals to their State loyalty.” The writer recounted that prominent unionists were commonly called to court during the secession crisis to defend themselves from specious criminal charges designed to gag future unionist activism.

In Harrison County, “an active minority, many of the politicians and office holding class”

593 They further counseled their delegate to begin treaty negotiations with foreign powers to “decide upon the Foreign policy of the Republic of Hardy.” Parkersburg News, April 4, 1861.
594 Fairmont True Virginian, July 10, 1861.
595 Wellsburg Herald, May 31, 1861.
were similarly “in favor of seceding from the Union and joining the Southern Confederacy,” and worked to repress unionists who were “thrown on their own resources.”

Secessionist political officials, aware that a majority of western Virginia’s counties were unionist, relied upon extra-legal tactics to intimidate their opponents. In Lewis County, “the political leaders of the county attempted to stampede the people into the ranks of the secessionists.” Spurred on by “the representatives of some of the old families,” Lewis County unionists were threatened by mob violence and their homes made the target of arson. In the southwestern portion of present-day West Virginia, the “small minority of the wealthier slaveholders” became “the nucleus of all aggressive secession movements.” They “utilized their wealth and social leadership” and “overawed or controlled a great many.” Their “social rank” was “so powerful that their influence was out of proportion to their numbers.” Hopeful that the Richmond Convention would soon pass an ordinance of secession, western Virginia’s “court-house cliques” marshaled their resources to deliver the region to the Confederacy.

The western elite got their wish on April 17, 1861. After the surrender of Fort Sumter and Abraham Lincoln’s subsequent call for 75,000 troops to suppress the southern rebellion, the Richmond Convention passed an ordinance of secession by a majority of 85-55. The ordinance would be submitted to Virginia’s voters for approval on

597 Edward C. Smith, A History of Lewis County (Weston, WV: Self-Published, 1920), 289, 294.
598 Jacob D. Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1900), 85, 157. The violence unionists faced was attested to by a Confederate volunteer whose father, Colonel B. F. Smith, remained a staunch Union man. He wrote: “‘My source of constant trouble is that my father will be in danger. Wicked and unscrupulous men, with whom he has lived in friendship for years, absolutely thirst for his blood. . . I am actually leading a set of men one of whose avowed objects is the arrest and the judicial or lynch murder of my father!’” Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War, 157.
May 23. While western Virginia’s unconditional unionist delegates voted against the ordinance, conditional unionists such as Samuel Woods firmly supported secession. He was joined by most western county leaders, including Gideon Camden, A. F. Haymond and Zackwell Kidwell, who pledged their unqualified support for the southern cause. With the ordinance passed by the convention, these men returned to their home counties to build support for its ratification.

Western leaders had a critical ally in both the SWVC and Baltimore Conference. Throughout the 1850s, the SWVC in particular built its influence among a significant portion of western Virginians by continually warning them of the threat the NWVC’s and MPC’s politicized activities posed to the region’s security. They drew upon this influence to portray Virginia’s secession as necessary to saving the state from submission to an abolitionist-controlled northern government. They cloaked secession in a moral legitimacy that county leaders could not and carried their secessionist message to the isolated western settlements they preached to throughout the previous decade.

Nonetheless, the SWVC and Baltimore Conferences never reached the heights of political leadership attained by unionist NWVC and MPC ministers. The NWVC and MPC became unquestioned unionist leaders because county leaders’ support of the confederacy created a vacuum in unionist political leadership. In their pro-Confederate crusade, the SWVC and Baltimore Conference naturally worked alongside the region’s secessionist hereditary elite. Nonetheless, this should not obscure the fact that southern Methodists played an integral role in shaping westerners’ political loyalties. They constituted the grassroots sinews of the secession movement.

599 Henry Dering to Waitman Willey, March 1, 1861, Charles Ambler Collection (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 10, Folder 3.
The SWVC’s and Baltimore Conference’s utility as a grassroots political force was long understood by western Virginia’s leadership. One year before the crisis, Gideon Camden, a prominent western judge and virulent southern partisan, wrote Virginia Senator R.M.T. Hunter to strategize about how best to maintain pro-southern feeling in western Virginia. Dealing with “a mixed population, many coming from the free states,” who brought with them “strong anti-slavery feelings,” Camden worried about the region’s loyalty in the event of Virginia’s secession. He was nonetheless optimistic because “We have the Southern branch of the Methodist Church,” whose “ministers and members take strong pro-slavery grounds, justifying and sustaining it by the precepts of the Bible.” Camden suggested that since “Our Southern Methodist preachers . . . find their way into every neighborhood,” they “should be furnished with documents to enable them to maintain their position before the people.” He made clear that “they should not become noisy politicians but should be well informed as to the controversy between the North and South and in a quiet way infuse it into the minds of the people.”

Two and a half weeks later, Camden’s son sent Hunter a list of SWVC ministers “to whom documents in favor of Southern rights should be sent.” Camden’s son similarly stressed that since SWVC ministers “have taken a strong stand in favor of Slavery and they traverse the whole country” it was “important that they should be well informed as to Northern aggression upon Southern Rights.”

SWVC minister Samuel Hargiss attested to his conference’s collusion with the western elite. He boasted that the SWVC’s defense of slavery and southern rights throughout the 1850s ensured that “we receive aid from

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beyond the pale of our own Church.”\(^{602}\) Between spring 1861 and the spring of 1862, secessionist Methodist leaders worked closely with the western elite to build and maintain support for the southern cause.

SWVC and Baltimore Conference ministers relied upon the broad circulation of their conference organs, the Nashville *Christian Advocate*, and *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, to spread their revolutionary message across western Virginia.\(^{603}\) In editorials and letters, SWVC and Baltimore Conference leaders demanded westerners remain true to Virginia and approve the secession ordinance’s passage. They compared the Confederacy’s cause to that of the colonies during the American Revolution and zealously urged westerners to take part in the struggle. They placed a stamp of moral legitimacy on rebellion that inspired their followers to defend southern rights. The Nashville *Advocate*, which served the SWVC since its formation, was “just the religious journal we need for the times,” especially since “all classes in Western Virginia, of all denominations, read our ‘Great Official’ with interest.” In the fractured state of affairs brought on by the secession crisis, “the boldness with which it maintains that position” against “those who are so Union-loving as to bow at the shrine of the Lincoln dynasty, and say the Union must and shall be preserved” made it an essential tool to ministers throughout the region.\(^{604}\) Commenting upon the Nashville *Advocate*’s political importance, one NWVC minister ruefully noted that “Probably no man in the entire South, not excepting Jefferson Davis, has done more steady and effective service than Dr.

\(^{602}\) Nashville *Christian Advocate*, March 14, 1861.

\(^{603}\) Baltimore Conference ministers and members also patronized the Baltimore *Christian Advocate* before the Civil War. However, the paper’s effectiveness as a secessionist medium was demolished by the attack of a unionist mob in the spring of 1861.

\(^{604}\) Nashville *Christian Advocate*, August 8, 1861.
M’Ferrin,” the editor of the Nashville paper.\textsuperscript{605} SWVC leaders effectively used these periodicals to portray the secession crisis as an event of providential importance. Western Virginia’s future course was nothing less than a “question of Southern independence or slavery; of freedom or subjugation. It involves our laws, homes, institutions, society, presses, churches—our present status and future history.”\textsuperscript{606} SWVC leaders commanded their followers to “fight for our altars and firesides. . . . There is no middle ground. He that is not for the South at this hour is against her.”\textsuperscript{607}

SWVC ministers also embraced the constitutionalist arguments utilized by southern secessionists. Confronted with qualms about the constitutionality of secession, one SWVC minister sarcastically asked how one could “Talk of a Constitution, when a Black Republican majority interprets it!” In this state of affairs, “the only alternative now presented to the fifteen Southern States is subjugation or independence.”\textsuperscript{608} SWVC leaders argued that free-soil northerners “seem to have carried the democratic notion of majorities ruling some distance beyond all laws or principles of equity.” Rather than provide the South with the equal rights the constitution guaranteed, the United States’ government was moving toward “a Republican version of ‘Might gives right’ . . . . They interpret the Constitution just as they know directly contradicts the understanding between the States when that instrument was adopted, and say, ‘We have the majority!’”\textsuperscript{609} SWVC circuit-rider James Kennedy similarly asserted that while the South “with an unyielding tenacity, holds on to the ancient and long-established doctrines of

\textsuperscript{605} \textit{Western Christian Advocate}, February 26, 1862.
\textsuperscript{606} \textit{Nashville Christian Advocate}, May 9, 1861.
\textsuperscript{607} \textit{Nashville Christian Advocate}, May 23, 1861.
\textsuperscript{608} \textit{Nashville Christian Advocate}, May 23, 1861.
\textsuperscript{609} \textit{Richmond Christian Advocate}, June 6, 1861.
self-government, State sovereignty,” the abolitionist-controlled Federal Government “invades and subverts State rights, makes might right.”

A blistering editorial published by William Kennedy in the Southern Methodist Itinerant punctuated the constitutional arguments the SWVC utilized to win westerners’ hearts and minds. He began by deconstructing the claim that “the equality of the sections is not disturbed by the exclusion of slavery from the territories, because the Southern man may take with him all that the Northern man can take.” Kennedy, like all secessionists, scoffed at this position, which in his mind demanded that the “Southern man will consent to become as a Northern man, and renounce what distinguishes him as a Southern man.” Kennedy condemned the fact that under such a policy the “Constitution is made to treat” the South’s “institutions as if they were a scandal and reproach.” In Republican hands, the constitution would become “the patron of the North, and an enemy, instead of a protection” to the South. Kennedy concluded “that nothing more nor less is at stake in this controversy than the very life of the South,” and “whether she shall be politically annihilated.” “If we submit . . . our fate as slaveholding [sic] is forever sealed.”

SWVC leaders further legitimized secession by comparing the South’s secession from the North to the MECS’s separation from the MEC in 1844. They positioned the secession crisis as the political culmination of the cultural trends set in motion by the schism. They asked their followers if “that [is] wrong in 1861, which was right in 1844?” Having “separated, ecclesiastically, from the abolitionists and agitators sixteen years before,” SWVC leaders were well aware of the “subjects in controversy between

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610 Nashville Christian Advocate, September 5, 1861.
611 Southern Methodist Itinerant, March 13, 1861.
612 Nashville Christian Advocate, September 5, 1861.
the North and South” and the cost of continued allegiance to a section that refused to
sanction slavery morally and protect it politically.\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, June 13, 1861.} In a long editorial, Kennedy
conclusively summarized the connection between ecclesiastical and political secession,
stressing that “I can’t see . . . how any man” who thought “we had sufficient cause,
before God and man, to divide the Church, and permanently separate ourselves from the
North—\textit{can now find reasons to justify adhesion to the North, politically.}” “\textit{Politically . . .}
. they have notoriously sought to do us greater injustice . . . than they had attempted to
perpetrate against us \textit{religiously, prior} to 1844 [emphasis his].”\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 29, 1861.}

While Kennedy defended secession as a constitutional necessity resulting from
thirty years of sectional tension, other SWVC ministers portrayed the North and South as
distinctly different cultures incapable of coexisting under a common national banner. An
SWVC itinerant in the Guyandotte Valley posited that the “northern and southern types
of character, philosophy and religion, are as widely variant as the poles . . . their systems
of political economy as divergent as those of slave and so-called free labor.” With
Lincoln’s election as President “the two systems have been made to antagonize so
seriously and irreconcilably . . . as to disrupt the country irrecoverably.”\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 29, 1861.} Another
SWVC leader stressed that the North’s free soil ethos “rests exclusively upon a so-called
free, white basis which ignores the radical differences of inferior and superior social
caste, and intellectual and moral development.” Indeed, while “we of the South are

\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, June 13, 1861.}
\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 29, 1861.}
\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 29, 1861.}
laboring to enact and obey God’s mandates touching masters and servants, they of the North are striving by lying, stealing, and war to resist and defy the same.”

The SWVC built upon the notion of southern distinctiveness by portraying secession as a product of revolutionary tradition. Southerners, like their colonial ancestors, were defending their homes and families from a superiorly-equipped force fighting not for sound principles, but financial gain. They demanded that westerners awaken to the perils they faced to defend themselves from what the SWVC saw as the brutal designs of invading Yankee abolitionists. Urging his followers to resist the North’s crusade to “subjugate the South” one SWVC minister counseled that “They have the more soldiers: we the better cause. Their fanatical hordes may descend upon us... But what are all these against... a brave and chivalrous people fighting for rights and homes?” Comparing the motives of the North to that of the British during the Revolution, another SWVC leader declared, “they fight for their shops, we for our homes; they for their pockets, we for our independence.” The North’s “motive is low and mean, but strong... Already images of confiscated estates play before their imaginations.”

The SWVC’s endeavors to place the southern cause in the same light as the spirit of 1776 outraged their unionist NWVC opponents. One NWVC minister castigated this “southern deception,” and condemned the “Leading ministers in the Methodist Church South” for “propagating these malicious slanders,” that the North was fighting for “booty, plunder, servile insurrection, and the utter destruction of life, property, character, morals, religion, and everything dear to mankind.” Nonetheless, the minister admitted that the SWVC’s message inspired many westerners “to believe it is their religious duty

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616 Nashville Christian Advocate, September 5, 1861.
617 Nashville Christian Advocate, May 2, 1861.
to fight till they all die rather than submit to the Government of the United States.”
SWVC ministers and members “call this a religious war, and pray earnestly to God to be delivered from the Northern savages.”\(^6\) The NWVC’s frustration only increased as the southern church expanded its grassroots secessionist efforts.

SWVC leaders moved beyond the pen to urge their followers, face-to-face, to support the Confederacy. Whether working in tandem with the western elite at public meetings or carrying the message along their isolated circuits, SWVC ministers constituted an essential disunionist force. In Roane County, SWVC minister John W. Flesher recounted his determined efforts to rebut the influence of the “many abolitionists among us,” particularly NWVC ministers seeking to keep western Virginia in the union. He reported that after impressing the necessity of secession upon his followers, “our people are determined to overcome.”\(^6\) In Kanawha County, amid “flying banners and martial music” and “the tears and sobs and smiles and waving of handkerchiefs of the fair,” the SWVC’s Rev. Smith and a large assemblage of the county’s militia and residents “marched to the Methodist Camp Ground” to hear Smith give a stirring pro-secession speech.\(^6\) Another Kanawha County SWVC minister similarly impressed upon his listeners the necessity of “rallying to the standard of Virginia in large numbers.”\(^6\) In Cabell County, SWVC preacher St. Mark Russell “in his usual animated and eloquent style,” gave a zealous speech “portraying the causes that should impel the secession of Virginia,” which elicited “deafening shouts” from the audience. Russell went on to introduce resolutions affirming that Virginia’s “union with the Confederate States, is the

\(^6\) Western Christian Advocate, June 12, 1861.
\(^6\) Nashville Christian Advocate, June 20, 1861.
\(^6\) Kanawha Valley Star, May 14, 1861.
\(^6\) Nashville Christian Advocate, July 4, 1861.
surest, if not the only remedy for the troubles which now environ and disturb her social and political systems.”622 Further South in Logan County, long-time school teacher and SWVC preacher Rev. Trotten fervently defended the southern cause before joining the Logan Wild Cats, a volunteer company formed in the late-spring. Trotten’s support of the Confederacy eventually cost him his life during the war.623 In Webster County, local southern Methodist preacher James McCray became an ardent support of the South.624 In Parkersburg, Wood County, Rev. Samuel Kelly relied upon the influence he cultivated throughout his 1850s battles with the NWVC to build support for secession. Kelly and his ministerial brethren “did all in their power to discourage enlisting in the Union army” and appealed to “State pride” as the central reason “for embracing secession.” They demanded that westerners fulfill “their duty to go with their state.”625

SWVC leaders were effective grassroots activists. One secessionist westerner remarked that “One of the saving elements” in “Western Virginia has been the presence and influence there of Methodist preachers.” They “have the confidence of the people, and they mingle with the people,” and when the “question of mere politics gave way to the great and absorbing one of nationality and independence . . . . we knew that Southern Methodist preachers . . . could be counted on.”626 Another westerner remarked that the SWVC “can be counted on in the hour of severest trial. . . . they love the flocks that have gathered too well to desert them.” SWVC ministers’ impassioned defense of secession

622 Kanawha Valley Star, April 30, 1861.
623 Mary Bland Hurst, Social History of Logan County, West Virginia, 1765-1923 (Columbia University, M.A. Thesis, n/d), 20.
624 R.L. Thompson, Webster County: History and Folklore, From Earliest Times to the Present (Webster Springs, WV: Start Printers, 1942), 62.
625 John W. Reger Papers (Buckhannon, WV: United Methodist Archives, West Virginia Wesleyan University), Box 1, Folder 14, 17-20.
626 Nashville Christian Advocate, June 13, 1861.
convince many westerners that the “cause is right.” The SWVC’s importance as a secessionist engine was also ruefully attested to by NWVC leaders. One northern Methodist bitterly described how in Parkersburg, SWVC leaders “told the people that the Northern Methodist preachers were Black Republicans, abolitionists, and that they carried the Bible in one side of their saddle-bags . . . and incendiary tracts and strychnine in the other.” The “book and the tracts were to produce insurrections, and the strychnine to be given to the slaves to poison their masters.” The importance of the Southern Methodist Itinerant as a secessionist engine was attested to by the NWVC’s John Reger, who denounced the paper as a “vile . . . dirty sheet.” Another minister recounted how southern Methodist leaders, “seconded by the Itinerant . . . have made themselves responsible for giving shape and complexion to the intellectual bewitchment that is cursing a large proportion of the citizens of Western Virginia.” Indeed, “All their preachers, without one exception, are practical secessionists.” J.B. Feather lamented how SWVC leaders cared little about “the Conversion of souls,” since “their main object” was “to prepare the minds of the people for this wicked rebellion that is now desolating our land.” The Baltimore Conference received equally harsh condemnation. MPC minister Samuel Young remarked that “Nearly the whole of the Baltimore Conference is disloyal.” Another minister flatly stated that the Baltimore Conference “was for the rebellion. Its ministers and members plotted, worked, sacrificed to promote its

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627 Nashville Christian Advocate, July 4, 1861.
628 Western Christian Advocate, August 7, 1861.
629 John W. Reger Papers, Box 1, Folder 14, 17.
630 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 27, 1861.
631 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 7, 1862.
632 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 28, 1862.
interests.” J.B. Feather spoke for many NWVC ministers seeking to combat the SWVC’s secessionist activism when called on his conference to “provide religious teachers for disaffected districts” traveled by secessionist Methodists in order to “teach the people sound Union sentiments.”

While the SWVC’s leaders publicly stumped for secession, the Baltimore Conference’s annual conference meetings, like those of their unionist Methodist opponents, were important nuclei of their grassroots secessionist activism. While the SWVC was only able to hold one annual meeting before their church was all but disbanded in 1862, the Baltimore Conference maintained its position as a potent disunionist force in the Greenbrier Valley and in western counties adjacent to the Valley of Virginia until 1865. Throughout the war, the organization took pride in its role as an agent of “organized disloyalty.” At the conference’s December 1861 meeting, John Martin, a leading minister, defended his conference’s secessionist course by stressing that “loyalty to the State [Federal Government]” would “mean a rejection of all former views and pledges relating to church separation.” Indeed, “separation and political secession were necessarily one.” The conference also pledged to cultivate closer relations with...
the SWVC, since “we are one in the fellowship of a common devotion to Methodism, and to the cause of the South, for which we cheerfully suffer.” At its 1862 meeting, the Baltimore Conference again proclaimed that “we claim to be good and loyal citizens of these Confederate States,” and encouraged “cheerful . . . obedience to the powers that be.” Two years later, the Baltimore Conference directed its ministers to continue their efforts to maintain the western Virginians’ wartime morale by fresh “declarations of principles and rights—civil and ecclesiastical.” Annual Conference meetings, in tandem with their grassroots speechmaking and editorializing, allowed secessionist Methodists to spread their message across western Virginia. As they strenuously defended secession, they welcomed the assistance of clergymen from outside their church.

Despite a general scarcity of evidence, it is clear that some Baptist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian ministers actively supported secession in western Virginia. As discussed in chapter two, a variety of institutional, theological, and social factors prevented these churches assuming the pan-regional influence enjoyed by western Virginia’s sectional Methodist Churches. Nonetheless, at the local level non-Methodist ministers were able to marshal their cultivated influence in support of the southern cause. In Wheeling, “four of the regular pastors in the Presbyterian and Episcopal Churches . . . proved to be secessionists,” and demanded that their followers approve the secession

638 Nashville Christian Advocate, December 19, 1861.
639 Martin, Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Now of the Methodist Episcopal Church South), 1862-1865, 28.
640 Martin, Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Now of the Methodist Episcopal Church South), 1862-1865, 70.
ordinance. While Wheeling’s Old School Presbyterian Churches managed to survive the Civil War in spite of their treasonous leadership, the Episcopalian clergy’s support of secession left their organization in disarray by the end of 1861. In Randolph County, “the Presbyterian Church” was “almost unanimously in favor of secession; and many of them have left home and gone with the rebel army.” In Monroe County, Presbyterian minister S. R. Houston passionately supported the Confederate cause. He encouraged enlistment in the Confederate Army, spear-headed a number of local efforts to collect supplies for the southern troops, and dedicated his weekly sermons to supporting the southern movement. Houston also went on to enlist in Monroe County’s Home Guard. Houston’s sermonizing centered on defending secession and “proving that the war on our side, being defensive, is a just one.” Not all Monroe County residents approved of Houston’s pro-secession stance. He confided in his diary that “the negroes express a strong dislike for the sermon I lately preached” defending slavery and secession.

Western Virginia’s Baptist leaders left behind the most evidence of secessionist political activism. In 1862, Rev. Matthew Maddox, a longtime Baptist preacher in Gilmer County, was arrested by Union army forces for “preaching Southern Doctrine” over the previous year. When he “was offered his freedom if he would promise not to preach,” secessionism any longer, Maddox refused. He was then transferred to Camp Chase, a prison in Columbus, Ohio, where he died in October 1863. In Wood County, L. D. Leachman, pastor of the New England Baptist Church, passionately defended secession

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641 Western Christian Advocate, July 31, 1861.
642 Pittsburg Christian Advocate, October 9, 1861.
643 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, September 17, 1861.
645 Broad Run Baptist Association, Broad Run Association Sesquicentennial, 1835-1985 (Jane Lew, WV: Broad Run Baptist Church, 1985), 7.
and all but forced a number of unionist congregants out of his church in 1861.\textsuperscript{646} In the Greenbrier and Guyandotte regions, Rev. Matthew Ellison drew upon his nearly thirty years as a Baptist preacher to influence his followers to support the Confederacy. Having organized 25 churches, baptized 2,000 residents, and preached 7,000 sermons, Ellison was confident of his abilities to convince his followers to resist “the public enemy,” and cast their material and spiritual fortunes with the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{647} While Baptist leaders like Ellison did not possess the cross-regional connections of SWVC leaders like William Kennedy and Samuel Kelly, they were nonetheless able to exert a potent secessionist influence.

The success of the SWVC’s and Baltimore Conference’s secessionist activism was demonstrated by the results of the May 1861 secession ordinance. As discussed in chapter three, the secession ordinance was passed by Virginia as a whole, but was firmly rejected in the west by a vote of 32,700-17,101. Twenty-seven of the counties that comprise present-day West Virginia voted against it and twenty-three in favor.\textsuperscript{648} All nineteen counties controlled by either the SWVC or the Baltimore Conference in 1860 posted firm majorities in favor of secession. The SWVC’s influence on westerners’ political decision-making was also apparent in counties where they competed most vigorously with the NWVC. In Jackson County, the NWVC was the leading branch of

\textsuperscript{646} New England Baptist Church Records (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), n/p.
\textsuperscript{647} Truett Rogers, West Virginia Baptist History, The Early Years, 1770-1865 (Terra Alta, WV: Headline Books, 1990), 162-163.
\textsuperscript{648} Two sets of returns exist for Barbour County. The first lists a small secessionist majority, the second a much larger unionist majority. In A House Divided, Richard Curry chose to use the returns showing a secessionist majority though this decision was likely a mistake. John W. Shaffer reveals in Clash of Loyalties: A Border County in the Civil War (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 191-193, that Union enlistments in Barbour far outpaced Confederate enlistments throughout the Civil War, which supports the idea that Barbour in fact voted unionist during the secession referendum. Curry’s analysis of the secessionist vote in western Virginia can be found on pages 142-147 of A House Divided.
the Methodist church, yet the SWVC maintained a spirited opposition to its northern opponent throughout the 1850s. The NWVC’s and SWVC’s battles generated divisions among Jackson county residents that were demonstrated by the relatively low Unionist majority of sixty-three percent posted there. While this Union victory was obviously not meager, it was dwarfed by most of western Virginia’s other unionist counties, which generally posted majorities well above seventy-five percent. The SWVC’s impact on the secession vote was also clear in counties that neither branch of Methodism dominated. While Gilmer County was dominated by the Baptist Church, the SWVC was leading sectional branch of the Methodist Church in that county. The Baptist Church’s relative inability to effectively mobilize beyond its local church was likely compensated for by the SWVC. Gilmer posted a firm majority in favor of secession in May 1861. This correlation between religious affiliation and political affiliation in western Virginia attests to the fact that the SWVC, while outnumbered by the unionist NWVC and MPC, exerted a determinative impact on the results of the secession ordinance.

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Despite western Virginia’s rejection of the secession ordinance, the SWVC and Baltimore Conference refused to abandon their cause. Secessionist Methodist ministers tirelessly supported the Confederate Army’s operations in western Virginia, hopeful that the army’s presence would reawaken westerners’ state and sectional loyalties or at the very least deliver the disaffected region to the Confederacy. They dedicated themselves to encouraging enlistment in the Confederate Army and to urging westerners to defend themselves against invading unionist forces. Within a week of the Virginia’s passage of

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649 The factors hampering the Baptist Church’s ability to become a grassroots political force in western Virginia are discussed in chapter two.
the secession ordinance, the Nashville Christian Advocate called on southern Methodists to “Cut down domestic extravagance, and put your domestic establishments on a war footing.” In preparation for enlistment, the Advocate urged its male readers to “Send your gun to the blacksmith and have it fixed” and to “Waste no more powder” hunting “small game.” Patriotic Methodists must immediately “form into volunteer companies” and “begin to train” while older residents should form “Home Guards.”

In Parkersburg, Samuel Kelly and his fellow SWVC leaders “strongly sympathized with the South and gave their influence” to convince residents “to volunteer into the rebel service and give their lives.” In Braxton County, Rev. C. Welch “buoy[ed] up the hopes of a rebel company then being raised in Braxton, and continued his labors till the close proximity of a Federal force warned him of danger.” An unnamed preacher in Braxton County passionately urged residents to enlist in the Confederate army, using “all his available theological influence for the cause of the rebellion.” He later joined the company he helped to raise.

In Mason and Boone Counties, Rev. W. G. Miller raised a company composed of men he ministered to throughout his career. Attesting to his leadership role as a recruiter, the men elected him captain of their company. Miller boasted that “so many members of the Church in the ranks and other positions” were “endeavoring to sustain the cause of our country.” He was particularly proud to note that “among the faithless Virginians, on the western border, that have been arrested for disloyalty to the South, we have yet to hear of the first Southern Methodist.”

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650 Nashville Christian Advocate, April 25, 1861.
651 John W. Reger Papers, Box 1, Folder 14, 18.
652 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 22, 1862.
653 Nashville Christian Advocate, December 12, 1861.
The SWVC’s role in the Confederate Army set it apart from the NWVC. While many NWVC and MPC ministers joined the Federal Army, they almost uniformly did so as chaplains. The SWVC, on the other hand, was able to boast that “several of our able and valuable ministers have taken position in the ranks of volunteer companies.” By July 1861, at least 11 of the SWVC’s 61 traveling ministers “had enlisted for the war against Lincoln. . . . determined to unite the sword with the Bible in defence [sic] of [their] country.” The SWVC’s presence in the Confederate Army was most remarkable for the fact that some of its ministers rose to the ranks of the officer class. In Henry Wise’s Legion, the first Confederate force to invade western Virginia, Rev. N. G. Robertson was elected first Lieutenant in one company while Rev. Staunton Field was chosen as Lieutenant in another. Both men sent letters describing the battles they took part in to the SWVC’s periodicals. In one letter Field described an engagement near the Nicholas County courthouse that resulted in a severe “loss on the enemy’s side” with “150 killed and taken prisoners.” A month later, he recounted “some sharp skirmishing” that took place the previous day and resulted in another rebel victory.

The SWVC was particularly integral to the Confederacy’s operations in the Kanawha Valley region in the summer of 1861. Henry Wise, who commanded the Confederate forces occupying the Kanawha Valley, understood the region’s importance to the Confederate cause. Control of the Kanawha country would open Confederate contacts to the west and serve as a valuable buffer against the invasion of Union troops over the Ohio River. Of equal importance was the control the Confederate army would

654 Nashville Christian Advocate, May 9, 1861.
655 Nashville Christian Advocate, July 4, 1861.
656 Nashville Christian Advocate, September 19, 1861.
657 Nashville Christian Advocate, October 10, 1861.
gain over the region’s salt industries. Wise’s attempt to swiftly occupy the region, however, was hampered by unionist resistance. In an official report to Robert E. Lee, Wise complained that “The grass of the soil we are defending is full of the copperhead traitors; they invite the enemy, feed him, and he arms and drills them.” Wise warned that his operations were increasingly hindered as he dealt with “A spy on every hill top, at every cabin . . . . From Charleston to Point Pleasant they swarm.” As Wise’s Legion worked to pacify the region, he relied upon the SWVC’s leaders to help track down and arrest NWVC ministers that maintained many of the unionist enclaves Wise so disdained.

The SWVC’s Staunton Field was well-prepared to assist Wise. His long history as a circuit riding minister in the Kanawha Valley and his hard-fought 1850s battles with the NWVC imbued him with an unqualified disdain for his denominational and now national opponents. He also possessed the knowledge requisite to hunt them down and eliminate their unionist influence. As Wise’s forces moved into the Kanawha Valley, Field dictated the most likely places to find unionist Methodists leaders. As a result NWVC “preachers were compelled to leave nearly all of that part of the Conference embraced in the two Kanawha Districts, and several circuits farther north.” Those who could not escape were arrested by Confederate forces. One captured minister described how “Our members were guarded every night in some places by armed mobs, commanded by Southern Methodists. Our churches . . . were claimed as theirs.” J.B. Feather similarly lamented how Wise’s forces, “with the aid of our Southern Methodist friends . . . have succeeded in driving . . . our preachers from their fields of labor” in the Kanawha

658 Boyd B. Stutler, West Virginia in the Civil War (Charleston, WV: Education Foundation Inc., 1963), 49.
659 Stutler, West Virginia in the Civil War, 53.
660 Pittsburg Christian Advocate, August 27, 1861.
661 Pittsburg Christian Advocate, August 27, 1861.
Valley. The NWVC’s “Rev. Mr. Hare, a superannuate member of the Western Virginia Conference, who was engaged in teaching school not far from Charleston, was taken by the rebels and carried off. It has not been ascertained what they have done with him.”

Rev. Mr. Molehan, a Methodist minister from the Ohio Conference “who had been to Charleston, Va, on business, was arrested on his way home, and conveyed to Richmond.” Many NWVC ministers were forced to flee the region during the summer of 1861, including Rev. Robert Dixon, “one of the fathers of Western Virginia Methodism.” Reflecting on these events, Feather lamented that “My very heart sickens while I think of the multitudes whose speech and gospel have been made “articles contraband of war,” as a result of “their love to their country and their Church.”

Fortunately for the NWVC’s ministers and members, Wise’s reign of terror did not last long. Despite winning a number of important skirmishes, including one at Scary Creek, Wise’s control of the Kanawha Valley was undercut by both superior Federal numbers and his own incompetence. When Union General Jacob D. Cox began his Kanawha Valley campaign on July 11, it signaled the beginning of the end for Wise. By July 24, a series of strategic blunders on Wise’s part led to a long retreat to eastern Virginia that signaled the conclusion of his military involvement in the west. Confederate forces led by General W. W. Loring succeeded in capturing the Kanawha Valley once more in September 1862 but held the region for only three weeks.

Despite Wise’s withdrawal from the Kanawha Valley, SWVC leaders kept the region’s secessionists connected with the Confederate government. Confederate officers

662 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 2, 1861.
663 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 21, 1861.
664 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 2, 1861.
665 Stutler, West Virginia in the Civil War, 53.
and officials in eastern Virginia relied on SWVC ministers’ knowledge of western Virginia’s rugged terrain to avoid Union companies and convey information to scattered secessionist enclaves in the region. In September 1861, the SWVC’s Rev. E.W. Sehon carried information to residents in the Union-occupied Kanawha Valley instructing them to prepare for a planned Confederate invasion of the region the following month. One of the letters Sehon was instructed to deliver inexplicably ended up in the hands of Union officials, who was amazed to learn “through what channel important information is communicated.” Hearing of Sehon’s activities, one westerner scornfully remarked that the “reverend rebel may honestly believe that he is doing the church a service in his efforts to prostrate the government,” but “in the end they would be futile.”666 The SWVC was an important hub and conduit of information outside the Kanawha Valley as well. Presbyterian minister S. R. Houston recorded in his diary that SWVC meetings in Monroe County were a frequent source of information on the wartime movements of Union and Confederate forces. Westerners, dispersed across a rugged terrain, relied upon their Methodist meeting house as a venue where residents could gather and share war news. In one instance “at a Methodist meeting in Nicholas some one reported he had heard 1,100 Federal Cavalry had suddenly entered Braxton and laid Sutton in ashes.”667 Church members quickly mobilized to defend their community. As the war continued into 1862, SWVC ministers continued to aid the Confederate Army’s operations. In Charleston, Kanawha County, SWVC minister John Brown and prominent western secessionist Samuel Price were arrested in Charleston, Kanawha County, while attempting to secure supplies, collect letters for delivery to soldiers in the Confederate

666 Wheeling Intelligencer, September 20, 1861.
667 “War Diary of Reverend S. R. Houston, Presbyterian Minister,” June 4, 1861.
army, and raise new recruits. They were paroled in time for Price to be elected Lieutenant Governor of the secessionist Virginia state government in 1863.668

SWVC ministers assisted the Confederate cause in more insidious ways as well. While most of the conference’s ministers acted as recruiters, soldiers, and purveyors of information for the army, some formed their own guerilla bands and directed their fury at NWVC ministers and members. Guerilla warfare was a fact of life in western Virginia during the Civil War and unionist westerners lived in constant fear of these armed “irregulars.” Union General Jacob Cox recalled that “In the first two winters of the war, these organizations were in the height of their pernicious activity, and the loyal West Virginians were their favorite victims.”669 Fabricius Cather, a Taylor County resident, similarly remembered the “excitement caused by the presence in the neighborhood of John righter [a guerilla leader] and his band.”670 Joseph Hill of Pocahontas County described how during “the Civil War we didn’t have any law. We were a law unto ourselves. Under such circumstances, you wouldn’t believe what is in the human heart.” He particularly remembered a “a band of thieves and robbers” who took from his “Mother at different times, bed clothes, wearing apparel, money and seven head of horses.”671

Guerilla leaders relished the opportunity to strike fear into the hearts of unionist westerners. In a circular distributed to recruit volunteers for a planned raid into western Virginia, John Imboden pledged that “My purpose is to wage the most active warfare

668 Staunton Spectator, October 7, 1862.
669 Cox, Military Reminiscences of the Civil War, 424.
670 Fabricius A Cather Civil War Diaries (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), February 27, 1862.
671 Joseph Hill Civil War Reminiscences (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 4.
against our brutal invaders and their domestic allies,” promising that “Our own Virginia
traitors . . . will receive our special regards.” He reasoned that since “Our enemies are
waging a war of unparalleled barbarity and ferocity” it was “our duty to slay them by all
the legitimate means in our power” for the “honor of our wives and daughters, the
sanctity of our homes, [and] liberty of our children.” Partisan bands like Imboden’s
frequently received assistance from western secessionists who saw them as saviors from
Union army aggression. Victoria Teass, a secessionist-sympathizer living in the Kanawha
Valley, recounted how “the ladies would provide” the irregulars “with a small bag of salt
. . . . Sometimes we gave them a shirt or a hat or other things needed.” No matter the
risk, “we did all we possibly could for them.”

SWVC leaders understood the power of guerilla warfare to sap unionist resolve
and strike decisive blows against Federal forces. Throughout the war, a number of
secessionist Methodist ministers raised their own bands to supplement the work of more
well-known raiders like John Imboden, John Righter, Peter Carpenter, and Zach Cochran.
SWVC leaders unabashedly assumed “leadership of the rebel marauders” bent on the

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672 Granville Davisson Hall Papers, (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University),
Miscellaneous Folder.
673 Victoria Hansford Teass Diary, 1862, no specific date. As news of western secessionists aiding these
guerilla bands continued to filter into Union lines, Union officers became increasingly draconian in their
attempts to discourage this assistance. Captain Kellogg, of the 123rd Ohio, who was stationed in Tucker
County in 1862, sought to discourage secessionist sympathizers from giving aid to guerilla bands by issuing
orders of assessment to a number of southern sympathizers. One assessment order, issued to Adam Harper
on November 28, 1862, stated that “In consequence of certain robberies which have been committed upon
Union citizens of this county by Bands of Gurilies you are hereby assessed to the amount of Two Hundred
and Eighty-Five Dollars to make good their losses.” If Harper failed to pay in a timely manner, his house
was to be burnt while he himself would be shot. These orders of assessment are discussed in A. S.
Bosworth, A History of Randolph County West Virginia, From its Earliest Exploration and Settlement to
the Present Time (Elkins, WV: Self-Published, 1916), 145-146, and in Hu Maxwell, History of Tucker
County, West Virginia, From The Earliest Explorations and Settlements to the Present Time (Kingwood,
intimidation of unionists and the plunder of their property.\textsuperscript{674} Even in strongly unionist Wood County, SWVC leaders and the secessionists they led “menaced and imperiled” a number of NWVC ministers in the area.\textsuperscript{675} Rev. John Mitchell was especially infamous. Mitchell, a well-known itinerant in Braxton County when the war began, doggedly “preached for secession” during the secession crisis. After the outbreak of the war, he carried his “base theory into practice by heading guerilla bands for the destruction of life and property.” Under Mitchell’s direction, “inoffensive and quiet citizens were unceremoniously dragged from their families to eke out a miserable existence in the dungeons of Richmond, while their property filled the coffers of an insatiable and unprincipled enemy.” Unionist Methodists certainly breathed a sigh of relief when news came that Mitchell had “paid for his offense against civil and divine law with his life,” after his band was surprised and routed by Federal forces at Arnoldsburg, Calhoun County.\textsuperscript{676} While unionists bristled at secessionist Methodists’ formation of guerilla bands, their outrage reached new heights when they learned of one SWVC minister’s complicity in an especially costly Confederate raid.

In November 1861, Confederate forces under Colonel John R. Clarkson began planning an attack on Guyandotte, Cabell County. They hoped to seize supplies, crush the 5\textsuperscript{th} Virginia Regiment of the Union army recently organized there, and in the process raise the morale of Confederate soldiers and citizens still stinging from their summer defeat in the Kanawha Valley.\textsuperscript{677} Clarkson had a significant advantage in that Guyandotte possessed a large population of Confederate sympathizers. Most conspicuous among the

\textsuperscript{674} Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 27, 1861.  
\textsuperscript{675} Western Christian Advocate, August 7, 1861.  
\textsuperscript{676} Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, July 1, 1862.  
\textsuperscript{677} Stutler, West Virginia in the Civil War, 121.
southern partisans were SWVC ministers and members, who established a strong presence in Guyandotte through their patronage and administration of Marshall College, the only SWVC-sponsored academy in western Virginia. On the evening of November 7, 1861, a “prominent minister” of the SWVC invited the new recruits to a service at his church, “while others were invited to spend the evening at the houses of citizens.” Between seven and eight p.m., roughly 500 rebel cavalrymen “galloped into the town, and unexpectedly attacked [the] soldiery, only a few of whom were armed.” By the time the raid was completed, nearly one hundred prisoners were taken, including MPC minister J. C. Wheeler, a lieutenant in the Union army. After raiding the town for supplies, the Confederates marched their prisoners across the Allegheny Mountains and into the Valley of Virginia as an early winter storm raged around them.\textsuperscript{678} NWVC leaders, outraged by an SWVC minister’s participation in the capture of both soldiers and unarmed civilians, pledged to eliminate their opponents’ influence once and for all.

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Even before the Guyandotte raid, unionist public meetings condemned guerilla attacks and demanded that comprehensive measures be taken to curb them. In Taylor County, residents declared that “Guerilla warfare is entirely at variance with civilization, also selfish, unnatural and wicked, and whenever carried on is only pursued for personal revenge and personal interest.” They called on their fellow citizens to protect the innocent “victims of its cruelty” through the formation of Home Guard units.\textsuperscript{679} A Mason County resident similarly argued that “the rebel rascals—who have advocated and perpetrated, upon innocent and unoffending Union people, the shocking barbarities that many have

\textsuperscript{678} Western Christian Advocate, November 13, 1861; Stutler, \textit{West Virginia in the Civil War}, 125.
\textsuperscript{679} Clarksburg \textit{National Telegraph}, May 2, 1862.
been the victims of, ought to suffer punishment and that of the severest kind.”

A meeting in Wood County resolved that it was “the duty of every loyal neighborhood to protect itself against the intrusion of rebels and the influence of their pernicious doctrines.” These rebels were far more dangerous than the “lesser evils of small-pox, plague, felons and incendiaries.”

The NWVC joined the anti-guerilla crusade with undisguised zeal. Still reeling from the attacks perpetrated upon their church membership, they resolved to drive SWVC ministers from the region once and for all. Northern Methodist leaders believed they had been victimized by the SWVC and its western elite allies throughout the previous decade and saw their opponents’ active support of secession, the Confederate Army, and armed partisan rangers as the logical culmination of their longstanding culture war. NWVC leaders truly believed that western Virginia would not be safe from secessionist influence until the SWVC was eradicated. Wesley Smith called on the “members and friends of Methodism . . . the most numerous and influential church in the

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680 Point Pleasant Weekly Register, April 24, 1862. Interestingly enough, many secessionists joined unionists in condemning the increasing frequency of guerilla attacks. An additional resolution adopted by the meeting stated that “we who voted for the Ordinance of Secession, doubly desire to express our disapproval of Southern guerrillas making this the theatre of their actions, and we pledge ourselves as law-abiding citizens, that we neither aid, abet nor harbor them.” Former and current supporters of secession in Harrison County similarly resolved that “we who voted for against the Ordinance of Secession will use our utmost abilities to protect all law-abiding citizens.” Point Pleasant Weekly Register, May 9, 1862.

681 Point Pleasant Weekly Register, April 17, 1862. Unionists also pledged to prevent avowed secessionists who left the region at the start of the Civil War from returning home. They directed their vitriol particularly at paroled Confederate soldiers and secessionist political leaders who had recently taken a loyalty oath to the United States Government. The April 10, 1862 issue of the Point Pleasant Weekly Register carried a full account of a meeting in Mason County that pledged to halt the return of former rebels. County residents, “having learned that certain leading rebels, fugitives from the county, are expected by their friends to return during the Spring or Summer,” and believing that the returning rebels planned “to encourage the disloyal and insurrectionary party to effect a more thorough organization among their friends and sympathizers, and to obtain and communicate to the rebel chieftains such information as will enable them to commit depredations on peaceable citizens with impunity,” resolved that “no loyal citizen ought to bail a rebel, or directly or indirectly aid him in procuring his release on bail.” Residents also called on “Federal officers commanding the armies of the United States” not “to permit rebels to return to their homes within the Federal lines, but to allow passes to avowed Secessionists to go beyond their lines, requiring them to declare upon death that they will not return within lines until peace is restored.”

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land” to “rally to the rescue” and to utilize “your influence with men [to] stand . . . by your country in this hour of her peril.”  

Seeking to convince his readers of the barbarities Confederates were capable of, Smith unflinchingly recounted reports of Confederate brutality: “a wounded soldier with his ears cut of” and another that was “bayonetted while crying for quarter.” Smith concluded that these horrible scenes were the “effect of the present treason and rebellion. No man can engage in it . . . without becoming an enemy to God and man.”

NWVC ministers throughout western Virginia responded to Smith’s call. Beginning in autumn 1861 they led a number of public meetings designed to mobilize their unionist followers against the secessionist threat. In Marion County, Rev. Moses Tichenell took a “bold and decided ground in favor of active, energetic, armed resistance and action to suppress and crush out the prevalent internal rebel raids.” He then introduced a number of resolutions, which stressed that “when self-protection, duty to ourselves, our families, society and our country demand it, we must and will meet the issue at all hazards and at any sacrifice.” The resolutions also directed their fury at Confederate sympathizers, warning them that they could no longer “aver or pretend that they cannot restrain, prevent, or suppress the fiendish raids that have been distracting and destroying the peace and security of the loyal citizens and their property in our county.”

In Marshall County, local Methodist preacher Edward Dowler “delivered a

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682 Wheeling Intelligencer, August 30, 1861.
683 Wheeling Intelligencer, September 2, 1861. One story, republished in a number of western Virginia newspapers, played a determinative role in illustrating the supposed barbarity of secessionists. First published in the Wheeling Intelligencer on September 16, 1861, the story focused on a recent murder in Parkersburg. After he “cheered for the Union,” a young man whose last name was Smith was shot dead in the street by a thirteen year old boy named Smotherman. It was “supposed he killed Smith at the instigation of his father,” a virulent secessionist. Both the father and son were later arrested.
684 Wheeling Intelligencer, September 12, 1861.
very appropriate address” calling on residents to resist the secessionist threat. The NWVC’s Thomas Trainer was then “called for and responded in a patriotic and eloquent manner. He spoke at some length, exposing traitorism,” and “lamenting the disturbed and distracted condition” created by rebel raids. He concluded by calling for vigorous action to snuff them out. 685

The SWVC bore the brunt of the NWVC’s fury. An SWVC minister in the Guyandotte region informed his followers through the Nashville Advocate that “The office of the Parkersburg News, a secession paper, was completely demolished on Friday night by a crowd of Union men, who considered it their duty to stop its issue.” He expressed his hope that “our brave little sister, the Southern Methodist Itinerant, has not been disturbed.” 686 Unfortunately for the SWVC, news later came that the Southern Methodist Itinerant “has been stopped by the interference of the Abolitionists,” while SWVC “congregations, in many instances, have been broken up, and their friends threatened, overawed, or outlawed.” SWVC leader Samuel Kelly was likewise “compelled to leave that city because of his secession proclivities.” 687 As news of the attacks on SWVC ministers and their conference organs became more frequent, the editor of the Nashville Advocate reassured western secessionists that “It costs some people more than it does others to be true to the South.” Nonetheless, “none, lay or clerical, are” as “fit

685 Wheeling Intelligencer, September 16, 1861. While Tichenell and Trainer by no means exaggerated the threat posed to western civilians by the guerilla attacks endemic to the region throughout the Civil War, the Union army did prove capable of capturing and killing a number of guerilla leaders. In September 1861, Zach Cochran, the former Taylor County sheriff and an infamous guerilla leader, was shot down alongside six of his men by a large detachment of Union soldiers outside of his farm. Cochran and his men had attempted to escape through Cochran’s orchard but were picked off as they ran. Cochran’s death led a number of prominent secessionists in the county to report to Union army officials in order to take the oath of loyalty to the United States Government. This story is covered in detail in the September 25, 1861 issue of the Wheeling Intelligencer.

686 Nashville Christian Advocate, June 6, 1861.

687 Nashville Christian Advocate, July 4, 1861.
at such a time as this to guide the choice and destiny of freemen, at a greater sacrifice, than the members of our Western Virginia Conference.” He encouraged the SWVC’s ministers to continue their efforts to maintain the Confederate cause. By the end of the year, however, the editor’s optimism proved to be of little avail for the SWVC.

As western Virginia was brought more firmly under Union control, attacks upon SWVC ministers and the churches they served dramatically increased. One minister wrote in December that the “Conference is passing through a fiery ordeal. Only some four of her circuits have not felt the tread of the enemies of civil and religious liberty.” Worst of all, “many of her preachers are . . . in exile, on ‘ceaseless wing,’ roaming” while “their families are exposed to the brutality and vengeance of an invading soldiery.”

In Mason County, “the loyal men” of the NWVC’s Beech Grove Church objected “very seriously, we are informed, to a certain Reverend” of the SWVC known to “have Secession proclivities, preaching in their neighborhood.” The unnamed southern Methodist was later arrested by Union army soldiers at the instigation of county residents. His fate is unknown. In Preston County, a “traitor Methodist preacher” known to frequently “utter treasonable sentiments” was driven from the county by a unionist mob. In Webster County, James McCray, a prominent local SWVC minister and fierce supporter of the southern cause was shot and killed by an unidentified assailant in Hacker Valley.

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688 Nashville Christian Advocate, July 4, 1861.
689 Nashville Christian Advocate, December 12, 1861.
690 Point Pleasant Weekly Register, April 17, 1862.
691 Clarksburg National Telegraph, January 3, 1862.
692 R.L. Thompson, Webster County: History and Folklore, From Earliest Times to the Present, 62. Non-Methodist secessionists faced similar perils during the war. In September 1861, a group of pro-Confederate citizens living in Hardy County wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis pleading for intervention to protect their crops and livestock from being pillaged by “Northern thieves.” One month later, Hampshire County residents reported to Davis that Union forces occupying their county had been “plundering and
In Tucker County, the SWVC’s Dr. Abraham Hershman was arrested by a union home-guard for supporting the Confederacy. He was sent to Camp Chase, a prison camp in Columbus, Ohio.\footnote{Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, January 27, 1863, \textit{Samuel Woods Family Papers} (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 1, Folder 1.}

When not seeking to intimidate or permanently silence secessionist Methodist ministers, Union partisans directed their fury at SWVC churches. Marsha Phillips, an NWVC member, described how in Upshur County Union soldiers “treat the Southern Church with the greatest contempt” and made “a ball-room out of it.”\footnote{\textit{Marsha Sumner Philips Diary} (Morgantown: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), October 27, 1861.} She later remarked how one evening “I heard a thundering noise over in Camp. Malinda said it was the boys dancing in the Southern Church and I think they put it down quite strong.”\footnote{\textit{Marsha Sumner Philips Diary}, November 11, 1861.} In Braxton County a Unionist “with malice aforethought, and without the fear of God before his eyes, touched” an SWVC church in Shaversville “with fire, and it went up in flame.”\footnote{John D. Sutton, \textit{History of Braxton County and Central West Virginia} (Parsons WV: McClain Printing Company, 1967 [1919]), 242.} An SWVC church in Ravenswood, Jackson County, met a similar fate at the hands of Union soldiers.\footnote{\textit{A Brief History of Methodism in Ravenswood, West Virginia} (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 6-7.} At the SWVC’s first meeting after the Civil War, conference secretary Josiah Hanks recalled that by early 1862, “most of the preachers of the Southern Church were forced by persecution to abandon their fields of labor and seek protection within the lines of the Confederate Armies.” As a result of these conditions, “The membership was scattered to the four winds . . . [leaving] most of the Societies in a
disorganized condition.”\footnote{Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, \textit{Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford, 1866 Meeting}, n/p.} SWVC leader G.S. Mede did not mince words when he blamed the NWVC for the SWVC’s tribulations. “Our misfortunes were more directly the result of an envious and vindictive spirit which seized the northern people, and especially the people and ministers of the M.E. Church, North, who availed themselves of the aid of . . . cruel military despotism,” to drive the SWVC’s leaders from the region, a feat that during the 1850s, “under the reign of [peace] they had verily failed to do.”

NWVC ministers, according to Mede, instigated and led a “reign of terror,” against SWVC ministers who were “compelled to flee for their lives” while their “sheep [were] scattered. Long years of trial and great suffering came upon us. Our church property was destroyed and the love of many waxed cold.”\footnote{Clarksburg Methodist Episcopal Church, South Records (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), n/p.}

The SWVC’s denominational opponents naturally delighted in its destruction. Rev. W. H. Wiley, an NWVC minister, happily reported that in Parkersburg, “the war has resulted very disastrously for the Southern branch of the M.E. Church in Western Virginia” and that “the general rise of Unionism” had “pretty much killed this Secession Church organization.”\footnote{Nashville \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 1, 1861.} NWVC minister J. B. Feather similarly remarked that “The Church South has run its course here, unless our arms should meet with awful reverses. . . . A majority, perhaps, of their preachers are in the rebel army” while “the others are hiding, running and dodging, day and night, to save their nappers.”\footnote{Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, August 27, 1861.} In the summer of 1862, the editor of the Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate} wrote what he believed was a fitting eulogy for his southern rivals. He remarked that “nothing could furnish a more vivid
picture of the disorganization that has fallen on Southern Methodism” than the fact that “Missions, Sunday Schools, publishing interests, all lie paralyzed.” Indeed, “How different from itself two years since! How the glory has departed!” Southern Methodist leaders were now left with “the mournful privilege of looking out on the sad desolations which . . . they have greatly helped to bring upon the land and the Church.” They “must stand forever historically identified with the darkest and most humiliating chapters in the annals of Methodism.”

The Pittsburgh Christian Advocate’s assessment of the SWVC’s situation one year into the Civil War was an accurate one. By mid-1862, the organization existed only in name in western Virginia. SWVC ministers and members, viewed by the NWVC and most western unionists as agents of the southern Confederacy, struggled in vain to maintain a viable presence in the region during the war. When the Nashville Christian Advocate was forced to cease publication later in 1862, SWVC members were almost completely cut off from their brethren. While the Baltimore Conference maintained its strength, its influence was limited to the Greenbrier Valley by 1862, leaving the vast majority of western Virginian secessionists to their own devices. Their leadership scattered or silenced, many devoted SWVC members were left to face the wrath of their unionist neighbors. The diaries kept by Isabella Woods, a southern Methodist and wife of prominent secessionist Samuel Woods, and Martha Watson, an Episcopalian infamous for her outspoken support for the Confederacy, show the extent to which secessionists were made into social pariahs as a result of their political loyalties. They also reveal the NWVC’s complicity in the persecution of known secessionists.

702 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 24, 1862.
Isabella Woods and her husband Samuel were in many ways unlikely secessionists. Both were northern-born, and after marrying in Pennsylvania and settling in Barbour County in the 1840s, Samuel distinguished himself as a lawyer and occasional defender of western political rights. While Woods’ political agitation sometimes set him at odds with Barbour County’s courthouse elite, he nonetheless cultivated a great degree of influence in his adopted county. Samuel and Isabella were raised as Episcopalians, but in the early 1850s joined an SWVC church. At the start of the secession crisis, Woods emerged as a conditional unionist, but after Lincoln’s call for troops in the wake of Fort Sumter, he denounced what he felt was a clear northern coercionist policy and fervently defended secession. After Virginia’s passage of the secession ordinance, Woods left his wife and children to join the Confederate army.

With her husband’s departure, Isabella Woods was left to care for their family in Philippi, Barbour’s county seat. The majority of Philippi’s residents were unionists and did little to disguise their scorn for Isabella and her family. They blamed her husband and other secessionists for the war that now engulfed them. Seeking to punish Isabella for her husband’s disloyalty, unionists confiscated much of the Woods family’s property. Isabella described in one letter to her husband how the family’s property “has been plundered by Union men of our own county.” Vengeful unionists also confiscated the family’s personal possessions. A clock of great sentimental value to Isabella eventually found its way to the mantle of the unionist Meyers family.\(^{703}\) Unionists expressed their satisfaction that well-off families like the Woods’ “who have been lying on beds of down

\(^{703}\) Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, July 18, 1861, *Samuel Woods Family Papers*, Box 1, Folder 1.
for so long; are now lying on beds of thorns.” By October, Woods’ fear for her family was evident when she warned her husband that “You don’t know what bitter enemies you have in town. Some are hoping and believing that you may never see your family, and would like to see me begging.”

Isabella Woods was also harassed by NWVC leaders who sought to make an example of her family for their support of secession. In July 1861, the NWVC’s Rev. W. H. Wiley took a break from his duties as a Union army chaplain to pay Isabella a visit. She described how Wiley “came to my house that morning [and] said he had come to town for vengeance.” She recounted to Samuel that Wiley “talked of your [sic] very insolently,” and demanded that town residents take sterner measures to restrain Isabella’s communications with her husband while he served in the Confederate Army. Woods’ hatred for Wiley was clear when she declared in a letter to her husband that the minister was a “man I want to hear is shot [All emphasis hers].” The NWVC’s Gordon Battelle similarly directed union officials in Barbour to carefully inspect Isabella’s letters to her husband, for fear that they contained information “intended to aid the confederate forces.” Isabella “was very angry to tell the truth & wrote to him to read my letter & if it was objectionable return it to me [and] if not forward it to you [Emphasis hers].” Other NWVC ministers appointed to ride circuit in Barbour purposely refused to minister to the Woods family. Isabella wrote to her husband in the summer of 1862 that “We have a preacher [Thomas M. Leslie] on this circuit, but he has never called, and I don’t care if he ever does.” Despite visiting a number of Isabella’s northern Methodist neighbors,

704 Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, September 26, 1861, Samuel Woods Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
705 Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, October 6, 1861, Samuel Woods Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
706 Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, July 18, 1861, Samuel Woods Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
707 Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, August 21, 1861, Samuel Woods Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
Leslie’s ardent support of the union and disdain for secessionists ensured the exclusion of the Woods family from his ministry.\textsuperscript{708}

Isabella Woods and her children were eventually able to secure passes to flee to eastern Virginia. There she was finally reunited with her husband and she and her family spent the rest of the Civil War safely behind Confederate lines. After the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, the Woods family returned to Barbour County. However, Samuel Woods’ support of the Confederacy resulted in his prohibition from practicing law until 1870, when restrictions against former rebels were relaxed.\textsuperscript{709}

The experiences of ardent secessionist sympathizer Martha Dent Watson in the closing months of the Civil War reveal that the NWVC ministers were not the only spiritual leaders willing to make an example of the disloyal. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the majority of Episcopalian ministers in western Virginia were Confederate supporters. While many Episcopalians supported the Confederacy, others, such as Fairmont, Marion County’s Episcopalian congregation, ejected their secessionist ministers at the beginning of the war. The church’s membership was without a regular minister for most of the war, but beginning in 1864, benefitted from the arrival of northern Episcopal ministers sent as missionary appointments. These missionaries were strongly unionist and drew the ire of passionate rebels sympathizers like Martha Watson.

In January 1865, Watson recorded in her diary that “There has been quite an ‘advent’ into our little church circle lately—namely that of an English clergyman” sent from Chicago to minister to Fairmont’s Episcopalians. Watson later recorded that the clergyman, Rev. Wosley, declared upon his arrival that he did not “think there is the

\textsuperscript{708} Isabella Woods to Samuel Woods, June 18, 1862, \textit{Samuel Woods Family Papers}, Box 1, Folder 1.
\textsuperscript{709} West Virginia’s proscription of ex-Confederates will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion.
slightest hope for the South. . . . a point on which I beg to differ.” Watson’s support for the Confederacy set her at odds with the new minister. She remarked that Wosley “has had my full history” and “seems to have taken up the idea that I am the most perverse, ill mannered, stubborn piece of humanity in existence. . . . I may thank the Steeles for the flattering opinion.”

It is perhaps not surprising that the Steele family went out of their way to inform Wosley of Watson’s political proclivities. The family’s patriarch, Samuel Steele, was a prominent NWVC itinerant and presiding elder who took an active part in the western unionist and separate statehood movements. The Steele family’s efforts to smear Watson’s character demonstrates the extent to which NWVC members saw it as their duty to ostracize any secessionist-sympathizers living in their midst.

Martha Watson concluded by March that she could no longer bear Rev. Wosley’s continued efforts to blend politics with his ministry and ceased attending church. She defended her decision in her diary when she disdainfully remarked that Wosley “admires the Yankee nation” and “seems to think obedience” to this position was “due from the people to their minister . . . that is a new doctrine, to me at least.” Wosley, however, would not let the matter of Watson’s non-attendance drop and paid a number of visits to her home to convince her to cease her support of the Confederacy and return to the church. His efforts, however, were of little avail and only led her to conclude that “the more I know of him, the less I like him.” Two months later, Wosley was ordered to report to Clarksburg for a new ministerial appointment, ending his battles with Martha Watson. Watson had little reason to celebrate as in the interim Robert E. Lee had

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710 Martha Dent Watson Diary (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), January 20, 1865.
711 Martha Dent Watson Diary, March 13, 1865 and March 20, 1865.
712 Martha Dent Watson Diary, March 21, 1865.
surrendered to Ulysses Grant at Appomattox Court House, effectively ending the Civil War. Watson mourned the failure of the southern cause, writing that “It is hard, so hard, to think that all the sacrifices and sufferings of our people have been in vain. The Southerners have fought nobly for independence and though they fail we honor them for their bravery, and feel proud that we belong to such a people.” She concluded her eulogy for the Confederacy with a sentiment undoubtedly shared by secessionists, whether Methodist or non-Methodist, throughout western Virginia: “Let us trust that God, who has permitted this great calamity to come upon us, will in his own good time bring all things right, but it is hard now to say ‘thy will be done.’”  

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With the conclusion of the Civil War, SWVC ministers and members struggled to rebuild what had once been the second largest religious denomination in western Virginia. After four long years of war, the SWVC’s ardent support of secession had resulted only in the scattering of its membership, the discontinuance of its periodicals, and the bankruptcy of its seminary, Marshall Academy. The tumult caused by the end of the war and the return of thousands of former confederate soldiers and officials to West Virginia precluded the calling of an annual conference meeting in 1865. When the SWVC’s ministers finally met in 1866 in Parkersburg, a former bastion of SWVC strength, they did not even have a Methodist church in which to hold their conference. They were forced to gather in a Baptist meeting house instead. Indeed, their organization’s affairs were so disorganized that it was impossible even to compile membership statistics. When the SWVC was finally able to present a full accounting of it

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713 Martha Dent Watson Diary, April 10, 1865.
membership numbers at its 1867 meeting, the figures testified to the deleterious effect the war had upon the church. In 1860, the SWVC boasted 10,823 members. Two years after the Civil War, its ministers accounted for only 6,684 members, barely more than half of its 1860 strength. That same year, the NWVC had already made up the membership losses the dislocations endemic to the Civil War had upon their church, and included more than 23,000 members in its rolls.

Despite these hurdles, SWVC ministers pledged themselves to rebuilding their organization. In Harrison County, G. S. Meade spearheaded the resurrection of the Clarksburg Methodist Episcopal Church, South and was later appointed Presiding Elder of the Clarksburg District of the SWVC. In Wetzel County, Rev. R. A. Claughton reestablished a regular circuit in 1867. In Parkersburg, the SWVC’s rebuilding efforts progressed more slowly. From 1866 until 1874, southern Methodists held their services in the home of Zachariah W. Turner, a prominent resident. However, on May 7, 1874, a new SWVC church, the Mt. Moriah Methodist Church was established in the city. Of particular interest was the primary trustee listed on the new church’s deed: John W. Davis. Throughout the Civil War, Davis was a copperhead opponent of many of President Abraham Lincoln’s wartime policies as well as those of the Republican-dominated West Virginia government. It is only fitting that Davis, disgusted by the northern-influenced state government established by NWVC leaders and other unionists during the Civil War, sought his spiritual home with the SWVC. The support men such as Davis and Turner gave to the SWVC as it rebuilt its organization helped the conference

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714 Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Western Virginia Annual Conference, Record of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Organized in West Milford in 1851 and Reorganized in 1866 at West Milford, 1866 Meeting, n/p.
715 John L. Rolfe, The Planting of Methodism in Wood and Adjacent Counties (N/D, N/P), 32.
to once again become the second largest denomination in the state. By 1890 it boasted over 25,000 members, a little more than half of the NWVC’s membership and more than twice that of the MPC.  

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SWVC ministers surveying the political terrain in the spring of 1861 believed that the abolitionist conspiracy they had long warned their membership about had reached its culmination. Working in tandem with county leaders and the independent Baltimore Conference, southern Methodists leaders sought to convince their followers to support Virginia’s decision to join the Confederacy and to rebut the NWVC’s defense of the union. In speeches, newspaper editorials, and informal conversations with members, SWVC leaders strove to convince westerners that their best interests lay in rejecting the abolitionist-controlled northern government and joining with the South. The SWVC’s politicized efforts bore fruit as all nineteen counties under the conference’s control approved secession by firm majorities in May 1861. Nonetheless, the SWVC and its elite allies were unable to prevent the rejection of the secession ordinance across western Virginia as a whole.

After the secession ordinance vote, SWVC leaders dedicated themselves to supporting the Confederate Government and army. Many ministers enlisted as privates while their church’s vast communication networks took on a militaristic orientation. SWVC leaders frequently used these networks to convey news and information from confederate eastern Virginia to western secessionists. Other SWVC leaders took military matters into their own hands by forming guerilla bands or working with secessionist

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leaders to drive NWVC ministers from the region. These terroristic methods resulted in a fierce backlash against the church which forced the SWVC to all but completely cease operations by mid-1862. As a result, dedicated members such as Isabella Woods were abandoned to face the wrath of unionist neighbors. Rendered nearly powerless by unionist persecution, SWVC ministers were unable to bring their influence to bear against the NWVC as its ministers assumed leadership of the West Virginia statehood movement.
In August 1862 western Virginians received word that Reverend Gordon Battelle succumbed to typhoid fever while serving as Chaplain for the First Virginia Regiment of the Union army. As the news of Battelle’s death spread, eulogies appeared in all of the region’s major newspapers. Discussing Battelle’s contributions to western Virginia politics, one writer explained that as an itinerant minister, he “knew the people thoroughly, having traveled among them . . . for twenty-five years” and as a result “was devoted to the cause of Western Virginia.” Battelle’s importance to the statehood movement was further emphasized by the public meetings held to honor his memory. An August 13 assembly in Wheeling praised Battelle’s “devotion to his country” and “his course in the convention called to form a new Constitution for the proposed State of West Virginia,” particularly his advocacy of public education and gradual emancipation. A mass meeting in Upshur County passed a series of resolutions that lauded Battelle as a “self-sacrificing patriot, devoted to the cause of our country, the union of States, the best interests of Western Virginia, and the cause of liberty and humanity everywhere.”

This outpouring of respect represents just one example of the pivotal place of Methodist ministers in western Virginia’s society and political culture. Between 1845 and

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717 Wheeling Intelligencer, August 19, 1862.
718 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 26, 1862.
1861, NWVC and MPC ministers traveled throughout the region ministering to the souls and political interests of western residents. As they spread their faith across western Virginia’s rugged terrain, ministerial leaders also condemned eastern slaveholders’ dominance of Virginia’s government as the core reason for the west’s halted economic development, the burdensome taxes it faced, and its lack of a free public school system. Politicizing their itinerant ministry, Battelle, Wesley Smith, Moses Tichenell, James Drummond and their colleagues developed vast social networks that allowed them to command both spiritual and political influence. When eastern Virginia moved toward secession, NWVC and MPC leaders emerged as a powerful grassroots unionist force and ensured western Virginia’s rejection of the secession ordinance in May 1861. With the west’s loyalty secured, Methodist leaders pressed forward to secure separate statehood.

The West Virginia statehood movement, and the central role Methodist leaders played in it, has scarcely been given the attention it deserves. Even Charles Ambler, the most prolific of West Virginia historians, ends his landmark *Sectionalism in Virginia* without discussing the statehood movement. While both Richard Curry and George Moore, devoted mid-twentieth century monographs to the movement, they expended their interpretive powers debating the extent of pro- and anti-statehood sentiment in the region rather than determining the sources of those attitudes or how opponents or supporters were able to mobilize their followers. Finally, no hard analysis of the Constitutional Convention or the role of ministerial leaders in shaping the northern influenced constitution it produced has been attempted.⁷¹⁹

Methodist ministers were central to the formation of West Virginia during the Civil War. From the passage of the secession ordinance until President Lincoln’s approval of statehood, Methodist leaders were unflagging in their zeal for West Virginia’s formation. When the call for a Constitutional Convention was finally approved by western voters in October 1861, Methodist delegates fought hard for the inclusion of northern oriented reforms in the new state constitution, particularly the creation of a system of free public schools, the dismantling of the county court system, the institution of ballot rather than oral voting, a more equitable tax code and most controversially, the gradual abolition of slavery.

Methodist leaders were equally influential grassroots activists. Between 1861 and 1863, they grappled with obstructionists opposed to the division of Virginia. Whether delivering speeches, stumping door-to-door, issuing pamphlets or penning newspaper editorials, Methodist leaders drew upon their accumulated political influence to urge westerners to support the dismemberment of the Old Dominion, particularly after West Virginia’s admission as a separate state became contingent on westerners’ approval of the gradual emancipation of slavery. The NWVC’s Gordon Battelle and James Drummond worked closely with lay Methodist political leader Waitman Willey to convince westerners that acquiescence to congressional dictation in the form of gradual emancipation was far preferable to a return to vassalage under the eastern oligarchy at the conclusion of the Civil War.

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The essential role of Methodist leaders in statehood movement unveils an entirely new way to understand the division of Virginia. For too long the history of West Virginia statehood, if told at all, was recounted from atop the shoulders of well-known figures such as Waitman T. Willey, John S. Carlile and Francis Pierpont.\(^{720}\) While this chapter makes no effort to discredit these men’s importance, it argues that the achievement of West Virginia statehood was equally indebted to Methodist ministers’ leadership. The entwinement of religion and politics in the formation of West Virginia attests to the importance of religious leaders to grassroots political mobilization and state formation during the American Civil War.

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The Virginia Convention’s passage of the secession ordinance on April 17, 1861 catalyzed Methodist leaders’ immersion in the statehood movement. Responding to what they believed were the arbitrary actions of a “drunken mob”\(^{721}\) at Richmond, Gordon Battelle, Wesley Smith, Dennis Dorsey and their brethren saw the secession crisis as an opportunity to inaugurate the political transformation they tacitly called for throughout

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\(^{720}\) Pierpont, Willey, and Carlile were the most well-known secular figures in the unionist and new state movements in western Virginia. Francis Pierpont emerged in the spring of 1861 as a fiery supporter of the Union. He was later elected Governor of the Restored State of Virginia. Carlile served a term in the United States House of Representatives during the 1850s, while Willey was a delegate to the 1850 Virginia Constitutional Convention and a candidate for Lieutenant Governor in 1851. Both men later served in the United States Senate representing the Restored Virginia Government. Willey was also later elected one of West Virginia’s first two United States Senators. He served two terms before retiring. Ambler’s *Sectionalism in Virginia*, Curry’s *A House Divided*, and Moore’s *Banner in the Hills* each identify these men as the “Fathers” of the new state.

\(^{721}\) Gordon Battelle to Francis Pierpont, April 23, 1861, *Francis Harrison Pierpont Papers* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University). Battelle and Pierpont, while members of different branches of Methodism, were nonetheless long-time friends, dating to their time together at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania. From 1860 until Battelle’s death in 1862 they corresponded regularly and frequently strategized about how best to advance the unionist and new state movements in western Virginia. Waitman P. Willey, the son of Waitman T. Willey details Battelle’s and Pierpont’s relationship in *An Inside View of the Formation of the State of West Virginia* (Wheeling, WV: The News Publishing Company, 1901), 225.
the 1850s: the creation of the separate state of West Virginia. Writing just six days after the ordinance’s passage, the NWVC’s Gordon Battelle exclaimed to MPC lay exhorter and future Restored Virginia Governor Francis Pierpont, “Was there ever . . . a juster cause, a better opportunity for any people to act for their state independence, than the people of the West have now put into their hands by Eastern disunionists? Now is the time for a new separate state of West Va, to stand ‘now and forever’ under the ‘glorious Stars and Stripes.’” After consulting with residents around his preaching appointments, Battelle pledged that “all the Unionists here to a man” were in favor and that a concerted movement for a division of the state would “carry every thing before it.” He urged that a public meeting be called somewhere in the region to strategize. Battelle was unaware that just such a meeting had concluded in Clarksburg the previous day. The meeting denounced secession, endorsed separate statehood, and called for a mass convention to be held in Wheeling the following May.

NWVC leaders took advantage of the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate’s wide circulation in western Virginia to alert residents about the upcoming convention. One zealous editorialist claimed that the Wheeling Convention would initiate “an independent era in the history of the western counties” by commencing “their separation from the eastern portion of the State” and that all loyal westerners should “appoint delegates.” The Advocate’s advocacy of the Wheeling meeting reached non-Methodists as well. Abraham Pittenger, a devotedly Presbyterian resident of Brooke County, nonetheless

722 Gordon Battelle to Francis Pierpont, April 23, 1861, Francis Harrison Pierpont Papers.
723 Gordon Battelle to Francis Pierpont, April 23, 1861, Francis Harrison Pierpont Papers.
725 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 14, 1861.
maintained a regular subscription to the *Advocate*. After reading the paper’s coverage of the nascent separate statehood movement, he wrote a number of enthusiastic letters to acquaintances throughout the region. In one letter, Pittenger excitedly recounted the news he just read in the *Advocate* and proclaimed that westerners would soon “declare Independence from our masters in the East.”

The May Wheeling Convention was the first of three meetings held in the city between May and August to discuss the course the west should take if the secession ordinance passed. At each of these meetings, NWVC and MPC ministers constituted the core of pro-statehood sentiment. Traveling throughout western Virginia in the 1850s, these men were well-aware of the burdens western residents faced as a result of eastern Virginia’s control of the state government. Their pre-war support of the region’s political and economic grievances, and their unionist efforts in early 1861, made them well-known and influential members of western society. Supporters of separate statehood looked to these men to press for a division of the state. While unionist leaders such as Waitman T. Willey and John S. Carlile vacillated between support and opposition to an immediate division of the state, Methodist leaders refused to budge.

The convention was called to order on May 13, 1861 and attracted nation-wide attention, with reporters attending from Cincinnati, New York, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and several other northern cities. After a prayer from MPC minister and delegate Peter T.

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727 This “convention” was in reality a mass meeting as the majority of its 432 delegates were irregularly elected at community meetings while others came to the convention with no electoral mandate at all.
728 Curry, *A House Divided*, 39. An article in the New York *Times*, attested to the national interest in western Virginia, stating “one-half” of Virginia’s “territory gravitates by kindred attraction to the North. Already is a victory gained which is conclusive of the whole contest. A territory equal to a first-class State
Laishley, a Committee on State and Federal Relations was formed to express the meeting’s sentiments. While the committee drafted its resolutions, the assembly was entertained with a number of speeches that revealed the emergence of clear pro and anti-separate statehood camps. First to the podium was John Carlile, who thundered against “the Court House cliques that have thus far brought this good old State to the very brink of ruin.”\textsuperscript{729} Carlile’s speech reflected the sentiments of NWVC ministers at the convention who remembered their own persecutions at the hands of western Virginia’s hereditary elite and the county courts they controlled.\textsuperscript{730} Carlile closed his speech by demanding that immediate action be taken to divide the west from eastern Virginia.

While Carlile and ministerial delegates such as Peter Laishley, Dennis Dorsey, James Pomeroy, and Benjamin Bailey earnestly prayed the assembly would initiate the steps necessary to achieve separate statehood, a clear anti-statehood bloc emerged. Led by John J. Jackson of Wood County, and including future supporters of West Virginia statehood Waitman Willey and Daniel Lamb, this faction pushed against the separatists. They warned that attempts to divide the state before secession was even approved by Virginia’s voters would be detrimental if not devastating to the statehood movement. Both Jackson and Willey vehemently argued that western Virginians would be hypocritical to denounce Virginia’s secession as unconstitutional while simultaneously seeking to secede from the east. Only after Virginia formally approved secession could delegates begin to discuss the question. Willey’s and Jackson’s conservatism ultimately


\textsuperscript{730} For a detailed discussion of the county courts’ persecution of NWVC ministers, see chapters 2 and 3.
ruled the day. Despite Carlile’s vigorous support of immediate separate statehood, “as well as the pleadings, prayers and arguments” of Dr. Peter T. Laishley, the final report of the Committee on State and Federal relations said nothing about a division of Virginia.  

The report instructed that if secession was approved by Virginia, westerners should immediately organize an election on June 4th to select delegates for a second meeting in Wheeling on June 11.  

In the weeks following the May Convention, Methodist leaders devoted all their energies to the statehood movement. They created intertwined pro-statehood communication networks designed both to raise residents’ fervor and to combat the varied forms of resistance to the movement that developed in the summer and autumn. Indeed, Methodist leaders confronted four streams of opposition that could stymie if not destroy the nascent movement. In addition to conservative unionists, many northerners doubted the expediency of western Virginia’s secession from eastern Virginia. The Washington D.C. Republican stated in June that West Virginia statehood “involved a complication of considerations which would preclude action upon it just at present.”  

An editorialist from the Philadelphia Press advised westerners not to press for separate statehood, but to instead “put the machinery of the state Government into operation upon the basis on which it stood before.” Methodist leaders knew they must prove that West Virginia statehood was overwhelmingly supported by its citizens and imperative to the region’s interests to erode this opposition. 

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733 Reprinted in the Wellsburg Herald, June 7, 1861.  
734 Reprinted in the Wellsburg Herald, May 31, 1861.
The conservatism of western unionists and the northern press paled in comparison to the determined efforts of secessionists and particularly southern Methodists to obstruct the movement. The SWVC fought West Virginia statehood as zealously as it defended secession. Since the *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, the SWVC’s primary mouthpiece was destroyed in April by a unionist mob, southern Methodists in western Virginia relied throughout the first two years of the war on their secondary organ, the Nashville *Christian Advocate.*\(^{735}\) This paper firmly denounced the “bogus” Wheeling Convention and the statehood movement. Its editors deprecated the proposed division of the state as an abolitionist scheme initiated by a minority of western Virginians and warned its readers “that the Northern Methodist Church is responsible” for the movement.\(^{736}\) SWVC leaders also denounced what they believed was the NWVC’s hypocrisy in supporting West Virginia statehood: “While disclaiming, in pious horror, against the right and act of secession by a Sovereign State, the Pittsburg Advocate and its friends are trying to move the western counties of Virginia to secede from that State!” Another southern Methodist furiously decried the fact “that Northern Methodist preachers . . . have been openly and busily at work to bring about” western Virginia’s “secession” from the east.\(^{737}\) SWVC minister William Kennedy went even further, warning his followers that “If Western Virginia should by any means be separated from the East, it will . . . immediately” result in “an unconditional surrender to Black Republican rule.”\(^{738}\)

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\(^{735}\) Between 1845 and 1857, the Nashville *Christian Advocate* was the primary newspaper read by southern Methodists in western Virginia. In 1856, the *Southern Methodist Itinerant* began publication in Wood County and became the SWVC’s organ in 1858. The SWVC’s membership nonetheless continued to vigorously patronize the Nashville *Advocate* as it closely covered the 1850s battles between the NWVC and SWVC and the 1861 secession crisis.

\(^{736}\) Nashville *Christian Advocate*, May 16, 1861.

\(^{737}\) Nashville *Christian Advocate*, June 6, 1861.

\(^{738}\) Nashville *Christian Advocate*, June 13, 1861.
Southern Methodists were joined by secessionists throughout western Virginia in their opposition to Virginia’s division. One southern partisan castigated the “treasonable convention that is now sitting in Wheeling.” Another deplored the “bold conspiracy now plotting to divide the State.” A secessionist meeting in Wayne County likewise resolved that “we utterly condemn the proposition to divide the State—and in our inmost souls we loathe and abhor the diabolical manner . . . proposed to effect it.” A Logan County meeting expressed its amazement that new-state supporters were willing to “invoke the aid of Ohio and Pennsylvania, and thus invite invasion of our soil by the Northern People” who had “no sympathy with our people or their institutions.”

NWVC leaders such as Wesley Smith devoted their energy and influence to facing down this opposition. In a lengthy speech delivered in Wheeling, Smith laid out his reasons for the necessity of West Virginia statehood, emphasizing that there must be “a new State organized, embracing all of Northwestern Virginia, just as soon as it can be accomplished constitutionally.” Returning to the argumentative tack his brethren embraced throughout the 1850s, Smith asserted that once free of the east, western Virginia, in “climate, soil, water power, mineral resources, proximity to market, and above all, in a moral, religious, and liberty loving-people . . . will have one of the most desirable states in the Union.” He urged westerners to “use all lawful means” to achieve

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739 Kanawha Valley Star, May 14, 1861.
740 Kanawha Valley Star, May 21, 1861.
741 Kanawha Valley Star, May 14, 1861.
742 Kanawha Valley Star, May 21, 1861.
Like his previous political tracts and his unionist speeches, Smith’s pro-statehood speech was printed and circulated by his fellow ministers across the region. The Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate* supported Smith’s efforts by devoting its columns to the statehood movement. When the passage of the secession ordinance, despite its firm rejection in the west, assured the calling of the June Convention, the *Advocate* stressed that western Virginia must “seek to be separated from the eastern portions of the State which have thus tampered with the ballot-box, and essayed to play the tyrant,” and that “the counties west of the Blue Ridge ought immediately to be erected into a free and sovereign State.” The paper promised that if the June Convention took the “early steps to effect this object” it “would mark the beginning of a new era in Western Virginia.” An editorialist writing under the pseudonym “Western Virginia” defended the cause of separate statehood with similar aplomb. He declared that the “overwhelming vote against secession in the western counties,” cleared the way for the “dissolution of the Old Dominion, and the erection of the western counties into a free and sovereign State.” This would free western Virginia from the tyrannical yoke of the east, allow the region to build up its long-neglected manufacturing interests and infrastructure development, and open the way toward a “glorious future.” He demanded that “neither minister nor layman abandon his post” in the battle for a separate state. Unflagging support of the movement “will amply repay the perils and sorrows of the present hour.”

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743 Reprinted in the Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, May 28, 1861. For a detailed analysis of the secession vote, see chapters three and four.
744 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, June 4, 1861.
745 Pittsburgh *Christian Advocate*, June 11, 1861.
Acting on the May meeting’s provisions, 88 men representing 32 of western Virginia’s counties assembled in Wheeling on June 11, 1861. The convention opened with a number of addresses, including a strong pro-statehood speech from Gordon Battelle. Foremost among new-state advocates at the convention were the MPC’s Rev. Dennis Dorsey and Charles Hooten as well as the NWVC’s James West. A zealous unionist and an influential figure in the Monongahela region of western Virginia, Dorsey became the first delegate to call for separate statehood when he introduced a number of resolutions demanding that the convention make “arrangements for [the west’s] separation from Virginia and the formation into a new State.”746 However, Dorsey and other pro-statehood delegates were sidetracked by the convention’s conservative element. Even John S. Carlile, who so passionately supported a division of the state in May, seemed to cast his lot with those seeking to postpone immediate action. 747 Ignoring the pleas of Methodist leaders, the delegates instead turned to reorganizing Virginia’s government on a loyal basis.

On June 13, under Carlile’s direction, the convention’s Committee on Business reported “An Ordinance For the Re-Organization of the State Government.” It vacated all state offices held by Virginians who supported secession and directed all unionists elected to the General Assembly on May 23 to take their seats as members of the “Restored Virginia General Assembly.”748 The convention’s pro-statehood element, with

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746 Lewis, How West Virginia Was Made, 84.
747 Carlile attempted to assure the June Convention that he had not abandoned the statehood movement. He claimed to have advocated immediate division in May because he hoped the Virginia General Assembly would permit a division of the state before the passage of the secession ordinance. Carlile now argued that with Virginia officially out of the Union, the restoration of Virginia’s government on a loyal basis was paramount. Carlile’s shifting opinions are discussed in Curry, A House Divided, 70-71.
748 Curry, A House Divided, 70. The May Convention urged westerners to vote against secession at the May 23rd elections and to cast their vote for representatives to the United States Congress and Virginia
Dorsey at the helm, saw the ordinance as a damaging, if not fatal blow to the statehood movement and firmly opposed Carlile’s plan. On June 14, Dorsey asked conservatives how they could “adopt a plan . . . which will ignore the special interests of Western Virginia.” “I know that the constituents I have the honor in part to represent will be seriously disappointed” if the meeting ignored the “dire necessity of separating Western from Eastern Virginia.”

Dorsey’s speech introduced the argumentative tack that defined the statehood movement for the next two years. If the conflict between the North and the South ended within the year, which many at the June Convention assumed it would, western Virginia would again fall under the control of the eastern slaveholding elite. Should that event occur, and with a constitution that maintained the east’s bloated majority in the state legislature, the question of West Virginia’s separate statehood “will turn upon who is in the majority, who is in the minority.” Eastern Virginia would “of course keep us down, as they have already done, if it be possible to for the purpose of meeting their little bills. It is very convenient to have somebody for this purpose.” Reminding his fellow delegates that “The interests of Eastern and Western Virginia are entirely antagonistic,” Dorsey argued that the sole purpose of the reorganization of Virginia should be to open the way for West Virginia’s separate statehood. Indeed, with the state government at Richmond out of the Union, the Restored Virginia Government could provide the approval for West Virginia statehood that would allow the division to be constitutional. Dorsey concluded by begging his fellow-delegates not to leave the west “at the mercy of Eastern Virginia,”

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749 Lewis, *How West Virginia Was Made*, 104.
after the war. Despite the intensity of Dorsey’s speech, immediate division was again delayed. On June 19, the Convention adopted the reorganization ordinance but included a provision, at Dorsey’s instigation, that the convention would reconvene in August solely to consider a division of the State. This provision convinced Dorsey and other supporters of immediate statehood to support the reorganization ordinance, which was passed by majority of 76 to 3.

The Restored Government’s primary function during the Civil War was to clear the way for West Virginia’s separate statehood. After West Virginia was admitted as a state in June 1863, Francis Pierpont, who was reelected governor in 1862, moved the restored government’s capital from Wheeling to Alexandria, Virginia. With the loss of the 50 counties that comprised West Virginia, Pierpont’s authority extended over a small collection of 13 counties situated on the eastern shore of Virginia, the region around

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750 Lewis, How West Virginia Was Made, 104.
751 At a caucus held that evening, the Convention elected Francis Pierpont governor of the reorganized state government. Daniel Polsley of Mason County was elected lieutenant governor. It is a testament to the new state of affairs in western Virginia that neither of these men had ever held a political office. Lewis, How West Virginia Was Made, 140-141. When Pierpont became Governor his office was located in the Wheeling Customs House. Attesting to the irregularity of the Restored Government, Pierpont’s office lacked a desk or any other furniture. He secured a pen, ink, and a “quire of paper” thanks to the timely assistance of a friend. Pierpont’s situation symbolized that of the Restored Government as a whole. It had no public funds to draw upon as they were under the control of the secessionist Virginia Government at Richmond. Aware that this lack of funds would ultimately cripple the Restored Government, Pierpont borrowed 10,000 dollars on his own credit from the Northwestern Bank and the Merchants’ and Mechanics’ Banks in Wheeling. Pierpont’s initiative likely saved the Restored Government from ceasing operations. Pierpont’s tribulations and initiative are related in Virgil Lewis, A History of West Virginia In Two Parts (Philadelphia: Hubbard Brothers, Publishers, 1889), 369-371. One of the first initiatives undertaken by the Restored Government was to formally accept Virginia’s share of the proceeds of the sale of public lands. The Land Fund was established by an Act of Congress on September 4, 1841. As discussed in chapter one, however, the eastern-controlled Virginia Legislature consistently refused to accept the proceeds of the fund. It believed that doing so increased Virginia’s dependency on the Federal Government. Antebellum western Virginia reformers consistently railed against the intransigence of the Richmond legislature, arguing that if Virginia accepted the proceeds, which by 1861 amounted to more than 40,000 dollars, they could spur the development of a public-funded school system. Lewis, A History of West Virginia In Two Parts, 371-373.
752 William C. Harris argues in With Charity For All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 23, that Abraham Lincoln and Congress hoped the Restored Government would serve as a model for unionists seeking to reestablish Federal Authority in other seceded states.
Norfolk, and the counties across from Washington D.C. adjacent to the Potomac.\textsuperscript{753} Despite its constricted authority, restored Virginia is notable for becoming the first southern state to abolish slavery during the Civil War. In December 1863, the restored General Assembly, at Pierpont’s instigation, called for a constitutional convention to meet the following February with the sole purpose of ending slavery in the state. On March 10, 1864, the convention formally approved a constitutional provision abolishing the institution. The new constitution also established the state’s first free public school system and disenfranchised all residents who gave voluntary aid to the southern rebellion.\textsuperscript{754} These provisions remained relatively unenforceable across the greater part of Virginia until after Robert E. Lee’s surrender in 1865, when Pierpont was finally able to enter Richmond and establish his authority over the state as a whole.\textsuperscript{755}

After the establishment of the restored government, Methodist leaders strenuously worked to maintain grassroots support for separate statehood throughout the summer of 1861. They feared that the June Convention’s failure to begin the process of separate statehood would be seen by westerners as a sign of the movement’s demise. MPC minister Charles Hooten, a longtime Preston County resident, gave a number of pro-statehood speeches in Preston and Monongalia Counties. He also showed proof of the popular support for West Virginia statehood by conducting a series of petition campaigns. Upon arriving in Wheeling for the August Convention, Hooten presented a fistful of petitions he collected over the previous two months among his charges.

\textsuperscript{753} Harris, \textit{With Charity For All}, 101.
\textsuperscript{754} The rights of freed blacks were ignored by the constitution. Blacks were denied the ability to testify in court, received no voting rights, and were barred from attending the newly-inaugurated free public school system. See Harris, \textit{With Charity For All}, 162.
\textsuperscript{755} Harris, \textit{With Charity For All}, 170.
Hooten’s efforts were supplemented by the NWVC’s William Shin. In a letter to Waitman Willey, Shinn related his dedicated efforts to canvass for separate statehood. He urged upon his followers his belief that Virginia’s division represented “the beginning of deliverance, not so much on the slave’s account, as on the account of the white man held in thralldom by the lowly despots created by the accursed system.”

On August 6, 1861, the June Convention’s delegates returned to their seats. Ministerial delegates West, Dorsey, and Hooton maintained their fervor for separate statehood. Their presence at these conventions attests to the fact that westerners trusted these men to act in their interests, again revealing their position as community leaders. Rev. West opened the convention by reminding his colleagues that “a large majority of the good and loyal citizens of Western Virginia are in favor of a division of the State.” West and Dorsey then gave passionate speeches calling on the convention to pass a separate statehood ordinance and to issue it to voters for approval. West punctuated their appeals by urging that “the time had come to look out for our own interests, and disregard the interests of those who wage a war against us.”

Methodist leaders once again faced determined opposition from the convention’s conservative element. Opponents of statehood generally represented members of the antebellum ruling class in western Virginia. While the overwhelming majority of western Virginia’s hereditary elite were dedicated secessionists, a few, particularly John J. Jackson, James Brown, Benjamin Smith, and John W. Davis, remained loyal to the Union. These lawyer-politicians were devoted Democrats before the Civil War and feared

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756 William Shinn to Waitman Willey, July 23, 1861, Charles Ambler Collection (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 10, Folder 3.
757 Lewis, How West Virginia Was Made, 207.
that West Virginia’s formation would initiate a Republican ascendancy in the new state. They also expected that separate statehood would lead to the educational and infrastructure programs many westerners had long supported. Men like Brown and Smith built their wealth through speculative landholding and had little desire to pay the property taxes requisite to supporting these programs. Further, they dreaded that westerners, given the chance to write a new state constitution, would eliminate the convoluted land laws that allowed the western elite to maintain its hegemony. Other opponents of statehood included men like Thomas Carskadon and Chapman Stuart, slaveholders and dedicated Democrats from Hampshire and Doddridge Counties. Carskadon and Stuart opposed separate statehood because they expected it to include the abolition of slavery.758

These conservatives were not oblivious to the fact that most western Virginians supported separate statehood. Thanks to Methodist leaders’ grassroots efforts, enthusiasm for the new state reached unprecedented heights during the summer and autumn of 1861. In the midst of this popular fervor, conservatives at May Wheeling Convention were introduced to the political costs their opposition to statehood entailed. John Jackson complained throughout the convention that citizens watching the proceedings from the galleries used groans, shouts, and other forms of harassment to intimidate him and other anti-statehood delegates from voicing their opposition. The hostility expressed by everyday westerners toward their traditional political leaders at the May Convention made clear to conservatives that they needed to alter their strategies. Campaigning for seats in the June Convention, they now assured voters that since the secession ordinance had officially passed, they supported statehood “at the proper time,” presumably after the

758 Curry, A House Divided, 43-44; 81.
establishment of the Restored Virginia Government. They hoped that by adopting this constitutionalist argument, they could shield themselves from further public backlash. In reality, they hoped to use their election to the June Convention, which carried over to the August Convention, to kill the statehood movement. Granville Parker, a passionate supporter of separate statehood, was not oblivious to these tactics. He remarked that since conservatives “found a large and earnest majority of the people were for a new State” they “Profess and pretend to be for a new State, and by such false pretenses retain the confidence of the people and the leadership of the measure, until they should be able to wreck the whole project.”

The August Convention’s Methodist contingent formed a clear voting bloc that consistently frustrated these anti-statehood delegates. After introduction of a resolution to postpone discussion of separate statehood indefinitely, Dorsey, West, and Hooton turned the tide and defeated the measure 42 to 40. Shortly after, Hooton moved that a committee of twelve be appointed as “an olive branch to gentlemen” opposed to statehood. Made up of six pro-statehood men and six anti-statehood men, the committee, which included Hooton, was instructed to permanently settle the issue. The following day the committee introduced an ordinance calling for the creation of the state of “Kanawha,”

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759 Curry, *A House Divided*, 44, 81, 89.
760 Granville Parker, *The Formation of West Virginia and Other Incidents of the Late Civil War: With Remarks on Subjects of Public Interest, Arising Since the War Closed* (Wellsburg, WV: Glass & Son, 1875), 99-103. Parker also suggested that opponents of separate statehood “confidently expected that the Union forces would soon crush out the Rebellion in Virginia” and that the “Reorganized Government would be acquiesced in and accepted by their recent persecutors . . . with themselves at the head. Incomparably grander this would be than to stand at the head of a comparatively small State on the Western border of the glorious Old Dominion.” The full debates regarding the expediency of West Virginia’s statehood are contained in Lewis, *How West Virginia Was Made*, 78-300.
to be composed of thirty-nine counties. The ordinance passed the convention on August 20 and cleared the way for an October 24 referendum.\textsuperscript{762}

Conservatives’ acquiescence to the ordinance’s passage was directly influenced by the rising tide of popular support for separate statehood. This increasing public clamor owed to the continued grassroots efforts of NWVC and MPC leaders. The pro-statehood communication networks these ministerial activists created raised residents’ fervor for the new state and combated the varied forms of resistance the movement faced. Methodist leaders used these networks to demand that the “loyal people of Western Virginia” give the “subject of their independence in a new State organization the fullest consideration.”\textsuperscript{763} The NWVC’s J. B. Feather, a zealous supporter of West Virginia’s statehood throughout the 1850s, promised his followers that “If we succeed in getting a new State, our open arms will embrace thousands who are waiting for our action.” He reminded westerners of the political and economic disabilities imposed on them by eastern Virginia’s control of the state government and argued that a firm vote for separate statehood would finally end the west’s vassalage: “That violent and unscrupulous oligarchy which has ruled with a rod of iron in time of peace, and fought with the sword

\textsuperscript{762} It is hard to determine just what caused an additional eight delegates to move to the statehood side over the last few days of the convention. Richard Curry argues in \textit{A House Divided}, 83, that some delegates inexplicably “gravitated” between the pro and anti-statehood camps throughout the convention with little pattern to their actions. Indeed, Curry cites as an example of this phenomenon a debate late in the convention to add an additional five counties, located in the Valley of Virginia, to the New State Ordinance. A number of delegates voted to include those counties, resulting in a vote of 35-27. Yet, when a motion was made to reconsider the vote, the very same delegates voted against including the counties. In the face of this inconsistent voting, the firm course taken by the convention’s Methodist leadership was crucial. Aware of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad’s importance to the Federal war effort, the convention included in the ordinance a provision that would allow Berkeley, Hampshire, Hardy, and Morgan Counties, which included the railroad within their borders, to become part of the new state if their residents approved the ordinance. Greenbrier, Jefferson, Pendleton and Pocahontas, Mercer, Monroe, and McDowell Counties were also authorized to join the new state on the same terms. See Otis K. Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History} (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1993), 122-140.

\textsuperscript{763} Pittsburgh \textit{Christian Advocate}, October 8, 1861.
of extermination in time of war, will find its counterpart in the future Western Virginia.”

NWVC and MPC ministers drew upon their influence in western communities to stump for separate statehood along their circuits. In the Kanawha Valley, the NWVC’s Daniel Cool spent the autumn of 1861 visiting members and friends of his church and urging them to cast their vote for a new state. NWVC member Hannah Robinson recounted to her sister that “Cool says he likes the State of Kanawha very well,” and described his door-to-door efforts to “get all the votes he can for it.” Cool’s canvassing of the Kanawha region was bolstered by ministers throughout the west. In Mason County, Rev. J. M. Phelps led a public meeting that introduced a number of resolutions approving “of the action of the convention at Wheeling, in their ordinance providing for a division of the State.” They further pledged “to sustain” the movement “with all the means in our power.” In Marshall County, the NWVC’s Thomas Trainer led three pro-statehood meetings in September, the first of which doubled as an army recruitment meeting. In the second meeting, held in his church, Trainer “dwelt ably upon the necessity for voting upon the new State ordinance.” At a third October 5 meeting, Trainer gave another pro-statehood speech before being “declared the unanimous choice” of the county to

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764 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, October 22, 1861 and September 17, 1861.
765 Hannah Robinson to Mollie Robinson, September 9, 1861, Robinson Family Manuscripts (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 1, Folder 5. While Robinson approved of her minister’s engagement with politics, she disapproved of the name “Kanawha,” and hoped that westerners would not “have to give up the name of Virginia for the poor little name of Kanawha.” Interestingly enough, between September and October, the Wheeling Intelligencer received no less than six letters from women’s groups throughout the region protesting the new state’s proposed name.
766 Wheeling Intelligencer, September 9, 1861. Phelps was later elected to the first Senate of the State of West Virginia. He subsequently became the first President of that body.
767 Wheeling Intelligencer, September 27, 1861.
serve as its delegate to the Constitutional Convention. In Marion County, Rev. Moses Tichenell defended separate statehood “in a spirit of true, bold, firm and determined purpose” which “found a hearty response throughout the vast audience.”

NWVC circuit rider Edward Ryan was particularly determined to carry the pro-statehood message to western Virginia’s isolated corners. Prior to the new state ordinance, Ryan made a number of trips to Wheeling to secure information “in reference to the new State,” to pass on to his followers. On Election Day, he organized a “body of voters that went to the polls and voted” for the ordinance. Ryan’s efforts were especially remarkable because he conducted them in the secessionist counties of Fayette, Nicholas, and Raleigh, where violence against unionists was a common occurrence. It was for precisely this reason that Ryan worked to build as large a group of voters as possible to rebut secessionists’ efforts to intimidate them. He was well-aware of the danger his support for the statehood movement placed him in and recalled how “I was told . . . that there was a bucket of tar and feathers ready to be put on me” if he persisted. Ryan escaped this fate and indicative of his position as a popular community leader, was chosen by his followers to represent them at the West Virginia Constitutional Convention.

Methodist leaders’ grassroots efforts paid off. On October 24, 1861 the new state ordinance was overwhelmingly approved by a vote of 18,408 to 781. On November 26,
1861, the sixty-one delegates elected to the Constitutional Convention took their seats. Most remarkable about the convention’s membership was its clear middle-class character. As discussed in chapters one through four, antebellum western Virginia politics were dominated by a hereditary elite of circuit-riding lawyers and large landholders who consistently supported eastern Virginia’s opposition to the political, economic, and social reforms demanded by a majority of the region’s populace. Since most of these men, excluding the exceptions noted above, cast their lot with the Confederacy the previous spring, they took no part in the West Virginia Constitutional Convention. Among the delegates, only sixteen were lawyers. Seventeen were small farmers and a number of others were doctors, merchants, teachers, carpenters, or mechanics.

Most conspicuous among the convention’s membership were the eleven ministers who made up close to twenty percent of its delegates. NWVC circuit riders Gordon Battelle, Robert Hagar, R. L. Brooks, John M. Powell, T. H. Trainer, Edward Ryan and James Pomeroy led the convention’s ministerial contingent.  

Hagar and Ryan stood out from their colleagues by representing secessionist counties, testifying to their leadership of the scattered unionist enclaves residing there. These ministers believed the convention represented the opportunity to shape the new state in the image of its free-soil neighbors by establishing a system of free common schools and a uniformly equitable tax code, encouraging economic development, dismantling the undemocratic county court

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772 They were joined by local Methodist preacher Josiah Simmons as well as three ministers whose denominational affiliations are as yet unknown.

773 Robert Hagar represented Boone County, which posted a 60 percent majority for secession. Ryan represented Fayette County, which cast a 76 percent majority in favor of secession. Given Fayette County’s overwhelming support for secession, it is unsurprising that Ryan was frequently threatened with violence for his new state efforts.
system, and most controversially, ending slavery. They formed a clear voting bloc in support of these liberal, northern-oriented measures and in two instances chaired committees.

Despite representing a rise to power on the part of westerners previously shut out of the region’s political system, the convention contained a group of conservatives who remained opposed to separate statehood. While most obstructionists at the August Convention were not elected to the Constitutional Convention because of their clear opposition to the movement, Chapman J. Stuart, James H. Brown, Benjamin Smith, Thomas Carskadon, and E. B. Hall somehow managed to secure seats, likely by promising to support their constituents’ desire for a new state. Throughout the convention, they sought to include measures in the constitution that would ensure its rejection when presented to the United States Congress for approval. When those strategies failed, they worked to check the convention’s reformism whenever feasible in order to produce a constitution that reflected as closely as possible that of Virginia’s antebellum government. They launched their first attempt to derail the new state movement when the Boundary Committee made its official report.

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774 The northern-influenced nature of West Virginia’s Constitution was not lost on observers. Granville Parker, a zealous supporter of the statehood movement defended the constitution by arguing “that the true interests and future well-being of West Virginia required a... form of Government resembling, in its main features at least, the Governments of those great States which have grown up as if by magic at the North and West of us.” He believed this was essential to inducing “capital and free labor to flow in from abroad, as the only means of developing the wealth of the new State.” Appealing to westerners’ hatred of the “court-house cliques” that frequently blocked the development of the region, Parker also stressed that the “Constitution is framed to meet and foster the great interests of the masses—the many, and not a favored few.” Parker, The Formation of West Virginia, 84.
775 The Educational Committee was chaired by Gordon Battelle, and also included Robert Hagar and Thomas Trainer. The Committee on County Organization was co-chaired by James Pomeroy and Peter G. Van Winkle.
The Boundary Committee was the only committee dominated by delegates opposed to separate statehood. The new state ordinance included thirty-nine counties in the potential new state. Yet when the Boundary Committee made its report on December 5, 1861, it arbitrarily included an additional thirty-two, located primarily in the Valley of Virginia. The report nearly doubled the size of the potential state and included counties that were clearly secessionist. Most of these counties were not even under the control of the Union army.\footnote{Report of the Boundary Committee, December 3, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} The convention’s Methodist contingent wasted no time attacking what they saw as a transparent attempt to demolish the new state’s prospects. R. L. Brooks lampooned the absurdity of the report by suggesting that if West Virginia included the Valley counties, it may as well begin preparations to annex Canada.\footnote{R. L. Brooks Speech, December 5, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.}

James H. Brown defended the report as having only the purest motives and attempted to convince opponents that it would protect unionists throughout Virginia. Brown went so far as to argue that “if there was but one solitary Union man in those counties, he is entitled to our protection and aid, and we ought to include them and save him.”\footnote{James Brown Speech, December 7, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} Chapman Stuart likewise asked his fellow delegates if they were, “going to say to this people, if they want to cut loose from the oppression and tyranny of eastern Virginia, that they shall not even have an opportunity of expressing their sentiments and views on this question?”\footnote{Chapman Stuart Speech, December 7, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} Thomas Carskadon similarly argued that “We have a
community of interest,” with the additional counties and if they were excluded he would vote against the Constitution as a whole.780

After over a week of acrimonious debate, Gordon Battelle flatly stated that the boundary report was nothing more than a “delusion and a snare” designed to defeat the new state project. He damned obstructionists for “embarrassing this whole question at every step and every stage by attempting this extensive grasp at additional territory.”781 NWVC circuit rider John M. Powell similarly denigrated the committee’s report as a “dodge” designed to artificially enlarge the state’s boundaries and slave population so as to “destroy us in Congress.”782 Robert Hagar likewise argued that every “secession county” the convention included “gives them more strength. . . . and if they hold an election . . . it will be to vote the new State down.”783 The passionate efforts of Hagar, Pomeroy, Battelle, and Powell evinced their unwillingness to sit back and allow the body’s seasoned political leaders to take charge. When the committee’s report was finally brought to a vote, the ministerial contingent formed a clear voting bloc against the inclusion of the Valley and southwestern counties and won a 28 to 17 majority in favor of striking them from the report.784

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780 Thomas Carskadon Speech, December 10, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
781 Gordon Battelle Speech, December 10, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
782 J. M. Powell Speech, December 11, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention. These Valley counties’ inclusion would have increased the new state’s slave population from 6,800 to nearly 50,000.
783 Robert Hagar Speech, December 11, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
784 The Convention retained the August Convention’s provision that allowed Berkeley, Hampshire, Hardy, Morgan, Greenbrier, Jefferson, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Mercer, Monroe, and McDowell Counties to join the new state if their voters approved the new constitution.
With the boundaries of the new state set, Methodist leaders moved toward imprinting their northern-influenced vision on the new constitution. Speaking for his fellow ministers, the NWVC’s James Pomeroy stated that “I am in favor of making liberal provisions here, so that we will say to the oppressed and down-trodden of every land; you will find liberal principles here; a people who do not ask you to be subject to, yet have no hand in making the law.”

Pomeroy introduced resolutions two days later that called on the convention to replace the oral voting system with a ballot-system. He defended these resolutions by asserting, with some validity, that “if it had not been for the viva voce plan of voting Virginia would never have voted herself out of the Union.”

Battelle pointed out that “I have long been satisfied from years of observation . . . that the present mode of voting here does give an undue power to men of wealth, influence and position . . . to unjustly control the exercise by others of the right of franchise.”

Despite the delegates’ general support for the ballot system, obstructionist James Brown sought to uphold the oral voting system he and other elite westerners used to maintain their power. He claimed that the “argument against viva voce voting and in favor of the secret plan seems to be predicated on the idea that the people are such cowards and slaves that they will not dare to come up to the polls like men.” Brown appealed to tradition: oral voting was a “Virginia system, long and dearly cherished by our people.”

His claims were shot down by R. L. Brooks, who recounted his Election

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785 James Pomeroy Speech, December 3, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
786 James Pomeroy Speech, December 5, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
787 Gordon Battelle Speech, December 5, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
788 James Brown Speech, December 5, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
Day observations as a circuit-rider in “our back western counties.” In one unspecified county, the election for the state legislature included a prominent local merchant. This merchant promised that if “any of his debtors should vote against him a suit in law should be the result, and that he would collect in the most hasty process possible.” Most of the merchant’s debtors toed the line and voted him into office, but one man “had fortitude enough under the threat to go to the polls and declare his independent choice” against the merchant. Ten days later he was served with a writ of debt. Speaking with county residents after the election, a number of them told Brooks that “I would not have voted for that man but the relation I sustain to him makes it my best policy to do so.” Brooks’ clear demonstration of the undemocratic nature of the oral voting system ensured a strong majority for the ballot system. Once again obstructionists fell in defeat.

With the ballot-system in place, Methodist delegates labored to ensure that the constitution included an equitable tax code and provisions for governmental support of internal improvements. NWVC delegate J. M. Powell opened the debate declaring that the new constitution should ensure that “all property shall be taxed in proportion to its value.” Powell’s resolutions met with no opposition whatsoever and when the Committee on Taxation and Finance made its report in late January, an equitable tax code was included in the Constitution without debate. State support for the construction of

789 R. L. Brooks Speech, December 5, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
790 Throughout the 1850s, NWVC ministers denounced the inequitable nature of Virginia’s property tax code, which favored the interests of the slaveholding east at the expense of western Virginia. Under the revised 1851 Virginia Constitution, slaves were taxed at a uniform worth of $300, far less than their actual value, while slaves under the age of 12 were not taxed at all. All other property was assessed according to its exact value.
791 J. M. Powell’s Resolutions Regarding the Equalization of the Tax Code, November 30, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention. .
internal improvements also met with little resistance. Battelle spoke for most of his colleagues when he declared that “I am an internal improvement man all through.”

The convention’s atmosphere of consensus palpably changed when the delegates commenced discussion of the report of the Committee on County Organization. Co-chaired by Peter G. Van Winkle and the NWVC’s James Pomeroy, the committee’s report drastically overhauled county government by abolishing the traditional county court system in favor of a northern-influenced township government system. This move deeply divided the delegates and led to a protracted debate regarding the future of local government in West Virginia. Formally presented by Van Winkle on December 18, 1861, the township system was a direct assault on the court-house cliques criticized by both Methodist leaders and western Virginians throughout the 1840s and 1850s. Van Winkle introduced the report by remarking that the county courts “are damned and have been for twenty or thirty years.” Rather than allowing these courts, which were scarcely responsible to the body politic, to administer West Virginia’s county government, they would be replaced by a system of townships. Townships would be roughly thirty square miles in size and hold regular meetings in a manner analogous to modern city councils. Each April, the townships were to elect one supervisor, one clerk, one surveyor of roads, one superintendent of schools (should the Education Committee’s report be approved), and one overseer of the poor. The supervisors elected by each township would make up a County Board of Supervisors, who in effect acted as a county legislature. The Board of

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792 Gordon Battelle Speech, February 3, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention. The only major disagreement was the extent to which the state’s government would be permitted to purchase stock in internal improvement corporations, which could potentially leave the state in debt. Eventually a compromise was reached that allowed the state to purchase stock so long as the investment was paid for within a year.

793 See chapters one through three for a discussion of the undemocratic nature of the county court system.
Supervisors would administer the “internal affairs and fiscal concerns of their County” including road construction and the regulation of “public landings.” It could also grant licenses and issue, collect, and disburse county taxes.\textsuperscript{794} The township system, both for its democratic elements, and northern orientation, was a radical departure from Virginia tradition.\textsuperscript{795}

Van Winkle defended his committee’s radical reconstruction of county government by arguing that townships brought “the government as nearly as possible into the hands of the people themselves” and enabled “every citizen to give . . . his personal supervision to the affairs of his county and neighborhood.” Townships were a necessary departure from the county courts, where “the power of the county was . . . wielded by a body which was self-perpetuating” and chose “successors of their own way of thinking.”\textsuperscript{796} Westerners, by taking an active hand in their local politics, would receive “such an education in reference to public matters it will no longer be possible to deceive them” into “sending inferior men to the higher legislative bodies.”\textsuperscript{797}

The township system’s many innovative features were assaulted by conservative delegates as an unnecessary enlargement of government and a “yankee” program ill-suited for western Virginia. Elbert Caldwell of Marshall County furiously asked whether

\textsuperscript{794} First Report of the Committee on County Organization, December 18, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
\textsuperscript{795} The influence of Whig Party ideals on much of the convention’s work was no coincidence. Many of the convention’s delegates, particularly Willey, Daniel Lamb, and Van Winkle, were devoted Whigs before the Civil War. Other state leaders, including Francis Pierpont and William Stevenson, were already avowed Republicans by the 1860 election. While Methodist leaders’ antebellum political affiliations are harder to pin down, those who eventually served in the West Virginia state government did so as members of the Republican Party. Democratic Party leaders, with the unsurprising exception of obstructionists such as Brown, Smith, Stuart, Hall, and Carskadon, were conspicuously absent from the convention.
\textsuperscript{796} Peter G. Van Winkle Speech, January 17, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
\textsuperscript{797} Peter G. Van Winkle Speech, January 17, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
the convention proposed to “uproot every Virginia doctrine and principle” and “require the citizens of the county to elect a string of officers at every election as long as your arm.”\footnote{Elbert Caldwell Speech, January 17, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} He introduced a motion to strike the Board of Supervisors from the report, which would effectively kill the township system and ensure “less expense to the people of the county.”\footnote{Elbert Caldwell Speech, January 17, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} Caldwell’s amendment was firmly supported by James Brown and Benjamin Smith. It was no coincidence that these three men were members of the Marion, Kanawha, and Logan County Courts, respectively.

Gordon Battelle and prominent Methodist lay leader Henry Dering resolutely fought Caldwell’s attempts to derail the township system. Battelle argued that “My whole life has been spent among” western Virginia’s “people, and I have tried to keep my eyes open in reference to the workings of these things . . . . I have known instances where the peace of the community, the best interests of society, have suffered” because of the “traditional” county court system.\footnote{Gordon Battelle Speech, January 17, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} Dering likewise argued that the township system “will produce an entire revolution in the whole affairs of the State, in every county of the State” that was long-needed.\footnote{Henry Dering Speech, January 18, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.} Battelle’s and Dering’s impassioned defense of the township system convinced the convention’s delegates to reject Caldwell’s amendment and the Committee on County Organization’s Report was adopted.\footnote{A roll-call vote was not recorded, making it impossible to determine whether ministers influenced the result.}
With the divisive debate over the township system resolved, the convention moved to the Committee on Education’s report. Throughout the 1850s, Battelle and his colleagues developed their political influence in western Virginia by demanding educational reform. The educational report Battelle submitted in late January represented the culmination of his engagement with education over the previous twenty years. Its provisions were nothing less than revolutionary when compared to the lethargic pace of antebellum educational reform in western Virginia. Battelle introduced the report by contrasting its progressive features with the abortive struggle to inaugurate a public school system in the west. He declared that the report fulfilled the demands of the educational reform movement by making “as liberal appropriations as practicable for . . . a thorough common-school system.” These provisions were especially important considering “there is no one subject perhaps upon which our people all agree so entirely as it does in reference to this one.” Further, “there is no appropriation of means . . . that so exactly and entirely reaches the whole people as does this.”

The Education Report called on the West Virginia legislature to launch a system of state-supported common schools. The system would be supported by a school fund, which unlike Virginia’s woefully underfunded Literary Fund, could rely upon a number of revenue sources. It drew on the sale of “forfeited, delinquent, waste and unappropriated lands,” the “proceeds of the estates of all persons who may die without leaving a will or heir,” taxes on the revenues of corporations created after the constitution went into effect, “all monies that may be paid as an equivalent for exemption from military duty” and the proceeds of the general state-wide property tax. The report also provided for the election of a state...
superintendent of schools, whose term coincided with that of the governor, as well as county and township School Superintendents. The school fund would be distributed at the township level.  

The muscular school fund and multiple levels of administration created by the report evinced a clear northern influence that drew the ire of the convention’s conservative element. They sought to dismantle the proposed system’s most progressive elements, especially its numerous revenue sources. Opponents particularly decried the report’s taxation of corporation revenue, which James Brown assailed as a “blow directly at the whole system of internal improvements,” that would leave “us a State of mountains land-locked until the wealthy people should endeavor to find a way out.”  

Benjamin Smith complained that the report’s provisions would “cripple corporations . . . the associated wealth of the people of the country,” and that few northern capitalists would invest their funds in the new state’s development given these taxation provisions. They also resurrected their criticisms of the township system by arguing that Battelle’s report created too many officers and would yoke westerners with burdensome taxes.

The following day, Battelle presented a long list of northern states whose implementation of similar educational systems in no way affected their infrastructure development. He sprang to the attack, asking “what the people of Kanawha [James Brown’s home county] have to complain of? A provision which provides that if these corporations are taxed, those revenues shall go to the benefit of educating their

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805 James Brown Speech, January 27, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
806 Benjamin Smith Speech, January 27, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
Rev. Robert Hagar joined his colleague by reminding his fellow delegates that educational reform was the paramount internal improvement and that western Virginian children “have all got the natural ability to compare with any of the children of Virginia.” However, lacking a thorough system of common schools, “such a fertile soil” would remain uncultivated.808

Conservative Chapman Stuart responded by arguing for the infeasibility of implementing a common school system in western Virginia given its rugged terrain. It would be impossible to “have a school sufficiently convenient” to meet the interests of its dispersed population and “no man will want to be taxed for a school entirely out of his reach.” Stuart concluded by remarking that “we are not situated as many of these states that have adopted this system, where their country is all smooth and cultivated and thickly settled. . . . In many places the families are miles apart.”809 Battelle’s frustration with the convention’s conservatives quickly became evident. He mockingly responded that the only way Stuart could be satisfied was if the state legislature resolved to “build [a school] on every man's farm.” He then requested that Stuart and “all the rest here . . . get out of their minds the idea that all the mountains in the world are in West Virginia.” “The system has been adapted to hill country elsewhere and I see no reason why it cannot be adapted to the hill country here.”810 NWVC circuit rider J. M. Powell castigated Brown,
Stuart, and Smith as “old fogies” unwilling to be taxed for the benefit of the state as a whole. 811

As the debate over the school fund’s resources reached a fever pitch, NWVC minister James Pomeroy called for a vote on the report’s financial features. The vote was close, but represented a hard-fought victory for supporters of a well-funded common school system. By a majority of 25 to 19, the convention retained the taxation features instituted by the educational committee—the Methodist contingent led by Battelle casting the balance. With a different set of delegates, the educational report would have lacked the support necessary for passage. After settling the taxation issue, the convention adopted the rest of the educational report with little debate. With the interrelated township and educational systems provided for, one remaining policy objective loomed before the convention’s Methodist membership: slavery.

NWVC leaders long argued that western Virginia’s blighted economic condition and political vassalage was a direct result of eastern slaveholders’ single-minded defense of the peculiar institution. Unwilling to miss the opportunity to strike a death-blow to slavery, the convention’s Methodist bloc fought to include a gradual emancipation provision in the constitution. Methodist delegates, by tackling the slavery issue, recognized a reality that many of the convention’s members inexplicably missed—the United States Congress would not approve the admission of another slave state in the midst of the Civil War. With this in mind, Battelle, Hagar, and Pomeroy launched a hard-fought, yet ultimately futile effort to effect the gradual abolition of slavery.

811 J. M. Powell Speech, January 29, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.

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While they unanimously supported emancipation, the convention’s Methodist contingent refused to confront the issue of African-American rights. Throughout the 1850s, NWVC leaders avoided attacking slavery from a moral basis. While most NWVC ministers were likely opposed to slavery morally, focusing upon the institution’s negative impact on western political, economic, and social development allowed them to avoid further political persecution as they worked to build their influence in western Virginia. Methodist leaders, when discussing blacks at all, generally voiced their support for the colonization of freed slaves in Africa. The NWVC’s and MPC’s support for colonization symbolized their belief that whites and free blacks could not peacefully coexist after emancipation. By portraying emancipation as necessary to achieving congressional approval for separate statehood, Methodist leaders sidestepped the thorny issue of what race relations in western Virginia would be like after emancipation. This unwillingness to deal with the implications of emancipation translated into public policy after West Virginia was admitted to statehood. The tax-supported public school system long supported by leaders such as Gordon Battelle was only open to whites after slavery was abolished in 1865.

On November 30, 1861, Robert Hagar “threw the Negro, like a hand-grenade, into the midst of the Convention” when he issued a resolution calling for gradual emancipation.\textsuperscript{812} He argued that since slavery was “the cause of the terrible rebellion in our midst,” the convention should engraft a gradual emancipation provision in the

\textsuperscript{812}Granville Davisson Hall Papers (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), Box 1, Miscellaneous Folder.
constitution. James Brown, speaking for fellow conservatives at the convention, replied that “it is unwise and impolitic to introduce the discussion of the slavery question into the deliberations of this Convention.” He called for the tabling of all anti-slavery resolutions. Brown’s demand was granted. This exchange represented the beginning of a trend at the convention. Whenever Methodist leaders sought to open slavery to discussion, as Battelle did later in December, conservatives suppressed the question.

Failing to gain a hearing on his first set of emancipation resolutions in mid-December, Battelle made another attempt in late January. He proposed barring the entrance of free blacks and slaves into West Virginia, and outlined a gradual emancipation plan to free all children born of slaves after July 4, 1863. The legislature would then provide for their education in preparation for “subsequent colonization.” Battelle’s resolutions were ignored by the delegates, many of whom feared introduction of the subject would bring the convention’s work to a standstill. Dering worried that if Battelle continued to press the issue “it will prove the opening of a Pandora’s Box to us.”

Battelle refused to give in. He formulated a final emancipation plan that opened the possibility of Congress admitting West Virginia as a free state while at the same time allowing the convention to limit its debate on the issue. On February 12, 1862, he issued a third set of anti-slavery resolutions. Retaining the clause forbidding the future importation of slaves into West Virginia for permanent residence, Battelle included a

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813 Robert Hagar’s Resolution Regarding Emancipation, November 30, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
814 James Brown’s Resolution to Table Hagar’s Resolutions, November 30, 1861, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
815 Gordon Battelle’s Resolution on Emancipation, January 27, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
816 Henry Dering to Waitman Willey, January 28, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
detailed gradual emancipation plan that would not go into effect until 1870. Moreover the plan would be submitted to voters separately from the constitution. Should a majority of voters approve of the amendment, it would be included in the constitution. Should it be voted down, the issue would be forgotten.

Battelle’s stubborn provocation of the slavery issue brought the convention’s proceedings to a grinding halt and “a kind of tremor—a holy horror, was visible throughout the house!” When E. B. Hall, a conservative delegate from Marion County, immediately moved that the resolutions be laid on the table Battelle firmly responded that “I hope that no such gag rule will be instituted here in this Convention,” and called on his colleagues to vote down Hall’s motion. Chapman Stuart responded that “the question is not debatable” and again demanded that the amendment be tabled. J. M. Powell and Robert Hagar replied that Battelle’s amendments deserved a fair vote. The convention acquiesced and by a razor-thin margin of 24 to 23 tabled Battelle’s emancipation amendments indefinitely. Every minister in attendance at the convention voted in favor of debating Battelle’s resolutions but failed to swing the vote.

The following morning, James Pomeroy “suggested that . . . the vexed question raised by the resolution offered the day before by Mr. Battelle might be compromised.”

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817 Battelle’s revised plan for gradual emancipation was as follows: “all children born of slave mothers after the year eighteen hundred and seventy shall be free - the males at the age of twenty- eight, and the females at the age of eighteen years; and the children of such females shall be free at birth.” Gordon Battelle’s Revised Emancipation Resolutions, February 12, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
818 Granville Parker, The Formation of the State of West Virginia, 78.
819 Gordon Battelle Remarks, February 12, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
820 Chapman Stuart Remarks, February 12, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
821 James Pomeroy Remarks, February 13, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
The “compromise” agreed upon by the convention was the adoption of the first clause of Battelle’s emancipation amendment, which barred the future importation of slaves or the emigration of free blacks into the new state. Though acquiescing, Battelle firmly stated that “I do not enter into this arrangement as a matter of compromise; because there has been no arrangement which could give it the dignity of a compromise.”

Despite Battelle’s disdain for the convention’s course, he voted for the measure, which passed by a vote of 48 to 1. E. B. Hall then asked “my friend from Ohio (Mr. Battelle) never to mention slavery here again.” A few days later the convention adopted the new state constitution and called for a referendum on April 4, 1862.

Supporters of West Virginia’s statehood had little time to celebrate the convention’s passage of the constitution. While westerners overwhelmingly approved of the new state ordinance and the calling of a convention, it was by no means assured that they would consent to the many northern-influenced innovations included in the new constitution, particularly the creation of township system. These issues were debated at length in the two months between the convention’s adjournment and the constitution’s submission to the voters. The Clarksburg National Telegraph, despite being a passionately pro-Union newspaper, viciously assailed the merits of the convention’s

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822 Gordon Battelle Remarks, February 13, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention. While racism was undoubtedly at play in the Convention’s decision to bar both slaves and free blacks from entering the proposed state for permanent residence, it should be noted that most of the Convention’s delegates hoped that the inclusion of this provision would sidestep the slavery issue by showing Congress that the institution had no future in West Virginia. Battelle, while he did support colonization, included this clause in his emancipation plan in order to appeal to the racist views held by most western Virginians, who feared that the new state would be flooded by free black migrants seeking employment in its developing industries. His opposition on February 13 to the convention’s “compromise” stemmed less from his disgust with its racist nature and more from his belief that it would defeat West Virginia statehood in Congress.

823 E. B. Hall Remarks, February 13, 1862, First Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.

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work. The *Telegraph*’s editors regretted that the “Convention, after all its labors, did not succeed in giving the people a Constitution that would have better answered the ends for which it was designed than that adopted.” The paper directed its fury at the township system, the “crowning objection to this Constitution,” and criticized its cost, the number of new political offices the northern-influenced plan created, and the likely result that “taxes will be immensely increased.” The paper concluded that “the people of West Virginia had better do their work over than to adopt this Constitution.”

The *Telegraph*’s sentiments symbolized a rising tide of opposition among conservative unionists. NWVC lay leader R. L. Berkshire lamented the “good deal of objection to the constitution through the country” and the “indifference as to its fate.” Chief among the opponents was John J. Jackson, a prominent Wood County lawyer and fierce opponent of separate statehood at the May and June Wheeling Conventions. Writing to a colleague in Ohio County, Jackson resolved to convince westerners that “the proposition to divide the State at this time is inopportune, indefensible, and absurd.” He urged opponents to organize meetings, particularly in the northern panhandle, to ensure defeat. The Wellsburg *Herald*, a northern panhandle newspaper, responded to Jackson’s call by publishing a number of editorials opposing the new constitution.

New state advocates also feared that war-time conditions in western Virginia would threaten the constitution’s passage. New state partisans identified “The deplorable

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824 Clarksburg *National Telegraph*, February 21, 1862.
825 Clarksburg *National Telegraph*, February 21, 1862.
827 Point Pleasant *Weekly Register*, March 27, 1862.
828 Despite this opposition, most westerners admired the convention’s work. Abraham Pittenger strongly approved of the Battelle’s public school plan, and looked forward to sending “all our children to school this summer when we get our new State to working.” Abraham Pittenger to unnamed recipient, no date, *Abraham Pittenger Papers*. 

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condition of the roads” and the “long distracted condition of the country” as barriers that could “prevent the circulation of the Constitution” and leave residents “as ignorant of the doings of the recent Constitutional Convention . . . as though they were residents of a distant State.” They demanded new state supporters throughout the region organize to “fully enlighten the masses.” Given these obstructions, Preston County’s Harrison Hagans feared that the “burning zeal” for a new state was waning and urged that westerners must once again be made “wild for a New State.”

A less threatening yet important center of opposition to the constitution was eastern Virginia, whose residents and leaders looked upon the new state movement with disdain. One easterner wrote to a relative in the Kanawha Valley that the “Bogus government at Wheeling is nothing more than chaff before the wind” and “any one acting under it has already committed treason & will be treated as traitors at final settlement of affairs.” He pledged that “our government will never give up one foot of Virginia to the Abolish.” Famous agriculturalist and fire-eater Edmund Ruffin was more vicious. As the constitutional convention began its work in December Ruffin railed against “the gross outrage on right and justice which the Convention has” perpetrated by “selecting . . . ‘representatives’ (so mis-called,) for some 40 disaffected counties in the north-west.” Conveniently forgetting the intimidation practiced by western secessionists against unionists during the secession referendum, Ruffin denounced the “illegal elections”

829 Point Pleasant Weekly Register, March 13, 1862.
830 Harrison Hagans to Waitman Willey, February 2, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
831 “Southern Confederacy” (Unnamed member of Robinson family) to Mollie Robinson, February 14, 1862, Robinson Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
supervised by the “enemies’ armies . . . by which ‘representatives’ were sent to the bogus legislature.”

Nobody was more aware of the precarious position of the new state project than Methodist activists. In the weeks following the convention’s adjournment, NWVC and MPC ministers returned to their grassroots networks to build support for the constitution. The “travelling connection” that defined the Methodist itinerancy enabled ministers to develop vast webs of influence among isolated western Virginia residents. Chief among the ministerial advocates of West Virginia statehood was naturally Battelle. By late February, Battelle “wrote several articles . . . published in tract form,” which were circulated by his brethren “throughout the mountain counties.” He also endured many sleepless nights at the offices of the Wheeling *Intelligencer* to strategize about how best to spread knowledge about the constitution “in the out-of-the-way places in Western Virginia.” He “dictated and directed names by the hour” of ministers and non-clerical new state supporters throughout the region who could be sent documents in favor of the cause by the *Intelligencer*’s printing office.

The importance of Methodist leaders to the new-state movement was attested to by non-members of the church. Granville Hall, a zealous supporter of West Virginia statehood, reflected that Methodist lay-exhorter and belated-new state advocate Waitman Willey “had a sure resource in his Church, to which his tact and talent had been devoted for many years” and that he relied on its ministers and members to spread the message. Despite expressing reservations about the immersion of ministerial leaders in western

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833 Wheeling *Intelligencer*, August 8, 1862.
politics, Hall admitted that West Virginia statehood was in large part “the work of the M.E. Church.”\textsuperscript{834} A late-March letter to Willey from NWVC minister William Hunter further demonstrated the intersection of religion and grassroots political activism in the statehood movement. Hunter related his efforts to convince westerners that statehood would result in a “rise at once in population, wealth, dignity, and influence,” for the new state.\textsuperscript{835} In Ritchie, Pleasants, and Tyler Counties, prominent MPC lay exhorter Zackwell Pierpont and MPC minister Joseph Vandervort, “zealously supported the movement to form the new State of West Virginia.”\textsuperscript{836} They relied upon their influential position as the founders of the MPC Church in those counties to convince their brethren to support the new constitution.

While Methodist leaders worked to combat opposition to and ignorance of the new constitution, they simultaneously contended with an equally important threat. Many observers, both inside and outside western Virginia, feared that the convention’s failure to include a plan for gradual emancipation in the new constitution would doom its approval by Congress. The Wheeling Intelligencer warned that “Congress will hesitate long before it will consent to the subdivision of a slave State simply that two slave States may be made out of it.” The Cincinnati Commercial similarly remonstrated that “The Convention” should not have ignored “the causes which have led to the disruption of the State.” The paper called on the adjourned convention to submit a separate emancipation vote to western Virginian voters.\textsuperscript{837} The Pittsburgh Christian Advocate likewise feared

\textsuperscript{834} Granville Davission Hall Papers, Box 1, Miscellaneous Folder.
\textsuperscript{835} William Hunter to Waitman Willey, March 27, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
\textsuperscript{836} I. A. Barnes, The Methodist Protestant Church in West Virginia (Baltimore: Stockton Press, 1926), 368
\textsuperscript{837} Hall, The Rending of Virginia, 417.
that West Virginia statehood was “made doubtful by the defeat of the measure which proposed to make Western Virginia a free State.”

Aware of the impossibility of convincing the recently-adjourned convention to reassemble, as well as the fact that Congress would not approve the creation of yet another slave state, Gordon Battelle took the free-state message directly to the people. His “An Address to the Constitutional Convention and People of West Virginia” was the most famous anti-slavery pamphlet written in western Virginia since Henry Ruffner’s ill-fated foray into the field in 1847. While historians have spent pages discussing Ruffner’s pamphlet, Battelle’s address has rarely been accorded the attention it deserves. Battelle firmly believed that Congress would not approve West Virginia’s admission as a slave state. He also knew that westerners would disapprove of Congress forcing them to accept emancipation. He worked to reconcile westerners to the likelihood that Congress would force the new state to approve gradual emancipation before admission by presenting them with a clear choice: a free soil West Virginia or a return to vassalage under the east at the conclusion of the Civil War. In taking this direct approach, Battelle became the unquestioned leader of western Virginia’s anti-slavery force.

Battelle’s forceful critique of slavery and his passionate plea for the creation of a free-soil West Virginia was reprinted in its entirety by the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate and circulated in pamphlet form “by the thousands” throughout the state. Battelle portrayed emancipation not as a radical abolitionist scheme, but as a measure made

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838 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 25, 1862.
839 For a detailed discussion of the Ruffner Pamphlet, see chapter one.
841 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 25, 1862.
necessary by the nature of the times. He pointed out that his “only participation hitherto in the discussions of this slavery question” was to oppose “the interference of strangers with any legal rights of the institution here.”842 He argued that in the wake of Virginia’s secession, however, West Virginia was on the precipice of a new age and the future prosperity of the state was predicated on it becoming free soil. Once admitted as a free state, West Virginia would “enter upon that high and honorable career of prosperity that has been so long and so iniquitously denied us as a people. Our virgin lands shall be tilled . . . our immense mineral wealth shall be disemboweled . . . [and] school houses and churches shall crown our hill tops.” Battelle concluded his address by emphasizing that to reach these goals, labor was needed, “and that labor must be free.”843 The Pittsburgh Christian Advocate lauded his work as boasting “a breadth and force of argument, a vigor and terseness of expression, and a patriotism and a glow of sentiment worthy of the best days of the Republic and its most illustrious founders.”844 By mid-1862, Battelle’s points were resonating, leading Henry Dering to exclaim that “The very great anxiety of our people to sever their connections with old Va is producing a considerable change in public sentiment in favor of a free state.”845

The effectiveness of Battelle’s free-soil message was made clear by the April 4 vote on the new state constitution. Despite the exertions of opponents, the Constitution was overwhelmingly approved by a majority of 18,862 to 514. Most indicative of the unprecedented shift in western sentiments were the results of an unofficial referendum on

842 Gordon Battelle, An Address to the Constitutional Convention and the People of West Virginia (Wheeling, VA: 1862), 8.
843 Battelle, An Address to the Constitutional Convention and the People of West Virginia, 3-5, 8.
844 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, February 25, 1862.
845 Henry Dering to Waitman Willey, June 18, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11 Folder 1.
gradual emancipation conducted the same day. Spearheaded by Battelle and other free soil activists, the test vote resulted in a 6,052 to 616 majority in favor. The vote’s implications sent shockwaves throughout western society. One resident remarked that “it is felt to be a blow at slavery that cripples the rebellion more than the defeat of an army.”

A correspondent to the Pittsburgh Christian Advocate similarly lauded the emancipation vote as “sufficiently one-sided to show the attitude of Western Virginia on both questions. . . . Before the rebellion, no such majority for emancipation could have been found in Western Virginia. . . . the vote just cast is significant of the revolution going on among the masses.”

Battelle and his colleagues’ grassroots efforts were determinative to shifting westerners’ attitudes.

Five weeks after the referendum’s passage the Restored Virginia General Assembly approved the dismemberment of Virginia and the creation of West Virginia, but made no mention of the recent gradual emancipation referendum. On May 29, Waitman Willey presented West Virginia’s petition for separate statehood to Congress. The unprecedented nature of the petition was attested to by Senator Charles Sumner, who stated that “Perhaps no question of greater importance has ever been presented to the Senate. It concerns the whole question of slavery; it concerns also the question of States rights; it concerns also the results of this war.” The Senate debate was fierce, and revealed northern members’ concerns with both the constitutionality of West Virginia statehood and slavery’s future in the proposed state. It often appeared likely that Congress would not approve the west’s separation from Virginia.

846 Wellsburg Herald, April 25, 1862.
847 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, May 6, 1862.
848 Hall, The Rending of Virginia, 464.
Aware that prospects were dimming, the NWVC’s James Pomeroy led a group of pro-statehood lobbyists to Washington and began a “long and patient labor” behind the scenes to “bring the members . . . around to understand our case and see it from our point of view.” Their efforts, combined with Willey’s introduction of an emancipation amendment to the West Virginia statehood bill, swung the Senate in favor of separate statehood. Despite being based on Gordon Battelle’s emancipation plan, the amendment became known as the Willey Amendment. It specified that all slaves born in West Virginia after July 4, 1863 would be free. All slaves under the age of 10 on that date would be freed at the age of 21 and all slaves between the ages of 10 and 21 would be freed at the age of 25. West Virginia would secure separate statehood only if the amendment was approved by a reconvened session of the West Virginia Constitutional Convention and by western voters in a second referendum.

The Willey Amendment was enough to satiate radical Republican Senators Charles Sumner and Benjamin Wade. The bill passed the Senate on July 14 by a vote of 23 to 17. Since the House of Representatives had recently adjourned, its consideration of the bill was delayed until December. It passed on December 9 by a vote of 96 to 55. With Congress’ approval secured, the final decision rested with President Lincoln. Lincoln carefully considered the statehood bill and even appealed to each member of his cabinet to provide written opinions on both the constitutionality and expediency of the bill. After careful consideration of his cabinet’s opinions, Lincoln approved West Virginia’s

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849 James Pomeroy Speech, February 16, 1863, Recalled Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
850 Curry, A House Divided, 101-105.
851 Attorney General Edward Bates, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells opposed admission. Secretary of State William Seward, Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton approved of the measure.
statehood on December 31, contingent on the provisions included in the Willey Amendment.

With Lincoln’s approval and with the clear support for gradual emancipation evinced by western Virginians, passage of a second referendum seemed to be a matter of course. Yet, when westerners expressed their support for gradual emancipation the previous April, they did so with the understanding that they, as the potential residents of the new state, were initiating the measure. It was a wholly different affair to have emancipation dictated by Congress. Opponents of West Virginia’s statehood seized upon this point as they organized to defeat the second new-state referendum. Further, men such as John Carlile, John Davis, and Sherrard Clemens, who previously supported separate statehood, turned their back on the new state project to join its conservative opponents. These men, increasingly disenchanted with Republican wartime policies, believed that congressional dictation of emancipation represented another flagrant violation of the Constitution.852 They endeavored to portray the Willey Amendment as an abolitionist-inspired plot to coerce western voters into supporting the Republican program. This proved a far greater threat to the new state’s prospects than debates over increased taxes or northern-influenced plans such as the township system. Dering lamented that the gradual emancipation provision would “divide our people and produce discord and strife,” while in Kanawha County James Brown predicted that the amendment would “kill the new state” in his neighborhood.853 Even the fervently pro-statehood Peter G. Van Winkle, a northern-born western Virginia resident, stated in no uncertain terms that

852 Curry, A House Divided, 91.
853 Henry Dering to Waitman Willey, June 18, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11 Folder 1.
he did not want emancipation “forced down my throat by outsiders.”

Waitman P. Willey similarly warned his father that “the opposition to the new state movement is rapidly gaining strength every day” as new state opponents successfully argued that the statehood bill “opens the gates to free negroes, and we will soon be overrun with them.”

J. W. Paxton, a member of the Constitutional Convention expressed concern that in “Ohio and Brooke Counties . . . every means are being resorted to, to rally the Democracy against us.”

In eastern Virginia, Edmund Ruffin spoke for his section by denouncing the “Rump Congress” and “the construction of “Western Virginia” as a “flagrant . . . foolish & useless . . . violation of the Federal Constitution, according to its plain letter.” He hoped that “a strong reaction against Yankee rule” and the Willey Amendment would destroy the movement.

Methodist leaders once again marshaled their resources to face down opposition to the Willey Amendment. For the first time since their emergence as political leaders these ministerial activists were without the help of Gordon Battelle and Wesley Smith. Battelle had died and Smith was debilitated by an undefined illness and forced to retire from his ministerial duties to convalesce under the care of his wife’s family in Pennsylvania. Despite these losses, Methodist leaders remained resolute.

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854 Peter G. Van Winkle to Waitman Willey, June 7, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
855 Waitman Willey to Waitman T. Willey, January 25, 1863, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
856 J. W. Paxton to Waitman T. Willey, January 5, 1863, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
858 William Kauffman Scarborough, ed., The Diary of Edmund Ruffin Volume II: The Years of Hope: April, 1861 to June, 1863, March 7, 1863, 594-595.
859 Authorities in both western Virginia and Washington did not forget Battelle’s pivotal place in the unionist and new state movements. In December 1862, Francis Pierpont secured for John Battelle, his old friend’s son, a clerkship under Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. In a letter to Pierpont, Chase stated that he was willing to provide this position for John Battelle “for the sake of his father.” Chase’s patronage is described in a December 21, 1862 letter from Pierpont to Waitman Willey, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
NWVC’s James Drummond and Moses Tichenell rose to replace Battelle and Smith. These men and their followers were convinced that if the Civil War ended without the creation of West Virginia the renewed persecution they would face from the east would be unprecedented. Between June 1862 and the second new state referendum in March 1863, Methodists zealously urged westerners to remember the Battelle pamphlet and accept the Willey Amendment. The importance of the Methodist Church’s grassroots activism was attested to by non-member Granville Parker. In his memoirs of the statehood movement, published in 1874, Parker recalled that “The Methodist Episcopal Church” was “then dominant and aspiring,” and that its “influence” was essential to securing West Virginia statehood.

NWVC ministers coordinated their free soil efforts to connect supporters of separate statehood. They consulted with members and non-members and urged the necessity of West Virginia statehood to protect the region’s economic interests, even if that meant congressional dictation in the form of making West Virginia a free state. They organized petition campaigns to Congress to showcase westerners’ fervent desire for separate statehood. Chief among the NWVC’s grassroots advocates was Rev. James Drummond. A long-time resident of western Virginia, Drummond threw all of his resources behind the cause of the new state. “Mingling with the people,” in the region’s northern panhandle, a major axis of opposition to the new state, Drummond stressed that if West Virginia statehood was not approved “our political prospects are blasted, and our part of the State will be doomed to a long, dark, gloomy servitude under the domination

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860 Rev. J. L. Clarke emphasized this point in a letter to Waitman Willey on June 28, 1862: “Wo be to the West if we have to go back under the domination of Richmond. And wo be to the M.E. Church if we as a people are not separated from the East.” Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11 Folder 1.

of the Eastern oligarchy.” Westerners’ “well-known loyalty” to the Union would make matters worse by bringing “upon us all that malevolence can inflict.”

Drummond urged Rev. T. H. Monroe, stationed in Parkersburg, to not only lobby residents to support the Willey Amendment, but to provide Willey with “information relative to the feeling on the New State question in our different localities,” which he would transmit to Congress. For the rest of the year, Monroe frequently corresponded with Willey and other supporters of statehood in Washington to keep them abreast of the latest developments on the ground. Drummond hoped that as Congress considered West Virginia statehood, a clear demonstration of support from the region’s residents would further legitimize the issue to the body’s membership. Shortly before the Senate’s approval in July, Drummond sent Willey a list of post offices throughout western Virginia and the names of ministers whose circuits passed by them. He instructed Willey to send documents in favor of the new state to these men to circulate among their charges. Drummond promised that “our members and preachers” would “visit upon the minds of men a conviction that their immediate pecuniary interests will be promoted by voting for the new State.” “Give us a new State and a glorious future must sooner or later be ours, but deny us this, and we are doomed to dwindle or have a miserable existence.”

Drummond’s zealous attempts to spread the new state message through his fellow itinerants were not lost on church members. Chester Hubbard, an NWVC lay

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862 James Drummond to Waitman Willey, June 27, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
863 Rev. T.H. Monroe to Waitman Willey, July 3, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11 Folder 1.
864 James Drummond to Waitman Willey, November 5, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11 Folder 1.
leader, wrote Willey that “Dr. Drummond is very anxious about the new State . . . and I think his anxiety is probably truly founded.”

Drummond’s political efforts soon bore fruit as a number of ministers responded to his call. Rev. James L. Clark of the NWVC wrote Willey to inform him that after consulting with his followers, “The people will go for the emancipation clause with a rush.” J. B. Blakely similarly informed Willey of his efforts to convince western residents that “That is our last hope. If we are handed over again to Richmond rule, we are hopelessly ruined for years to come.” When Willey briefly returned to his home in Morgantown during the late summer of 1862, NWVC circuit rider Benjamin Ison made it a point to pay him a visit to strategize about how best to build support for an emancipation clause. Confident of the support of his fellow ministers, Drummond spent the interim between December 1862 and March 1863 meeting his preaching responsibilities and aggressively lobbying for the new state cause. He resolved to do “all I can in a quiet, unobtrusive manner to bring home to the hearts and minds of those whom I have social intercourse the conviction that their highest earthly prosperity depends upon the new State and that every man should be at the polls.” As he stumped for the cause, Drummond contacted fellow ministers John Reger, Andrew Jackson Lyda, and Gideon Martin, who were serving as chaplains for the Union army. He urged them to ensure westerners in their regiments voted in favor of emancipation.

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865 Chester Hubbard to Waitman Willey, June 30, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
866 Rev. James L. Clark to Waitman Willey, Wheeling, June 28, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
867 Rev. J.B. Blakeney to Waitman Willey, June 30, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
868 Benjamin Ison to Helen Robinson, no date, Robinson Family Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.
869 James Drummond to Waitman Willey, December 15, 1862, Charles Ambler Collection, Box 11, Folder 1.
Moses Tichenell, a central figure in the western Virginia unionist movement, fervently supported Drummond’s new state crusade. Between November 1862 and February 1863 Tichenell was “no idle spectator” but “traveled thousands of miles . . . watched by guerillas” to build support for statehood. As Tichenell “talked to our people” he assured them that despite Congress’ call for an emancipation provision “the high prize that we have contended for forty years is within our grasp” and that westerners need only to approve the new constitution in March to ensure their deliverance from the eastern oligarchy.  

In central western Virginia, the NWVC’s S. R. Dawson zealously spoke in favor of separate statehood. Between 1862 and 1863, he gave a number of speeches in Ritchie, Doddridge, and Lewis Counties calling on his followers to remain true to the cause.  

In Mason County, Rev. J. M. Phelps maintained his dedication to West Virginia statehood by holding a number of public meetings over the autumn and winter of 1862 and 1863 that labeled opponents as “traitors.”

As Methodists built support for the Willey Amendment, the Constitutional Convention reassembled on February 12, 1863. Two new ministers joined the convention: the NWVC’s Moses Tichenell took over the seat formerly occupied by E. B. Hall, of Marion County, and Pocahontas County, heretofore unrepresented, sent the MPC’s Rev. Samuel Young. Young’s selection as a delegate again illustrates the

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870 Moses Tichenell Speech, February 14, 1863, Recalled Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
872 Point Pleasant Weekly Register, September 18, 1862.
873 A. F. Ross, a teacher from Ohio County, took over the seat vacated by Gordon Battelle’s death. Former President of the Convention John Hall’s seat was filled by Samuel T. Griffith, a physician and NWVC
pivotal organizational role unionist ministerial leaders played in secessionist counties.

After approving the new delegates’ credentials, the convention opened with a speech by Waitman Willey, who urged the necessity of adopting the emancipation amendment that bore his name.

The recalled convention’s delegates generally supported the amendment. However, a clear fissure emerged over whether loyal slaveholders should be compensated for the loss of their property and whether the new state government or the Federal government should provide compensation. James Brown defended state-funded compensation by asserting that new state opponents would “use every effort to arouse opposition to this Constitution on the very ground that we make no provision in this Constitution” for “taking the private property of people without just compensation.” He concluded that constitutionality and justice made the compensation of slaveholders necessary. Brown was joined by Benjamin Smith, his partner in obstruction at the first session of the convention. On the heels of Brown’s speech, Smith rose to support compensated emancipation. His speech consumed an entire afternoon session.

exhorter from Mason County. When the Constitutional Convention reconvened, John Hall was confined to a prison cell in Mason County for the murder of Lewis Wetzel, the editor of the Point Pleasant Register. The dispute between the two men stemmed from a sarcastic article Wetzel wrote criticizing the “fogyism” of conservatives like Hall at the First Constitutional Convention. Wetzel’s murder is covered in detail in the October 1862 issues of the Register.

874 James Brown Speech, February 12, 1863, Recalled Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.

875 Smith’s determined defense of compensated emancipation likely stemmed from his war-time experiences. While Smith was a devoted unionist, his son joined the Confederate army and eventually rose to the rank of Major. Benjamin Smith, despite disapproving of his son’s decision, allowed him to take one of the family’s slaves to the army to serve as a body servant. In the summer of 1862, the slave escaped and made his way to Union lines in the Kanawha Valley, which were under the command of Jacob Cox. When Smith demanded the return of his family’s property, Cox refused. Smith eventually returned with a letter from Cox’s superiors ordering that he turn over the slave. However, by this time the slave had “taken advantage of his liberty to go to Ohio. Mr. Smith’s case thus ended, but it left him with a good deal of irritation at what he thought a wrong done to him.” This episode is recounted by Jacob D. Cox in Military Reminiscences of the Civil War (New York: Scriber’s Sons, 1900), 159.
The Methodist leadership, particularly James Pomeroy and Moses Tichenell, firmly pushed back against Brown and Smith. Tichenell regretted that “The gentleman from Kanawha plainly intimated that he would rather sacrifice the new State than jeopardize the interest of the slave owners.” Tichenell, like most of the delegates, understood that the small percentage of slave-owners who remained loyal to the Union was meager compared to the number of westerners who would oppose compensated emancipation as an unwanted reminder of eastern political dominance. While conceding that some loyal slaveholders might vote against the constitution, he pointed out that “a much greater number of non-slave-holders might be brought to vote against” the constitution out of fear that they would be taxed to pay “for the rich people’s ‘niggers.’” Pomeroy similarly argued that in Ohio County, “which we are told is the battle ground in this contest . . . we will lose largely in the vote if we pass a resolution of this kind.” Robert Hagar protested that “Gentlemen presume because they own a few slaves that they should rule the whole Union, or state.” He squarely attacked Brown’s and Smith’s claims for the necessity of slaveholder support, declaring that he had heard enough of “such talk last winter . . . We can carry it without you.” Tichenell’s, Pomeroy’s, and Hagar’s comments made clear that the convention’s Methodist contingent would not be overawed by conservatives.

As the debate over compensated emancipation wore on, the tensions between supporters and opponents of the provision threatened to throw the entire convention into

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876 Moses Tichenell Speech, February 12, 1863, Recalled Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
877 James Pomeroy Speech, February 16, 1863, Recalled Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
878 Robert Hagar Speech, February 17, 1863, Recalled Session of the First West Virginia Constitutional Convention.
disarray. After nearly a week, the creation of two special committees, and a volume of debates, the convention settled the compensated emancipation question. In a victory for the convention’s Methodist bloc, compensation was left to the Federal Government. In a resolution later transmitted to Washington, the convention asked Congress to appropriate two million dollars to assist the new state in reimbursing loyal slaveholders for the loss of their slaves and absolved itself of any commitment to compensation. On February 19, the amended constitution was approved unanimously and the convention adjourned *sine die* on February 20.\(^{879}\)

In the one-month interval between the passage of the amended constitution and the second statehood referendum, Methodist leaders continued to marshal support for the statehood movement. Before the convention even adjourned, Pomeroy called on the body’s members to attend a public meeting he organized with Tichenell a few days later in support of the new state. The effectiveness of these efforts was demonstrated on March 26 when the amended constitution was approved by a vote of 28,321 to 572.\(^{880}\) The results of the referendum were certified to Abraham Lincoln, who on April 20 declared that West Virginia would officially become the thirty-fifth state on June 20.

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Days after the results of the second referendum became public, a Methodist resident of Morgantown summarized the centrality of his church to West Virginia’s decades-long struggle for political independence. He boasted that the “The position of the

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\(^{879}\) See the convention proceedings between February 18 and February 20 for a detailed account of this settlement. The Willey Amendment also abolished the provision barring free blacks from settling in the new state but retained the clause forbidding the future importation of slaves into the new state.

\(^{880}\) The civilian vote was 20,625 to 440. A vote conducted among western Virginians serving in the Union Army resulted in a majority of 7,828 to 132. For detailed results, see Curry, *A House Divided*, 149-150.
M.E. Church in this national struggle has been and is most happy for the national Government, but especially for West Virginia,” and that the Church’s political efforts in West Virginia were “to the Government equivalent to fifty thousand armed men and many millions of money.” Reflecting on the new constitution’s provisions for a free school system, its abolition of the county court system, and its recently approved gradual emancipation amendments, he could express nothing but pride that “Our State this day is free in fact. . . . Not made free by the bayonet, but by the living principles of immutable truth, which we as a church maintain.”

West Virginia statehood was marked by a day-long celebration in Wheeling, the new state’s capital. Residents from throughout the region arrived to take part in the ceremonies marking the historic day. The festivities included the inauguration of NWVC lay member Arthur I. Boreman as the first governor. Business “was suspended, private and public buildings were gaily decorated” and the evening’s ceremonies were capped off “with a brilliant display of fireworks.” The enthusiasm and “joy was not confined to Wheeling” as throughout the villages and towns of the new state the “day that gave official birth to West Virginia was hailed with delight.” Indeed, all on hand agreed that “the future of the new commonwealth shall be as peaceful and prosperous as its early morning has been troubled and convulsed.”

As West Virginians celebrated, the members of the first West Virginia State legislature were sworn in. The central role of Methodist leaders in the western unionist and new-state movements was attested to by the body’s membership. Of the 20 members

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881 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, April 11, 1863.
882 Boreman was a dedicated member of the NWVC. In 1888 he was elected as a lay delegate to the MEC’s General Conference meeting in New York.
883 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, June 27, 1863.
of the Senate, 19 were members of the NWVC, including four ministers. In the House of Delegates, 22 of the body’s 50 delegates were NWVC members, including seven ministers. NWVC minister J. M. Phelps, a fervent unionist and new state supporter, was elected as the Senate’s first President. The new legislature dedicated its first session to enacting the more liberal features of the new state’s constitution. Members divided and organized the state’s fifty counties into townships, established a system of free public schools, and formally accepted the conditions of the Morrill Land Grant Act, which resulted in the creation of West Virginia University in 1867.\textsuperscript{884} Despite these successes, ominous signs for the future were already perceptible as the legislature enacted provisions aimed at the punishment of confederate sympathizers. Among these laws was an act that forfeited to the state the property of residents who supported the Confederacy. Enforcement fell under the discretion of county “home guards” who often substituted objectivity with a desire to exact vengeance on political or social enemies. While the importance of these laws was lost in the euphoria of West Virginia’s statehood, they set the foundation for the fractious and violent politics that marked the Reconstruction era in the state.

Conclusion: Reconstruction and Redemption in West Virginia, 1863-1872

Speaking to a mass gathering during the waning days of the Civil War, NWVC circuit rider and first superintendent of West Virginia’s public schools W. R. White appealed to his audience’s pride and patriotism. The North’s impending victory assured that “the future of this country promises to be a bright and glorious one.” “Nearly all Europe have looked upon our government as a weak, imbecile theory . . . as a political adventure that would collapse with the first appearance of internal difficulty.” Now “foreign nations stand in awe, in a kind of reverential fear, at the Successful triumphant and glorious termination of our war for the Union and freedom.” The Union’s hard-fought victory ensured that “republican Government is a reality and that we people who live under such a glorious form of Government are able to perpetrate and maintain it.”

The NWVC expressed similar optimism at its 1865 annual meeting. After four years of brutal strife, “the wicked and unholy rebellion . . . is fast on the wane, and already the beam of a bright and prosperous future are [sic] dawning upon us.” West Virginians “now stand a free people,” delivered once and for all from the authority of eastern Virginia. Looking back on their church’s central role in the western unionist and West Virginia statehood movements, Methodists around the new state shared their

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885 Henry Solomon White Papers (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
886 Methodist Episcopal Church, Western Virginia Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church: Western Virginia Conference Records (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 1865 Meeting.
leaders’ sense of accomplishment. One Monongahela Valley minister boasted that “Methodism must be regarded as molding the lives and religious sentiments of perhaps more than one fourth of the people living in the new State of West Virginia.” As the war-torn United States passed through this “revolutionary crisis. . . . Methodism, as much as any other agency, is exerting a transforming power upon the yielding mass.” In Wood County, a lay member of the NWVC predicted that “her unmistakable and unflagging loyalty will make her the Methodist Church of the future in West Virginia. The success of the National Government will deal a death blow to Southern Methodism from which it will never recover.” NWVC leaders, continuing to see their church as a force of morality, loyalty, and political progress, wasted little time devoting their organization’s energies to rebuilding a war-torn West Virginia.

On July 19, 1865, a meeting of NWVC preachers and laymen laid the groundwork for the one of the largest religious relief agencies in West Virginia’s history. Spearheaded by James Drummond, a crucial grassroots leader in the western unionist and new state movements, the agency was devoted to ameliorating “the destitution of our people whose property and homes have been laid waste by the contending armies.” The society appointed agents to “travel abroad and collect funds for this purpose,” and to impose upon westerners the necessity of assisting those whose lives and fortunes were disrupted by the war. Nathan Goff, a devoted Methodist and Republican Party leader, was among the members of the board formed to administer the agency’s work. Goff’s participation in the NWVC’s relief activities attests to the continued entwinement of

887 Pittsburg Christian Advocate, May 2, 1863.
888 Pittsburgh Christian Advocate, August 8, 1863.
religion and politics in western Virginia. Methodist and Republican leaders staunchly believed their leadership would guarantee future of prosperity for West Virginia.\footnote{Kanawha Republican, August 8, 1865.}

SWVC leaders, their membership scattered and their organization all but destroyed, had little reason to share their opponents’ optimism. G. S. Mede spoke for many of his brethren when he lamented the wartime “misfortunes” of his church, which he believed were the direct result of the “envious and vindictive spirit which seized . . . the people and ministers of the M.E. Church, North.” Mede, exhibiting a penchant for historical revision that former confederate leaders would come to practice all too well, insisted that “our Church” had in no way “exposed herself to the just wrath or even suspicion of the government, by any offensive or ‘disloyal’ ecclesiastical enactments.”\footnote{Clarksburg Methodist Episcopal Church, South Records (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).} Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the war, SWVC ministers returning to West Virginia from the Confederacy were arrested while others, such as Abraham Hershman, remained in Federal Government custody.\footnote{Shepherdstown Civil War Diary, April 20, 1865, (Morgantown: WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).} In spite of this continued political and religious repression, Mede shared the NWVC’s desire to look toward the future. Now that “we have been preserved” and “the storm of persecution subsided,” men like Mede could set about rebuilding their church, knowing that “what we have lost in members, we more than gain in purity.”\footnote{Clarksburg Methodist Episcopal Church, South Records (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).}

The SWVC gradually reestablished itself in West Virginia in the years following the Civil War. While the war settled once and for all the slavery question that divided them from the NWVC, SWVC leaders continued to see themselves as vanguards of the
southern way of life. They remained an important bulwark of opposition to the NWVC’s Yankee influence. In Parkersburg, in the aftermath of the war, Zachariah Turner, an SWVC class leader, held religious services for his fellow southern Methodist brethren for the first time since 1861. By 1874, the little church’s membership had grown enough to justify the construction of a new church building. Completed within a few months the church’s trustees included two copperhead opponents to West Virginia Statehood, John Baxter and John W. Davis.¹⁸⁹³ The SWVC’s developing position as a haven for conservative unionists, opponents of West Virginia statehood, and returning Confederates was also apparent in Barbour County. By 1870, under the leadership of former prisoner of war Abraham Hershman, the SWVC had reestablished itself in Barbour. Of the 47 members making up the SWVC Church in the county seat, 23 were veterans of the Confederate Army while another 15 were relatives of former Confederates.

Further South in the Greenbrier Valley, the Baltimore Conference established its own course for the future. Safely behind Confederate lines for most of the war, the conference could express in 1865 “our gratitude to God for the degree of prosperity and success which have attended our labors. . . . [We] take courage in the constancy, the Christian fortitude and patience of our people, and in their unity of feeling and sentiment, and their abiding fidelity to, and confidence in us as their ministers.”¹⁸⁹⁴ Within a year, the Baltimore Conference officially aligned with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Baltimore Conference’s admission to the MECS in 1866, much like the SWVC’s

¹⁸⁹³ John L. Rolfe, The Planting of Methodism in Wood and Adjacent Counties (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 32.
¹⁸⁹⁴ John S. Martin, Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church (Now of the Methodist Episcopal Church South), 1862-1865 (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University), 69-70.
dedication to rebuilding its presence in West Virginia, demonstrated that their cultural war with northern Methodists was far from over.

The MPC’s ministers and members faced their own challenges at the close of the Civil War. While the postwar positions of northern and southern Methodism in West Virginia were starkly different, they shared the advantage of a unified membership. The MPC’s wartime unity, on the other hand, was shattered by a divisive debate over race. At the MPC’s 1866 annual meeting, ministers and lay members furiously debated whether the word “white” should be stricken from the organization’s discipline when it came to matters of voting and church governance. Embracing the results of the Civil War, Peter Laishley, Dennis Dorsey, J. B. McCormick and numerous other wartime unionists and supporters of West Virginia statehood believed that future black church members should possess the same voting rights as whites. However, a much larger contingent of the church’s membership, led by George Nestor, vigorously opposed this proposal. By the end of the conference meeting, an exasperated Committee on Ecclesiastical Relations reported that “an irreconcilable difference of opinion and purpose” existed among the conference’s membership. As a result, “in the spirit of Christian tolerance and of Christian Liberality, we agree mutually that, each minister of the conference, and each society or church, of the district, shall with full official consent of this body, be privileged to choose and adopt such future ecclesiastical relations as they may severally prefer.”

Laishley, Dorsey and their followers were permitted to withdraw from the MPC’s West Virginia Annual Conference to seek a new home with The Methodist Church, a northern
offshoot of the MPC which separated from its parent organization in 1856 over the very same issues. The rest of the organization remained aligned with the MPC. 895

The MPC’s division revealed the potent power of race to divide a previously unified religious population. West Virginians, as noted in chapter five, were willing to support emancipation in order to achieve their statehood, but had little desire to share their new state with African-Americans. Throughout Reconstruction, white West Virginians vigorously opposed legislation and constitutional amendments designed to uplift the status of former slaves, particularly black suffrage. Indeed, despite their position as the most well-known figures within the MPC, Dorsey’s and Laishley’s influence and wartime political leadership could not transcend the racism that plagued the MPC’s governing councils. While West Virginia’s Methodist Protestants eventually reunited in 1877, their 1866 schism, which effectively ended their political influence in the new state, was an ominous sign for the future of Reconstruction in West Virginia.

The NWVC’s, SWVC’s, and MPC’s contrasting post-war positions symbolize the central problems facing West Virginia Reconstruction. West Virginia’s wartime leaders, like the NWVC as a whole, felt great pride in their multiple political accomplishments. However, the return of ex-Confederate leaders and soldiers, and particularly southern Methodist leaders who had so vigorously extolled secession, generated a profound sense of insecurity on the part of West Virginia’s Methodist leaders. This insecurity is easily understood given the persecution and outright violence unionist Methodists faced during the secession crisis and the early days of the Civil War. Despite the general powerlessness of returning rebels, as symbolized by the state of the SWVC, West

Virginia’s leaders believed they constituted a threat to their political ascendancy and perhaps even the continued existence of West Virginia. This fear was also valid, as many Confederate and SWVC leaders believed that Yankee interlopers and their northern Methodist allies had hijacked West Virginia from its parent state. Furthermore, the fracturing of the previously-unified MPC suggested that racial issues could turn previous supporters of West Virginia’s Republican Government against it. Confronted by these central problems and anxieties, West Virginia’s Methodist leaders had to negotiate the complex task of reintegrating former rebels into a body politic that did not even exist before the Civil War. Ultimately, Republican and Methodist leaders chose proscription rather than reconciliation, and in the process unwittingly laid the groundwork for the redemption of West Virginia and the destruction of the northern-influenced vision they had for West Virginia’s future.

West Virginia’s 1863 statehood was seen by supporters as the dawning of a new era. The state’s political system experienced an infusion of new blood at almost every level. While the NWVC’s near dominance of the state legislature has already been accounted for, NWVC ministers or church members also made up all but three of the new state’s officers, including the governorship. Joining these religious leaders were farmers, merchants, bankers, teachers, and carpenters who had never previously grasped political power. A newspaper reporter who visited the first session of the Cabell County court was particularly astonished at the youth of the judge, clerk, and lawyers who constituted the sinews of the county’s legal system. Cabell County’s traditional courthouse elite was nowhere to be seen, the majority of them serving in the Confederacy or proscribed by

West Virginia’s new political leaders could point to a number of accomplishments during its first few years in power. By the end of the Civil War, West Virginia’s first system of tax-supported common schools was in operation, while the northern-influenced township system inaugurated an unprecedented period of democracy and transparency in county governance. With the assistance of the Morrill Land Grant Act, West Virginia’s leaders established West Virginia University in 1867. West Virginia’s Methodist leaders brought their state further into step with the North by formally ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment one month after its passage by Congress in January 1865.\footnote{Ambler, \textit{West Virginia: The Mountain State}, 261.} Despite these accomplishments, seeds of dissent were apparent as early as the 1864 Presidential Election. While Abraham Lincoln easily carried the new state by a majority of 23,152 – 10,438, dissatisfaction with his wartime policies was clear as Lincoln polled 5,000 fewer votes than the Willey Amendment received the previous year. While residents were willing to accept the Willey Amendment in exchange for statehood, they clearly had reservations about nationally-mandated abolition, denial of civil liberties to northern dissenters, and the confiscation of Confederate property. These latent signs of opposition were more fully developed under Radical Reconstruction as the military occupation of the South and black suffrage further eroded West Virginia Republicans’ increasingly fragile hold on political power. West Virginians’ declining support for national
Republican wartime policies contributed to Methodist leaders’ increasing anxiety. The return of ex-Confederate political leaders and soldiers after the conclusion of the Civil War further unsettled state leaders.898 Many feared that these returning Confederates, in league with conservative unionists who had opposed West Virginia statehood and Lincoln’s prosecution of the war, would use their political coalition to seize power in the new state and perhaps even reunite West Virginia with Virginia.899

Ironically, the seeds of this political war were planted with West Virginia’s formation. Union counties contained about 210,000 residents, or sixty percent of the state’s population. The other forty percent of the population not only opposed West Virginia Statehood, but were also overwhelmingly pro-Confederate. As noted in chapter five, these counties were included in the new state by obstructionists opposed to the statehood movement as a whole. Their efforts failed, and for reasons still unknown, the West Virginia Constitutional Convention and the United States Congress assented to the inclusion of these secessionist counties. Throughout the war, many of these counties remained under the control of the Confederate Army. With Lee’s surrender in April 1865, residents suddenly found themselves transferred from Confederate Virginia’s political jurisdiction to that of West Virginia.900


899 These fears were not unfounded. In 1865, and again in 1866, the Virginia Legislature passed resolutions calling for a reunification of the Old Dominion. The Wheeling Intelligencer also published a number of articles throughout 1866 arguing that unionist and ex-Confederate Democrats were plotting with Virginia’s leaders to achieve these goals. For more information, see Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 95.

900 Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 84-85. For a more detailed discussion of the boundary dispute at the 1861 Constitutional Convention, see chapter five.
This rebel minority was in no position to control West Virginia’s politics on its own in 1865. However, in the years following the war, former Confederate leaders gradually formed a coalition with conservative Unionists that eventually enabled them to challenge Methodist leaders’ control of the state. These conservatives, many of them former Whigs and Democrats, were initially supporters of West Virginia’s formation. However, after the Willey Amendment became a necessary precondition for statehood, men such as John Carlile, John Davis, and Sherrard Clemens bitterly opposed separate statehood. Like conservative unionists throughout the Midwest, these men were troubled by Lincoln’s suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, the emancipation of the slaves, and the arming of black soldiers. They aimed to preserve a white man’s government and the constitution “as it is” from Republicans’ fanatical assaults. This developing anti-Republican coalition explains the repressive political policies adopted by West Virginia’s leaders in the aftermath of the war.901

Methodist and Republican leaders’ capitulation to proscription was equally influenced by the passions engendered by the Civil War. Guerilla warfare and the campaign of violence waged by Confederate raiders ensured that for many former rebels, their homecoming would be anything but peaceful. In the spring and summer of 1865, the West Virginia Legislature was flooded with petitions from residents across the state demanding that the government act to prevent Confederates from returning home.902 In

901 Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 90-92. Throughout the Civil War, West Virginia’s Republican leaders were never able to garner more than 28,000 votes on any issue and frequently contended with the nearly 4,000 voters who were either pro-Confederate, or who threw their support to conservative unionists. In addition, the secessionist counties included in the new state contained 20,600 white males of voting age. Given these figures, it is not surprising that West Virginia’s leaders resorted to proscription.
902 John Shaffer, Clash of Loyalities: A Border County in the Civil War (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2003), 129, 154. These events were foreshadowed by the treatment of Confederate sympathizers throughout the Civil War. Supporters of the southern cause received little protection from
both Clarksburg and Fairmont, returning Confederates were attacked by unionist mobs. In Monroe County, Rev. S. R. Houston described the condition of returning Confederates as “truly lamentable.” All of Monroe was in “a great deal of excitement, apprehending evils from the Yankees.”

Known Confederate sympathizers suffered continued persecution. A southern partisan in Shepherdstown lamented the biased justice handed down by unionist court officers. While “all loyal men can get judgments . . . no one’s evidence is allowed who would not take the oath of loyalty.” A few months later, at the first session of the Superior Court, the presiding Judge instructed the “jury to indict and convict all Rebels and to let none escape who had not been loyal.” Local resident and southern sympathizer William Edwards was indicted for treason and sent to the penitentiary within three hours. During his indictment, trial, and sentencing, “Judge Balch would allow him no Counsel.”

“Yankees in town” also “ordered all returned soldiers to take off their gray clothes or go to prison.” Jacob Vorhees “a man with one arm, was arrested. He had lost the other at Bull Run . . . Arrested for wearing his old gray uniform.”

These episodes reveal that many unionist West Virginians supported the repression of returning Confederates, a fact that was not lost on West Virginia’s leaders. Convinced that former rebels and conservative unionists constituted a threat to

civil authorities against attacks perpetrated by their unionist neighbors, particularly since magistrates were often architects of these repressive policies. Throughout the war, the private correspondence of southern sympathizers was subject to search, their property seized, and the doors of most public social institutions closed to them.


904 Williams, West Virginia: A History, 89.

905 Shepherdstown Civil War Diary, April 8, 1865 and July 17, 1865, (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).

906 Shepherdstown Civil War Diary, April 28, 1865, (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).
their political power and confident that their decision would be supported by most of the state’s unconditional unionists, West Virginia’s Methodist leaders initiated proscription.

West Virginia’s inaugural proscription legislation, the voter’s test oath, was passed in February 1865. The test oath required all persons whose loyalty was challenged to swear under oath to both their past and future fidelity to the Union. A resident’s oath could be challenged by a fellow voter, ensuring that old feuds or disagreements frequently manifested themselves in disenfranchisement. The test oaths were generally very effective in unionist counties, but carried almost no weight in the counties dominated by Confederates during and immediately after the Civil War. In the 1865 elections, Henry Mason Mathews, a Major in the Confederate Army, was elected to the West Virginia Senate. When he arrived in Wheeling, Mathews was denied his seat by NWVC class leader and Governor Arthur I. Boreman. The general ineffectiveness of this test oath resulted in the passage of West Virginia’s first constitutional amendment in 1866. The amendment was a radical proscription plan marked by new and draconian parameters for voter registration. The amendment, which was eventually ratified, permitted the governor to appoint three-member voter registration boards for each of West Virginia’s counties. These boards were permitted, subject to no appeal, to refuse to register and even to strike from the voting rolls any person suspected of disloyalty at some point during the Civil War. Residents who had previously taken an oath of loyalty to the United States and West Virginia governments could still be disenfranchised under this amendment. In addition, the amendment permitted the legislature to pass laws that denied teachers and lawyers the ability to practice their profession without first taking an iron-clad oath of loyalty. Overall, these laws disenfranchised between 20,000 and 25,000
Defending the amendment, Boreman remarked that “too great anxiety is manifested on the part of those who actively engaged in the Rebellion to repossess themselves of place and power. . . . It has scarcely been nine months since their rebellious organization . . . yet now they gravely insist upon . . . participation in the making and administration of laws.”

Many West Virginians shared Boreman’s sentiments. A mass meeting in Barbour County adopted resolutions declaring its “unalloyed satisfaction” with the new constitutional amendment. However, this early support soon turned to resistance in many parts of West Virginia, particularly after the radically-led United States Congress began its campaign to protect blacks’ voting rights. While many West Virginians could support the disenfranchisement of ex-Confederates, they could not stomach the idea of former slaves voting in counties like Greenbrier, where 85 percent of the white population was disfranchised. This increasing and racially-motivated opposition ensured that organized resistance to proscription frequently exploded into outright violence. Physical attacks on county registration boards became common in Monroe, Randolph, Tucker, Marion, Cabell, Wayne, and Logan Counties. In a number of instances, Federal Troops were called in to calm these disturbances.

In 1868, a mob of Confederate sympathizers attacked pointedly an NWVC Church in Fayette County during

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907 Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 93. The West Virginia legislature passed a number of additional laws that struck at Confederate sympathizers’ civil liberties. One law specified that court cases arising in previously secessionist counties could be moved to neighboring counties that had remained loyal to the Union. For more information, see Rice, West Virginia: A History, 156.

908 West Virginia Senate Journal, January 16, 1866, (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University).

909 Shaffer, Clash of Loyalties, 158. Supporters of proscription frequently blurred the distinction between former rebels and Democrats. Many West Virginia Democrats, though they had remained loyal to the union, were hated for their opposition to separate statehood.

services. The mob covered the pulpit with the Confederate battle flag and forced the presiding minister to preach a sermon extolling the Confederacy. In Marion County, Federal troops intercepted a shipment of muskets intended for a former Confederate officer. As Republican candidates campaigned across the state, their speeches were frequently interrupted by crowds of disenfranchised former rebels. After being shouted down from his podium in Marion County, MPC class leader and former Restored Virginia Governor Francis Pierpont left the county in disgust.\footnote{Shaffer, \textit{Clash of Loyalities}, 163.}

The final straw came in form of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Before ratification, West Virginia Republicans refused to grant the vote to former slaves living with the state. They also left behind a poor record in terms of education for African-Americans. West Virginia’s first public school system, despite its many merits, was a segregated one.\footnote{Ambler, \textit{West Virginia: The Mountain State}, 270; Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 103-104.} Nonetheless, in a situation that was replicated throughout much of the mountain South, Republicans in West Virginia were unable to defend continued proscription measures against former Confederates while at the same time granting the vote to former slaves.\footnote{In \textit{Southern Mountain Republicans, 1865-1900: Politics and the Appalachian Community} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 9, Gordon McKinney similarly explains that Republicans throughout the mountain South learned during Reconstruction that so long as they were associated with efforts to secure greater rights for former slaves, they would never gain the support of mountain residents.} The most potent argument against continued disenfranchisement, however, was its clash with the legacy of the western Virginia reform and statehood movements. The incongruity between westerners’ long struggle for an equal voice in Virginia’s politics and the disenfranchisement of nearly 25,000 white residents could not have been more obvious. These realities forced many Republicans to reassess their support for proscription by the end of the 1860s. This gradual shift was
evinced by the new group of leaders elected to the West Virginia Legislature in 1869. Most of the Republican and Methodist leaders that previously supported proscription were jettisoned in favor of Democrats (many of them former conservative unionists) and Republicans in favor of easing the state’s proscription policies.  

West Virginia’s Republican leaders realized that they had no future as a political force in West Virginia unless they relaxed their policies regarding former Confederates. While they would risk their political power by enfranchising former rebels, a continued dedication to proscription all but guaranteed the long-term destruction of their party. Horace Greely, a national leader among moderate Republicans, laid the case out plainly in a letter to the Wheeling Intelligencer. Greely warned West Virginia Republicans that “your house is built upon the sand. . . . Every year one thousand of your rebels die, and one thousand, or more, of their sons become of age, you can’t disenfranchise them. The rebels will be enfranchised in spite of you. . . . Now you can amnesty the rebels—soon the question will be, shall they amnesty you?”  

Undoubtedly influenced by this stark assessment of their political future, Republican leaders passed the Flick Amendment to the state’s constitution in January 1870, which re-enfranchised nearly all former Confederates previously denied the right to vote. They also relaxed the test oaths which denied many conservative unionists the right to vote and practice their professions.  

West Virginia Democrats wasted little time seizing the opportunity provided by Republicans’ retreat from proscription. In November 1870, West Virginia voters returned the Democratic Party to power. Democrats seized a large majority in the House of

915 Wheeling Intelligencer, May 21, 1869.
916 Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 100.
Delegates and a two-seat majority in the Senate. Democratic gubernatorial candidate John Jacob defeated incumbent Republican William Stephenson by 2,010 votes. Two out of the three representatives West Virginia sent to the United State House of Representatives were Democrats. In 1871, West Virginia’s first Democrat-controlled Senate replaced Republican Waitman T. Willey, one of the crucial figures in the West Virginia Statehood movement, with Democrat and future Vice Presidential nominee Henry G. Davis. Perhaps most startling to Republicans were the gains Democrats made in strongholds like Marshall, Wood, and Monongalia counties. While these counties still returned large Republican majorities, they paled in comparison to previous victories.917 The 1870 elections ended Reconstruction in West Virginia. The new state was “redeemed” from the very men who made it.

The Democratic leaders who rose to power in 1871 included many of the antebellum elite so disdained by Methodist leaders. Gideon Camden, Samuel Price, Charles J. Faulkner, and Jonathan Bennett were ardent supporters of the Confederacy during the war and vigorously denounced from behind Confederate lines the formation of West Virginia. While none of these men possessed any real enthusiasm for the new state, they did not seek, as Republican leaders feared, to return it to Virginia. Rather, they saw their control of West Virginia politics as an opportunity to become much bigger fishes in a much smaller political pond.918 Once sworn into office, these leaders ceremoniously passed the Flick Amendment for a second time, which was eventually ratified by West Virginia’s voters by a majority of 23,546 – 6,323 in April 1871. With proscription a dead letter, Democrats turned their attention toward refashioning West Virginia’s northern-

918 Williams, West Virginia: A History, 87.
influenced state constitution to fit their conservative vision. In mid-1871, the Democrat-controlled legislature approved the calling of a new constitutional convention, which it submitted to residents for approval on August 24, 1871. West Virginians approved the convention by a slim margin of 30,220 – 27,685, a result that revealed that West Virginia Republicans, while severely weakened, still wielded political influence.\footnote{Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 103; Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 161.}

West Virginia’s second constitutional convention in ten years assembled on January 16, 1872. Only twelve of its seventy-eight members were Republicans and only one delegate, Waitman T. Willey, served in the first West Virginia Constitutional Convention. Further attesting to the new (or old) state of affairs after West Virginia’s redemption, the vast majority of the convention’s delegates were lawyers. Not a single minister sat in the body. The teachers, farmers, artisans, and other figures representative of West Virginia’s middling ranks were also conspicuously absent. The reactionary and southern-influenced nature of the convention was apparent from its commencement. Samuel Price, SWVC member and former lieutenant governor of Confederate Virginia, was chosen as President. Three years earlier he had been disqualified from a judgeship on the grounds of his wartime treason.\footnote{Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 161.} Most of the important committee chairmanships were given to former rebels while early debates focused on purely symbolic issues. One afternoon was spent debating whether Grant and Lincoln counties should be renamed Davis and Lee. Another few hours were spent arguing over whether the United States flag should be flown over the convention hall, which was ironically an NWVC church.\footnote{Ambler, \textit{West Virginia: The Mountain State}, 273; Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 366.}

\footnote{Curry, “Crisis Politics,” 103; Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 161.}
\footnote{Rice, \textit{West Virginia: A History}, 161.}
\footnote{Ambler, \textit{West Virginia: The Mountain State}, 273; Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 366.}
When the Constitutional Convention finally began its work in earnest the result was essentially an updated version of the 1851 Virginia Constitution. Most of the northern-influenced measures enacted by NWVC leaders in 1862 were discarded. The township system so supported by Rev. James Pomeroy was replaced with the traditional county court system. The secret ballot advocated by Rev. R. L. Brooks was swapped for a system whereby voters would have the choice of sealed or oral ballots, thereby ensuring the elite’s retention of its traditional ability to shape the votes of its dependants. The tax-supported public school system so passionately defended by Gordon Battelle remained in operation, but its revenue sources, particularly the corporate tax, were significantly reduced. The convention also grafted onto the new constitution a number of convoluted land laws that placed many residents’ land titles in question. John Williams and Barbara Rasmussen, two of the most prominent historians of industrialization in West Virginia, agree that these laws made it far easier for titles to be transferred from small landowners to mining or lumber corporations. They were central to the rise of the extractive colonial economy that plagued West Virginia well into the twentieth century. The economic dependency, political powerlessness, and social dislocation endemic to the West Virginia’s industrialization had their roots in the 1872 Constitutional Convention.

The final piece of business considered by the Constitutional Convention was a proposal to ban ministers from holding political office. Defending the measure Samuel Woods argued that proscribing preachers was necessary because “the M E preachers who

got into the Legislature behaved so shamefully."\(^{924}\) Woods was likely referring to Methodist leaders’ support of Confederate proscription, though he could also have been remarking on the many northern-influenced political and social initiatives spearheaded by the church’s leaders. Despite its reactionary orientation, the Constitutional Convention eventually defeated the measure by a vote of 38 – 26. All Republicans at the convention voted against it. Its work completed, the convention submitted the revised West Virginia Constitution to the state’s voters for approval on August 22, 1872.\(^{925}\)

West Virginians approved their new state constitution by a majority of 42,344 – 37,777. As the five percent margin of victory makes clear, residents were deeply divided about the document’s merits. This was particularly the case in counties dominated by the NWVC. Despite the organization’s waning political power, they likely worked to organize their followers against the new constitution. Resistance to the new constitution was strongest in the Monongahela Valley, the state’s Ohio River Counties, and in the lower northern panhandle, all centers of NWVC strength. Further, the NWVC was the leading religious denomination in all twenty counties posting majorities against the new constitution. In addition, counties posting close majorities in favor of ratification (between 50 and 52 percent), were also led by the NWVC.\(^{926}\) The connection between the NWVC and resistance to West Virginia’s redeemers was also clear in the vote on the Flick Amendment the previous year. While the amendment was overwhelmingly endorsed by West Virginians, five counties posted majorities in opposition to it. All five

\(^{924}\) Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 345.
\(^{925}\) Williams, “The New Dominion and the Old,” 346. Many of the convention’s delegates felt little need to graft the ministerial proscription measure onto the constitution. They believed that the memory of proscription would limit the political influence of Methodist leaders. Additional research is necessary to determine whether they were correct.
\(^{926}\) Rice, West Virginia: A History, 163; Shaffer, Clash of Loyalties, 169.
of these counties were led by the NWVC. While most West Virginia Counties posted majorities in excess of 80 percent in favor of the amendment, Taylor and Upshur, also traditional NWVC enclaves, marshaled majorities of only 51 percent. Despite the persistence of these important enclaves of opposition, the new constitution, which remains in effect, further eroded the legacy left by West Virginia’s wartime Methodist leadership. Conservative leaders, by diminishing democratic local government, cutting funding for public schools, and laying the groundwork for the exploitative colonial economy that blighted the lives of many state residents, dashed the high hopes NWVC leaders had for West Virginia’s future at the state’s formation.

The Methodist political ascendancy in West Virginia looks very different when viewed from the perspective of 1872. In 1863, West Virginia statehood and the rise of a new and religiously motivated political constituency heralded a new era of participatory democracy, social development, and economic expansion. West Virginians, led by politically-awakened grassroots ministerial leaders, freed themselves from the slaveholding eastern oligarchy as well as the western courthouse elite, formed their own state, and enacted the public schools, democratic political system, and equitable taxation they had long called for. They seemingly placed their new state on a path to prosperity akin to that enjoyed by their northern neighbors. However, the return of former Confederates and their alliance with conservative unionists generated an anxiety among West Virginia’s new political leaders that resulted in ultimately futile efforts to silence their political opponents. As a result, West Virginia statehood does not appear to be so

927 These correlations were generated by cross-referencing the NWVC’s 1860 and 1890 membership statistics with the 1871 Flick Amendment and 1872 Constitutional referendums, which can be found in George Wesley Atkinson and Alvaro Franklin Gibbons, Prominent Men of West Virginia (Wheeling, West Virginia: W. L. Callin, 1890), 146-148.
much a culmination of decades of political agitation, but rather a brief, incongruous
interlude in the state’s history, a way-station on the road to redemption and eventually
industrialization. Nonetheless, one cannot help but wonder how different West Virginia’s
future may have been had Methodist leaders retained their control over state politics.

The brevity of this epilogue to the story of the entwinement of religion and
politics in Civil War-era West Virginia demonstrates that much work remains to be done
to fully understand the role sectional Methodist leaders played in postwar politics. The
question of whether or not Methodist leaders played a part in the politics of
industrialization and class conflict in late-nineteenth Century West Virginia also awaits
an answer. Nonetheless, it is clear that the social fault-lines established by the NWVC’s
and SWVC’s denominational battles continued to shape westerners’ religious loyalties
long after the Civil War. Slavery was abolished and West Virginia redeemed, but the
scars of the Civil War were not fully healed. By 1890, Methodism was the leading
religious affiliation in all of West Virginia’s 55 counties. Both the NWVC and SWVC
more than doubled their 1860 membership totals, while the MPC, likely still weakened
by its 1866 schism experienced only modest growth. Most remarkable, however, was the
fact that with only three exceptions, the NWVC dominated the very same counties in
1890 that it controlled in 1860. Likewise, all but two counties led by the SWVC in 1860
remained under the southern church’s control. While the political battle for the control of
West Virginia ended in 1872, the cultural war waged by the NWVC and SWVC
persisted.

This clear cultural division among West Virginia Methodists may help explain the
vicious culture wars that plagued the state in the late twentieth century. Indeed, the role
of religious leaders on both sides of the Kanawha County textbook controversy, which focused upon the inclusion of multi-cultural content in high school textbooks, may have had much to do with the religio-political alignments established by Methodist leaders a century before. The extent to which the cultural geography created and perpetuated by the NWVC and SWVC continues to shape social issues in the state is a question that must guide future research into the intersection of religion and politics in nineteenth- and twentieth-century West Virginia.

Despite Methodist leaders’ fall from power in 1872, their direct involvement with sectional Virginia politics, the secession crisis, and the West Virginia Statehood movement attests to the fundamental role religious leaders played in the politics of the Civil War-era Border States. The religiously-charged political message espoused by northern and southern Methodists leaders spoke to and eventually for different factions of western Virginians. NWVC leaders’ demands for constitutional revision, educational and economic development, and fair taxation reflected the aspirations of many western Virginians who hoped to shape their region in a northern image. The SWVC, on the other hand, provided a moral undergirding to the conservative pro-slavery position held by eastern Virginia, as well as western Virginia’s traditional elite. The SWVC also appealed to non-slaveholding westerners uncomfortable with the “yankeefied” reform agenda espoused by many of the region’s residents. The MPC, on the other hand, gained the support of westerners seeking to avoid these fractious battles. The NWVC’s, SWVC’s, and MPC’s denominational battles brought to the forefront the culture war simmering just below the surface of the region’s antebellum political culture.
The NWVC’s rise to political prominence during the secession crisis, their achievement of West Virginia Statehood, and their creation of a northern-influenced West Virginia state government, ensured the short-term ascendancy of their cultural vision. Yet fearful of the threat posed by returning Confederates and their conservative unionist allies, state leaders adopted policies that laid the foundation for the eventual defeat of their northern-influenced vision. Equally important, the issue of race, which was nearly always avoided by NWVC leaders during the antebellum and Civil War eras, proved too powerful for them to control. While Methodist leaders weathered the storm of emancipation during the statehood movement, black suffrage and Confederate disenfranchisement spelled their demise. While more research is needed to determine the role played by SWVC leaders in West Virginia’s redemption, there is no question that by 1872 their southern-influenced vision for West Virginia was on the rise.

Situated on the contested border between the North and South in the nineteenth century, West Virginia is an ideal case for analyzing how rival ministerial leaders and religious organizations inspired disaffected citizens. The story of Methodism, political crisis, and political change in West Virginia attests to the fundamental role political outsiders can play in fomenting cultural divisions and effecting governmental change. It also explains the continued allure of church-based activism to political dissenters around the world as well as the tools these dissidents employ to catalyze political transformation. Religiously-inspired grassroots organizations appeal to those who feel abandoned by political leaders or isolated from fellow citizens. Their ability to mobilize a diverse citizenry in support of a common set of political, social, and economic grievances is crucial to understanding how these organizations can effectively build and lead new
coalitions during a period of political crisis. Finally, they demonstrate an important means by which ordinary citizens, if only for a fleeting moment, can fundamentally transform their political culture and society.
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Appendix A: Additional Tables

Table A.1: Secessionism, Religious Affiliation, and Political Affiliation

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Leading Religious Organization</th>
<th>1860 Election</th>
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Table A.2: Unionism, Religious Affiliation, and Partisan Affiliation

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Table A.3: County Secession Vote in Western Virginia Compared With Religious Affiliation and Other Socio-Economic Variables: Doddridge and Calhoun Counties

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<td>Secession Ordinance Vote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of The Population Enslaved</td>
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<td>Average Farm Value (In Dollars)</td>
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<td>Value of Manufactured Products (In Dollars)</td>
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Table A.4: County Secession Vote in Western Virginia Compared With Religious Affiliation and Other Socio-Economic Variables: Putnam and Fayette Counties

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<td>Percent of The Population Enslaved</td>
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<td>Average Farm Value (In Dollars)</td>
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