lears Ago

Why Maryland Stayed Loyal' To The Union

JOHN C. SCHMIDT

YLANDERS who went to the polls ago this November to elect a had four candidates to choose e campaign issues were as stark or secession; slavery or emancilignment with the industrial North ricultural South; peace or war.

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Gov. Thomas Hicks forestalled declaration of State's position by refusing to call Legislature.

Governor Hicks came in December, 1859, when South Carolina passed resolutions reaffirming its earlier claim to the right of secession and calling for a convention of all the slaveholding states to devise proper defense measures and to consider the pros and cons of secession. The Maryland General Assembly referred the resolutions to a select committee. Governor Hicks himself was cool to the idea of secession.

Critical Of Abolitionists

John C. Breckenridge, the 39-year-old vice president of the United States, for the

This completed with split in the Democratic party. In the meantime, however, members of still another faction had met a month earlier in Baltimore and nominated their candidate. The Constitutional Union Convention met at the old First Presbyterian Church at Fayette and North streets. It was made up mostly of "political antiquities:" members of the dying Know-Nothing party and old line Whigs.

They adopted no platform, except a windy declaration of principles of the Union, the Constitution and the enforcement of laws. Sixty-three-year-old John Bell, of Tennessee, secretary of war under President Harrison and a long-time political figure, was nominated for the presidency.

One week later, the Republican National Convention assembled in Chicago and nominated Abraham Lincoln as its standardbearer. Thus the four political armies drew battle lines for the November 6 election.

Lincoln Does Poorly

Polls opened in Baltimore at 8 A.M. and closed at 5 P.M. The city was suffering an economic depression as a result of the political unrest and various Government policies that were adversely affecting trade and production. Marylanders had no united political opinion to express, and by narrow margins the electors of Breckenridge carried the city and State. The vote for him was 42,497; for his nearest competitor, Bell, 41,777.

In electing Breckenridge, Marylanders aligned themselves - albeit weakly - with the deep South: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. Bell carried only three states: Kentucky. Tennessee and Virginia. Douglas unwise.



Maryland Historical Society

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Despite une agnation, nowever, mun, land took no unified stand; made no overt declaration of where her citizens stood on the issues of the day; did not even proclaim a position of neutrality between the

disunited states.

The reasons Maryland failed to speak out can be attributed largely to one man, Gov. Thomas Holliday Hicks. He was a controversial figure who had argued for a secession clause in the Constitution of 1851, spoken out for secession several times in the interim and made anti-Lincoln remarks. Yet he refused, time and again, to call a special session of the Legislature

consistent, but its outcome was that Maryland adhered to the Union-if not by choice then by failure to act until there was no

alternative.

State Soil "Polluted"

The mixed motivation's of Governor Hicks, the son of a Dorchester county farmer, characterized the pattern across the State. "Diversified" was the way a contemporary writer, W. Jefferson Buchanan, described Maryland's population. He said an influx of merchants, manu- a declaration of the State's intention to facturers and day laborers had "polluted" cast her lot with the South, should disthe State's soil, and blamed the resulting solution of the Union become inevitable. mixture for Maryland's failure to agree on Civil War issues.

By 1860, there were almost as many free Negroes in the State as there were slaves; about 85,000. Slaves were largely confined to the Southern counties and the Eastern Shore. In that year, almost one out of five free Marylanders had been born out of the State. Most of these were from foreign countries, but a sizable number-24,000were from the North. There were 57,000 Germans, most of whom were Democrats of the Jeffersonian type, espousing liberty and equality for all. These could not hold into the party platform; (3) conservatives

rights of slaveholders.

On the other side of the political fence were the tobacco-raising families of English descent in the southern counties. These depended on slave labor, as did farmers of the Eastern Shore. Then as now, the small counties exercised a disproportionate influence in the Legislature; Baltimore in 1850 had one fourth of the population but only one tenth of the representation. The slaveholding counties were determined to uphold this unbalance of power, fearful that a Legislature that more honestly represented the population would overthrow

United Front Impossible

A third major group was made up of commercial and manufacturing interests in Baltimore and the northern and western counties. Manufacturing did not use slave

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The select committee made its report on March 8, and its tone reflected the because he indicated he feared it would repugnance with which most citizens at pass an act of secession. this time viewed a break-up of the Union. Hicks's course was neither brilliant nor The report took cognizance of the "aggressive policy of the anti-slavery elements of the country towards our Southern institutions," condemned the system of assisting the escape of fugitive slaves and the "constant efforts of the Republican party of the North . . . to trample still further upon our rights. Yet," the report continued, "Maryland will not be precipitate to initiate a system that may begin the destruction of this majestic work of our

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dangers inherent in the situation.

The National Democratic Convention of 1860 met at Charleston, S.C., on April 23. Three factions quickly emerged: (1) supporters of Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois, numbering half the 600 delegates; (2) Cotton States delegates who opposed Douglas and insisted on putting the slavery issue with a Democratic party that championed who opposed the extreme views of the Cotton States but who also opposed Douglas. The convention adjourned amid great confusion without agreeing on a candidate. It did agree to meet again in Baltimore

A Row Over Seating

The city's hotels were filled as the opening session convened in the city's Front failed to dispel the storm clouds that had hung over Charleston, however. There was an immediate controversy over seating, in which Douglas men occupied seats of secession men. The convention again divided. Virginia withdrew first, followed by North Carolina, Oregon and California. Kentucky and Tennessee retired for consultation. Georgia refused to re-enter the convention.

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Positive Stand Urged

After Lincoln's election, there arose demand on the part of nearly all political factions that Governor Hicks call the Legislature into special session, in order to establish some measure of control over the fast-developing and far-reaching events. The State's actions—or absence of them were being misinterpreted by both sides, and more and more Marylanders favored a positive stand, one way or another.

In the South, the election of Breckenridge was hailed as a great victory. Hick's earlier cool replies to South Carolina on and slipped through Baltimore in the night secession and other similar statements were held up in the North as evidence of Maryland's loyalty to the Union. From Novem-Stigma On The State ber to March, mass meetings were held frequently in Baltimore, some upholding the governor's course, others condemning it.

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Historian J. Thomas Scharf gives other, more compelling reasons. "His views of national affairs were evidently influenced materially by his indisposition to act in con-Street Theater. The new time and place cert with a political party in Maryland to which he was opposed. Old wounds were still rankling; unforgotten and unforgiven party defeats were still working in the executive mind; and he could look for no patriotic aid or counsel from the men who dared to curb the fraud and infamy by which he himself obtained his position.'

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Stigma On The State

Much controversy surrounds the reasons for this. The popular explanation was that a plot to assassinate Lincoln as he passed through Baltimore had been uncovered. There was never any evidence produced of such a conspiracy, but the report circulated widely. Another opinion holds that Lincoln made the trip in secret to avoid meeting the Baltimore Committee to welcome him, whose members were unpopular in the State.

Whatever the reason, the event had an unfavorable effect in placing a stigma on the people of Maryland in the eyes of the North and the Federal Government. A lull in the political storm settled briefly when Lincoln appointed a Marylander, Montgomery Blair, as his Postmaster General. But the bubble burst once and for all early on the morning of April 12 when Confederate batteries opened fire on the Federal garrison at Fort Sumpter in Charleston harbor. Three days later, President Lincoln issued a call of 75,000 men to arms, ending all hopes of peace.

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On the second day of its Frederick session, the Senate concluded that it had no Constitutional authority to pass secession legislation. The House of Delegates followed suit a few days later. This action was a bitter disappointment to the Southern counties and other secessionists, but the legislators resisted clamors of those who sought to break away from the Union.

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> Other arrests took place as the summer of 1861 wore on. Fearful that a September session of the State Legislature might show secession sentiment, Federal authorities went even further in their efforts to assure election of Union sympathizers. The Secretary of War ordered the arrest of any members of the legislative body as well as other citizens the military authorities deemed necessary to prevent an act of secession. Fort McHenry became filled with political prisoners, and many of the State's leading citizens went South to join the Confederate

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Detachments of soldiers were sent to "protect" Union voters, and these same soldiers were permitted to vote, swelling the Union margin. Many civilian voters were challenged, and some arrested. The vote was light, but the Union majority heavy. The Union ticket, headed by Augustus W. Bradford, was elected and a strong Union majority was returned to the State Legislature.

Unionists continued to rule the Legislature until Federal military control was withdrawn from the State after the war. Maryland was a loyal state in fact, as well as in name, once Federal force had made certain it would follow such a path.



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Rioting In Pratt Street

April 19 brought news of a bridge blowup at Harpers Ferry and of the approach of more troops from the North. That afternoon an estimated 10,000 citizens rioted in the streets in protest to the passing through of Federal soldiers. This bloodshed on Pratt street cast the die for Federal intervention into Maryland life and politics that lasted throughout the war.

A committee of Baltimoreans was chosen to see President Lincoln and make a plea that no more Union soldiers pass through the city. This was agreed upon, but the Federal capital considered itself in great danger. It was without communication with the North from the time of the Baltimore riot. Its communication via the Potomac was threatened and the arsenal at Harpers Ferry was in rebel hands.

Avoiding Baltimore, a large Northern force under Brig. Gen. B. F. Butler boarded a ferry at Perryman and landed at Annapolis on April 23. To prevent Southern sympathizers from reinforcing and supplying the Confederates at Harpers Ferry, General Butler took a body of men and seized the Relay House 6 miles from Baltimore on the B.& O. Railroad. Then, under cover of a driving thunderstorm on May 13, he brought a large portion of his force into Baltimore and took possession of Federal Hill. He acted without orders, and the storm kept citizens in their homes.

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sion, the Senate concluded that it had no Constitutional authority to pass secession legislation. The House of Delegates followed suit a few days later. This action was a bitter disappointment to the Southern counties and other secessionists, but the legislators resisted clamors of those who sought to break away from the Union.

More Trouble Provoked

Again, however, it-made formal expression of its sympathy in a resolution calling the war unconstitutional and repugnant, and sympathizing with the South in its determination to hold on to self government. It sent a delegation to Jefferson Davis to assure him of Maryland's sympathy.

Administration partisans in Baltimore sought to provoke trouble by accusing the city administration of arming states rights supporters and working to plunge Maryland into revolution. Even though unfounded, these rumors were heeded by the Federal Government, which already had ringed the

states rights supporters. The State was to elect a governor, senators from eleven counties, as well as a large number of delegates and lesser officers. On election day, military rules were issued for the detection and apprehension of persons attempting to vote who were known to have aided the Confederate cause.

Detachments of soldiers were sent to "protect" Union voters, and these same soldiers were permitted to vote, swelling the Union margin. Many civilian voters were challenged, and some arrested. The vote was light, but the Union majority heavy. The Union ticket, headed by Augustus W. Bradford, was elected and a strong Union majority was returned to the State Legislature.

Unionists continued to rule the Legislature until Federal military control was withdrawn from the State after the war. Maryland was a loyal state in fact, as well as in name, once Federal force had made certain it would follow such a path.



