

## **South Carolina Secedes from the Union**

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Quickly following Abraham Lincoln's election, the South Carolina General Assembly had called for a convention to draw up an Ordinance of Secession. After the election of delegates to the secession convention on December 6, 1860, it was clear to everyone that South Carolina would soon be pulling out of the Union. The few candidates who sought compromise were easily defeated.

The delegates to the convention met in the First Baptist Church in Columbia on December 17. Those in attendance were almost all wealthy slaveholders. On the first day of the convention, the assembled group passed a unanimous resolution to secede from the Union. The next step was to formally draw up an Ordinance of Secession.

At this time in Columbia, there was an outbreak of smallpox. Fearing that the epidemic might hinder their progress, the conventioners decided to change location and on the morning of December 18 they embarked on trains for Charleston. In that city, they reconvened at St. Andrew's Hall and at a little after 1:00 pm on December 20 an Ordinance of Secession had been drawn up and unanimously approved by the 169 delegates. The word of its passage leaked to the citizenry outside the hall and was met by loud cheers of approval and cannon fire.

The delegates decided to hold a ceremonial signing of the Ordinance that evening. They assembled at 6:30 pm and walked in silent and solemn procession to Institute Hall. The hall was bursting with more than three thousand spectators. After a prayer, the president of the convention, David Jamison, walked to the podium and slowly read the Ordinance:

“An Ordinance to dissolve the union between the state of South Carolina and other states united with her under the compact entitled “The Constitution of the United States of America”. We the people of the State of South Carolina, in convention assembled, do declare and ordain, and it is hereby declared and ordained, that the ordinance adopted by us in convention on the twenty third day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, whereby the constitution of the United States of America was ratified, and also all Acts and parts of Acts of the General Assembly of this state, ratifying amendments of the said Constitution are repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other states under the name “United States of America” is hereby dissolved.”

As the word dissolved passed Jamison’s lips, an enormous cheer erupted from the crowd.

According to one observer, it was “a shout that shook the very building, reverberating, long-continued, rose to Heaven, and ceased only with the loss of breath.” Following the reading of the Ordinance, Jamison asked each of the delegates to come forward and sign his name to the document. The crowd applauded each man wildly during what became a two-hour procession. Finally, Jamison brought the ceremonies to a close. According the Charleston Mercury:

“At the close of the signatures the President, advancing to the front of the platform, announced that the Seal of the State had been set, the signatures of the Convention put to the Ordinance, and he thereby proclaimed the State of South Carolina a separate, independent nationality.

To describe the enthusiasm with which this announcement was greeted, is beyond the power of the pen. The high, burning, bursting heart alone can realize it. A mighty voice of great thoughts and great emotions spoke from the mighty throat of one people as a unit.

The State of South Carolina has recorded herself before the universe. In reverence before God, fearless of man, unawed by power, unterrified by clamor, she has cut the Gordian knot of

colonial dependence upon the North - cast her fortune upon her right, and her own right arm, and stands ready to uphold alike her independence and her dignity before the world.”

Over the next few days, the delegates passed a number of other resolutions, including one that called for the federal government to restore all its fortifications and arsenals in the state to South Carolina authority. Several miles from the city, Major Robert Anderson of the United States Army and his troops were certainly wondering what the coming days would bring.