

The South Forms a Government **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

During the second week of February, 1861, the delegates to the convention in Montgomery, Alabama continued their deliberations. Because their debates were often acrimonious, they often shut their doors to the public and convened in closed sessions. Presiding over the convention was Georgian Thomas Howell Cobb, a former governor and Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The assembly in Montgomery did not wish to reinvent the wheel in forming their government. In fact, they had great admiration for the U.S. Constitution and for the Founding Fathers but felt that the United States had drifted from the founders' intent.

On February 6, a group of 12 of the delegates had begun to hash out a provisional constitution to get their new government operating. In doing so, they looked carefully at the U.S. Constitution. The provisional Confederate Constitution closely paralleled the original U.S. version, with a few interesting differences.

Many of those assembled had served in Congress and there was an overwhelming sentiment that the power of the Executive branch of government had grown too large. There was general agreement that the impeachment process was too slow a process for removing an incompetent president, and so Article II of the new constitution provided for removal of a president by a two-thirds majority vote of the Confederate Congress.

As there were varied opinions on slavery within the room, the men left serious deliberation on that topic for a more permanent constitution to be created later. However, they

did include two provisions on the subject. First, they banned the African slave trade. With approximately four million slaves in the America by 1860, they felt this was sufficient to provide for future needs and they did not wish to be dependent on Northern merchants for obtaining additional slaves. Second, they incorporated a strong Fugitive Slave act into the constitution, providing that any escaped slave must be returned or restitution made.

On February 8, 1861, the document titled "A Constitution for the Provisional Government of the Confederate States of America" was brought to the assembly. At midnight, after nearly nine hours of closed debate, it was passed unanimously. On the next day, February 9, 1861, Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was elected President and Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia Vice-President of the Confederate States of America.

On February 11 in Springfield, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln boarded a two-car private train, bound for Washington. Since his election in early November, six states had left the Union and Civil War seemed inevitable. This weighed heavily on Lincoln as he spoke to the crowd bidding him farewell: "Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young man to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being... I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail... To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell." Lincoln would arrive in Washington 12 days later.

In Pensacola, Florida, the *U.S.S. Brooklyn* and another federal warship arrived at Fort Pickens on February 6. The *Brooklyn* was loaded with supplies and soldiers to reinforce the

beleaguered forces under Lieutenant Adam Slemmer. However, upon arrival only the provisions were brought ashore to Fort Pickens. During the *Brooklyn's* voyage to Florida, President Buchanan had reached an agreement with Florida officials whereby Florida agreed not to attack the fort if Buchanan agreed not to land the reinforcements. So, the Floridians and the U.S. forces continued to maintain a very tense truce across the waters of Pensacola Bay.