

Secession of Arkansas and Tennessee **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

The firing on Fort Sumter and President Lincoln's call for 75,000 troops to put down the rebellion led quickly to the secession of four additional slave states, and the likelihood of full-scale civil war. Following Virginia's secession on April 17, Arkansas and Tennessee made their own preparations to leave the Union.

Of the eleven states that eventually joined the Confederacy, Arkansas ranked tenth in population, exceeding just Florida, and it had only joined the Union in 1836. Elements of its population were strongly Unionist in sympathy, while others ardently supported secession. In January 1861, Governor Henry Rector had called for a statewide election to determine whether delegates should be elected to a State Convention to consider secession. He also persuaded the U.S. garrison guarding the Federal arsenal in Little Rock to evacuate the position, after pro-secession forces had gathered there and threatened to remove them by force. The electorate voted in favor of a State Convention, which met in Little Rock on March 3. The delegates, however, were split, with a majority opposing secession, except in the event of an attempt by the government of the United States to make war upon the Confederate States. Having thwarted efforts to leave the Union, the delegates adjourned, but plans were made for a special statewide election in August to vote for or against secession.

Following the surrender of Fort Sumter, President Lincoln in his Proclamation of Rebellion asked Arkansas to provide a regiment of troops to subdue the seceded states. Governor Rector refused this request, and ordered state troops to occupy the Federal arsenal at Fort Smith. The State Convention quickly reconvened in the capitol on May 6 and adopted an

Ordinance of Secession by a vote of 65-5. After the president of the convention requested that the vote be made unanimous, four of the dissenters changed their vote, making the final tally 69 to 1 in favor of secession. Only Isaac Murphy of Huntsville refused. Two weeks later Arkansas would join the Confederate States of America.

Tennessee was an important state for the Confederacy due to its location and its agricultural and manufacturing strength. It bordered eight states and stretched from Appalachians to the Mississippi. In 1860 the state had voted for the moderate Constitutional Union and native son candidate John Bell. Governor Isham Harris supported secession, and in January 1861 he gave a speech to the state legislature critical of the U.S. Government's treatment of the south and calling for a State Convention to consider secession. A statewide election held in early February showed the divided nature of the population. While west Tennessee strongly supported secession, east Tennessee just as vehemently opposed the measure. Voters in middle Tennessee, meanwhile, were split on the issue, with a small majority opposing a convention. The overall vote total was 54% in favor and 46% opposed.

As in other states like Virginia, Arkansas, and North Carolina, Lincoln's Proclamation after Fort Sumter calling for troops to put down the Rebellion galvanized secessionist sentiment in Tennessee. One Unionist congressman wrote that the proclamation caused "a tornado of excitement that seems likely to sweep us all away." Governor Harris quickly called on the state legislature to approve an Ordinance of Secession, pursuant to ratification by the people. They did so on May 6, the same day that Arkansas left the Union. Harris then moved to form an alliance with the Confederacy, even before citizens had the chance to ratify secession. When the election was finally held in early June, the population had voted in favor of disunion by a vote of

more than two to one, though a majority in east Tennessee still voted to remain in the Union. By late July, Tennessee had officially joined the Confederacy, the last state to formally do so.