

THE DAYS OF SECESSION

1860 - 1861



THE PRINTING OFFICE of the Washington Telegraph was situated in a building by the side of the tavern at the town well. William Etter had bought the tavern some years before and made a home of it for his wife and four sons and two daughters.

John Eakin, lawyer, became the editor of the Washington Telegraph in 1860.

There was also a young printer's devil living in the Etter home — Sam Williams — who would go with the Chicago Tribune after the Civil War, and write his Memorabilia of Hempstead County in 1885 — but on a day in November, 1860, he was sitting alone in the office of the Washington Telegraph. He wrote of that day many years later:

The day following the presidential election day was an uncommonly gloomy one for November. It was ushered in with rain, and all day long there had been a constant downpour. As I sat alone by the window and gazed out upon the dark pall of clouds that enveloped the earth, and listened to the ceaseless patter of the rain, I felt a vivid presentiment that the forbidding scene was a presage of the dreadful feeling of gloom that was about to be cast over the entire South by the news of Lincoln's election.

In due course of time — I think it was the third day — intelligence of the result reached Washington. Abraham Lincoln had been chosen! The announcement fell upon our little community with the awfulness of a death knell. The entire male population assembled at the postoffice before the arrival of the stagecoach, and when the intelligence was given out a feeling of sadness fell over us: with leaden hearts the little knots of men finally dispersed to their homes . . .

Abraham Lincoln was the man, who, when he had been elected Senator from Illinois, two years earlier, had said, "I believe that this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free ..."

Republican platform which "condemned attempts to reopen the African slave trade and denied the authority of Congress to give legal status to slavery in the territories ..."

"States rights!" — that was what the slave holding states had always been shouting about — "States rights! The federal government is only an agent of the states, and possesses no power except that which has been given it by the states themselves —"

But the civil War was here, and it had come a few short months after that November presidential election day, when a shot was fired on Fort Sumter, in South Carolina, on April 12, 1861. Seven southern states had seceded from the United States of America and had demanded that the arsenal at Fort Sumter be delivered by the federal forces to the newly formed "Confederate States of America."

The moment of decision for Arkansas came when Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, sent a message to Governor Henry M. Rector, requisitioning "one regiment of 780 men to help suppress the rebellion ..."

Governor Rector had replied: "In answer to your demand for troops from Arkansas to subjugate the southern states, I have to say that none will be furnished."

A Secession Convention had been meeting in Little Rock at that time, to decide if Arkansas should secede from the Union, and on May 2nd, the vote was taken: there were sixty nine "ayes" and one "nay."

Arkansas seceded from the United States of America and accepted the provisional constitution of the Confederate States of America.

Augustus Garland was chosen as the delegate to attend the Confederate Congress in Montgomery, Alabama.

Edward Gantt resigned his seat in the United States Congress. Dr. Charles Mitchell resigned his seat in the United States Senate.