

DRANESVILLE

A Northern Virginia Town in the Crossfire
of a Forgotten Battle, December 20, 1861

Ryan T. Quint



Savas Beatie
California

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To my parents, with love and appreciation.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BYU: Brigham Young University

CSR: Compiled Service Record

FRSP: Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park

Frank English Letters: "Letters and Genealogy of the Means-English Families, 1828-1950"

LOC: Library of Congress

NARA: National Archives and Records Administration

OR: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies

JCCW: Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War

USAHEC: United States Army Heritage and Education Center

USC: University of South Carolina

VMHC: Virginia Museum of History & Culture

WCU: Western Carolina University

Photos have been placed throughout the text for the convenience of the reader.

Introduction

The following pages are proof as to how a project can take on a life of its own, twisting and turning into something entirely unexpected. I came to the battle of Dranesville in a rather roundabout way. The story starts with the wounding of Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson at the battle of Chancellorsville.

When Jackson went down from a volley fired by his own troops, command of the Army of Northern Virginia’s Second Corps lay in flux. Major General A. P. Hill at first took charge of the corps, but he was soon wounded himself, the victim of Federal artillery fire. The other division commanders in Jackson’s corps were not yet experienced enough, nor did they have the appropriate rank, to lead almost 28,000 men and officers. So, Robert E. Lee turned to Maj. Gen. James Ewell Brown (J. E. B.) Stuart.

Commanding the Confederate army’s cavalry, Stuart reached the scene around midnight on May 3. He inherited a command expected to continue Jackson’s attack from the evening before, though it was badly fragmented by the thick confines of Spotsylvania’s Wilderness. In a matter of hours, Stuart organized the corps and launched a series of devastating attacks against the Union lines around Chancellorsville. By 10:00 a.m., Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker’s Army of the Potomac was in full retreat from Chancellorsville. The Army of Northern Virginia had won another victory, however impractical it seemed on paper.

This was a story I told as I worked for the National Park Service at the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park. On programs that focused on Jackson’s wounding and its aftermath, I always mentioned the arrival of J. E. B. Stuart early in the morning to assume responsibility for the action. Up to that point, I explained, Stuart had only commanded infantry once before in the war, at the battle of Dranesville—where Stuart had led some 2,000 soldiers.

Now he was expected to command 28,000 in his second infantry command. The battle of Dranesville hadn't gone so well for Stuart, but at Chancellorsville, his leadership played a large role in the eventual Confederate victory. In those retellings I gave for visitors at the National Park, many people had never heard of the December 20, 1861, engagement, and that's not very surprising, considering the dearth of material about it. There are certainly articles about the battle, or chapters set amongst larger works, but this is the first monograph dedicated solely to the actions around Dranesville in the fall and winter of 1861.

In those articles and summaries of the battle, Dranesville is usually classified as a meeting engagement of two opposing foraging parties that bumped into each other and started the battle. That is partially true, but as I began to research, I realized there was an undercurrent of events that never seemed to get any mention. And that is where the project began to develop in its own direction. My original intention was to write a tactical narrative and analysis of the battle of Dranesville—something that I believe I have still accomplished—but I quickly realized telling that story required coming at it from another angle that up until now others had overlooked. That angle involved the very active role that the civilians of Dranesville played in their own story. White and Black, free and enslaved, Unionist and Confederate, the people of the tiny town threw themselves into the conflict that began to tear at the country's seams in April 1861. Dranesville's civilian activity eventually produced responses from both armies in the fall of 1861. That led to the persecution of Unionists, ambushes of Federal soldiers, and raids into town in the days and weeks before the formal battle of Dranesville. The events of this cat-and-mouse game have never been discussed to any serious length until now, and readers will find the whole story in the pages that follow.

Occurring in the winter of 1861, Dranesville has often been overshadowed by other, larger battles, including the war's first major engagement at First Manassas that summer. Smaller battles like Wilson's Creek and Ball's Bluff still held sway in the northern populace's consciousness in a line of Federal defeats. But Dranesville did have important ramifications. First, the Federal victory there, no matter how small it was, gave the sagging Union morale a badly needed boost. Second, it proved to be a baptism of fire and chance to command large numbers of troops for officers who would go on to become some of the war's most famous leaders. Edward Ord, for example, commanded a brigade of Pennsylvania Reserves in its first fight. He finished the war commanding the Army of the James; the Reserves became one of the finest divisions in the Army of the Potomac. For the Confederates, J. E. B. Stuart's defeat at Dranesville proved to be a blackmark against his record that drew criticism both by fellow officers and newspaper editorialists, with some even calling for his removal from command. It was criticism that he would weather

and overcome—rising to prominence as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia’s cavalry until his death in 1864. I wanted to dive into and flesh out these stories, of which I only had a bare understanding. With that, the project morphed into a story about a town, its people, and a battle that transformed the lives of everyone involved.

Acknowledgments

This project has taken nearly seven years to complete, and it would not have been possible to finish without the help of the numerous people below. I hope each one of them knows they have my ultimate thanks for the million ways they showed support and assisted during the course of writing this book.

The thanks start with the legions of librarians and archivists who helped in the search for materials. That includes the staff of the Central Rappahannock Regional Library, the Virginia Museum of History & Culture, the City of Alexandria Library, the Library of Congress, the University of Virginia, Minnesota Historical Society, the New York State Library, Winthrop University, and the Public Library of Anniston-Calhoun County. The staff at the University of South Carolina, especially McKenzie Lemhouse, helped find Frank English’s correspondence and the wartime photo of John Bratton, reprinted below. Because of my repeated visits to the Virginia Room at the Fairfax County Library, Christopher Barbuschak, Michele Bernocco, Suzanne LaPierre, and Elaine McRey all deserve special thanks. Victoria Thompson at the Fairfax County Court House helped track down the Coroner’s Inquest for Henry St. Clair.

Early in the phases of research that led to this book, Ron Baumgarten graciously fielded questions about Dranesville, and Jim Gandy at the New York State Military Museum pointed me to resources for the 34th New York Infantry. Becky Ryer sent me the writings of her ancestor, Cordello Collins, a Bucktail with the 1st Pennsylvania Rifles, and Maureen Lavelle saved me a trip all the way out to Utah when she scanned the papers of Thomas Kane for me. Becca Toy likewise scanned material from the College of William & Mary. Brandi Oswald, a friend and archivist at the National Archives, saved the day when they helped track down the proceedings and case files of Dranesville’s accused men, which had been misplaced on the shelves at College Park. All the way out in California friend David Dixon scanned documents from the collections of the esteemed Huntington Library. Pittsburgher Jim DiNucci, one of the kindest people I’ve ever met and worked with, sought out the grave of Alexander Smith and sent me photos. Rich Condon, another proud Pittsburgher, sent along information about Capt. Robert Galway.

Just as I seemed to be coming to the end of the research for this book the outbreak of COVID-19 brought everything to a screeching halt. Some of the research I still needed was housed in the papers of Edward Ord, at Stanford University—obviously a vital piece of the puzzle. The staff at Stanford’s special collections, led by Tim Noakes, sent nearly 100 scans of Ord’s letters in what amounted to a game-saver.

Closer to home, friend and co-worker at the Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, Noel Harrison, found out about my Dranesville project and was more than happy to share his veritable wealth of knowledge from his days as a graduate student. He graciously shared an article that he wrote about the Fairfax civilian experience, which tipped me off to the much larger story of persecution of Unionists in 1861 in communities like Dranesville.

Help also came from the now retired Chief Historian at Fredericksburg, John Hennessy, who kindheartedly fielded questions that I had regarding Joseph Johnston’s headquarters following the battle of First Manassas.

As the manuscript came along, I set out to compile a total list of casualties from the battle. One of my best friends, Sean Redmiles, helped in a project that proved mutually beneficial, as he worked at the Frying Pan Farm at the time. He scoured the compiled service records even more than I did. Then came John Moyle and his son, Matthew. Matthew’s Eagle Scout Project was to establish a sign commemorating the battle. John joined the effort of totaling up the losses, not an easy task due to the multitude of newspapers with different names and spellings, and some names not reported. John also became a sounding board as I shared my interpretive ideas of the battle with him. I believe the list of names that is appended to this book is the end result of a lot of hard work by the likes of Sean, John, and Matthew. They deserve the credit and my thanks.

Once the rough draft of this manuscript was finished, many people read it over and sent back feedback that made what exists now a much better result. Chris Mackowski, a great historian and greater friend, read the entire thing and provided line edits. Jim Morgan, expert on the battle of Ball’s Bluff, read my chapter on that engagement and saved me from some embarrassing hiccups. Jake Wynn, another person I’m privileged to call a friend, provided feedback and suggestions regarding Andrew Curtin’s mobilization of Pennsylvania volunteers. Keith Poulter line edited the rough draft and caught several errors that would have otherwise gone unnoticed. His knowledge of the English language is a delight to behold, and our conversations sometimes made my head spin, but he was right every time. David Snyder likewise copyedited the manuscript and caught numerous mistakes that I thought I had earlier corrected. Shannon Doherty took a clunky and bloated manuscript and made it much more readable—she has since become my Civil War

travel companion and my best friend. I am eternally grateful for all their efforts in making this a better book.

Edward Alexander masterfully created the maps, taking my sometimes rough and unclear directions and turning them into wonderful pieces of cartography that makes this a much more readable manuscript.

The staff at Savas Beatie, especially Ted Savas, Sarah Keeney, Lisa Murphy, and Veronica Kane were all extremely helpful in shepherding the project along. It has been a long time coming, and they helped to turn a series of disjointed Word documents into the book you hold today.

I must close by also thanking the congregation of the Church of the Brethren in Dranesville for welcoming me to their annual remembrance of the battle. I was an outsider looking to tell a story—their story—that they've known for so long and have kept alive. Their words of encouragement, especially from John Waggoner and Craig Stutzman, greatly aided me over the years, and their somber ceremony each December proved a continual reminder that this story is about people who breathed, lived, loved, and—ultimately—died at Dranesville.

Thank you all, sincerely, from the depths of my heart.

Prologue

“You Have Killed Him”

The Murder of Henry St. Clair

December 30, 1854, was a busy day in the small community of Dranesville, Virginia, 20 miles to the west from the District of Columbia. It started with the annual hiring out of enslaved people. A common practice throughout the institution of slavery, the hiring occurred on or around New Year’s Day when enslavers auctioned off people for a year’s worth of work to the highest bidder. Dranesville’s hiring was no different. The town’s small populace turned out at this public occasion to watch and place bids. Bidders looked up at the platform, considering the choices of human chattel up for auction. Neighbors vied against one another, competing for the best available bids as the day went on. They examined the people standing on the platform, checking for anything they could consider deficiencies in order to lower the asking price that the masters had set.¹ Lewis Clarke, formerly enslaved, later reminisced on the dread that accompanied the season: “If anybody is going to sell a slave, that’s the time they do it; and if anybody’s going to give away a slave, that’s the time they do it; and the slave never knows where he’ll be sent to. Oh, New-Year’s a heart-breaking time.”²

It’s not known where exactly the bidding took place, but “local tradition in Dranesville is that slave hiring was conducted on a platform near the Drane

1 Jonathan Martin, *Divided Mastery: Slave Hiring in the American South* (Cambridge, 2004), 47.

2 Lewis Clarke, “Leaves from a Slave’s Journal of Life,” *The Anti-Slavery Standard*, 20 and 27 October, 1842, accessed Jan. 4, 2020. https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/clarke/support1.html#menu_links.

Tavern.”³ When the hiring was finished, the crowds began to break up to look for food and drink to pass the evening. Many of them moved west down the Leesburg Pike, headed for another of the town’s taverns owned by Henry Bicksler. One of those people, twenty-one-year-old Henry St. Clair, had just hours to live.

* * *

The September 8, 1818, edition of the Leesburg newspaper *Genius of Liberty* carried a brief advertisement. “Washington Drane respectfully informs his friends & the public in general, that he has opened a house of entertainment at his new building on the road leading from Georgetown to Leesburg—15 miles from the former and 16 miles from the latter.” Drane’s advert continued, “The house and furniture are new and elegant and every requisite attendance has been provided for the genteel accommodation of either parties of pleasure or persons on business.” Drane came to call his establishment the Mountain View Hotel. Guests could stay for twelve and a half cents per night and get breakfast the following morning for another twenty-five cents.⁴

Washington Drane had come from the District of Columbia to set up his new hotel. His entire business plan hinged on location. As he was constructing his hotel, the Leesburg Pike was almost completed, opening travel between Georgetown and Leesburg. Drane figured his hotel would be a natural half-way stopping point for wagon traffic traveling between Washington and Leesburg. Nestled at the intersection between the Leesburg and Georgetown Turnpikes, Drane hoped to get business from both.⁵

The idea paid off handsomely. Historian Charles Poland writes, “From 1815 to 1830 it was commonplace for 40 or 50 wagons pulled by four and six horse teams to daily traverse the small town.” That much business traveling down the turnpikes soon enticed others to open their own taverns and way stations so that, at one time, there were no fewer than five taverns operating within the immediate area.⁶

Even as others came to the growing community, they respected Washington Drane as the unofficial town leader. He was a toll collector on the turnpike and served as the community’s postmaster.⁷ Drane died in 1832; eight years later, the

3 Janet Hofer, “A Most Foul Murder,” *Great Falls Historical Society Reflections*, 1984-1985, 17.

4 *Genius of Liberty*, Sep. 8, 1818; *Genius of Liberty*, Jul. 4, 1820; *Genius of Liberty*, Jun. 7, 1825.

5 *The Sixth, Seventh, and Eighth Annual Reports of the Board of Public Works to the General Assembly of Virginia: Volume 3* (Richmond, 1824), 79.

6 Charles Preston Poland Jr., *Dunbarton, Dranesville, Virginia* (Fairfax, VA, 1974), 17.

7 Gina McNeely, “Dranesville Tavern: The History of a Roadside Inn,” *Virginia Cavalcade*, 43, No. 2, Autumn 1993, 74; *List of Post Offices in the United States, with the Names of the Post-Masters* (Washington, D.C., 1828), 30.

Virginia General Assembly set aside thirty acres of land to “be laid off into lots with convenient streets and alleys.” This new town was to “go by the name of ‘Dranesville.’”⁸

Though the town was well established by the mid-1850s, it was still small enough that everyone seemed to be related to one another. For example, Drane’s widow, Ann M. Dade, remarried the same year her husband died, this time to a man named John B. Farr. Farr assumed Drane’s responsibilities as postmaster and Justice of the County Clerk.⁹ The taverns continued to flourish—especially Drane’s old Mountain View, which hosted the slave hirings every year at the eastern end of town.

By the 1850s, daily traffic through Dranesville kept the town afloat, though change lurked on the horizon. Just to the south, the Alexandria, Loudoun, & Hampshire Railroad Company was laying tracks through the town of Herndon. Soon, iron rails would siphon traffic away from mules and oxen, and from Dranesville.

On the evening of December 30, 1854, after the slave-hiring ended, Farr was joined by the soon-to-be-dead Henry St. Clair. The two ate dinner together, Farr recounted later. St. Clair finished his food first and left for Henry Bicksler’s tavern. Farr followed soon after “smoking a segar.” When he got to the tavern, Farr “heard a fuss and supposed there was a fight.”¹⁰

Others were already clearing out of Bicksler’s Tavern because of the growing tension. Doctor William B. Day, one of those who left, towered over most men, weighing nearly 275 pounds, with piercing blue eyes. Usually, he was affable and in good humor—those eyes of his closed “so tightly when he laughed that you could not see them.”¹¹ Yet Day was far from jovial that night. “Twenty minutes before the fracas,” he later said, “I was afraid there would be someone killed.” Not wanting anything to do with the goings-on, Day made his way home, just a few hundred yards from the tavern.¹²

8 Daniel A. Willis, *Legends, Half-Truths, and Cherished Myths of the Drane Family* (Privately Published, 2016), 70; *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia Passed at the Session Commencing 2nd December 1839, and Ending 19th March 1840* (Richmond, 1840), 128. Emphasis in original.

9 Edith A. Sprouse, ed., *Fairfax County in 1860: A Collective Biography*, Vol. 2 (Fairfax, VA, 1996), 633.

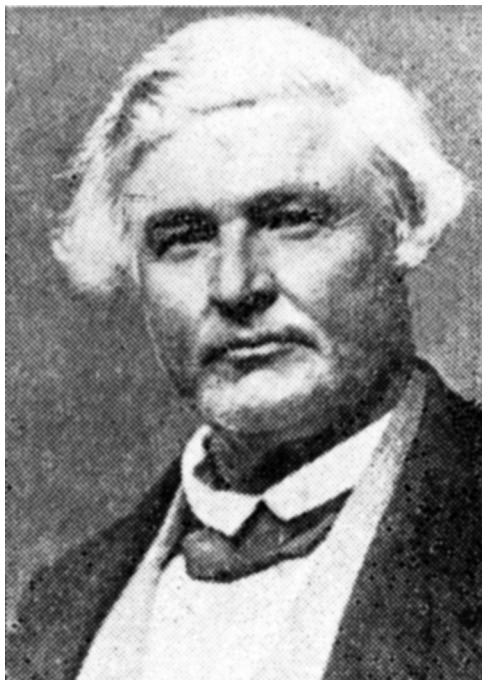
10 John B. Farr Deposition, Henry St. Clair Coroner’s Inquest, Historical Records Room, Fairfax County Courthouse.

11 Elisabeth Alice Gibbens Cole, *An Account of Our Day Family of Calvert County, Maryland* (Lettsworth, MD, 1982), 73.

12 William B. Day Testimony, St. Clair Coroner’s Inquest; Fairfax Commission Maps, 1860, 6-4, Historical Records Room, Fairfax County Circuit Courthouse.

Dr. William B. Day
in a poor original image.

*Courtesy of the Fairfax County Public
Library Photographic Archive*



Back inside Bicksler's, St. Clair began to antagonize a man named Thomas Dickey, picking the fight that would kill him. St. Clair and his friends grabbed Dickey, who "begged them to let him go," according to one witness. Bartender James Waldren remembered others crying out, "Let's have a fair fight!" Waldren and others jumped forward, trying to separate the men, and the melee was on.¹³

Dickey soon got reinforcements: his brothers John and Robert. John tried to enter the tavern but was stopped at the door. Shouting, "Let me git in, God Damn, let me git in," John Dickey started his assault, trying to get to his besieged brother while throwing punches in every direction. John B. Farr, recently arrived with his cigar, tried to stop Dickey, but soon "the crowd came rushing out," pushing both men out of the way.¹⁴

Finally, the bartender Waldren successfully cleared the room. Waldren grabbed St. Clair's collar and half-dragged, half-shoved the young man out of the door. Thomas Dickey, finally freed from St. Clair's grasp, decided to enact his revenge, and swung out with his fist, landing "several blows" on his attacker.¹⁵

As the masses of people tumbled out of the tavern and into the darkness, St. Clair had no idea who had hit him. But he had his suspicions. He lunged off the porch, shouting, "God damn your soul Bob Dickey. What did you hit me for."¹⁶

13 Townsend T. Milstead Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest; Deposition of James F. Waldren, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

14 Moses Williams Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest; John B. Farr Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

15 Deposition of James F. Waldren, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest; Henry Bicksler Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

16 William Walker Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

Robert Dickey, nine years older than St. Clair, had saved his brother, Thomas, and now found himself in the front yard of the tavern, standing in the darkness. It should have been nothing more than a standard bar brawl with a few punches and curses passed back and forth. But Robert Dickey, before he left the barroom, made a spur of the moment decision. He reached into his left pocket and pulled out a small knife. Many around Dickey, including Waldren, tried to convince him to put the knife away, but when St. Clair jumped from the porch, Dickey was still holding the weapon.¹⁷

A crowd gathered in front of the tavern, drawn to the commotion. In the darkness they now saw two figures start to fight and trade blows, but no one could tell who exactly was continuing to fight. Neither did they see Dickey's knife doing its deadly work. Minor Crippen, a resident of Dranesville, saw "a few blows lapsed" before he finally saw St. Clair's face clearly.¹⁸

St. Clair collapsed to the ground. The throng of onlookers, finally realizing something was wrong, surged forward. A small fire was burning nearby, and in those flames the people saw Robert Dickey stagger back. Witnesses saw his hand covered "as if he had dip'd it up to [the] elbow in a tub of blood."¹⁹ They looked down at St. Clair, who was either already dead or very close to it. With adrenaline coursing through his body, it did not appear to have dawned on Robert Dickey what he had just done. Someone in the crowd said, aghast, "Robert you have killed him." Dickey snapped back into reality and sprinted off into the night.²⁰

Farr's brother sent for Dr. Day, the same man who had left the tavern not a half hour before. Day investigated St. Clair's body inside the tavern and his deposition left a grisly picture. Day found seven stab wounds and pronounced, "I think the three on the breast would have caused death or even any of the wounds in the stomach or thigh."²¹

While Day performed the autopsy, others hunted Dickey. He did not make it far, getting captured about a quarter of a mile from the tavern. His captors dragged him back to the tavern, while others found Dickey's bloody knife, thrown into a nearby field.²²

17 Moses Williams Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest; James Waldren Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

18 Minor Crippen Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

19 John B. Farr Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

20 Moses William Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

21 William B. Day Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

22 Moses William Testimony, St. Clair Coroner's Inquest.

In his capacity as Justice of the Peace, John B. Farr called on Robert Drane, town constable (and Washington Drane's son), to convene an inquiry of 12 men to go back to Bicksler's and sort out the details of the death. By 10:00 p.m., three hours after the murder, the twelve men reported as directed. Their investigation did not take long. In lieu of a jail, which Dranesville lacked, Dickey was imprisoned "all night in the room where the corpse of his mangled victim lay." The next morning, he was transported to the Fairfax County jail.²³

Dickey had to wait several months for the next court session to begin. When it opened in June, his case took four days to prosecute. He was found guilty on charges of second-degree murder and sentenced to 18 years imprisonment.²⁴

Life went back to normal in Dranesville. Wagons kept traveling down the turnpikes, and the yearly slave hirings continued. But a storm was coming, one that would bring far more death and destruction than just one knifing. And amid that same storm, John Farr, William Day, and many others who were present at Bicksler's would know what it meant to face their own charges of murder.

²³ *The Daily Express*, Jan. 6, 1855.

²⁴ Hofer, 4.

Chapter One

“The Union Is Dissolved”

South Carolina’s Secession and Fort Sumter

Seconds seemed like hours in the deathly quiet room. One at a time the 169 delegates answered the question posed to them. They sat awaiting their turn and, “As name by name fell upon the ear of the silent assembly, the brief sound was echoed back, without a solitary exception in that whole grave body—Aye!” The roll call started seven minutes past 1:00 p.m. and finished when the last delegate affirmed his decision eight minutes later.¹ It was December 20, 1860, and the delegates in St. Andrew’s Hall had just voted for South Carolina’s secession.

Word soon raced out into Charleston’s streets. “The enthusiasm was unsurpassed,” a newspaper column read. “Old men went shouting down the streets. Cannon were fired, and bright triumph was depicted on every countenance.”²

The whirlwind of celebrations reminded a visiting schoolteacher of a “double-distilled Fourth of July.” Shops closed for the day, and the bells of the famed, white-spired St. Michael’s rang continuously. To add to the din, fire companies raced down the streets “noisily jingling their bells.” Bands played “La Marseillaise,” and the “ground fairly shook beneath the double-quick of all the young men of the city under arms and apparently eager for duty.” Elsewhere, groups of African Americans “stood . . . at every passageway,” watching the events unfold before

1 *Charleston Mercury*, Dec. 21, 1860.

2 *Ibid.*; Maury Klein, *Days of Defiance: Sumter, Secession, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 1997), 145.

them. Printers at the *Charleston Mercury* jumped to their presses and published an extra edition of the paper that boldly declared, “THE UNION IS DISSOLVED!”³

But for all the celebrating, the actual Ordinance of Secession had yet to be signed. For that, the delegates reconvened at St. Andrew’s Hall at 6:30 p.m. Meanwhile, the city continued its festivities throughout the entire afternoon, and it was decided to move the affair to a larger venue, Institute Hall, down the street. The column “formed in procession and moved forward in silence” towards Institute Hall. The route “was ablaze with burning tar, which overflowed so that some-times the whole width of the street was aflame.”⁴

It took the delegates about fifteen minutes to get to the Hall, an imposing Italianate building constructed in 1854. Designed to hold 3,000 people, that night the Hall overflowed with spectators, and many more crowded Meeting Street. Taking the whole event in was Edmund Ruffin, whose long, snowy white hair drooped down to his shoulders. An acerbic, fierce secessionist, Ruffin had come from his home in Virginia to witness the Secession Convention. He followed the delegates from their initial meetings in the state’s capital at Columbia and now, in the evening hours, ticked down the seconds to the moment for which he had waited so long—the dissolution of the Union. Watching the crowd, Ruffin later wrote in his diary, “In the rear & on the sides of the hall, & in very spacious galleries above, there were places for an immense audience—& every seat was filled.”⁵ The massive crowd waited eagerly for the delegates to arrive.

Delegates entered the building in pairs of twos, arm in arm. They were among the wealthiest men in South Carolina, including John L. Manning, who enslaved 648 people. Mary Chesnut, whose husband James was a delegate, wrote, “South Carolina was never more splendidly represented.”⁶ The spectators drowned the delegates with applause as they walked into Institute Hall.

Senators and representatives from South Carolina’s state government accompanied the secessionist delegates. A stage in the center of the hall held the key dignitaries, including the state’s governor, Francis Pickens, and the President of

3 Anna C. Brackett, “Charleston, South Carolina (1861),” in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Volume 88, December 1893 to May 1894 (New York, 1894), 946; W. F. G. Peck, “Four Years Under Fire in Charleston,” in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Volume 31, June to November 1865 (New York, 1894), 358; *Charleston Mercury*, Dec. 20, 1860. Emphasis in original.

4 *Charleston Mercury*, Dec. 21, 1860; Brackett, “Charleston, South Carolina,” 946.

5 William C. Davis, *Rhett: The Turbulent Life and Times of a Fire-Eater* (Columbia, SC, 2001), 411; Edmund Ruffin, *The Diary of Edmund Ruffin: Volume 1*, ed., William Kauffman Scarborough (Baton Rouge, 1972), 512.

6 Ralph Wooster, “Membership of the South Carolina Secession Convention,” in *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (Oct. 1954): 193; Mary B. Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, eds., Isabella D. Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery (New York, 1906), 4.

the Secession Convention, David F. Jamison. To begin the evening, Jamison stood and read to the crowd the secession ordinance. It would not have taken him very long; the whole document was only 108 words long. The 3,000 people in front of Jamison listened as quietly as they could as he read. At the end of the document, Jamison finished “The union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of ‘The United States of America,’ is hereby dissolved.”⁷

As the word “dissolved” left Jamison’s lips the crowd “could contain themselves no longer, and a shout that shook the very building, reverberating, long-continued, rose to Heaven, and ceased only with the loss of breath.” The cheering continued in waves for the next two hours, as the delegates were called to sign their names to the parchment.⁸

Someone ran outside and read the document to the throngs of waiting people. In the tumult that followed “the two palmetto-trees which stood on either side of the platform were despoiled of their leaves by the audience as mementos of the occasion, and the meeting slowly dispersed.”⁹ It had been a day that few would ever forget. And in exactly a year—December 20, 1861—South Carolina’s sons would be fighting and dying at Dranesville. Almost no one could have foretold the sacrifice and suffering that lay in the future.

* * *

Even before the signatures dried on the parchment, it became clear that South Carolina was not fully prepared to be its own independent nation. A correspondent from the *New York Tribune*, who found himself suddenly in enemy territory in Charleston wrote, “There is neither an army nor navy to protect her.”¹⁰

But that was not wholly accurate, either. Charleston was filled nearly to bursting with militia companies. They kept wary eyes on the United States soldiers, under the command of Major Robert Anderson, who were stationed at Fort Moultrie and Castle Pinckney. Robert Rhett, one of South Carolina’s most fiery secessionists, called those garrisons “the great and most threatening

7 *Journal of the Convention of the People of South Carolina, Held in 1860, 1861 and 1862, Together with the Ordinances, Reports, Resolutions, etc.* (Columbia, 1862), 48; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 128 volumes), Series 4, Volume 1, 1. Hereafter cited as *OR*. All references are to Series 1 unless otherwise noted.

8 *Charleston Mercury*, Dec. 21, 1860.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *New York Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1860.

difficulty,” to South Carolina.¹¹ For all their enthusiasm, the militia companies lacked any centralized command, and before anyone in the city understood what was happening, Anderson whisked his command out of Moultrie and Pinckney. By the time Charlestonians woke up on December 27, the Federal soldiers were safely ensconced within Fort Sumter, a bastion in the center of Charleston’s harbor. Members of the secession convention, livid that Anderson had slipped past their patrols, responded by passing resolutions condemning the major’s move as overtly hostile.¹² It soon became apparent that there would be a showdown over the fate of Fort Sumter, and for that, South Carolina needed more troops.

Wheels were already in motion. Three days before the formalization of secession, South Carolina passed “An Act to Provide an Armed Military Force,” which directly led to the organization of the first ten regiments of South Carolinian infantry. One of those ten, the 6th South Carolina Infantry, would, in a year’s time, see action at Dranesville.¹³

Zealous calls for volunteers flooded the countryside. One of the most eager was young Frank English. Sixteen years old, English lived with his parents and siblings on a plantation outside of Columbia. His father, who was worth nearly \$90,000, enslaved 87 people on the plantation, and was referred to as “Colonel” throughout the county.¹⁴ Frank wrote to a friend in Virginia supporting secession and looking forward to war. His friend replied, “I hope you may be gratified and come home as scatheless as the ducks we used to shoot at last winter.” Saying goodbye to his family, and bringing along an enslaved man named Lewis, Frank raced off to enlist.¹⁵

He joined the Fairfield Fencibles, a company led by his cousin, John Bratton, a well-respected planter and doctor in Winnsboro. Bratton’s personal wealth totaled \$21,000 and included 76 enslaved people. His peers called him “quiet,

11 Robert B. Rhett, *A Fire-Eater Remembers: The Confederate Memoir of Robert Barnwell Rhett*, ed., William C. Davis (Columbia, SC, 2000), 18-19; OR 1, 2-3.

12 OR 1, 2-3; See Davis Detzer, *Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War* (Orlando, 2001), 116-132; *Journal of the Convention of the people of South Carolina, held in 1860, 1861 and 1862, together with the ordinances, reports, resolutions, etc.*, 115.

13 *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, Vol. 12 (Columbia, SC, 1874), 726.

14 Frank English 1860 Census Info found in Richland County, South Carolina 1860 Census; Information on John English’s slave ownership in 1860 South Carolina, Richland County Slave Schedule; “History of the Means Family,” Vol. 3, T52, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

15 Charles R. Venable to Frank English, Jan. 19, 1861, “Letters and Genealogy of the Means-English Families, 1828-1950,” Volume 1, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (hereafter referred to as Frank English Letters); Frank English to his mother, Apr. 15, 1861, Frank English Letters.

cultured, self-possessed, ostentatious, efficient, without fear and without reproach, not self-seeking.”¹⁶ The company of soldiers, under Bratton’s leadership, soon got to drilling.¹⁷

On a calm spring day in March, the Fencibles marched into Winnsboro. The women of the town bequeathed a newly sewn flag to the soldiers in an elaborate ceremony. Handing the flag to the volunteers, one of the women said, “Take this banner and under the guidance of our gallant and experienced commander, may it ever lead you on to honor and victory.” With their new flag, and alongside the other companies that soon made up the 6th South Carolina, the soldiers kept at their drill in the weeks to come.¹⁸

As the days passed and the 6th South Carolina trained, events continued at a breakneck speed. Following the Palmetto State’s lead, six more states passed their own secession legislation. Those states sent their own delegates to Montgomery, Alabama, the provisional capital of the new Confederate States of America. Working out the details of their new government, the delegates picked Senator Jefferson Davis from Mississippi to be their president.¹⁹ In early March, Davis focused his attention on Charleston, and sent newly commissioned Brig. Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard to oversee operations against Fort Sumter.²⁰

As Beauregard’s positions around Charleston Harbor became more and more fortified, the 6th South Carolina was finishing its own preparations. On March 20, its colonel wrote directly to Jefferson Davis, “The same spirit of patriotism which actuated this Regiment to volunteer in the defence of their State has caused them to authorize me to tender their services in defence of our common country, the Confederate States,” the regiment’s colonel pledged. All of Winnsboro was astir on April 9, three weeks later, when news came that the regiment was ordered to

16 John Bratton 1860 Census Info found in Fairfield County, South Carolina 1860 Census; John Bratton, *General John Bratton, Sumter to Appomattox: In Letters to his Wife*, ed., J. Luke Austin (Sewanee, TN, 2003), 1-3; John Bratton Compiled Service Record (hereafter cited as CSR), National Archives and Records Administration, (hereafter NARA).

17 John Bratton, *Letters of John Bratton to his Wife*, ed., Elizabeth Porcher Bratton (privately published, 1942), 3-4.

18 *The News and Herald*, Memorial Edition, May 25, 1910.

19 William C. Davis, *A Government of Our Own: The Making of the Confederacy* (New York, 1994), 120, 128.

20 *OR* 1, 25. Though born as Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, and thus usually referred to by historians as P. G. T. Beauregard, he had in fact dropped the usage of his first name by the Civil War, and signed his correspondence using only “G. T.” T. Harry Williams, *P. G. T. Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray* (Baton Rouge, 2d ed., 1995), 6; *OR* 1, 27.

Charleston.²¹ The infantry, including John Bratton and Frank English, boarded trains that rattled down the tracks towards Charleston. The regiment arrived in Charleston on the evening of April 11.²²

Meanwhile, Beauregard prepared for the confrontation with Fort Sumter, towards which all his batteries were pointed. By the time the 6th South Carolina arrived, Beauregard's correspondence with Anderson was nearing an end. Beauregard had tried to coax Anderson's command out of Sumter to no avail, and time was running out.

In early April, President Abraham Lincoln ordered Gustavus Fox to mount a relief expedition for Fort Sumter. Fox had urged Lincoln's predecessor, James Buchanan, to allow him to sail to Sumter's relief, but the lame-duck president did nothing. With Lincoln in power, Fox again suggested the idea, which was quickly greenlighted. Fox's goal was to deliver supplies that were loaded onto his steamer, the *Baltic*. If Confederates in the harbor prevented Fox from resupplying Sumter, however, he was to blast his way through and relieve the fort.²³

After ordering Fox's armada to set sail, Lincoln followed up with a message to South Carolina's governor, Francis Pickens, that told him of the relief expedition on its way. Pickens quickly alerted Beauregard that Fox's ships were coming. Continuing the chain reaction, Beauregard wired back to Montgomery to alert the Confederate secretary of war, LeRoy Walker, of the recent developments. Walker telegraphed back bluntly, "Under no circumstances are you to allow provisions to be sent to Fort Sumter." With his orders, Beauregard redoubled his efforts to force Anderson to capitulate.²⁴

Those efforts ended early on April 12. Knowing Anderson would not give in, Beauregard sent his final message: the Federals had an hour to surrender, or he would open fire. At 4:30 a.m., an officer pulled the lanyard on a 10-inch mortar. The shell arced high into the predawn air before exploding in a great fireball. From all over the harbor other guns, mortars, and howitzers opened fire, following the signal.²⁵

The 6th South Carolina heard gunfire for the first time in those early morning hours. The regiment's major, Thomas Woodward, recalled in a speech years later, "How you rushed out, formed your companies, and clamored for your arms,

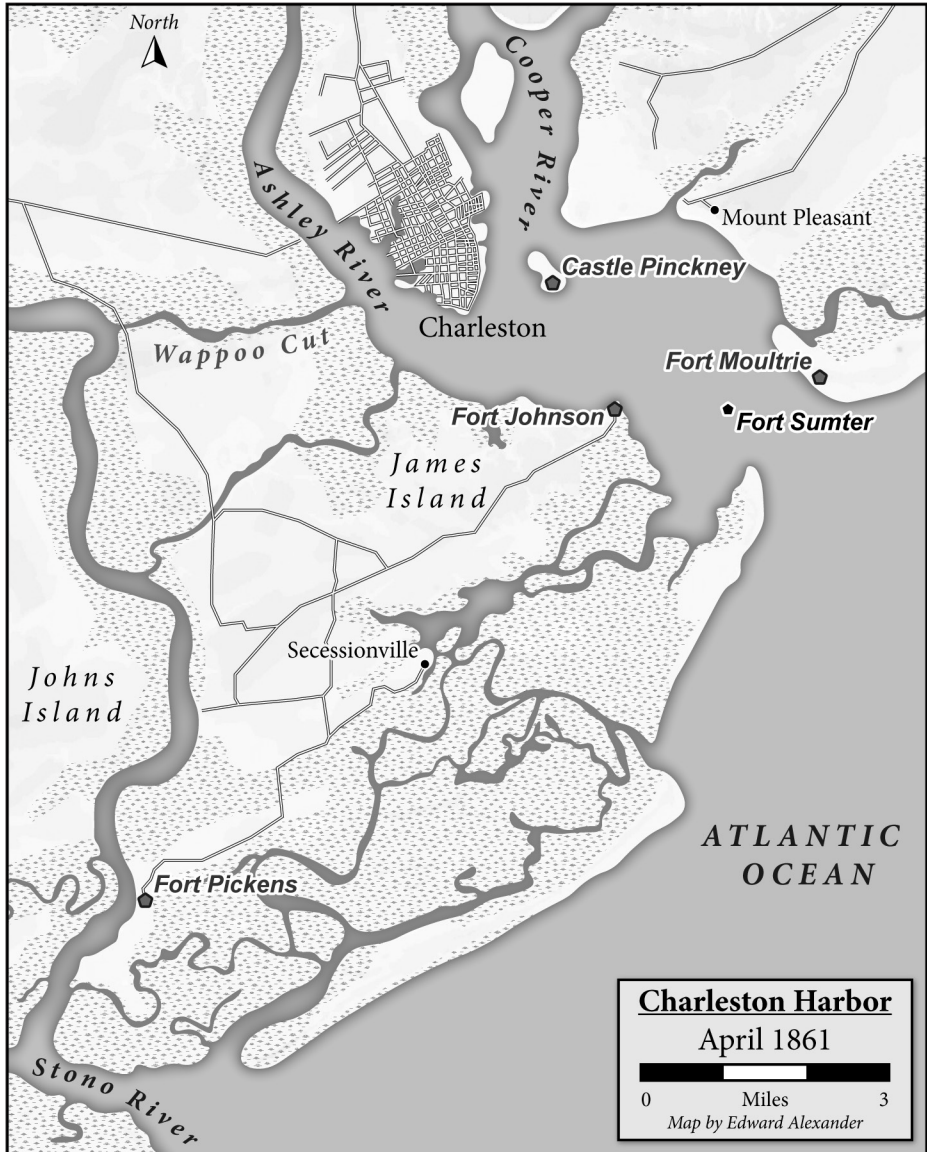
21 Thomas W. Woodward, *Address of Maj. Thomas W. Woodward: From Fort Sumter to Dranesville* (Columbia, SC, 1883), 4; *The News and Herald*, Memorial Edition, May 25, 1910.

22 Woodward, *Fort Sumter to Dranesville*, 5.

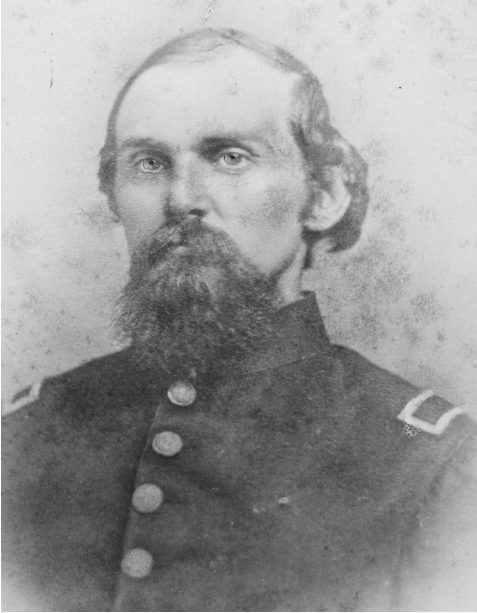
23 OR 1, 235-236; Samuel W. Crawford, *The Genesis of War: The Story of Sumter, 1860-1861* (New York, 1887), 405.

24 Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*: Vol. 4, eds., Roy P. Basler, Marion Dolores Pratt, and Lloyd A. Dunlap (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953), 323; OR 1, 289.

25 OR 1, 1, 14; Detzer, *Allegiance*, 269.



which were here for the first time issued to the command.” With muskets in hand, the regiment made its way “to the battery, where we remained silent but eager spectators of the conflict which was going on around the harbor.” They were far from the only ones watching the bombardment. Mary Chesnut scribbled in her diary, “The women were wild, there on the housetop. Prayers from the women and



John Bratton

6th South Carolina Infantry

*Courtesy of South Caroliniana Library, University of
South Carolina, Columbia, SC*

imprecations from the men, and then a shell would light up the scene.”²⁶

As the morning hours ticked by, the Confederate artillery continued to hammer away at the fort. At the mouth of the harbor, observers noticed the arrival of Fox’s armada. What those observers did not know was that strong gales had scattered Fox’s small fleet of vessels. With his force severely depleted, Fox and his officers could do nothing but

watch Fort Sumter get pummeled, just as hundreds of other spectators did from Charleston’s rooftops.²⁷

Confederate officers feared, though, an incursion by Fox’s ships against the underside of Charleston, via any of its inlets or side rivers. Beauregard’s concerns lay primarily with the Stono River. He had spent time studying the outlets of the river and realized that Federal ships could sail up the Stono to bypass the batteries ringing the mouth of the Harbor. Beauregard ordered reinforcements sent to garrison outposts along the Stono’s winding route.²⁸

Those orders made it to the 6th South Carolina and the companies of soldiers were soon scurrying to ships that would bring them into the Stono. John Bratton wrote to his wife, “We were hurried through the city so rapidly that I had to leave everything behind, among other things, that little brush bag that your mother gave me when we went on our wedding tour.” Bratton regretted that, “My favorite hair brush and indeed everything that it contained are lost with it.” The companies of the 6th were divided up and dropped off at the various outposts along the Stono. Now without his hairbrush, Bratton and his Fairfield Fencibles were stationed on

²⁶ Woodward, *From Fort Sumter to Dranesville*, 5; Chesnut, *Diary from Dixie*, 36.

²⁷ OR 1, 1, 11.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 194, 274.

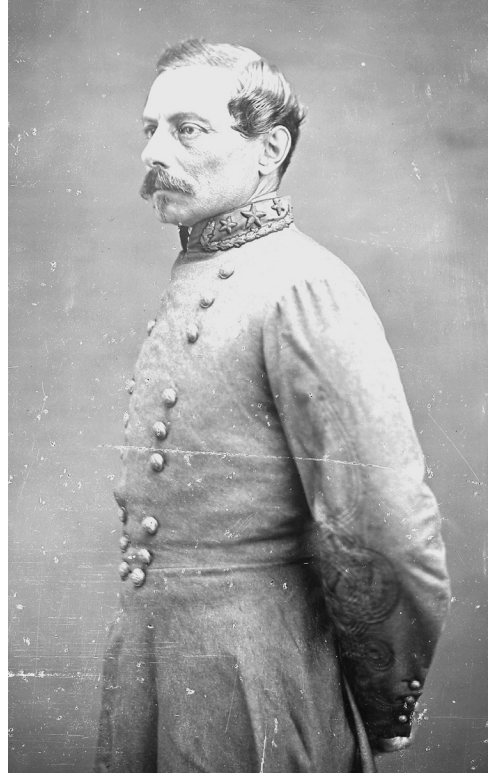
General P. G. T. Beauregard

NARA

Battery Island at Fort Pickens. Young Frank English finally had his war.²⁹

But Fox's ships never came. They stayed out of range of the Confederate guns and waited for the inevitable. Too far away to take part in the bombardment, Bratton and the other soldiers of the 6th watched and listened as Beauregard's guns continued to fire. Just shy of 2:00 p.m. on April 13 those guns began to fall silent. Over the preceding 34 hours 2,361 shot and 983 shells had been fired at the fort, and much of the interior was on fire. It was useless to resist anymore. Anderson surrendered his garrison.³⁰

The battered garrison boarded Fox's steamship, and the small armada turned for New York. Thus ended the bombardment and began the war. In the opening shots of the conflict the 6th South Carolina had not suffered any casualties. But eight months from then, on a battlefield outside Dranesville, the regiment would not be so fortunate.



29 Woodward, *From Fort Sumter to Dranesville*, 5-6; Bratton, *General John Bratton*, 9.

30 H. W. Hubbell, "The Organization and Use of Artillery in the War of the Rebellion," in *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, Volume 11 (Governor's Island, 1890), 398; *OR* 1, 12; Abner Doubleday, *Reminiscences of Forts Sumter and Moultrie in 1860-'61* (New York, 1876), 158.