**The Civil War: 150 years later**

By Carolyn Click - McClatchy Newspapers

**tool name**

[close](javascript:mi_story_tool.closeTool();)

tool goes here

COLUMBIA -- On a foggy day near Christmas 1860, a delegation of South Carolina's wealthiest, most powerful citizens - planters, judges, legislators and clergy, all white men - assembled at Columbia's stately red brick-columned First Baptist Church to contemplate smashing the Palmetto State's bond with the United States of America.

Within hours, the assembly adopted a resolution that for some among the group - those who relished the moniker of "fire-eater" - thought was 30 years past due: "The state of South Carolina should forthwith secede from the Federal Union."

A day later, Dec. 18, fearing an outbreak of smallpox, the top-hatted gentry adjourned to Charleston, crowding onto trains in the early morning darkness with an urgency of mission that had exploded with the Nov. 6 election of President-elect Abraham Lincoln.

**Civil War's 150th anniversary stirs debate on race**

At South Carolina's Secession Gala, men in frock coats and militia uniforms and women in hoopskirts will sip mint juleps as a band called Unreconstructed plays "Dixie." In Georgia, they will re-enact the state's 1861 secession convention. And Alabama will hold a mock swearing-in of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.

Across the South, preparations are under way for the 150th anniversary of the Civil War. And while many organizations are working to incorporate both the black and the white experience, there are complaints that some events will glorify the Old South and the Lost Cause while overlooking the fundamental reason for the war: slavery.

"It's almost like celebrating the Holocaust," said Benard Simelton, president of the Alabama conference of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "Our rights were taken away and we were treated as less than human beings. To relive that in a celebratory way I don't think is right."

This "convention of the people," called by the state legislature after Lincoln's election, was united and swift. On Dec. 20 - 150 years ago Monday - it adopted the Ordinance of Secession, declaring South Carolina, one of the original 13 colonies, no longer part of the United States.

"THE UNION IS DISSOLVED!" screamed the headline of the Charleston Mercury, a pro-secession newspaper.

Looking backward, as Americans prepare to mark the sesquicentennial of the Civil War, we know what that December 1860 decision meant for South Carolina, then the third wealthiest state in the Union.

It meant:

1. **Economic devastation**: The lucrative rice plantation culture that had fueled S.C. prosperity for generations ended with the war's emancipation of slaves. Cotton survived until the 1920s. But its post-war sharecropping and shares system kept blacks and poor whites in poverty. South Carolina's economic fortunes would not begin to recover for a century. Today, the state remains among the poorest in the nation.
2. **Racial strife**: For a brief period after the war, newly freed black citizens were allowed their constitutional rights, including the right to vote. But by the 1890s, the white minority had disenfranchised the former slaves, leading to a mass black exodus. For almost 100 years, racial discrimination was the law of the land until the civil rights movement brought change.
3. **Economic an d political realignment:** The war's end vanquished the Lowcountry elite that long had controlled the state. Planters were replaced by manufacturers, as the center of the state's economic power moved to the Upstate. White Democrats, led by Wade Hampton and other Civil War heroes, regained control of the state a dozen years after the end of the Civil War. But, over time, their political majority morphed into Upstate populists and, later, modern-day Republicans. Still, the dominant political thread - white conservatism defined by a distrust of the federal government - remains constant even to today, evidenced most recently by opposition to federal stimulus spending and health care reform.
4. **Division among religions:** Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Lutherans split over slavery and secession, all using the Bible to justify their positions. Southern Baptists, who split in Charleston and never reunited with their Northern brethren, were latecomers in embracing the civil rights movement. In 2009, the Southern Baptist Convention formally apologized for its stances on slavery and civil rights.
5. **A stunted educational system**: For years, South Carolina could not decide if the great mass of its young citizens belonged in classrooms or the cotton fields and, later, textile mills. Compulsory school attendance was not embraced until the 1960s. Higher education was reserved for the elites. Often, the best and the brightest young people, white and black, left the state, never to return.
6. **Continuing unease with the role of federal government:** South Carolina's pre-war mantra of states' rights in defense of slavery gave way to a 20th century mantra of states' rights in opposition to civil rights and federal power. But even as the state continues to chafe at the roles claimed by the federal government, it relies on federal largesse to power huge parts of its economy, including its military installations, ports, highways and social programs.

Those legacies were unknowable to the Secession Convention's wealthy, politically savvy men.

"They did not envision the cataclysm that would happen," USC historian Walter Edgar said. "They weren't thinking of losing a whole generation of young white men. They weren't thinking about losing two-thirds of their capital wealth," the value of S.C. slaves.

Secession's chief legacy, Edgar said, "has been grinding poverty, for both blacks and whites."

"It was hubris," David Jamison Rutledge, a great-great-grandson of Secession Convention president D.F. Jamison, acknowledged ruefully at a recent reunion of descendants of the signers. Rutledge admires his ancestor, but thinks Jamison and the others never would have placed their names on the Ordinance of Secession if they had known the turmoil, privation and death that secession would unleash.

**'A Southern Slaveholding Confederacy'**

South Carolina's ruling class and its white citizenry welcomed disunion, energized by 30 years of debate over nullification, slavery and secession.

"The people here are in earnest in what they have done, and all threats of coercion, war ... are treated as buncombe," an unnamed Charleston correspondent wrote in the Christmas Day 1860 edition of the New York Herald. If the "northern Republican hordes" come South, "they would soon succumb either to the operation of the climate or the deadly effect of the South Carolina rifles."

The election of Lincoln, an anti-slavery Midwesterner, electrified South Carolinians who had come to distrust the federal government with a vengeance over the preceding three decades as anti-slavery feeling rose in the North and Congress began interfering with the South's "peculiar institution."

That backdrop meant the crowds that heard the news of Lincoln's 1860 victory already were primed for secession. U.S. District Judge Andrew Gordon Magrath of Charleston rose from his bench, tore off his robe and resigned. The S.C. congressional delegation followed suit.

U.S. Sen. James Henry Hammond initially resisted resignation, but later also quit, writing to a friend: "South Carolina does not wish to create a Republican Nationality for herself independent of her Southern Sister States. What she desires is a Southern Slaveholding Confederacy and to exemplify to the world the perfection of our civilization, the immensity of our resources and that the wonderful progress of these United States is mainly due to us."

**An incubator for dissent**

The 169 delegates to the convention included five former governors, four former U.S. senators, the presidents of Furman University and Limestone College, two railroad presidents and a dozen ministers. More than 40 had been members of the state Senate and 100 of the S.C. House of Representatives, according to Lesser.

Ninety percent were S.C. natives, Lesser said. Most were college graduates; nearly all owned slaves. Twenty-seven delegates owned 100 or more, and one delegate, former Gov. John L. Manning, owned more than 650.

The delegates worked swiftly, settling on a text of the Ordinance of Secession that was uncomplicated by length or equivocation: "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 hereby repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of the 'United States of America,' is hereby dissolved."

As post-war nostalgia flourished for the "Lost Cause" of the Confederacy, some Southerners sought to downplay the role of slavery in secession, justifying the war as a cry for states' rights. But historians say the documents from the Secession Convention show just how deeply the issue of slavery was embedded in the delegates' minds.

Four days after passing the secession ordinance, the delegates adopted a lengthy "Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union," denouncing the North repeatedly on one subject - slavery.

History belonged to the 169

The 1860 election of Lincoln was the breaking point.

"They thought if Lincoln is elected and the slaves are freed, we will have to deal with a black majority population," said Edgar.

(For his part, Lincoln said his goal, in calling for military volunteers in 1861, was preserving the Union, not ending slavery. Only two years later did he declare an end slavery in the rebellious states.)

South Carolinians had been looking for a chance to break up the Union since 1830, Edgar said. But it was 1860 before the other Southern states that would form the Confederacy fell in line behind the S.C. secessionists.

"As the demographics of the lower South changed, all became black majority states," Edgar said. "A plantation economy built upon a slave labor model transformed the economies of the lower South and it became their economic engine."

On Dec. 20, 1860, history belonged to 169 men who marched from Charleston's' St. Andrews' Hall to meet the state's legislators. The lawmakers waited for them at the foot of the stairs of Institute Hall. Inside, 3,000 people greeted the delegations with thunderous applause.

"Then each went up and signed the paper, and the deed was done," the Rev. A. Toomer Porter, an Episcopal priest from Charleston, recalled in his autobiography, published 33 years after the war's end.

The deed, he wrote, "cost millions and millions of money; tens of thousands of lives, destruction of cities and villages, plantations and farms, the emancipation of five million of African slaves, the entire upheaval of society, the impoverishment of a nation.... It was a deed which made the North rich and the South poor, and has made Southern life one great struggle from that day to this."

Read more: <http://www.thesunnews.com/2010/12/19/1877144/the-civil-war-150-years-later.html#ixzz18Yq6ZE4a>

QUESTIONS *The Civil War: 150 Years Later*

1. Explain this quote from the article:

*But even as the state continues to chafe at the roles claimed by the federal government, it relies on federal largesse to power huge parts of its economy, including its military installations, ports, highways and social programs.*

1. List one specific piece of evidence that supports this quote from the article:

*South Carolina's ruling class and its white citizenry welcomed disunion,* ***energized by 30 years of debate over nullification, slavery and secession.***

1. List one specific piece of evidence that supports the following statement **AND** one specific piece of evidence which refutes the following quote from the article.

*The deed, he wrote, "cost millions and millions of money; tens of thousands of lives, destruction of cities and villages, plantations and farms, the emancipation of five million of African slaves, the entire upheaval of society, the impoverishment of a nation.... It was a deed which made the North rich and the South poor, and has made Southern life one great struggle from that day to this."*