Summer 1992

Francis Gildart Ruffin: A Jeffersonian Agrarian in the Old South and New Virginia, 1816 - 1892

R. Allen Brahin
Old Dominion University

FRANCIS GILDART RUFFIN: A JEFFERSONIAN AGRARIAN IN THE OLD SOUTH AND NEW VIRGINIA, 1816 - 1892

by

R. Allen Brahin
B. S. May 1989, James Madison University

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
August, 1992

Approved by:

Harold S. Wilson (Director)

Peter Stewart

James W. Sweeny

ABSTRACT

FRANCIS GILDART RUFFIN: A JEFFERSONIAN AGRARIAN IN THE OLD SOUTH AND THE NEW VIRGINIA, 1816 - 1892

R. Allen Brahin
Old Dominion University
Director: Dr. Harold S. Wilson

For over forty years, Francis "Frank" Gildart Ruffin derived his livelihood from slave labor and agricultural pursuits. Like Jefferson, Ruffin believed that the nation should be based on the industry of small farmers. Once the Civil War began, he served the Confederacy on the staff of the Commissary Department. Following the war, Ruffin actively engaged in politics in the Old Dominion, though he never sought office. He became associated with the "Readjuster" party in Virginia. Its goal was to readjust or reduce the state's debt, which was to be particularly beneficial to farmers. Ruffin was an original Readjuster, but later broke with the party believing that it had forsaken an agricultural emphasis in favor of big business and the black vote. As Virginia became industrial, Ruffin felt that the state would ultimately be ruined. He wrote political pamphlets and actively campaigned to return Virginia to her pre-war disposition. This did not occur, but Ruffin never stopped trying to return the Commonwealth to the traditions of his youth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

THE BEGINNING

The first Ruffin to see the colony of Virginia was William Ruffin, in 1662. William Ruffin settled in Surry County, and most of the Ruffin family traced their ancestry back to him, including Frank G. Ruffin, the subject of this study, and Edmund Ruffin the well known Virginia agrarian and secessionist. How the family came to inhabit these shores is not an absolute certainty. However, the tale that has been passed down through the generations is an interesting one indeed. The Ruffin family tradition holds that they are of Scottish extraction. In Scotland, the clan was known as Ruthven. The Ruthvens hailed from Perthshire, Scotland, where the third (Patrick Ruthven) and fourth (William Ruthven) Lord Ruthvens were implicated in a plot to kill Rizzio, a favorite of Queen Mary. As a result, a hasty exit to France was in order. Upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the Ruthvens returned to England. It was at this point that William Ruthven became William Ruffin and left more than a name behind.[1]

---

[1]Madeline McMurdo Whitmore, The Collected Papers of the Monticello Association (Charlottesville, Va: Monticello Association, 1984), 70-71. See also, Stefan Zweig, The Queen of Scots (London: Cassell and Company, 1936), 119-21, 170, and 244; and J. De Roulhac Hamilton, ed., The Papers of Thomas

In a letter to a friend, Frank Ruffin described what he called the "characteristics" of the Ruffin family, particularly the men. The traits that Ruffin listed also fit himself and Edmund Ruffin quite well. Ruffin wrote that "they were almost universally high spirited, high tempered, quick to take and resent offense, but placable, except when their personal dignity was invaded." He went on to state "they have not generally been obtrusive, of their opinions though tenacious of them, and have been too independent and outspoken to make politicians . . . and they have always relished rural pursuits."[2] This was certainly true of Frank and Edmund Ruffin. Both men were very outspoken in their beliefs, and they were both very important to agricultural reform in nineteenth century Virginia. Frank Ruffin never held office but both Frank and Edmund Ruffin served on the governing body of the state agricultural society. This is not to say that they did not follow politics keenly, for both men did, and Frank Ruffin especially used various means to let others in the Commonwealth know where he stood on the various issues of the day.

Frank Ruffin, Edmund Ruffin, and Judge Thomas Ruffin of North Carolina were all cousins. All three men traced their heritage back to Robert Ruffin. He was the grandson of

---

Ruffin, 4 vols. (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission and Edwards and Broughton State Printers, 1918), 4: 237.

[2]Hamilton, 237.

William Ruffin, the first Ruffin to come to Virginia. Robert had seven children before he died in 1721. One of those sons, Edmund, was the great-grandfather of Edmund Ruffin, the secessionist.[3] Another son, John, was the grandfather of

---

[3]Edmund Ruffin (5 January 1794 - 18 June 1865) was born in Prince George County, Virginia. At sixteen he entered the College of William and Mary but neglected his school work and was asked to leave. He was a private in the War of 1812 but did not see combat. In 1813 he returned home and married Susan Travis of Williamsburg. The young couple settled at the Coggin's Point Farm which he had recently inherited from his father, and it was here that Ruffin began the agricultural experiments that would win him recognition. Agriculture in eastern Virginia was suffering at this time, but Ruffin was sure that improvements could be made to the land that would restore prosperity. He read Sir Humphrey Davy's Elements of Agricultural Chemistry (1815). After reading this work Ruffin became convinced that marl was the cure he was looking for. He used the terms "marl" and "calcareous earths" interchangeably. He further concluded that if marl was used in conjunction with good plowing techniques, the rotation of crops and proper field drainage the earth would once again be productive. The results of his experiments became a 242-page book entitled An Essay on Calcareous Manures published in 1832. The success of this work convinced Ruffin to start a journal devoted to agriculture in June of 1833. He produced The Farmer's Register for a decade before ceasing publication. Ruffin wrote many of the articles himself, but also reprinted articles from other journals that he considered to be of value. It was not until he veered from agriculture and began to use the journal as a vehicle for his own political views that interest in the journal so decreased that he was forced to abandon the project. Throughout his life, Ruffin maintained a keen interest in politics. From 1823 until 1826 he served in the Virginia Senate, but then resigned because he did not approve of the methods employed by politicians. Originally he was a Whig in outlook, but quickly became a Democrat. This was due to the struggles over slavery and states rights. During the Civil War, the South honored him by giving him the privilege of firing the first shot on Fort Sumter and the shot which blocked the bridge over Cub Run at the first Battle of Manassas (Bull Run). The war destroyed his fortune and on 18 June 1865 he took his own life, a bitter and defeated man. Dictionary of American Biography (1935), s. v. "Edmund Ruffin."

Thomas Ruffin[4] and the great-grandfather of Frank Ruffin. Thomas and Edmund Ruffin were of roughly the same generation and Frank Ruffin was a quarter of a century younger.[5]

Throughout their lives, the three cousins wrote letters and visited back and forth. Because they held similar

---

[4]Thomas Ruffin (17 November 1787 - 15 January 1870) was born at "Newington" in King and Queen County, Virginia. He graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1805 and studied law under David Robertson in Petersburg and Archibald D. Murphey of North Carolina. In 1808 he was admitted to the North Carolina bar and settled in the town of Hillsboro. He married Anne Kirkland in 1809. While still a young man, he served for a time as Speaker of the House of Commons but was to never hold office again. He was very much a Jeffersonian Republican. In 1824 Ruffin was first elected as a Superior Court judge. He resigned his appointments as a judge several times to pursue other interests, but in 1833 he became Chief Justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court. He remained in this position until 1858, at which time he retired to his farm in Alamance County. Judge Ruffin is primarily remembered for his broad and scholarly knowledge of all branches of law. His decisions while a justice show his great versatility. By the time he retired, Ruffin had rendered 1,460 opinions. With the coming of the Civil War he represented North Carolina at the peace conference in 1861. He did not believe in the right of secession and sought to preserve the Union. When this failed, Ruffin fully supported his state and even voted for the ordinance of secession. Once the war began, he endorsed the Confederacy. Like his kinsmen, Frank and Edmund Ruffin, Thomas was deeply involved in agricultural improvement. From 1854 to 1860, he was President of the North Carolina Agricultural Society. He was a proponent of scientific agriculture and operated two profitable plantations that were several miles apart. Unlike his two cousins in Virginia, Thomas was a deeply religious man. This is not to say that the others were not religious, but Edmund particularly had reservations about organized religion. As with many other prominent southerners, Thomas Ruffin followed the teachings of the Episcopal Church. Ruffin was also a trustee of the University of North Carolina for almost forty years. He died on his farm in 1870. Dictionary of American Biography (1936), s. v. "Thomas Ruffin."

[5]Tyler, Lyon G., ed., "A Ruffin Genealogy," William and Mary Quarterly 18 (1909-1910): 251-58.

interests and had comparable temperaments, they were very much interested in discussing important topics with one another. Since the three men devoted so much time and energy to the improvement of agriculture, they looked to one another for encouragement and to compare the results of their agricultural experiments. In early April of 1857 Edmund Ruffin visited Thomas and his family. The entries in his diary during his stay reflect his respect and admiration for his "distant relative and very near friend." He noted Thomas's excellent health and constitution at seventy years of age, his intellect, his lack of pretension despite his accomplishments and position in life, and his industry. Edmund wrote of Thomas as being "simple, as any ordinary farmer," a high compliment given the importance of land and agriculture to the Ruffin men.[6]

Frank Ruffin's mother was Frances Ann Gildart, and he was given the name Francis Gildart Ruffin. However, throughout his life, Francis understandably was known to all as "Frank" Ruffin. After the Civil War, Frank Ruffin was often addressed simply as "Colonel Ruffin" because of his service in the Confederate Commissariat. In death, Frank Ruffin's name returned to what it had been at birth; Ruffin's obelisk at Hollywood cemetery in Richmond is inscribed "Francis Gildart

---

[6]William Scarborough, ed., The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 1: 53-55.

Ruffin, 1816-1892."[7]

Frank Ruffin was born to William Hopper Ruffin and Francis Ann Gildart Ruffin of Albemarle County, Virginia, in 1816. Frank's mother apparently died during childbirth or shortly thereafter. William Ruffin decided to relocate to Wilkinson County, Mississippi, and he took his infant son with him.[8] In 1821, Frank was orphaned. The youngster was then brought by his uncle, Albert Gallatin Ruffin, to live with his paternal grandparents in Raleigh, North Carolina. Frank's grandfather, William Ruffin, would enrich the young boy's life in the four short years they spent together before William's death in 1825. William had been a volunteer in the Revolutionary War, and at the tender age of sixteen, he witnessed the siege at Yorktown. When Lafayette toured the United States in 1824, he stopped in Raleigh to visit William Ruffin and reminisce about the war.[9]

As was the practice in the antebellum South, education was the responsibility of each family. If an education were to be obtained, one went to a private academy or was taught at home by family members or tutors. There was little in the way of public schools. Such was the case with young Frank Ruffin. Late in his life, Frank Ruffin wrote a letter to a cousin

---

[7]Ruffin is buried in the Harvie plot at Hollywood cemetery. He was interred in section 1, number d, on 6 June 1892.

[8]Whitmore, 72.

[9]Ibid., 73.

about the role his grandfather had played in his schooling.

> At the age of sixty-six he retained enough Latin to superintend the preparation of my daily tasks for Dr. McPheeters . . . and to him and the late William Bingham of Orange[10] I owed such proficiency that I took my Latin degree at the University of Virginia when I was but little over sixteen years old.[11]

After William passed on in 1825, Frank went to live with Albert Gallatin Ruffin (the uncle who took him to North Carolina) and his wife, Eliza Roane Ruffin. Eliza was a Roane, and a relative of the famous Spencer Roane.[12] The

---

[10]William Bingham (1754 - 5 February 1826) was the first headmaster of the school he established. In 1801 he was appointed as Chair of the Latin and Greek departments at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He resigned his appointment within a few years, however, because of what he considered to be the poor preparation of students. He then removed to Hillsboro, North Carolina (Thomas Ruffin's hometown) and reopened his private school. In 1810 Bingham was compelled to move his school to Mount Repose, eleven miles from Hillsboro, citing disciplinary problems with the students. Bingham carried on the tradition of the strict and serious Scottish tutor. He was noted for his strictness, but also had the reputation of turning out superior students. He remained headmaster until his death in 1826 whereupon his son, William James Bingham, assumed the position shortly after graduating from the University of North Carolina with highest honors. See Samuel A. Ashe, et al, eds., Biographical History of North Carolina From Colonial Times to the Present (Greensboro: Charles Van Noppen Publishers, 1907), 6, 66-7.

[11]Hamilton, 236.

[12]Spencer Roane (4 April 1762 - 4 September 1822) was born in Essex County, Virginia. He attended the College of William and Mary and was active in the Phi Beta Kappa Society. After reading law in 1782 he served in the House of Delegates in the mid-1780s and he served on committees with John Marshall, Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee. In 1786, Roane married Governor Patrick Henry's eldest daughter, Anne. He became a judge of the General Court in 1789 and in 1794, was elected to the state supreme court of appeals. He was, by far, the youngest member in that body. He was a strict constructionist in constitutional matters. He was an ardent supporter of Jefferson and Jefferson desired that Roane should become his

Ruffins resided in Hanover County, Virginia, where a great many members of the family claimed residence, including Edmund Ruffin who resided at "Marlbourne." Edmund named the estate after his agricultural experiments using marl[13] to restore soil. Albert G. Ruffin died in 1829, four years after Frank came to Hanover County. Clearly, young Frank had witnessed tragedy and must have been acutely aware of his own mortality.

After Albert's death, his wife adopted young Frank, raising him with great love and understanding.[14] Eliza took particular interest in Frank's personal life and tried to give the youth direction.

In 1839, Frank became engaged to Caryanne Nicholas

Chief Justice, but the Federalists managed to block his appointment in favor of fellow Federalist, John Marshall. In 1804, he founded the Richmond Enquirer with his cousin, Thomas Ritchie. Roane came to attack the federal Supreme Court for possessing too much power. He believed that the Court should be held accountable to the citizens of the republic. Republican leaders, including Jefferson, hailed him for his views. Predictably, his views upset some, including Chief Justice John Marshall. Because Roane believed that the federal government should answer to the states he was associated with the extreme state-rights theory. Later, Roane would be hailed as "the father of secession." Roane himself believed that he was "entirely federal." He died at Virginia's Warm Springs in 1822. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "Spencer Roane."

[13]Marl was rotten lime rock or stone. Ruffin saw marl as having two purposes. The first was to get rid of acid in the soil. The second was to preserve organic manures from loss of gaseous products of decomposition. Its chief advantage was that it prepared the ground for the application of manure. See Avery O. Craven, Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860, (Gloucester: Peter Smith Printers, 1965), 137-38.

[14]Whitmore, 73.

Randolph. How they met is not known, although Frank Ruffin was born in Caryanne's home county of Albemarle and he apparently owned at least some land in the area. The relationship seems to have been based on a genuine and deep mutual affection. In the nineteenth century marriages were often made out of convenience or necessity, rather than based on feelings. Following the announcement of their engagement on 20 September 1839, Eliza Ruffin wrote to Caryanne Randolph thanking her for making Frank such a happy young man. Eliza was no doubt particularly anxious to see Frank happy, since his past was filled with such sadness. Eliza Ruffin was about to leave the state in order to marry Governor Charles McDonald of Georgia,[15] so she was not able to meet Frank's future bride before she departed for the empire state. Eliza asked Caryanne to "cultivate an acquaintance by letter," and to "write to me unreservedly - as one that is deeply interested

---

[15]Charles James McDonald (9 July 1793 - 16 December 1860) born in Charleston, South Carolina, graduated from South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina) in 1816. After reading law, he was admitted to the bar in 1817 and began practice in Milledgeville, Georgia. He held political offices throughout the 1830s, and from 1839 until 1843 he was governor of Georgia. He also served as a justice of the Supreme Court of Georgia from 1855 until 1859. In national politics, McDonald was a Democrat who believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution. Late in his life, McDonald was associated with the Southern Rights Party and such figures as Rhett, Barnwell and Colquitt. This group came out against Henry Clay and others who favored compromise to preserve the Union. The Southern Rights Party held that secession was a sovereign right. McDonald died in Marietta, Georgia in 1860, just a few short months before the beginning of the Civil War. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "Charles James McDonald."

in you and already considers you as a daughter." Eliza went on to say, "It cannot be wrong to correspond with your affianced husband, when the engagement too is sanctioned by the parents of both sides." Eliza considered Frank the "noblest creature that ever existed," "His conduct has been a beautiful example of affection and duty and I have repaid it with a mother's fondness."[16] Later that year, on 18 December 1839, Eliza again wrote to Caryanne, explaining the hectic life of being a Governor's wife. Eliza was now living in Milledgeville, Georgia. Despite her new life, Eliza's letter to Caryanne still centered on Frank. Eliza implored Caryanne to "crown his happiness as soon as possible." She went on to say "I have absolved him of his promise to me of not marrying until he is twenty-four years of age, for he cannot be happy without you . . . there is great happiness in two young and loving hearts together struggling on. . . ."[17]

Caryanne Randolph also had reason to look forward to the union. The Randolphs hoped that the new couple would live at Shadwell. Thomas Jefferson Randolph,[18] Caryanne's father,

---

[16]Whitmore, 73.

[17]Ibid., 74.

[18]Thomas Jefferson Randolph (11 September 1792 - 7 October 1875) born at "Monticello," the home of his grandfather, Thomas Jefferson, was educated by local tutors in Albemarle County, Virginia. At the age of fifteen, he was sent to Philadelphia to pursue studies in botany, natural history and anatomy. However, finance was his true gift. "Jeff," as he was called by the family, was Thomas Jefferson's favorite grandchild. In 1816, Jefferson put Randolph in charge of his entire estate, which by that time was deep in debt. He was

had some financial woes and hoped that Frank would buy the property, along with some additional acreage, and provide Thomas Jefferson's grandson with some relief. A sale of some kind did occur between the two men, but it was probably a family arrangement as no deed survives from this period.[19]

Frank and Caryanne were married on 28 December 1840. They began their married life at "Edgehill" in Albemarle County, while a house was being built for them at Shadwell. Much interest was shown in the house; Caryanne's sisters asked questions such as "What are the plans" and "When will it be finished?"[20] The house was built on part of the old "Punch Bowl Tract." According to family legend, a few days before

---

successful in reducing the debt, but was never able to completely overcome it. When Jefferson died in 1826, he named Randolph as the executor of his estate. Randolph spent $40,000 of his own money in an effort to satisfy his grandfather's creditors. Ultimately, he was forced to sell Monticello and it passed out of the family with the exception of the graveyard. Randolph also had an interest in agriculture and was active in the Albemarle County Agricultural Society. During the 1830s he served in the Virginia House of Delegates and was also on the Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia. In 1832, he made a speech to the Virginia Assembly calling for the gradual emancipation of slaves. What was to become of these freed slaves was not made clear. Randolph was a Democrat throughout his life. He had been impressed with Andrew Jackson and stayed with the party. During the Civil War, Randolph supported the South and received a commission as colonel in the Confederate Army, but he was too old to take the field. Randolph was also president of the Farmers' Bank of Charlottesville. He died at "Edgehill" in 1875 and was buried at Monticello. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "Thomas Jefferson Randolph."

[19]Ibid., 74.

[20]Ibid., 74.

Peter Jefferson took out his patent for one thousand acres of land on the Rivanna River, William Randolph, Jefferson's friend and neighbor, had already taken out a patent for two thousand four hundred acres adjoining the Jefferson tract. Peter Jefferson could not find a suitable location on his land in which to build a house; therefore, he asked his friend Randolph to sell him four hundred acres from the larger patent. Their friendship was so strong, and land so plentiful, that Randolph offered the land on the condition that Jefferson merely provide him with the "biggest bowl of Arrack punch at Henry Weatherbourn's." The story is more than a family myth, as the deed to the property contained the conditions described above.[21]

The Ruffins' new home was also called "Shadwell" and sat opposite the original wooden dwelling, which burned when Jefferson was nearing adulthood. Because he lived at Shadwell, Frank was able to farm on the land where Thomas Jefferson was raised. The house that the Ruffins built was a "commodious brick building much in the style of the Edgehill mansion."[22] It was fitting that the new Shadwell was made of brick, as Jefferson was not fond of wooden structures, perhaps owing to the loss of his boyhood home. In any event, Jefferson claimed that wooden structures were not durable, and

---

[21]Ibid., 74-75.

[22]Ibid., 75.

were subject to rot.[23]

When Frank and Caryanne Ruffin began having children, they too carried on this long tradition. Their first progeny, who died while still an infant, was named Spencer Roane Ruffin. The second child was named Jefferson Randolph Ruffin, carrying with him a lifelong reminder of his connection to three proud and old Virginia names. The rest of the Ruffin offspring reflect other family members in their names.[24]

Alas, life at Shadwell did not go as smoothly as the young couple had hoped. In 1846, six years later, Eliza McDonald, Frank's adoptive mother, wrote him suggesting the couple might come to Georgia and seek new opportunities that were developing. She wrote that she was sorry to hear of the "deplorable account of Frank's pecuniary affairs." She then urged Frank to cut loose and have some land of his own.[25] As Eliza explained to Caryanne, "Frank has a lively genius and requires excitement and success to make him shine and be happy." Eliza further explained "In that community of old inhabitants of established popularity, he would, I know, have to wait a longer time than suits his impatient temper and then his long tarrying in your parents' house fostered his natural

---

[23]Jack McLaughlin, Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 71.

[24]Whitmore, 75.

[25]Ibid.

indolence . . . it has all turned out as I had predicted."[26]

[26]Ibid., 76.

CHAPTER 2

THE LAND

Although Frank Ruffin was about to move away from Albemarle County, he would remain connected to it. The key to his ongoing connection was Thomas Jefferson. Ruffin's wife, Caryanne, was a direct descendant of the great Virginian and with Ruffin helped to perpetuate the Jefferson bloodline, and at the same time, Ruffin carried on Jefferson's agricultural legacy.

It was Thomas Jefferson who said, "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue."[1] It was also his ideal to have a republic which was comprised mostly of small yeoman farmers.[2] Jefferson was a proponent of experimental agriculture. Ever the scientist, Jefferson looked to experiments that would increase the yield of the land and make farming generally more productive. He used a six-shift system of crop rotation utilizing large tracts of land. The

---

[1]William Peden, ed., Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1954), 164-65.

[2]C. William Hill, Jr., The Political Theory of John Taylor of Caroline (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977), 290.

practice of crop rotation was to be an important and long-lasting advancement. Because Jefferson saw the value of crop diversification, he was able to utilize fully rotation. Crop rotation involved moving the various crops every year. If corn were grown in an upper field and wheat in a lower field one year, the next year wheat would be grown in the upper field and corn in the lower field. Some fields would go unplanted for a season in order to recover nutrients. Most farmers in Virginia relied on a single staple crop - tobacco. If it were the only plant being grown, it would be impossible to rotate planting fields without utilizing fresh lands. This practice would lead farmers throughout the South to seek new lands in the West. Because of this practice, agricultural reform was retarded. Such was the case in the Commonwealth.

Three tenets of Jeffersonian thought were prevalent in Frank Ruffin's thinking throughout his life. First, agricultural interests should be placed above those of commerce and industry. Both Jefferson and Ruffin were suspicious of a strong central government. Although Jefferson did not support secession and Ruffin did, they both anticipated the eventual tyranny inherent to such power.[3] Also, both men relied on slave labor for the cultivation of their lands. They each held the view that if slavery were ended, the former slaves should be returned to the shores of

---

[3]Avery Craven, Edmund Ruffin: Southerner (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 42.

Africa. Jefferson thought that slavery should be ended on humanitarian grounds, yet he was economically dependent upon the work of his slaves.[4] Frank Ruffin, too, relied on slave labor. In 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, Ruffin was listed as owning thirty-three raning in age from one to forty-nine. These included nineteen males and fourteen females. By having such a wide age distribution and a majority of males, Ruffin insured himself of a continuing productive workforce.[5] However, after the Civil War (1861-1865) the slaves were free and planters throughout the South were economically devastated. If they were to survive, they had to find new and more efficient ways of farming.

In 1853, the Ruffins left Shadwell in Albemarle County and moved to "Summer Hill" in Chesterfield County, Virginia. There, Frank Ruffin turned his complete attention to agriculture. Pursuing the life of a small planter, Ruffin met with many hard realities. The conditions faced by farmers in the Commonwealth had been changing for decades, and the life of a planter, large or small, was not what it once had been. Since the War of 1812, agriculture in Virginia was in a virtually constant state of depression. Farming practices established by the original emigrants were designed for

---

[4]John C. Miller, The Wolf By the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery (New York: Free Press, 1977), 264-72.

[5]U.S. Bureau of the Census. Eighth Federal Census, 1860 Slave Schedule for Chesterfield County, Virginia, 9 July 1860, 37.

maximum profit and not the prolonged productivity of the land. These wasteful practices were continued by succeeding generations. Crops were not rotated, nutrients were not restored to the soil, and once profitable staple crops were rarely abandoned, even when overproduction threatened their economic wellbeing. This culture led to the impoverishment of many farmers. Edmund Ruffin noted, "Almost every man was growing poorer, or the prospects of his family becoming worse." He added, "The proprietors having no hope of the improvement of their lands, or of being remunerated for ever so great industry and devotion to their business, thought it was well to bestow very little." Ruffin also claimed that he could not think of a single planter in his vicinity who did not desire to sell his property and search for fresh lands in the West.[6] Planters began seeking positions which would add outside incomes to help meet expenses, but still allow time for agrarian pursuits.

Frank Ruffin moved to the town of Manchester, about three miles below Richmond, on the James River. Ruffin no doubt wanted to be near the state capital so that he could be close to the seat of state power. Although he never ran for office, Ruffin took great interest in the affairs of the Commonwealth and how they were addressed by the office holders in Richmond. Also, to the benefit of his agricultural interests, Ruffin

---

[6]David F. Allmendinger, Jr., ed., Incidents of My Life: Edmund Ruffin's Autobiographical Essays. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 168-69.

would be centrally located. This meant that he could visit planters relatively easily and they, in turn, could visit him. Accommodations and transportation to and from Richmond were no doubt the best in the state. Another factor which may have caused his move was the desire to put some distance between his father-in-law, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, and himself. Frank Ruffin was the head of a growing family with his own thoughts about how a family and a farm should be run. Both men were intelligent, and spoke their minds, and this probably caused great friction between the two. Perhaps one of the conversations they shared prompted Frank's desire to be near Richmond. For the next forty years, Frank Ruffin was a constant contributor to the Richmond newspapers, voicing his concern over the state of the Commonwealth.[7]

The 1850s were intellectually stimulating for Ruffin. He went into the capital every day, as well as corresponding and visiting with prominent planters on issues of concern. Like his famous cousin, Edmund, Frank Ruffin looked to improved agricultural techniques to restore once exhausted land.[8] Because of Frank's long interest in the agricultural affairs of the Old Dominion, especially with the Albemarle County

---

[7]Madeline McMurdo Whitmore, The Collected Papers of the Monticello Association, (Charlottesville, Va.: Monticello Association, 1984), 77.

[8]Ibid., 76.

Agricultural Society, which Thomas Jefferson helped establish,[9] he was honored by his fellow planters when they offered him the secretaryship of the recently reformed Virginia Agricultural Society in 1853. In that year, Frank Ruffin also assumed full-time editorship of the Southern Planter. He accepted both positions with great alacrity. The Farmers Register, edited by Edmund Ruffin, had ceased publication in 1842.[10] The Southern Planter had become the leading organ for improved husbandry, and it was fitting that a member of the Ruffin family should once again lead the way to better farming practices.

The thread that held Ruffin's life together was agriculture. Whatever he was involved in, farming was never far from his thoughts. Throughout his long life, Ruffin always looked for ways to make farming more efficient and profitable. During the decade of the 1850s, Ruffin and General W. H. Richardson conducted agricultural tours throughout the state. These tours were much like those of Arthur Young in Western Europe, who toured in the first decade of the nineteenth century. The object of these tours was to see what agricultural reforms could be found and later

---

[9]Barbara McEwan, Thomas Jefferson: Farmer (Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1991), 92.

[10]William Scarborough, ed., The Diary of Edmund Ruffin. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972) 3: xviii.

promoted.[11] The gospel of agricultural reform spread by men such as Frank Ruffin was finally producing results. Through the efforts of the Virginia State Agricultural Society, local societies and farming journals, farming methods were finally being improved. These included the rotation and diversification of crops, deeper plowing, contour plowing (which reduced erosion), the introduction of farm machinery such as the reaper for harvesting wheat, and chemically analyzing the soil. The soil itself was also being rejuvenated. Edmund Ruffin used the pages of his Farmers' Register to show that the application of marl could double and even triple the production of once-exhausted lands. In addition, various types of guano and manure were being added to the soil which produced similar results.

Although Ruffin was devoted to agriculture in Virginia, there were times when he became somewhat irritated about the personal and financial sacrifices he was making. In the mid-1850s Ruffin wrote to a friend in Petersburg that "I have travelled some 5,000 miles by rail at my own expense, and pay 50 dollars a month for postage."[12] Even in our own day, this would be an enormous burden.

The Virginia Agricultural Society was reorganized and incorporated in early 1853. In March, fewer than 200 members

---

[11]Charles W. Turner, Virginia's Green Revolution, (Waynesboro, Va.: Humphries Press, 1986), 22.

[12]Frank Ruffin to H. Chamberlayne, Francis Gildart Ruffin Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

met at the Exchange Hotel in Richmond. Members subscribed $100 each toward the authorized capitalization, with the hopes of raising $200,000. The society authorized a special study to be made of the fertilizer inspection law to see if it might be in need of revision. Premiums for the next agricultural fair were agreed upon, memorials were written to be presented at the next meeting of the General Assembly, and finally, copies of the Southern Planter were distributed by Frank Ruffin to each member. Once the formal meeting was over, Frank Ruffin delivered a paper on the "Rules of Crop Rotation."[13] Because Frank Ruffin was now editor of the Southern Planter, many people sought out his advice. The paper Ruffin delivered at the meeting described his system of a six-field rotation, earlier advocated by Thomas Jefferson, and the various crops he grew on his plantation. Already, Ruffin had gotten away from the exhausting effects staple crop farming had on the soil, and had diversified the crops that he grew. As was fitting, Edmund Ruffin, Frank's cousin, delivered the second address that evening. Edmund reviewed the effects of calcareous manures on soil. He had been conducting experiments on manures and soils for over twenty years, and so was a recognized authority on the subject. The platform of the state society paralleled that of the Ruffins - that as many farmers as possible be converted into scientific farmers. To be such, one must use strategies that included

---

[13]Turner, 25.

the rotation of crops, the renewal of soils using manure and guano, and improved husbandry. They were fairly successful in doing this. Companies were formed that imported various guanos from around the world and marling was increasingly used to neutralize acidic soil.

When Frank Ruffin took over the editorship of the Southern Planter in 1851,[14] it was on a part-time basis, so much so, that articles were often edited from a bed of wheat straw under an oak tree on his plantation. Ruffin assured readers that he was a farmer who was wholly dependent upon his land for a living.[15] He emphasized the practical aspects of the journal and, for the most part, did not use it as a progressive instrument. Ruffin decided on an annual subscription rate of $1.25.[16] Ideally, Ruffin would have wanted the periodical to reflect the defunct Farmers' Register, which very much sought to promote agricultural change. However, after seeing the fate of the Register, he determined that the Southern Planter would be very straightforward and appeal to the common farmer.[17] At the head of the title page, Ruffin used two quotations that reflected his thoughts on the place of farming in American life. The first quotation was from Xenophon, who wrote

---

[14]Southern Planter, July 1851, 195.

[15]Ibid., January 1852, 30.

[16]Ibid., July 1851, 1.

[17]Ibid., 195.

"Agriculture is the nursing mother of the arts." The other quotation was from Sully, who said "Tillage and pasturage are the two breasts of the state." The Sully quotation was particularly appropriate. Jefferson had called for a nation (state) comprised of small yeoman farmers. Frank Ruffin, too, thought that the farmer should remain the backbone on this country and not be overwhelmed by industry and progress.

Frank Ruffin learned from the mistakes that his cousin, Edmund, had made. A large reason for the failure of the Farmers' Register was that Edmund Ruffin used its pages to promote his own political views in addition to advice on improved husbandry. Frank Ruffin was careful only to include articles that directly related to farming in his Southern Planter. In many ways Frank Ruffin's journal was a continuation of the early years of the Register. In its pages were articles promoting the use of marl, the rotation of crops, and the planting of ground covers.

Slave labor was not a reality for the average farmer in the Commonwealth. However, those with any means at all usually acquired slaves. While Frank Ruffin's journal was intended for all farmers, he addressed the realities of daily interaction with the slaves. Through the pages of the Southern Planter he argued that the key to success was the practice of a daily conference with the overseer so that he would understand and carry out the employer's wishes. He wrote,

> Though uneducated, often bigoted, and adverse to change because instinct teaches them that when they leave the beaten track of practice, they have no compass to guide them through the wilds of theory . . . they have commonly an amount of shrewd sense, and a happy knack of removing difficulties that often baffle the more cultivated employer and saves him many a fall from a freshly mounted hobby.[18]

Overseers were often criticized for not properly looking after a planter's farm. Thomas Ruffin was not as fortunate in his dealings with overseers in North Carolina. The overseer pushed Ruffin's slaves so hard that several of them, in effect, went on strike. Ruffin was forced to use his skills as a judge to intercede before work was resumed. Even his wife complained that her garden was a "wilderness of weeds" and added, "that she will never again be cheated of the labor of her gardener by an overseer."[19]

In 1855 Ruffin became both proprietor and editor. Although he paid a "high price" for the journal, he felt justified in this because it had a large advertising section, and, as he put it, allowed him to " . . . do some good."[20] During this period the offices were located at Twelfth Street, between Main and Cary Streets in downtown Richmond. Throughout Ruffin's tenure with the journal, its circulation fluctuated between four thousand and five thousand subscribers

---

[18]Ulrich B. Phillips, Life and Labor in the Old South (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1963), 326.

[19]Ibid., 325-26.

[20]Southern Planter, January 1855, 17-18.

per year.[21] Among these subscribers were some of the most prominent planters in the Commonwealth. There was Hill Carter, who lived at "Shirley." He had extensive acreage on the James River farmed with slave labor. Edmund Ruffin also subscribed to the journal, indicating that he approved of his cousin's efforts. Perhaps the number of prominent men subscribing to the journal was a drawback. These men were better educated than the average farmer, and as a result they were more likely to employ scientific techniques to farming. It was the common farmer, the men who made up the majority of farmers, who needed to be persuaded to abandon outmoded farming practices. These were the men Frank Ruffin sought to convert.

In many ways the journal was the unofficial record of the Virginia Agricultural Society. The Planter always listed the proceedings of the meetings, and kept subscribers abreast of the society in every way. Frank Ruffin was a member of the society's Executive Committee, thus giving him the opportunity to further his journal and the society itself. In January of 1853, for example, the Southern Planter reported that Edmund Ruffin, Sr., was forced to resign his post as President of the society due to ill health and advancing age. Also reported were the attendance figures for the meeting that occurred only a few weeks prior. Frank Ruffin was compelled to reiterate the purpose of the Virginia Agricultural Society because

---

[21]Ibid., January 1854, 25, and January 1855, 17.

attendance had been so poor. "The society affords to farmers the opportunity of meeting and comparing opinions, and doing it in a manner that is not at all calculated to embarrass them."[22] Ruffin was no doubt combatting apathy that had begun in Virginia, and throughout the South.

Frank Ruffin and Edmund Ruffin were probably the two most visible and tireless advocates of agricultural reform in the Commonwealth. They conferred frequently through the meetings of the Executive Committee. Although Edmund Ruffin resigned as President of the state agricultural society, he worked in the committee and behind the scenes as tirelessly as ever. In his diary of 29 October 1858, he observed,

> . . . Our meetings of the Executive Committee are always pleasant, in bringing together intimate friends & intelligent companions. In such relations most of the members have stood to each other, from the beginning of our service to this time. We had nine to attend this evening, of which I especially number F. Minor, F. Ruffin, W. C. Knight & W. Tate, these I especially value.[23]

Because of their journals, the two Ruffin cousins became, in many ways, the spokesmen for farm reform in the Old Dominion. However, they were by no means the only Virginians interested in reversing the declining fortunes of farming in the Commonwealth. Virginia farmers subscribed to out-of-state journals such as New York's Cultivator. In 1838, the Virginia State Library subscribed to over one hundred different farm journals, including Edinburgh's Quarterly Journal of

---

[22]Ibid., January, 1853, 16.

[23]Scarborough, 242.

Agriculture and London's Encyclopedia of Plants.[24]

After moving to Chesterfield, Frank Ruffin looked forward to establishing a true home life, away from the long shadow of the Randolph clan; Caryanne, on the other hand, greatly missed the company and companionship of her family. Caryanne and her sisters exchanged letters, always with the hope that they could all spend an extended amount of time together. All of the Randolph girls were extremely close, and it must have been hard on Caryanne to be so far away from them. The problem was made worse by the extended absences of her husband, who was often travelling throughout the state or in Richmond looking after affairs there.

Caryanne Ruffin was pregnant nine times during her marriage. Two of these pregnancies occurred after the family moved to Chesterfield. Late in her pregnancies, Caryanne returned home to her family for the birth of her children. This was only natural since she would be among friends and family and be more relaxed. The family also may have had a trusted mid-wife that delivered the Randolph children. The birth of their ninth child once again brought tragedy to Frank Ruffin's life. On 24 July 1857, Caryanne delivered a baby girl, which they named Cary Randolph Ruffin. It was especially prophetic that the ninth and final child should be named for Caryanne Ruffin. Four days after she delivered the

---

[24]Turner, 25.

child bearing her name, Caryanne Ruffin died.[25] An account of her death is given in the journal of Caryanne's brother-in-law, Robert Garlick Hill Kean (who later was to serve the Confederate States of America as a War Department clerk).

He writes,

> Monday morning I went down to Edgehill reaching there about 10 A.M. Found Caryanne sinking and in a dying condition. . . . She had been leaving messages with the family as they chanced separately to come in, or were sent for (for a crowd was forbidden) and said after I kissed her 'Garlick, I leave Jane still more to your care and love - she has always been my child - Our intercourse has always been very pleasant to me. I hope it has been so to you.' I told her it had been eminently so, and her kindness had years ago won my whole heart. She said Mr. Ruffin is very fond of you. I want you and all my family to make him one of them. He has no family of his own. She talked beautifully of her faith in Christ, and showed in her extremity that she was, as Mrs. Davis said, as we rode down to Edgehill (I had gone to town for her - sister C. had asked for her) an eminent Christian. Dr. Davis summed up his admiration for her thus, 'she had the good sense and intellect of a wise man, combined with the delicacy and tenderness of a refined woman - I think she was - and I pause to reflect to give the statement the emphasis of deliberate truth, she was the very wisest woman I ever knew.' We buried her at Monticello on Friday, the 31st of July . . . . The first circumstances which endeared sister Caryanne to me (I had long admired her powers of eloquent conversation) was my finding out through Lucy soon after the first time Jane rejected me (in 1850) that she at least was my friend. My acquaintance with her was not intimate (for want of opportunity) till my visit to Summer Hill last year and the year before. - What a storm of sorrow! . . . . Poor Frank Ruffin. He was to go home today to Summer Hill alone there to see to ten thousand things to remind him with incessant and terrible distinctness that the temple is desolate and the deity fled - How past imagination is a husband's loss when his wife dies![26]

Caryanne Randolph Ruffin was buried in the family plot at

---

[25]Whitmore, 77.

[26]Ibid., 77-78.

Monticello about fifty feet from the sage of Monticello.[27] The news of Mrs. Ruffin's death quickly spread throughout Virginia. Edmund Ruffin's diary entry for 1 August 1857 read " . . . My daughters went to Petersburg . . . . They brought back the melancholy news of the death of Mrs. F. G. Ruffin, whom, not long since we had visited & seen well & cheerful . . . ."[28] The news of Caryanne's death was also announced in newspapers around the state, including those in Northern Virginia.[29]

Following Caryanne's passing, Eliza McDonald sent a letter of sympathy to Caroline Randolph, Caryanne's sister, extolling Caryanne's virtues. Eliza wrote, "She had no superior; and the influence she exerted over her husband ennobled his character and had I the choice of the world, knowing her as I did, I should have chosen her for my adopted son."[30] The Randolph sisters ran a well known school at Edgehill plantation, and members of the Randolph and Ruffin families could always be counted among the students being

---

[27]The author has been to Monticello and has located Caryanne's tombstone through the high wrought iron fence that surrounds the graveyard. The tombstone reads "Caryanne Nicholas Ruffin. Third daughter of Thos. Jefferson and Jane Hollins Randolph. Married to Francis Gildart Ruffin on December 28, 1840. Born April 22, 1820-Died July 28, 1857. Plucked by our Father, as a full blown rose. Just when its sweetest fragrance filled the air, She blooms immortal in the courts of heaven and sheds a rich perpetual fragrance there."

[28]Scarborough, 95.

[29]See the Alexandria Gazette for 4 August 1857, 3.

[30]Whitmore, 78.

tutored there. The "Edgehill aunts" adopted and raised the two youngest Ruffin children, Eliza Ruffin, and baby Cary. In a time when many women lost their lives giving birth, motherless children were fairly common. Because of this, the sisters always had room in their hearts and homes for nieces and nephews.

The school was closed during the Civil War, but once it re-opened, two of Frank Ruffin's grandchildren were students there. These were the children of William Roane Ruffin, Frank's oldest son, who lived at Valley Farm in Chesterfield County. Along with the older boys, Ruffin continued to live at Summer Hill. Once again Ruffin had to overcome tragedy and grief and allow life to go on.[31]

For the next year, Frank Ruffin continued to edit the Southern Planter and manage his farm. However, in June of 1858 he wanted to make some changes in his life including a decision to sell his interest in the journal. In an editorial entitled "Valedictory," Ruffin explained to his subscribers why he was divesting himself of the Southern Planter. He wrote:

> Prompted by a variety of reasons which are altogether private, and which therefore need not be recited, I have sold my interest in the Southern Planter, and at the same time have resigned its editorial chair to another. I have not been unmindful of the character of the paper or the interests of its subscribers in my successor, Dr. James E. Williams of Henrico County, a farmer, a man of industry and intelligence, and a gentleman of great suavity of manners and genuine kindness of heart . . . . It is

---

[31]Ibid.

> natural that I should feel regret at dissolving the relations which I have held towards the agricultural public of Virginia for the last eight years, and proper that I should express it. In all that time I cannot hope to have escaped censure, nor to have pleased everybody, which to say truth, I have preferred not to do . . . . I do not propose never again to enter the columns of the Planter, I presume I could not keep out of them if I would. At such times, then, as I may feel prompted by the spirit of the past, possibly too often for usefulness to others or profit to my self, I shall contribute to the Planter. And therefore I need not utter that painful word, Farewell.[32]

Indeed Frank Ruffin was correct. He did continue to contribute to the Southern Planter. Actually, Ruffin did not present much of his own material to the journal while he was its editor. Perhaps he felt this gave it an air of respectability, or that others did not perceive the Planter as an organ for Ruffin's personal agenda. Certainly, Ruffin steered clear of using anything other than articles on farming. The articles that were used came from planters, both large and small, from throughout the state. Letters that Ruffin received in reaction to previous articles were often published, and these often led to rather lively and ongoing dialogue on subjects such as whether to pen animals up or let them graze freely. Ruffin may have delighted in such things.[33] A large part of the Virginia Agricultural Society's mission was to do the same thing, to let the farmers

---

[32]Southern Planter, June 1858, 387.

[33]The author has reviewed the issues of the Southern Planter during Ruffin's tenure, and though the journal did not always publish on a regular basis, each issue is consistent. The surprising thing one finds is the absence of articles by Frank Ruffin.

of the Commonwealth debate issues that were of concern to them and arrive at some kind of consensus. Ruffin's role as editor of the Southern Planter was in many ways a continuation of his role as secretary of the society.

Following the Civil War, Frank Ruffin was briefly co-editor of the Southern Planter. In 1869 he co-edited the journal with C. B. Williams. Also during that year Ruffin served as a judge for the Virginia State Agricultural Society Fair. In keeping with his position Ruffin judged the essays that were submitted.[34] Also during that year, Ruffin received a letter from a farmer praising him for his contributions to sheep husbandry in Virginia. The writer said that Ruffin "had done more to arouse our people to the importance of sheep husbandry in our state, both by your writings on the subject and efforts personally to raise and distribute improved breeds at moderate prices, than anyone with whom I am acquainted."[35] This letter is evidence that Ruffin's efforts at reform and improvement in agriculture were being noticed by the farmers of Virginia.

As late as 1876, Frank Ruffin was still contributing to the Southern Planter offering his thoughts to anyone who would care to read them. Here is Ruffin's cure for distemper:

> One gallon of salt, half a pint of saltpetre, half a pint of flour of sulpher, half gill of powdered copperas; mix in these proportions a good large quantity at a time, and

---

[34]Southern Planter, December 1869, 705-7.

[35]Ibid., December 1869. 736-37.

> put it where every horned beast can get to it at will, and keep it there from the first of May to the first of September. To cure, treat with boluses of sugar or drenches of molasses, administered in large quantities, say half of sugar or half gallon of molasses administered every two or three hours, until the animal dies or gets relieved. If relieved, follow this treatment with a teaspoon of calomel.[36]

By the outbreak of the Civil War, Frank Ruffin once again put his happiness on the line and remarried. His second wife was Ellen Strother Harvie, a granddaughter of the distinguished former Chief Justice John Marshall.[37] This

---

[36]Ibid., July 1876, 508.

[37]John Marshall (24 September 1755 - 6 July 1835) was born into humble circumstances on what was then the near western frontier in Fauquier County, Virginia. The Marshalls were mostly humble farmers and traced their lineage back to Wales. His father, however, became friends with George Washington, even fighting along side him in the Seven Years War. Because of this he earned the rank of colonel and had some standing in the colony. Little is known of Marshall's mother, except that she was descended from William Randolph and Mary Isham Randolph. Because of that link, Marshall was related to Thomas Jefferson, Robert E. Lee and members of the Randolph family including Caryanne Randolph, Frank Ruffin's first wife. Although Marshall was related to Thomas Jefferson, the two were not close and agreed on very little. John Marshall volunteered for service during the Revolutionary War and saw many campaigns. Following his military service, he attended a few law lectures under George Wythe at the College of William and Mary, but never earned a degree. Despite this, he was admitted to the bar in Fauquier County, Virginia in 1788. From there he became a member of the Assembly in the 1780s. He was a champion of Washington's administration and became an ardent Federalist. He gained notoriety for his legal prowess and in 1799, President John Adams appointed Marshall to the United States Supreme Court. Curiously, Washington had to ask him twice. During Marshall's tenure on the court, he established the principle of judicial review through the case of Marbury vs. Madison. Marshall's court was clearly Federalist and was attacked by those who favored "state sovereignty." These included Spencer Roane, John Taylor of Caroline, and most notably, his distant cousin, Thomas Jefferson. In the 1820s, age had caught up to him, but he would not resign because he was afraid that Andrew Jackson

union produced no off-spring, but it does seem to have been a mutually happy union.[38] It is quite likely that Ruffin met his future wife while attending social functions in Richmond. Frank Ruffin did not know it then, but he was about to be drawn into a great conflict that would change forever the Virginia of his youth, and even endanger his health.

---

would become the new President and be in a position to name his successor. When Jackson was elected, he decided to remain on the court as long as possible. On 6 July 1835 he died. He was eighty years old and had been Chief Justice for thirty-five of those years. Dictionary of American Biography (1933), s. v. "John Marshall."

[38]Whitmore, 77.

CHAPTER 3

CONFEDERATE SERVICE

In November of 1860, the Ruffins were preoccupied with the possibility that Lincoln might become the next President of the United States. If he were elected, they reasoned that the southern states would become politically enslaved. The slaves, too, would be freed within a short time and chaos would reign across the South. With this in mind, Edmund Ruffin ordered secession pamphlets from Charleston, South Carolina. He gave half the pamphlets to Frank Ruffin and the two began to distribute them.[1] In North Carolina, Thomas Ruffin had been opposed to secession, but by March of 1861 the Judge had concluded that the South could not receive justice under the Lincoln administration. This led Thomas and his two sons, William and Sterling, to embrace the doctrine of secession.[2]

The South did, in fact, secede from the Union and establish its own government. Both Edmund and Thomas Ruffin were too old to aid the Confederate cause; however, Edmund was given the honor of firing the first shot on Fort Sumter

---

[1]William Scarborough, ed., The Diary of Edmund Ruffin, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 1: 482-83.

[2]Ibid., 572.

because of his pre-war agricultural efforts. Frank Ruffin was younger than his cousins and thus, was able to aid the Confederate cause directly. Because he had established his keen intellect in Richmond before the war, the Confederate government chose Ruffin for an office position in the War Department rather than a field command.

The Commissary Department began courting controversy from its inception on 26 February 1861, when Confederate President Jefferson Davis chose Lucius Bellinger Northrop[3] to be the acting commissary general. It was widely known in Richmond, and throughout the Confederacy, that Davis and Northrop attended West Point together, and in 1833 both men served in the 1st Dragoons. However, the bonding between the two men more likely occurred in late 1833 when both men were brought up on court martial charges by their commander, Major Richard B. Mason. Davis and Northrop testified on each others'

---

[3]Lucius Northrop (8 September 1811 - 9 February 1894) was born in Charleston, where his family was well known. He "earned" a medical degree in the 1850s and practiced in Charleston before the war. He had a somewhat harsh personality, which tended to put people off. After the war, he was imprisoned for a time. Upon his release he retired to a farm near Charlottesville, Virginia. During those years, Northrop continued to write to Davis. In the letters, Northrop revealed his bitterness towards J.E. Johnston and P.G.T. Beauregard for their attacks upon him and his staff. In 1889 Northrop's wife died. The next year, Northrop suffered a stroke, and removed to Pikeville, Maryland, where he remained until his death in 1894. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "Lucius Bellinger Northrop."

behalf, and were acquitted.[4]

The friendship between the two men was widely acknowledged, but things were not always what they seemed. While Northrop was acting commissary general, the permanent position was offered to Richard Griffith of Mississippi. When he refused, Davis then offered the post to Captain William Maynadier who had previously served in the Ordnance Department of the United States Army.[5] When both gentlemen declined the call to service, Davis was forced to offer the position to Northrop. In addition to the support Northrop received from President Davis, P. G. T. Beauregard and South Carolina Governor Francis Pickens requested Northrop because they had become familiar and appreciative of him in pre-war Charleston.[6] Jefferson Davis expressed his complete confidence in Northrop when he wrote that his new commissary

---

[4]Thomas Robson Hay, "Lucius B. Northrop: Commissary General of the Confederacy," Civil War History 9 (March 1963): 5-23. Richard Barnes Mason (16 January 1797 - 25 July 1850), great-grandson of George Mason of Gunston Hall. He was born in Fairfax County, Virginia, in the shadow of Mount Vernon plantation. Mason was elected a Major in the 1st Dragoons two days after it was created on 2 March 1833. He was also the first military and civilian Governor of California. In April of 1849, he was relieved as major, and subsequently, he also lost his command of the Dragoons. His administration was noted for its extreme conservatism, which gained Mason many critics. However, due to his years of loyal service to the army, he was made a Brigadier-General in time to fight in the Mexican war. Following the war, Mason returned to Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, where he died in 1850. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "Richard Barnes Mason."

[5]Hay, 6.

[6]Ibid.

general had "strong practical sense and incorruptible integrity."[7]

As an agency of the Confederate government, the Commissary Department was subject to the policies of Jefferson Davis and the executive branch. The official policy was that cotton would be withheld from warehouses, and this would force diplomatic recognition of the Confederacy. Unfortunately, cotton was the only commodity that the South had to offer on a wide scale, or in some cases it was the only commodity in which those who could help the South gain food and supplies were interested. Since this policy ultimately failed, it would be pure conjecture to claim that had Davis allowed cotton to be traded for goods and vital services, the Confederacy might have fared better. Certainly it would have lessened the hardship sustained throughout the South.[8] For the Commissary Department, this policy was a major factor in its sustained inability to keep the Confederate army fed.

Although Lucius Northrop sustained much criticism throughout his tenure as commissary general, he was fortunate to have Frank Gildart Ruffin as his assistant. As Northrop's assistant, Frank Ruffin weathered personal attacks, physical illness and formal investigations into his conduct, moreover

---

[7]Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 303.

[8]For a detailed and thorough study of Confederate Diplomacy and the cotton question, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, King Cotton Diplomacy, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959).

his devotion to the Confederate cause and his superior, Northrop, never wavered. Although Ruffin saw much in the Confederate government, including Davis himself, that chagrined him, his eventual resignation on 28 February 1865 was due to ill health and not to complete disillusionment.

The Commissary Department became one of the first four administrative divisions in the Confederate States Army on 26 February 1861. Lucius Bellinger Northrop was nominated as Commissary General of the Confederate States Army by Jefferson Davis. His confirmation to this post was not unanimous and was questioned and challenged thoughout his tenure. Numerous attacks faced by Northrop, his deputy, Major Frank Ruffin and others, came from Henry S. Foote[9] of Tennessee. Foote was a

---

[9]Henry Stuart Foote (28 February 1804 - 19 May 1880) has often been called the "Vallandighan of the South." Vallandighan was an Ohio congressman who was outspoken in his support for the South. Lincoln later had him expelled to the Confederacy. Foote was born in Fauquier County, Virginia and was admitted to the bar in Richmond in 1823. He moved to Mississippi in 1847 and was elected to the United States Senate. While a senator in Mississippi, Foote was in violent disagreement with his fellow senator, Jefferson Davis, over the Compromise of 1850 and the principle of secession. It is even said that the two came to blows once. Foote supported the Compromise, while Davis did not. In 1858 he decided to move to Nashville, Tennessee. Although he did not support secession, he accepted election to the first regular Confederate Congress from Tennessee's fifth district in November of 1861. He launched thirty inquiries while a member of Congress. Eleven of these were for fraud in the Quartermaster and Commissary departments. In 1864, Foote went North on a peace mission not supported by the government and was expelled. After the war, he became friends with President Grant and was made Superintendent of the New Orleans Mint. He died in 1880. See Ezra J. Warner, "Henry Stuart Foote" in the Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 86-87.

vocal and active critic of both Jefferson Davis and his administration. Although Foote was later expelled from the Confederate Congress for attempting to negotiate an unauthorized peace with Lincoln, his attacks on the Confederate administration did not seem to lose impact or general support.

Mary Chesnut, the famous Civil War diarist, noted in her diary for 24 February 1862 that "The irrepressible Foote . . . now has turned his attention to annoying and impeding as much as lies in a Foote - Mr. Davis and his cabinet."[10]

Northrop was replaced in February 1865, by John C. Breckenridge as brigadier general of the Commissary Department and Northrop continued under General Isaac M. St. John after the evacuation of Richmond. The continuation of Northrop's system suggests that he was making the best of a system beset by distribution and transportation difficulties, equipment failures, speculation, and lack of access to the geographic areas of production.

The Commissary Department and its Bureau of Subsistence were responsible for keeping the Confederate troops fed, making the commissary central to Confederate success. Because of the vital role the commissary played, it was subject to its share of criticism.

Mary Chesnut, summed up the relationship between the

---

[10]C. Vann Woodward, ed., Mary Chesnut's Civil War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) 295.

Commissary Department, headed by Northrop, and the rest of the Confederacy. Her comments came barely six months into Northrop's administration:

> Now, if I were to pick out the best abused, where all catch it so bountifully, I should say Mr. Commissary General Northrop was the most cussed and vilified man in the Confederacy. He is held accountable for everything that goes wrong in the Army. He may not be efficient, but his having been a classmate and crony of Jeff Davis at West Point points the moral and adorns the tale.[11]

Mary Chesnut enjoyed a prominent social standing which allowed her access to the leading figures in the war, including the family of Jefferson Davis. For this reason, her diary commentary provides an insight on the emotional pulse of the war.

In May, 1862, George Wythe Randolph became the first non-civilian Confederate Secretary of War, succeeding Judah P. Benjamin. The War Department was located in Richmond's Mechanic's Hall. Randolph was an appointee of Jefferson Davis, but this did not mean that the two men enjoyed an intimate relationship. Randolph and Davis were formal and stiff in their interactions with one another.[12] Like Northrop, Randolph was immediately challenged. Randolph assumed office just after General Henry A. Wise's debacle at Roanoke Island. Wise came to Randolph seeking a command and when he was not sufficiently satisfied he indignantly

---

[11]Ibid., 124.

[12]George Green Shackelford, George Wythe Randolph and the Confederate Elite, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 149.

proclaimed: "There is no Secretary of War. He is merely a clerk, an underling and cannot hold up his head in his humiliating position."[13]

Under the Confederate system of government, General Lee was designated Randolph's superior in strategic matters, meaning that Lee, usually with the approval of President Davis, had the final word on the strategy the troops would employ in the field. However, after Joseph E. Johnston was wounded, Lee took over field command. As a result of these changes, Secretary of War Randolph became President Davis's chief military advisor.[14]

The Secretary of War had a delicate but demanding position; Randolph had to recruit staff members on wom he knew could be rely. Often these staff members were related to Randolph by blood or marriage. This caused many to criticize Randolph. Certainly it was true that those chosen by Randolph were often members of prominent Virginia families and a majority of them were educated at the University of Virginia, as was Randolph. But he was justified in this practice. Randolph's position was sufficiently precarious that he needed able men.

It was only natural that Randolph would draw from those with high social standing. In Virginia, all those with social

---

[13]Ibid., 72. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "George Wythe Randolph."

[14]Shackelford, 76.

standing were related to the Randolphs.[15] Randolph was fortunate in that Frank Ruffin was working closely with Lucius Northrop. Ruffin was Randolph's nephew-in-law, and the Secretary of War knew that he could count on Ruffin to act as a "watchdog" of the commissariat.[16]

George Wythe Randolph was Caryanne Randolph Ruffin's uncle, but they were contemporary in age, and so the Ruffins often visited with George Randolph at Shadwell and Edgehill. The personal relationship the two men enjoyed before the conflict made it only natural that they would want to help each other out wherever possible. When Frank Ruffin moved to Chesterfield County in the 1850s, he left George Wythe Randolph in charge of his Albemarle land which was held in trust for his children.[17]

Certainly, Randolph knew that Ruffin would give him accurate information about what was occurring at the Commissariat. This does not mean that Randolph was suspicious of Northrop. In fact, the three men were allies in that they all favored trading cotton through the lines in exchange for meat, but President Davis would not hear of it. This caused tension between the War Department and the executive branch. Family tradition even holds that besides ill health, Randolph

---

[15]Ibid., 95.

[16]Ibid., 115.

[17]Madeline McMurdo Whitmore, The Collected Papers of the Monticello Association (Charlottesville: Monticello Association, 1984) 76.

was moved to resign because of Davis's complete refusal to alter his cotton policy in any way.[18]

On 29 June 1861, just prior to the first battle of Bull Run, Frank Ruffin was appointed a Captain in the Subsistence Department. Ruffin signed his oath of allegiance to the Confederate States of America on 19 August 1861. A month later on 2 September 1861, Ruffin was promoted to the rank of Major. It was not until 8 October 1863, that Ruffin received his last promotion making him a Lt. Colonel. Ruffin reported to Commissary General L. B. Northrop until 1863.[19]

Ruffin and Randolph had something else in common during the war; both men were somewhat frail and Ruffin took several official sick leaves. These occurred on 8 July 1862, 28 July 1863, and 27 July 1864.[20] Ill health finally forced Frank Ruffin to resign his commission on 28 February 1865.[21] From the beginning, Ruffin was unsure whether his health would fit him for Confederate service. General Northrop testified in

---

[18]Ibid., 80.

[19]The documents showing Ruffin's promotions may be found in box 5, folder 1, of the John Marshall Papers. These are housed in the Manuscripts Department of the Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

[20]Leave slips indicating dates may be found in the compiled service record of Francis Gildart Ruffin, United States Archives, Washington D.C. There is also an unsigned letter stating that this person spoke to Ruffin's physician personally (presumably Northrop who counted on Ruffin), and in fact, Ruffin's health would have been compromised further had he remained in the Confederate service.

[21]Ibid.

February of 1863 " . . . I met him (Ruffin) in May of 1861 at the Spotswood Hotel (in Richmond) . . . where he proposed to resign." Northrop added "I told him I desired to keep in position those men who were acquainted with the business of the Commissary Department."[22] A little over a year later, Ruffin's personal physician (Dr. Beale) testified (during a hearing to determine if Ruffin was guilty of contract fixing) that from the first of May, 1862, until the third of July, Ruffin was sick. The doctor reported that Ruffin was mentally overworked, and that he also suffered from acute gout. In July of 1862, Ruffin was sent by his doctor to Allegheny Springs until late September of that same year. The doctor said it was a matter of "life or death" to Frank Ruffin.[23]

Once Northrop was appointed, he began to assess the task at hand. He was not pleased at the prospect presented. Northrop wrote to Davis in August of 1861 informing him that the Confederacy would not have enough swine or beef to feed the armies and the slaves east of the Mississippi.[24]

But by October of 1861, there were some signs of hope for the Commissary Department. Frank Ruffin reported that 116,000

---

[22]Confederate States of America, Report of Committee on Quartermaster and Commissary Departments on Case of Major Frank G. Ruffin, (Richmond: n.p., February 1863)(hereafter cited as "Ruffin Case Report"), 5. Report is in the rare book room of the Virginia State Library in Richmond.

[23]Ruffin Case Report, 4.

[24]Richard D. Goff, Confederate Supply, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1969), 36.

hogs and 26,500 cattle had been slaughtered east of the Mississippi River. This produced a total yield of 29,818,888 rations of salt meat. Ruffin thought this enough to feed 225,000 men for 120 days.[25] The figures that Ruffin provided for the department, during the course of the war, clearly show that Ruffin was very much Northrop's chief assistant. It is Ruffin who did the research and made up the reports for the commissary that were then shown to Northrop for his approval.[26]

There was a corn meal shortage in the Deep South in the summer of 1862. Fortunately, Richmond did have reserves from 1861 and these were dispatched throughout the South by rail. By 1863 even Virginia was affected by the flour shortage and Secretary of War Randolph ordered Virginia's borders sealed to prevent export of flour and other staple foodstuffs. There was even an impressment of flour held by Richmond speculators.[27]

The fall of 1862 brought to the Commissary Department changes and challenges. In late November, James Alexander

---

[25]Ibid., 36-37.

[26]In the Francis Gildart Ruffin papers at the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, there are numerous charts and papers in Ruffin's handwriting that show how involved he was with the daily running of the Commissariat. Unfortunately, the subject or place concerned in most of these papers is not clear. Obviously, Ruffin knew what they applied to, but looking at an unlabeled column of figures one hundred years later is not much help to the researcher.

[27]Goff, 78.

Seddon replaced George Wythe Randolph as Secretary of War. This brought the War Department back to civilian control, as it had originally been under Judah P. Benjamin. Unlike Randolph, Seddon proved to be subservient to Jefferson Davis.[28]

Just before Seddon took over the War Department, Ruffin and Northrop wrote to Secretary of War Randolph warning him that the Subsistence Bureau could not guarantee meat stocks beyond January of 1863. Drought in the South, wasteful packing, and even problems with salt, all combined to hamper efforts to procure protein for the army.[29]

Shortly after James Seddon became Secretary of War, in November 1862, Ruffin wrote to him complaining about citizens who refused to sell goods to the Confederate Government at

---

[28]James Alexander Seddon (13 July 1815 - 19 August 1880) was a native Virginian. He was raised at "Snowden" in Stafford County. This house was burned during the war. In 1835 Seddon graduated from the University of Virginia law school and subsequently practiced in Richmond. He served in the federal House of Representatives, off and on, from 1845 until 1851. Seddon then retired to "Sabot Hill," his estate in Goochland County. He was a keen follower of Calhoun and he also read a variety of subjects. Although noted as a conversationalist, Seddon was not known to be humorous or jovial. Seddon was a member of the peace convention in 1861, and was elected to the first Confederate Congress. He was asked to resign this position and replace G.W. Randolph as Secretary of War in 1862. Seddon's physical appearance was once described as "an exhumed corpse after a month's interment." After the war, Seddon was imprisoned by northern authorities for a time. Upon his release, Seddon returned to his estate in Goochland County. He considered his entire life a failure once the Confederacy collapsed. He died at "Sabot Hill" in 1880. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "James Alexander Seddon."

[29]Goff, 78-79.

fair prices. Northrop was strongly in favor of impressing food for the Confederate cause, but many civilians criticized him on the grounds that they too were facing severe food shortages. Ruffin and Northrop told Seddon that if this continued, there would be no way to feed the army. They then suggested that a fair price schedule be adopted using average prices from several pre-war years. Seddon agreed with the recommendation and on the eve of 1863, Seddon established a fair price guide to be used throughout the South for the impressment of food. Only the railroads were to be exempted.[30]

Railroads were vital to the smooth flow and distribution of goods, and if anything were to hamper their running the Confederacy would have been permanently disabled. Thus, price guides were ignored by the railroads, and this ensured that railroad operators did not cease running as a protest.

The strategic importance of railroads was well known to both sides during the war, but they were especially so with the South. In November of 1864, Ruffin received a letter from a Major Allen who wanted the Secretary of War to add a line of railroad that he thought would be of benefit to his troops. Ruffin responded, "The Major recommends connecting Union Springs with Montgomery. This was referred to the Secretary of War. This was right locally, but a more general view forbids." He added that "the importance of transportation is

---

[30]Ibid., 98.

much like the possibility that like the loss of a nail to a horseshoe may be a few miles of rail to our cause."[31]

Ruffin and Northrop worked hard to ensure that the Confederate troops received their daily rations. However, the Commissariat could not control the forces of nature, and in 1862, these forces were less than kind throughout the South. The Commissary Department had intended to build up a surplus of vital supplies in case mother nature did not cooperate, but this never came to fruition. The upper South experienced a drought, which led to a drop in wheat production. This in turn led to decreased corn production, which meant that there were not as many hogs available for slaughter. Cattle, which the Confederacy had been procuring from out West, had to stop in Texas due to a lack of available grazing grass, and those cattle that were pushed on despite this, often arrived emaciated.[32]

In November of 1862, Frank Ruffin sent a subsistence report to the Secretary of War. Typical of Ruffin's work, it is detailed and meticulous. The summary begins with a breakdown of meat in the Confederacy as follows:

---

[31]Frank Ruffin to Major Allen, 17 November 1864. Letter is contained on page 18 of the Subsistence Scrapbook, number 6, in the manuscript division of the Virginia Historical Society.

[32]Northrop to Cummings, 15 December 1862, in the papers of the Confederate States of America, Department of Commissary. These are in the manuscript collection of the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond. Hereafter cited as Commissary Papers, C.S.A.

Bacon

Stock on hand Oct. 1 1862	5,154,366 lbs
" 1 1863	2,059,716
Deficit	3,094,650 "

Beef

The number of beeves available October 15th, 1863 are reported as follows:

Virginia-Valley of Virginia, etc. 6,000 =	10,000 head
South West Virginia, 4,00 to 5,000 say 4,000	
On hand October 1862	8,500 head
Excess	1,500 head
In other states as follows:	
South Carolina	500 head
Georgia	820 "
Alabama	1,100 "
Florida	200 "
Mississippi	14,000 "
Total	16,621 head

These figures illustrate the Confederacy's dependence on the western states for a regular supply of meat. No wonder then, that so much anxiety was expressed over retaining Vicksburg.[33]

The study also notes that no new hogs had been procured and there would be no guarantee that a regular supply could be found. Also noted were the parties who sold to the government at prices that greatly transcended the general schedule of impressment. This meant that corn cost the department $40.00

---

[33]J. DeRoulhac Hamilton, ed., The Papers of Thomas Ruffin, 4 vols. (Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission and Edwards and Broughton State Printers, 1918), 3: 349.

a barrel, or twice what the schedule allowed for. Ruffin also pointed out that the Bureau warned of meat shortages two years prior to their occurence. It was recommended that the regular army ration be reduced because it was always "more than a soldier needed, or under ordinary circumstances, could consume."[34] Ruffin was forced to figure future expenditures with the exorbitant profit rate in mind. He figured pork costs and profits out of Nassau in this way:

1 barrel pork costs at Nassau say...	$20.00
600 % profit	$120.00
	$140.00[35]

The report also outlined the Commissary Department's concern over railroads. Ruffin pointed out that many supplies were being stolen off the trains before they reached their destination, which was beyond the control of the department, but still served to make it look bad. Secondly, there was a need for improved rail service. Ruffin claimed that the Weldon line was the only track coming into Richmond from the South making it quite vulnerable. Ruffin wanted to see a road built from Greensboro, North Carolina, to Danville, Virginia. This he argued, would improve the service from the South, as well as leaving the Commissary more options.[36] The Commissariat made every effort to be efficient and effective.

---

[34]Ibid., 351.

[35]Commissary Papers, C.S.A., n.d.

[36]Hamilton, 353.

Despite this, those involved in the day to day operation of the department, Ruffin and Northrop especially, were under constant attack, from the beginning of the war. The Commissary Department was even criticized, following the Battle of First Manassas, by generals who previously supported Northrop and his staff. This led the Commissary General to write a detailed defense of himself and his department. Although it is long and detailed, it gives the reader an excellent impression of the problems then facing the Commissariat.

> Generals Beauregard, Imboden, and Johnston criticize the management of my department in the matter of supplies for the Confederate army at Manassas either before or after the first battle. In the statements of these Generals, there is some conflict, but they all concur in making me appear a preposterous imbecile, whom Mr. Davis was guilty of retaining. General Imboden in effect charges Mr. Benjamin with suppressing, in order to shield my incapacity, an official report of a board of officers convened by Johnston . . . . The facts are that the engineer, General Beauregard, neglected his communications, so that the "troops for the battle" and "supplies" were "retarded"; but the supplies were at the depot . . . . General Beauregard made but one demand on me (July 8th, by a telegram which I have) for a commissary of the old service . . . . The findings of the Board are incoherent as stated by Imboden. The interdictions alleged by him are refuted by Colonel Ruffin (my chief assistant), and by all the letters sent officially to me in August, 1861. I have Fowles detailed report of the rations at Manassas; there was plenty of provision for a march on Washington. If I had removed his commissaries as he alleges, or had "interdicted" them as Imboden states, General Beauregard need not have been hampered, in a country which all the generals have declared abounded in the essentials of food . . . .[37]

Frank Ruffin was, himself, the subject of an

---

[37]R. W. Gilder, et al., ed., Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle Publishers, n.d.), 261.

investigation in late December of 1862. Ruffin was accused of showing favoritism in awarding a flour contract to Haxall, Crenshaw and Company. Apparently, Ruffin's mere acquaintance with those gentlemen was enough to cause someone to suspect him of duplicity. A congressional committee was formed to investigate the allegations. The committee was chaired by the Hon. W. P. Chilton. Ruffin found out about the proceedings through the newspapers in Richmond. Ruffin was understandably upset about this, and he immediately wrote a letter to the chairman on 16 January 1863.

> Sir: On Tuesday last, in the House of Representatives, Mr. H. S. Foote took occasion to make very distinct charges against me as an officer and a gentleman. I learned by the papers of yesterday that an investigation of that matter had been referred to the committee of which I learn that you are chairman, and I write to you this morning to announce myself ready for instant trial. I ask for it on two grounds: 1st, your duty to rid this bureau of my presence if I be corrupt; 2nd, the justice which I am very sure you will accord me at once, if I have been outraged by Mr. Foote . . . .[38]

Ruffin's honor was at stake, as was his integrity. In short, he was justifiably outraged at Foote's behavior. No warning had been issued to the Commissary Department, and by the time Ruffin read about it in the paper, the investigation was several weeks old and about to go into committee. On 30 January, Ruffin wrote another letter to the committee room where Chilton was holding a session. Ruffin wrote:

> Sir: In the letter addressed to you by Hon. Mr. Foote, under date of January 28, in which he declines to attend the sittings of your committee whilst engaged in the

---

[38]Ruffin Case Report, 3.

> investigation of his public charges against me, he says that he had received on that subject, "statements from sources of apparent respectability." He further says that the newspaper "statements," in regard to the matter "had been greatly strengthened by the affirmation of respectable gentlemen in Richmond, professing to have knowledge of particulars." I would most respectfully suggest to yourself and your colleagues, that I am anxious that Mr. Foote be requested to point out distinctly to yourselves "the source of apparent respect," and name the respectful gentlemen, and that they be summoned before your committee for examination in my case . . . .[39]

Ruffin obviously knew that he was innocent, and that Foote was out on a witch hunt, so he diplomatically tried to call Foote's bluff and resolve the matter once and for all. Finally, Ruffin and Northrop were called in to testify on their own behalf. Ruffin's health was his ultimate defense. As it turned out, the contract was awarded at some point while Ruffin was at the springs recovering his health. General Northrop was asked by the committee if Frank Ruffin was involved in the contract negotiations during the period in question. Northrop told the committee that Ruffin had been on sick leave at the request of Ruffin's physician, and that "for a while he was confined to his bed. I visited him often, but I was not allowed to see him by order of doctor Beale. I did not consult with him about business when I did see him." Northrop added, "indeed I have refrained from talking to him for I was apprehensive that I should never have his services again, and I could not spare him." The committee then asked the general what position Ruffin held within the Commissary.

---

[39]Ibid., 3-4.

Northrop's reply was that Ruffin "attends to the buying of cattle, and purchasing the beef for the army about Richmond; but he attends anything else which his local knowledge fits him for, but I approve all contracts. He is one of the truest people I know."[40]

The official report was made on Wednesday, 18 February 1863. The House met in session at noon, and was opened with prayer by the Rev. Henry A. Wise, Jr. The Committee, led by Mr. Chilton of Alabama, arrived at the conclusion that Major Frank Ruffin "had no connection, official or otherwise, with the making of said contract, and no interests whatever in the benefits or profits thereof." The Committee added "on the contrary, the proof conclusively shows that he knewnothing of the fact that any such contract was in contemplation until after it was consummated, being on furlough, by reason of sickness when it was made." The report was then signed by Mr. Chilton.[41] Even though Ruffin was cleared of the charges, wounds were opened on both sides of the issue.

Though not directed at Ruffin personally, the Daily Richmond Whig ran an editorial on 24 June 1863, claiming that there were "many leakages, countless inaccuracies, possibly a little corruption," in the Commissary Department.[42] No

---

[40]Ibid., 5.

[41]Douglas S. Freeman, ed., Southern Historical Society Papers, (Richmond: Southern Historical Society, 1941), xlvii: 152. Hereafter cited as SHSP.

[42]Daily Richmond Whig, 24 June 1863.

investigation seems to have arisen out of the editorial, but it does leave one to wonder if Senator Foote was involved with the piece.

The Whig was not the only Richmond newspaper that delighted in taking editorial jabs at the Commissary. The Richmond Examiner called the Commissary Department "the most corrupt branch of the government . . . it is besieged by avaricious men who have enriched more than one seedy and ingenious adventurer."[43] The papers in Richmond were, as a rule, not very kind to Jefferson Davis's administration. In a letter to his cousin, Ruffin let it be known that he was not very impressed with Davis or the newspapers. He remarked "Have you seen what a botch Mitchell (the editor) is making of the Enquirer. I was asked by Browne, the President's aid, [sic] sometime ago to try and get him in that position." He added "I declined at once, for several reasons . . . I do not really know whether Davis wanted him or not, but if he did, it is only proof of his lamentable want of judgement of the characters and capacities of men."[44]

In March of 1863 the Confederate Congress passed a law that made it legal for quartermaster and commissary officers to seize private property if it were to be used for field armies. The statute merely established a legal basis for a practice that had been occurring on a regular basis.

---

[43]Richmond Examiner, 18 October 1862.

[44]Hamilton, 3: 295.

Certainly, the impressment question had been on the minds of land owners, especially if they owned slaves as well. Resistance was encountered because the War Department paid for the damages using their own payment chart, which was lower than the commercial price or value. Most property owners went along with the policy for the good of "the cause." The bill also included a provision allowing the impressment of slaves as military laborers. This had been a bone of contention with planters since the opening months of the conflict.[45]

The year 1863 marked the middle of the conflict, and the war was taking its toll on Frank Ruffin's private life as well as his personal health. He still had three boys living at home with him, and all were of school age. In May of 1863, Ruffin wrote to his cousin, Judge Thomas Ruffin of North Carolina, inquiring about schools in the area. Ruffin was worried that "our schools are too near the seat of war: both boys and tutors are always in an excitement of some kind or another: and this is very unfavorable to learning."[46] It was preferred that the boys stay together and look after one another. Ruffin's children were all in their adolescent years, yet none of them swore, drank, chewed tobacco, smoked, or lied. This was quite unusual in the nineteenth century,

---

[45]Emory M. Thomas, The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865. (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 196.

[46]Hamilton, 3: 313.

especially among three male adolescents.[47]

General Robert E. Lee wrote to Commissary-General Northrop in April of 1863, complaining that his Army of Northern Virginia was not getting the meat rations it required. Northrop sympathized with Lee, but he pointed out that he had been in Raleigh a few days before where he saw depots "blocked up at three different points," as well as "horses killed and railroads that were worn out." These problems caused a delay in the shipping of commissary supplies, but it was not anything Northrop could control. Still, Lee was counted among Northrop's detractors.[48]

George Wythe Randolph was ill for some time and it was determined that Randolph should go abroad for the sake of his health. However, the war did not stop for Randolph, and he encountered the same problems the rest of the Confederacy did. Varina Davis wrote to Mary Chesnut on 6 November 1864 explaining the dilemma faced by the Randolphs: "Mrs. George Randolph . . . has been detained at Wilmington, waiting for a passage out with her poor husband, who has been ordered to sea by his physicians . . . ."[49] On 20 November 1864 Davis was able to report that ". . . Mrs. Randolph has at last been able to run the blockade. The ship was fired into 100 times. He

---

[47]Ibid., 314.

[48]H. A. Herbert, ed., Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of the Rebellion (Washington: 1894-1947) Series 4, 3: 687-88.

[49]Woodward, 664.

is much better since they arrived in Bermuda."[50]

In the late autumn of 1864, Northrop and Ruffin, now a Lt. Colonel, once again found themselves walking a fine line between performing their duties and following the policies outlined for them. The Power, Lowe and Company had been bringing in subsistence supplies, with a profit margin of 650 per cent. When their contract came up for renewal in autumn of 1864, the government was inclined not to renew it because the government deemed that 300 per cent profit was sufficient. Northrop and Ruffin were then forced to fight to save the contract, but it was ultimately refused. The immediate outcome of this was that Lee had a severe meat shortage for the third consecutive winter.[51] The Commissary would receive the blame and yet it was government policy that caused the shortage. Episodes such as this caused Frank Ruffin to say of Jefferson Davis "he is a mule, but a good mule." Ruffin later came to think of Davis as an ass.[52] In a letter to his cousin, Judge Thomas Ruffin, Ruffin held Jefferson Davis accountable for the state of the Confederacy.

> It presents a gloomy view of our affairs in a vital matter. But what I regard as worse is the fact that but for mismanagement it need not have been so bad. But for

---

[50]Ibid., 675.

[51]"Ruffin Testimony," Papers relating to the Commissary Department, C.S.A., hereafter cited as PRSD. The collection is housed at Virginia Historical Society in Richmond.

[52]Edward Younger, ed., Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 31. Kean is pronounced "cane."

> Mr. Davis, as you are aware, we could have made contracts which, I make no question, would have relieved much of the stress for meat; but for him the railroad connection would have been working long ago . . . But for him--alas! how many things might have been done that are not.[53]

Ruffin wrote to Northrop on October 18 1864, that "meat is a bulky article and will not pay, and hence blockade-runners will not bring it . . . . The Government will effectively kill all importations of that character."[54] In the same letter Ruffin informed Northrop that he had received a counter offer from Power, Lowe and Company. They wrote to Ruffin that if the contract were extended, they would make the ships "Will-o-the-wisp," "Night Hawk," and two others available to the subsistence department at the islands [not specified] to be loaded at half weight capacity. Ruffin concluded by stating that he considered the extension of the contract as "absolutely necessary to the service."[55]

Ruffin was rightly concerned that unless government policy changed, there would be little or no change in the scarcity of meat. In November of 1864 Ruffin once again wrote to Northrop about the critical need to award a contract to those, such as Power and Lowe, who were willing to bring in the necessary amounts of meat. Ruffin detailed the necessary amounts to sustain a fighting army.

If the Army is to be kept up to its present numbers, it

---

[53]Hamilton, 3: 348.

[54]Herbert, Series 4, 3: 738-39.

[55]Ibid., 739.

> will require at full rations 81,000,000 pounds of meat. Of this a very large part must come from abroad, and much of it, of necessity and in common prudence, is wanted instantly. The proposition of Power, Lowe and Co., presents the best, and so far as I know, the only plan of an immediate supply, whilst the regulations offer nothing in the present, or, if we can judge by the past, in the future.[56]

Secretary of War James Seddon also received a letter from Ruffin in February, 1865, imploring him to change the contract policy if the war was to be won by the South. Ruffin outlined some key points in an effort to effect a change in policy.

> I have good reason to think that the spirit of Congress as a whole is not heroic, and reverses in the spring may cause more defection than is now anticipated. North Carolina, better indeed than she is reported, is yet in an unsatisfactory condition. There certainly is not meat enough in our limits to feed both Army and people at half their customary rates, and starvation is the parent of mutiny and discontent. The corn for General Lee's army is now mainly obtained from beyond the limits of Virginia, and nearly all his subsistence depends upon the integrity of the road from Weldon to Petersburg.[57]

Ruffin knew well the importance of railroads. Should the "integrity" of the main supply road into the Richmond vicinity be cut, the Confederacy's days would have been indeed numbered. The railroads deserved to be called the "lifeline of the Confederacy" as much as the blockade runners did.

Efforts to secure food were not limited to the South , or even the United States. At the beginning of 1864, Frank Ruffin received orders from Secretary of War Seddon to draw up a contract under which Nathaniel Beverley Tucker would go to

---

[56]Ibid., 784.

[57]Herbert, 4, 3: 88.

Canada in an effort to use his influence in the North to procure food for the Confederacy. Ruffin noted that the contract was large, the contractor was without capital, and the amount of meat was limited.[58]

Barely a month before Ruffin was to resign his commission, the Confederate Congress attempted to completely restructure the Commissary Department. Under the congressional proposal, quartermasters and commissaries, regardless of position, who were forty-five years of age or younger, were to be replaced by civilian employees who were bonded, over age, disabled, or medically exempted. President Davis wisely vetoed the bill.[59]

Both Northrop and Ruffin testified before Congress that Secretary of War Seddon and President Davis had frustrated all of their good ideas.[60] Both men were still in office when they spoke before Congress, which is an indication of how defeated they must have felt. In any event, it could not have

---

[58]Ludwell Johnson, "Beverley Tucker's Canadian Mission: 1864-1865," Journal of Southern History 29 (February 1963): 88-99. Nathaniel Beverley Tucker was born into a prominent Virginia family. Following in the footsteps of his father, St. George Tucker, N. B. Tucker taught on the law faculty at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, the family seat. Tucker was sensitive and ambitious, and was even resentful of his father. Tucker was also the half brother of John Randolph of Roanoke. See Drew Gilpin Faust, A Sacred Circle, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). Although not strictly about Tucker, it does put him into context with such contemporaries as Edmund Ruffin, and even explores his theories on natural philosophy.

[59]Commissary Papers, C.S.A.

[60]Ibid.

been easy for the two men to speak their mind, no matter how frustrated they really were.

James Seddon was "deeply pained" by the testimony and said that if Northrop and Ruffin felt they could not carry on the Commissariat with him, then they were bound to resign instead of attacking their superiors.[61]

John C. Breckenridge became the last Secretary of War for the Confederacy in January of 1865. As a condition to his appointment he asked that Isaac M. St. John replace Lucius Northrop as Commissary General. This request was granted, but Northrop continued to serve the commissariat.[62] Breckenridge and St. John were not in office long enough to be fairly evaluated, but Northrop must have taken satisfaction in seeing his successor follow his policies of procurement.

The war was ending much as it had started for Ruffin. In January of 1865 another probe was launched in the Commissary Department. This one was headed by Senators Caperton and Baldwin. Ruffin was not to be a factor in this investigation owing to his impending resignation. He, however, did write a

---

[61]Younger, 103.

[62]Hay, 19. Isaac Munroe St. John (19 November 1827 - 7 April 1880) was born in Augusta, Georgia. He enlisted in the Confederate Army in South Carolina and came to the attention of Confederate Officials during the Peninsula campaign with Magruder's Army. St. John was an engineer and had good organizational skills. John C. Breckenridge picked him out of the ranks to be Commissary General. After the war, he was a civil engineer for the Louisville, Kentucky railroad. He died in 1880. Dictionary of American Biography (1963), s. v. "Isaac Munroe St. John."

letter to the two men expressing what he himself saw wrong in the Commissariat.

> Gentlemen: It has been suggested to me that the substance of my testimony, reduced to writing by one at the request of the committee is defective in this: that it suggests no remedy for the state of things therein developed. I have not considered it my duty to go into that under the summons which has brought me before your committee. But to avoid any misconception in any quarter on that head I now say, that there is a series of measures which if carried out will subsist the armies of the Confederacy.
>
> 1st The increase of the tax in kind
> 2nd The privilege of using cotton in exchange for subsistence without restriction.
> 3rd The use of coin in the enemy lines, where cotton cannot be used.
> 4th The assignment of proper persons to the duties of the department, whether they be or be not subject to military service.
> 5th Reform in transportation.
> 6th The requisite amount of currency.
>
> Of course it is implied that the military situation shall not be rendered materially worse in respect of railroads and territory than it is at present.[63]

Four months later, with the end in sight, the Confederacy collapsed. Although the Confederate Government tried to hold on, the cause was lost. Men such as Ruffin and Northrop were proud that they had served, but carried bitter memories of what might have been had they been free to procure food by any means possible.

Looking back, it can be seen that the South beat incredible odds to last as long as it did, but at the time the fight was still hot and every last man wanted to save the Confederacy. Egos were involved; no one wanted to be

---

[63]Francis Gildart Ruffin to A. G. Caperton, 23 January 1865, in the Francis Gildart Ruffin Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

perceived as a traitor to his country; and so they valiantly fought on until the bitter end. Frank Ruffin resigned before the end of the war, but he was only spared a few months of toil and effort for the Confederacy. His writings would seem to indicate that he believed in the work he did with Northrop, and that without Davis and his cotton policy, even more could have been done.

When Northrop testified that he could not have run the Commissary Department without Ruffin, he was offering a fitting tribute to the man who had the necessary skills to run the Commissary. Ruffin knew as much as anyone about crops and cattle, he was good with figures, and he knew many of the South's leaders. Many agreed with Northrop when he said that Ruffin was one of the "truest" people he had ever met, and such a person could not have hurt the Commissariat, especially when paired with the hard personality of Northrop. Throughout the war, Ruffin served Northrup and the Confederacy faithfully. His was an important, but thankless job performed under almost impossible circumstances. Despite this, Ruffin gave all he had to the Confederate effort, even to the point of endangering his health. He saw the Confederacy through to its last days with the knowledge that he served as ably and faithfully as anyone could have.

Late in his life Ruffin wrote that Virginia and the South had been ruined in "character and tone." The former slaves were now free, and the way of life Ruffin knew for forty-nine

years was drastically and permanently altered. There could be little doubt of the emotional impact of the fall of Richmond or of the death of the Confederacy on Frank Ruffin.

CHAPTER 4

FRANK RUFFIN AND POSTWAR VIRGINIA

Following the Civil War, Frank Ruffin was involved in the movement to rid Virginia of Reconstruction and the hated Underwood Constitution. Frank Ruffin had fought to preserve the Confederacy and a traditional way of life. However, he was not prepared to live under the new rules simply because the South had lost. In 1867 Ruffin gave a speech to the Border Agricultural Society of Virginia and North Carolina that showed that he was clearly "unreconstructed." He began by stating that he was "an advocate of African slavery as it existed in the late Confederate States; and of the reserved rights of the states, including the right to secede." Having said that, Ruffin also had to admit that "they are not and can never be again; the fiat has come down from heaven."[1]

Ruffin was convinced that the North was destined to usurp the rights of the South and that Civil War and Reconstruction were the results of this.

> Out of the Federal Convention of 1787 sprang two great parties. Of these, each had two leading principles - one good and one bad. The Federal party construed the constitution liberally, as they called it, i.e., against the states, and distrusted the masses. The Democratic party construed the constitution strictly, i.e., in favor of the states, and professed to trust the masses.

---

[1]Southern Planter, December, 1867, 641.

> Unhappily, there was no third party to construe the constitution strictly and distrust and curb the masses, to extract the good and reject the bad of the opposing parties. . . . We have been prostrated not by slavery, but by the sacrifices that we made to the Union. We are an isolated race of white men; robbed by long continued sectional legislation of the just proceeds of our labor; deprived of our liberties by force of arms; odious, because we periled all in defense of a system which has disgusted an impious philosophy and a blind philanthropy. I believe the South, especially the older states of it, are the most religious and conservative people in the world, except the English.[2]

The Underwood Constitution of 1867 contained many provisions that were offensive to conservatives, and even some moderates, in the Old Dominion. Because the Constitution allowed Negro suffrage, a great many whites in the Old Dominion despised it. There were some positive aspects to the Constitution such as providing for a system of public education, but the race issue overshadowed those provisions.[3]

Following the Civil War there were many whites in the South who still viewed the world from an antebellum perspective. They sought to find ways that would limit the inclusion of blacks in white society. It was argued that blacks and whites should share the relationships that existed between them before the war. This way of thinking has been called the "Conservative mentality."[4] Race relations were not the only issue that conservatives rallied around. As they

---

[2]Ibid., December 1867, 641-47.

[3]Allen Moger, Virginia: Bourbonism to Byrd, 1870-1925 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 7.

[4]Joel Williamson, The Crucible of Race (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79.

argued that blacks should "know their place" so should socially inferior whites. It was widely acknowledged in the South that white males from the upper class should look after the affairs of state, and any challenge to this was clearly unacceptable to them. Thus, conservative thought affected social, political and racial issues.[5] By using the race issue, southern conservatives, particularly those in Virginia, were able to gain political control over whites who otherwise would have challenged their hold on power.

Curiously, these same conservatives, most of whom owned slaves before the war, tried to ally themselves with blacks early in Reconstruction. Because the former slaves had universal male suffrage, conservative whites saw the obvious need to make a power play. The blacks were told that their former owners had always had their best interests in mind and would continue to do so.[6] Adopting a paternalistic attitude, conservatives argued that southern blacks would have their interests best served by whites who understood them. Why, they argued, should northerners be allowed to come South and assume control of southern governments? When blacks refused to vote for southern white conservatives, a new plan was needed. Viewing blacks as "ungrateful," whites began to agitate for the disfranchisement of black voters, and they

---

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., 80-81.

also stepped up race rhetoric directed at poor whites.[7]

John Curtiss Underwood, a native of New York, came to Virginia a few years prior to the war. He supported the Union during the conflict which helped him gain political power following the war. Men such as Underwood wanted to see those who aided the Confederacy during the war lose their right to vote. It was feared that, as a consequence, control of the state would fall into the hands of Negroes, carpetbaggers and a small number of whites. This led to a conservative backlash. Most prominent men in Virginia supported the Confederacy during the war and they did not want to lose their hold on state politics. This led to an alliance of old Whigs and Democrats. Members of both groups formed the new Conservative party in 1867. They chose as their leader Alexander H. H. Stuart.[8]

Stuart's plan was to put together a group of prominent native Virginians who would go to Washington as the voice of moderation. Ultimately, their goal was to eliminate the

---

[7]Ibid., 82-83.

[8]Ibid., 8. Alexander Hugh Holmes Stuart (2 April 1807-13 February 1891) was born in Staunton, Virginia. He studied at College of William and Mary and the University of Virginia. In 1828 he was graduated from the University of Virginia and was admitted to the bar. Before the war he was elected to several offices on the Whig ticket. Although he was not sure that the South should secede, he nonetheless supported the Confederacy during the war. Following the war, he worked to restore Virginia to native control. He also published a few political pamphlets and served, for many years, as rector of the University of Virginia. Dictionary of American Biography (1936), s. v. "Alexander Hugh Holmes Stuart."

clauses in the Underwood Constitution that would deny them their political rights because of their wartime sympathies. The Confederate disability clauses were of much concern to Ruffin, and if it were adopted, it would virtually assure that conservative white Virginians would have little or no voice left in state government. Stuart used the papers in Richmond to rally support for his cause. He wrote:

> Negro suffrage is now inevitable. The Democrats have been completely and hopelessly defeated. General Grant and the Republicans demand and have the power to enforce Negro suffrage, and have decided to do so. We are unanimously opposed to it, as unreasonable and unjust, but it is part of our punishment for the fatal error of secession, war and defeat. It is wise to face the facts. The Underwood Monstrosity not only gives the vote to Negroes, but it disfranchises practically all the white men of Virginia. This double inequity is manifestly unjust, unfair and unreasonable. An appeal to the better instincts of the North, to the less Radical press and to the more conservative Republicans will likely be heard. Many Northern people sympathize with us and many Republican senators and representatives have never heard our side of this vexed question. Let us agree to enfranchise the freed men if they will permit the ex-Confederate soldiers and civilians also to vote, "Universal suffrage and universal amnesty." This proposition must be advanced before the Senate adopts the Underwood Constitution, as the House has already adopted it. It is to remember that the intelligence, wealth, and character of any community rule it. If once we secure the control of the State without National interference we can and will take care of future problems as they arise.[9]

Stuart complained that the Old Dominion had passed into the hands of strangers. These men bought the richest coal mines and the best estates for a fraction of their worth.[10]

---

[9]W. H. T. Squires, Unleashed at Long Last: Reconstruction of Virginia, April 9, 1965 - January 26, 1870, (New York: Negro University Press, 1939), 343-44.

[10]Moore, 42.

On Christmas Day of 1868 twenty-eight like-minded men, among them Frank Ruffin, met with Stuart. They decided that a meeting should be held on the thirty-first of December at the Exchange Hotel in Richmond. This would give them time to issue invitations to distinguished men from throughout the state. They would then decide which measures should be adopted to " . . . rescue the State from the dangers which threatened her."[11] It was concluded that a committee of eight should be formed, with Alexander H. H. Stuart as chairman. The committee chosen included George Bolling of Petersburg, Thomas Flournoy of Halifax, John L. Marye, Jr., of Fredericksburg, D. C. DeJarnette of Caroline, Frank G. Ruffin of Chesterfield, B. H. McGruder of Albemarle, and James Johnston of Bedford.[12] This group was composed of men from around the Commonwealth in order to show that they reflected the views of the entire state. Those at the December thirty-first meeting authorized the committee members to proceed to Washington and present the views of potentially disfranchised Virginians to the Congress of the United States. They carried with them a document stating their purpose for being in Washington and signed by everyone present at the meeting.[13]

Regrettably, Frank Ruffin declined the honor of serving

---

[11]Alexander H. H. Stuart, A Narrative of the Leading Incidents of the Organization of the First Popular Movement in Virginia, (Richmond: William Ellis Jones, Printer, 1888), 26.

[12]Ibid., 27.

[13]Ibid., 28-29.

on the committee that was to go to Washington, D. C. He helped draft the plan that was presented to President Grant and was as concerned about its outcome as anyone. Ruffin's decision not to serve in the group showed his concern for the wellbeing of the Commonwealth. He reasoned, rightly no doubt, that those outside of Virginia would confuse him with his radical cousin, Edmund Ruffin.[14] It was unfortunate that Ruffin did not go to Washington. The committee was composed mostly of urban members, and Ruffin's agricultural concerns would have balanced the group.[15] On 6 July 1869, President Grant removed the test oath and disfranchisement clauses from the Underwood Constitution before it was adopted. Stuart gave Grant credit for the " . . . deliverance of Virginia from tyrannical misrule . . . ."[16]

Frank Ruffin once again took to the pages of the Southern Planter in May of 1868. He felt the time had come to address the abuses of Reconstruction. He claimed that the "course of Virginia since the war appears to have been almost wholly an error." He then listed four things that had been attempted, but had predictably failed. Specifically they were:

1. We have endeavored to restore our old relations to the Union.

---

[14]Jack P. Maddex, Jr., The Virginia Conservatives 1867-1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 70. See also Richmond Dispatch, 3 October 1880.

[15]Maddex, 70.

[16]Stuart, 67.

2. We have endeavored to work Negroes on wages.
3. We have sought to import labor.
4. We have invited immigration and tried to sell our lands.

Ruffin then put out a call to "my brother farmers" adding that "we must think and act for ourselves or we must let others think for us and act accordingly."[17]

In 1871 the Conservative party (which would later become the Democratic party in Virginia) passed what became known as the Funding Act. The "Funders," as they were known, got through a bill which refinanced two-thirds of Virginia's pre-war debt with high interest bonds.[18] The Funding Act caused new bonds to be issued which paid six percent interest in return for two-thirds the amount of the old bonds plus interest charges. The remaining third, which was West Virginia's share, was settled by issuing interest bearing certificates. Once the Funding Act passed, the state discovered that revenues were not sufficient to pay off the interest on the bonds and meet state operating expenses. This led to criticism of the act. There were many who wanted the state to concentrate on providing services such as health, education and the improvement of roads rather than paying off the debt. White farmers in Virginia were also suspicious of the act. They saw themselves as being unfairly burdened with taxes that were used to pay off big business and lawyers who

---

[17]Southern Planter, May 1868, 258.

[18]Moger, 18.

were involved in the speculation and improvement that led to the debt.[19]

The Conservatives considered paying off the debt the only honorable thing to do.[20] There were many people throughout the Commonwealth who thought the bill would lead to fiscal ruin. Frank Ruffin decried the bill and claimed that it would have an unduly deleterious effect on farmers in the Old Dominion.[21]

While the Conservatives were successful in repelling radical rule, their fiscal policies caused a backlash. In February of 1879 the Readjusters decided to organize themselves for a campaign, which was ultimately successful.[22] From 1879 until 1886 the Old Dominion was controlled by a curious mix of Republicans and Readjusters.[23] The Readjusters derived their name from those who wanted to "readjust" the Virginia state debt.

John S. Wise, the son of former Governor Henry A. Wise, put the Readjuster cause in rather succinct terms. He wrote:

It was felt on all hands that the condition of the state

---

[19]Charles E. Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1961), 17.

[20]I. A. Newby, The South: A History, (United States of America: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 307.

[21]See Frank G. Ruffin, Facts, Thoughts and Conclusions in Regard to the Public Debt of Virginia, (Richmond: John and Goolsby Book and Job Printers, 1885).

[22]Woodward, 95.

[23]Newby, 307.

> demanded the repeal of the infamous Funding Bill, and a readjustment of her liabilities, upon a basis which would enable her to meet her obligations as they matured, instead of making her drag a chain of liabilities lengthening year by year. The people insisted that they have been betrayed and entrapped into the measure of 1871; that they wrote were, by the circumstances of its passage, relieved of any moral obligation to support making a settlement with the creditors, which there was a hope of carrying out. These people were at once called readjusters. Their opponents were called debt-payers, but why, no man can say. For there was not a man among them who advocated an increase in taxation, or who did not know that it was impossible to accomplish that. How to pay a deficit of a million dollars a year without increasing taxes was a problem never resolved by any alleged debt-payer. They were effusive in their oratory about protecting the honour of the grand old Commonwealth and preserving her fair name from the taint of repudiation. They did not hesitate to denounce the readjusters as a band of robbers and pirates; but never, from the day they started their exalted cry about honour, until they claimed credit for it, did they once propose a measure of their own by which the state might be relieved in any other way from the bankruptcy into which she had been plunged by their own folly. A wag of the period defined a Virginia debt-payer as one who would rather owe you all his life than cheat you out of a cent, and this is perhaps as near to a description of what he was as any that can be given.[24]

John "Parson" Massey was an Albemarle preacher who took up the "cause of the people." Like others, he felt that improvement in Virginia, especially education, could not occur so long as there was an oppressive debt hanging over the state. Therefore, he was the first acknowledged person to call for a readjustment of the state debt. This earned him

---

[24]John S. Wise, The Lion's Skin: A Historical Novel and a Novel History, (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1905), 303.

the sobriquet "Father of the Readjuster Movement."[25]

Although he is little more than a footnote in Readjuster literature, Frank Ruffin was, in fact, one of the few original Readjusters. Massey called Ruffin one of the "first and ablist" of Virginia Readjusters.[26] Both Massey and Ruffin intended for the Readjuster party to be the voice of reason in Virginia. The party would aid farmers, improve education, and reduce the state debt. It would also uphold the traditions of Virginia's past, while dealing realistically with the problems Virginia faced in the present. Agriculture and education were areas in which the original Readjusters wanted to see reform. Massey liked to quote Thomas Jefferson, who said, "The earth

---

[25]John Edward Massey, (2 April 1819 - 24 April 1901) was a Baptist clergyman. He was born in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. He was originally a Whig but following a trip to New England in the mid 1850s he became an ardent Democrat. During the War Between the States, he was a staunch supporter of secession and the southern cause. He thought that carpetbaggers, bankers and taxes, along with interest rates, were running the state into the ground. Because of this he became a "champion of the people." He wanted Virginia to create a school system and he also wanted improved conditions for farmers. He also knew that this could not occur so long as the Funding Act was in place. This led him to call for a readjustment of the debt which, in turn, became the Readjuster Party. During the 1870s, he was elected to office in both Virginia's House and Senate. He also sought the party's nomination for governor of the Readjuster ticket but blamed his loss on William Mahone's takeover of the party. He then bolted from the party and helped to create a more progressive Democratic party in Virginia. He lived at "Ashlawn" in Albemarle County late in his life. Shortly before his death, he was elected to Virginia's constitutional convention of 1901-1902. Dictionary of American Biography (1933), s. v. "John Edward Massey."

[26]Frank G. Ruffin, Mahoneism Unveiled (Richmond, Virginia, 1882), 1. Pamphlet from the Virginia State Library in Richmond.

belongs always to the living generation . . . neither the representatives of a nation, nor the whole nation itself assembled, can validly engage debts beyond what they pay in their own time."[27] They did not, however, want to see progress with regard to race. Also, they tended to be opposed to big business.

One historian has called the original Readjusters, including Frank Ruffin, "reactionary agrarians." Civil war had ended plantation society and cleared the way for an emerging industrial base. Although these men were dismissed as "embittered," it must be remembered that they had owned slaves and had earned their livelihood from the land for decades.[28] Suddenly, the way of life they had known during their formative years and far beyond was stripped away from them. Rather than adapt to a new era, they harkened back to the Virginia that existed before the war; a Virginia that was rural, not urban, that earned its living from the land, not the factory.[29] By 1880, the few men Ruffin could count as allies were either dead or aligning themselves with the Funder camp.[30]

The Richmond Dispatch, which was clearly Funder, claimed

---

[27]Elizabeth H. Hancock, ed., John E. Massey: An Autobiography, (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1909), 64.

[28]James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 54.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., 67.

that "Parson" Massey was "head and front of their rebellion and preaching communism of the worst sort. If this is not a war on society we know not what it is."[31]

Unfortunately for Ruffin, the party platform was changed quickly and radically. Contrary to the original platform, agrarian reform ceased to be an issue with the party. In addition, blacks were given a voice in the party. As a moderate conservative, Ruffin was soon alienated from the very party he helped to create.

William Mahone was well known in the Commonwealth. He was "the Hero of the Crater," a battle fought at Petersburg, Virginia, in the summer of 1864. He was also a very successful railroad president. Mahone's two passions in life were politics and money, and the two came together when he joined the Readjusters on the debt issue. Utilizing his ability as an organizer, and the money in receivership from his railroad, Mahone soon came to dominate the Readjuster party and succeeded in making the party reflect his own goals. Mahone was a master manipulator, and this helps explain his rise to power, and even his ability to make enemies. In an effort to control public opinion, and to further his long range business plans, Mahone bought control of the Richmond Whig.[32] He was not above pretending to be something he was

---

[31]Richmond Dispatch, 19 August 1879.

[32]C. Vann Woodward, Origins of the New South, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), 97.

not if it would benefit his interests. Mahone demonstrated this when he took a leading part in organizing the Conservative party and then later made a complete political aboutface, abandoning the party. It is then not so hard to understand why Frank Ruffin felt so betrayed and outraged. Mahone unsuccessfully sought the Conservative party nomination for Governor in 1877. He obviously blamed the Conservatives for his loss and said they were under the "foreign" influence of the Pennsylvania and Baltimore railroads. This caused him to change his colors and become an ardent Readjuster.[33] Mahone's dislike of Northern businesses dated back to 1873. In that year, the "panic of 1873" occurred. This was the result of rampant speculation and over expansion. Throughout Virginia, once thriving businesses went bankrupt. Mahone, too, felt its effects. His railroad interests were consolidated and their control was won by northern capitalists. Mahone never forgot what had happened to him.[34]

Many changes were brought about by Mahone and the Readjusters, which confirmed Ruffin's suspicions about Mahone's motives and his plans for the party. These changes would drive Ruffin and those like him back towards the conservative debt-payers.

The Readjusters built a new power base appealing to poor

---

[33]Ibid.

[34]Raymond Pulley, Old Virginia Restored, 1870-1930 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 34.

whites, and blacks. They were the very people conservatives were determined to exclude. The Readjusters promised sweeping reforms in exchange for support, and throughout the early 1880s, they were quite successful. The poll tax was repealed (allowing the Readjusters to increase their voting base), businesses, the darlings of the conservatives, had new taxes levied against them. These taxes were used to support new programs in education and public welfare. A college for blacks was established in Petersburg, labor unions were issued state charters, and many important state positions were given to those who were loyal to the party.[35]

The University of Virginia was severely affected by the Readjuster spoils system, when it saw its entire Board of Visitors replaced with loyal Readjusters in 1882, one of whom was Frank Ruffin's oldest son. Professors who were interested in keeping their positions guarded their opinions carefully, lest they be replaced as well.[36] The students, who were mostly conservative, were outraged. A large number of wealthy, traditional Virginians were educated at the university and they were concerned that the Readjusters might ruin the institution's reputation. While a student at the university, Woodrow Wilson worried about corruption by

---

[35]Newby, 307-8.

[36]James Tice Moore, "The University and the Readjusters," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 88 (1970): 88-101.

"foreign elements."[37]

In March of 1881 William Mahone entered the United States Senate. He really could not afford to be a Readjuster at the national level, and found he had to align himself with a party in order to be effective. When Mahone chose the Republican party, the fallout in Richmond was almost immediate. Frank Ruffin had not formally abandoned the Readjusters, but he did so at this point. Ruffin saw the Republicans as the "party of the negro," and his views on race were those of a conservative southern white, who had prospered by slave labor before the war.

To Frank Ruffin, Mahone had become an unprincipled "boss" who sold out the honor of Virginia. Ruffin began writing newspaper articles and pamphlets which attacked Mahone and efforts to raise the status of blacks. Ruffin pointed out that it was he and Massey who had started the Readjuster movement, and that Mahone was little more than a boss who had stolen the party away from the very people who founded it. Frank Ruffin had clearly had all he could take and drew battle lines by stating:

> I was a readjuster before General Mahone knew the meaning of the word . . . I was a co-worker along with Mr. Massey. As soon as the war closed I took the ground that, as the state had been despoiled of territory and personal property, and thereby made a bankrupt, that on those who had taken or destroyed her assets must rest the burden of her public debt. I would hold to that doctrine still if the people had not concluded the question by adopting a Constitution in which a debt was admitted. After that I

---

[37]Ibid., 90.

> bowed to the sovereign will . . . Gradually the re-adjuster party grew out of these issues - debt and suffrage; and I was a readjuster. But I had never ceased to vote with the Democratic party in Federal elections, and with the conservative party of Virginia - a somewhat wider term - in state elections. I did not do this for any admiration of the party, whose course in the war had caused me to dislike them; nor from any great attachment to the conservatives, who led by General Mahone and others, played into the hands of self-seekers of all sorts . . . I could do nothing else. The alternative was to join the Republicans, carpet baggers, and scalawags, who were using the negroes as General Mahone once used, and is now using the same combination to corrupt our politics and to ruin our society, careless of anything but the money and the power this wickedness might produce.[38]

Clearly, Frank Ruffin was a man who stood on principle, and would not brook those who would use Virginia for personal or monetary gain. Such men were rare even in Ruffin's day. On 1 August 1882, John Massey wrote a letter to Frank Ruffin asking him to address the people of Virginia. Massey felt Ruffin the most qualified to explain the dangers the Readjusters now posed to the Commonwealth. The letter read:

> This in my opinion, cannot be better done than by a plain, clear, fair, and honest statement of facts. The people of Virginia are honest and patriotic. Information derived from a plain and truthful statement of facts is all they need to ensure their doing right. You know me too well to suspect me of flattery when I say I know no man who possesses all the requisite qualifications for giving such a statement more fully than you do . . . You are, upon principle, both a Democrat and a Readjuster, and never wavered or faltered in your devotion to either . . . . You are a close observer, and are familiar with the history of the Readjuster party and those who claim to be its leaders. You have watched closely their gradual usurpations, and understand their selfish designs. You have a remarkably fine memory, and possess in eminent degree the power of stating facts clearly, correctly, and

---

[38]Frank Ruffin, An Appeal to the 31,527 Re-adjuster Democrats of Virginia, (Richmond, Virginia), 1. Pamphlet from the Virginia State Library in Richmond.

> concisely. I therefore appeal to you to give the people of Virginia the benefit of your information and your fine judgement upon the important issues which they will soon be called upon to decide . . . .[39]

Ruffin was only too happy to oblige "Parson" Massey's wishes. For sixteen pages, Ruffin laid out a cogent indictment of General Mahone and the conduct of the party Ruffin helped found. The pamphlet concludes:

> But never before saw I anything like the state of affairs which General Mahone has sought to bring, and in some particulars has brought, upon the people of Virginia. I know now as THE MOST SHAMEFUL THING that I ever witnessed, the mode well known to the public, in which he was permitted to neglect his duty in Washington and to invade the Capital at Richmond, to dictate, corrupt, and poison the proceedings of our legislature. I pity the Virginian who does not blush when he thinks of it.[40]

Throughout the 1880s Ruffin published pamphlets warning gentle Virginians that their political liberties were being usurped by the Mahone machine. In one such pamphlet he described the financial deceit in which the Readjusters were engaging. True to form, Ruffin's accusations were reinforced by detailed and tedious charts. Ruffin was so articulate in his arguments, that it is quite possible that many of his strongest points were not fully understood by many Virginians. The Republicans may have counted on that being the case.[41]

Under Mahone's patronage, the Readjuster party gained a

---

[39]Ruffin, Mahoneism Unveiled, 1.

[40]Ibid., 16.

[41]Frank Ruffin, A Reply To General Mahone's Assault on the Democratic Party and the Roanoke Platform, (Richmond, Virginia, 1887) 1-43. Pamphlet found in the Virginia State Library in Richmond.

reputation for abusing the spoils system. The Board of Visitors at the University of Virginia is but a small example of this. Frank Ruffin was, himself, to feel the effects of this system twice in 1882. Ruffin won for himself an appointment as second state Auditor. He was known as someone who was good with figures and had a keen mind. However, after Ruffin sought to break with the Readjusters over Mahone and race, the party turned on him. A letter appeared in the Richmond Dispatch which plainly showed that Mahone and the Readjusters did, indeed, try to control all offices in Virginia, even minor clerkships such as Ruffin's. As had happened during the war, Ruffin became aware of a situation that affected him directly through the Richmond newspapers. Mr. R. D. Reverley wrote:

> Dear Sir (Frank Ruffin), The warm personal regard, and I may say the high appreciation I have for you as a gentleman of brilliant talent and unblemished honor, makes the step I am about to take a most painful one to me. The clerkship you hold is claimed by the sixth district, and the claim is being pressed. This, with other considerations not necessary to mention, force me to say that resignation of your clerkship would be accepted. In taking this step I can assure you that I am not influenced by any other considerations than those of a desire to promote the harmony and success of the party to which I owe my position and the successful administration of my office.[42]

Reverley was a crony of Mahone and the Treasurer of Virginia. It is doubtful whether anyone truly pressed for that office. More than likely, Mahone was using Ruffin to show that only those who completely followed the party line could expect

---

[42]Richmond Daily Dispatch, 9 July 1882.

patronage even for minor offices such as Ruffin's.[43] Ruffin, however, did not bow to the pressure. He wrote a letter to his sponsor, W. F. Giddings, in which he stated:

> I certainly shall not accept his invitation to resign the office I hold. It was by the kindness of Major Walker, the Senator from Chesterfield, and yourself that this office, whose bestowal had been allotted to you two by competent authority. Under a full understanding, was assigned to me; and an issue having been made upon me, your appointment of me was fully ratified at two successive meetings of the caucus by a decided majority. Under such circumstances a resignation would not only do injustice to myself, but it would be also a failure to uphold your rights, which I represent, and which I respectfully conceive to be outraged by this proceeding.[44]

In September of 1882, the Readjuster caucus refused to endorse Ruffin for the post of State Commissioner of Agriculture. Obviously, Ruffin was well-suited for the position and would have been an ideal selection. Once again, he blamed the rebuff on Mahone and his "boss tactics."[45] Ruffin might have been opposed to Mahone on principle, but increasingly, he was able to base his criticism on personal experience.

Frank Ruffin also had very definite opinions about the place of blacks in Virginia politics and society. Simply put, Ruffin believed that blacks were inferior to whites and nothing would change that. Ruffin held that the "Americo-

---

[43]Charles Chilton Pearson, The Readjuster Movement in Virginia, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 148.

[44]Richmond Daily Dispatch, 9 July 1882.

[45]Harrisonburg-Rockingham Register, 7 September 1882.

African" race still had not learned how to conduct a society.[46] Ruffin went on to say that,

> the negro is by nature a vine; incapable therefore, of transmutation into a tree; a parasite, which must rise by climbing on something outside of and higher than itself, or--must trail upon the ground; just as we see it every day and all around us, in one condition or the other.[47]

Frank Ruffin believed that, although Reconstruction was over, northern politicians still influenced the course of the South. He reflected the view of most white southerners when he wrote:

> The whole world knows that Mr. Lincoln emancipated the negroes, not on philanthropic, but on political considerations; that he not only wanted to intimidate the South into submission, but that he wanted negroes to enlist in the armies of the northern states--as they did to the number of 186,000. The infamy of reconstruction is a matter of unforgetting and unforgiving history, made up of official documents and undisputed facts gathered from the slave states of the Confederacy.[48]

Ruffin decried black contributions to society since emancipation. "In that period," he said "negroes have depreciated from a high degree of efficiency as agricultural laborers in slavery to a state of worthlessness in freedom."[49] In freedom blacks were rude and unprincipled,

---

[46]Frank Ruffin, The Negro as a Political and Social Factor, (Richmond, Virginia: J. W. Randolph Publishers, 1888), 6.

[47]Ibid., 14.

[48]Frank Ruffin, White or Mongrel?, (Richmond, Virginia, n.d.) 1. Pamphlet found in the Virginia State Library in Richmond.

[49]Ibid., 3.

and getting worse with each new day.[50]

Ruffin pointed out that despite the outlay of six million dollars over a twenty-year period, the education of blacks was not changing the high illiteracy rate. He cited similar findings throughout the South, Liberia, and Haiti as well. Ruffin was convinced that blacks did not share the intellectual capacities of whites.[51]

Frank Ruffin also worried about miscegenation. He claimed that a great many people saw inter-marriage as the solution to the race problem. He was also quick to point out that such theories were usually proffered by northern politicians. He summed up the whole issue this way:

> With these factors before her, Virginia regards it as a portentous evil to have this race as a permanent in her politics; but she contemplates as intolerable the prospect of its residence here upon the same social plane with her white citizens. For that insures degradation of the latter into mongrels. Knowing all this and seeing the years of discord and conflict that must follow the attempt of the negroes, aided by the Republican party and the philanthropists of the northern states to climb upon the social plane of the white man, it is our duty to look for a remedy, partial or complete, for this disorder.[52]

A strange event happened to Frank Ruffin that may have intensified his feelings about blacks. In 1874, a series of sixteen fires occurred at Ruffin's beloved Summer Hill. Because there were so many fires in such a short span of time, suspicions were immediately aroused. As it turned out, a

---

[50]Ibid.

[51]Ibid., 4.

[52]Ibid., 5.

former slave houseboy was later found to have set the fires. Apparently the former slave, Hilary Page, wanted to move to Richmond, and he thought the blazes would force the family to move into town. In this he succeeded, but his plan ultimately backfired. Page was found out and hanged. Ruffin did not sell his farm. Although he lived in town, he continued to grow crops on his farm. However, in 1884, he made the decision to sell his personal property on the farm and then rent out the land. Ruffin was now in his late sixties and farming was, no doubt, becoming a burden to him. By leasing the land, he could earn money from it without having to worry about productivity. Among the items sold on 17 September 1884 were farm animals, wagons, hay, several types of plows, various farming implements, as well as, up-to-date items such as an "Iron Age" cultivator.[53] When they left the farm in 1874, Frank and Ellen (Harvie) Ruffin moved into the John Marshall house, just off Capital Square. The house belonged to Ellen Ruffin and her sisters, who were granddaughters of the late Chief Justice.[54]

Although Ruffin gave up farming at this point, he remained committed to agricultural reform. In the late 1870s, the Richmond city directories listed Ruffin as a Grange agent for the Commonwealth of Virginia. He maintained an office at

---

[53]Broadside found in the Francis Gildart Ruffin Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

[54]Whitmore, 79.

204 East Main.[55] In 1872, farmers across America, particularly in the midwest, began organizing granges. These were local organizations that were affiliated with the National Patrons of Husbandry. The underlying goal was to improve the "languishing condition of agricultural interests, caused in part by the oppression of unequal legislation, both state and national."[56] The Grange agitated for reduced railroad rates. They also sought increased fertilizer production. Additionally, farmers were to eliminate middle men wherever possible in an effort to lower costs. They met with mixed success and many abandoned the cause for various reasons.[57]

In addition to voicing his opposition to black equality, Frank Ruffin also offered a solution to the matter. The remedy he offered was much like one of his arguments - logical and precise. Ruffin called for the removal of blacks from the South, and suggested that the northern and western states absorb this new population.[58]

During the Readjuster years, Democrats and Republicans both sought the black vote. The Readjuster Republicans

---

[55]Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer and Richmond City Directory, (Richmond, Virginia: J. W. Randolph and English Printers, 1877), n.p.

[56]Pearson, 59.

[57]Solon Justus Buck, The Granger Movement, 1870-1880 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1913), 204.

[58]Ruffin, White or Mongrel?, 5.

(Mahoneites) appealed directly to blacks for votes as follows: "Put us in office and we will keep your schools open, pay your teachers, provide for your higher education, abolish the whipping post, and remove your insane from jails to a well equipped asylum."[59] The Conservatives were not nearly as successful in their attempt to recruit the black vote, and the party was not as active in this area.

The James River and Kanawha Canal was a project that stockholder Frank Ruffin and fellow planters and farmers supported. They saw the canal as being of great benefit to farmers, who could move their goods to market more quickly and more cheaply than ever before. The canal, initiated in the 1780s by men such as George Washington, was to have been a waterway that would link Virginia with the Ohio River Valley, which would have provided access to the Mississippi River. Despite numerous incarnations and cash infusions, the waterway had not been completed. In March of 1832, the James River and Kanawha Company was incorporated and funds were raised for the project in the commercial interest of Virginia. Work continued on the canal but 196 and one-half miles of navigable water proved to be the final result. In 1880 the company was bought out by the railroads which were in direct competition with the canal and had a direct interest in helping to secure

---

[59]Virginius Dabney, Virginia the New Dominion, (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1971), 384.

its demise.[60] However, it was still a dream of prominent and tradition-oriented Virginians in 1870. In 1874 Ruffin discovered the plans of the company to build a railroad extension rather than the canal. Stockholders instructed the company to pursue canal funding, rather than railway funding, in November 1875. Despite this, business interests lobbied Richmond in an effort to ensure that the rail line would be extended. The canal never was a financial success and in 1880 the property was sold and rails were laid on the towpath of the canal.[61] Ruffin was once again reminded that Virginia was becoming more responsive to the needs and wishes of business and northern capital and less receptive to farmers who looked to her for help.

In February of 1884 Frank Ruffin was actively engaged in letter writing to enjoin the citizenry of Richmond, or at least the readership of The State, and the General Assembly of Virginia to return Senate bill No. 150 to committee for further consideration of the intentions and outcomes. Senate bill No. 150 authorized incorporation of the Richmond Dock and Dry Dock Corporation, and in doing so, Ruffin believed, jeopardized the rights of individuals as well as the state.[62]

---

[60]Kent Druyvesteyn, "With Great Vision: The James River and Kanawha Canal, A Pictorial Essay," Virginia Cavalcade 21 (Winter 1972): 27-28.

[61]Maddex, 161-63.

[62]Frank G. Ruffin, Memorial, an appeal to the General Assembly of Virginia, 26 February 1884, in the Francis Gildart Ruffin Papers, Manuscripts Division, The Earl Gregg Swem

Ruffin stated in a 23 February 1884 letter to the editor of The State that he did not oppose a drydock bill in general, but specifically Senate bill No. 150 as written and amended " . . . which would override all opposing private rights by the grant of such unusual, oppressive and unnecessary powers as are neither proposed nor demanded by any ship-building company from the Penobscot to the Delaware."[63] He, in fact, invited the authors of the bill to come forward as openly as he had, and identify themselves and defend the carte blanche nature of their bill.

As written, the bill authorized the corporation to build on a site at or near Richmond on either side of the James River and allowed facilities involved with loading and unloading of cargo as well as the construction and repair of ships, vessels and boats. In addition to these activities, authority was given to store merchandise and property and to charge for the services. To facilitate connection to other portions, the corporation was further authorized to build canals and railroads not to exceed ten miles in length, despite the proximity of existing railroads.

Ruffin wrote of his commitment to the idea of building ships below the falls and near Richmond on the James River. This position was stated in a pamphlet endorsed by the Board of Aldermen and the Common Council of Richmond. Ruffin wrote

---

Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

[63]The State, 23 February 1884.

that he felt Richmond to be " . . . the best site for that purpose of any on the Atlantic coast."[64] He viewed the bill as illegal in view of the Virginia State Constitution, specifically Section 15 of Article 5 stating that "no law can embrace more than one object, which shall be expressed in its title."[65] Various portions of the Richmond Dock and Dry Dock bill involved other areas that were not included in the bill's title such as warehousemen and shipowners, granted rights to building canals and railways, as well as activity in manufacturing and mining. Also, granted was the right for the corporation to engage in real estate speculation. In addition to the issue of legality, Ruffin anticipated environmental damage to the James River, and surrounding areas, due to the largesse of rights Senate bill No. 150 would grant to the corporation. An example of this was the proposition again to dredge or deepen the James River. Not only could that jeopardize the river, but he was unsure whether additional expenditures were even necessary. Ruffin's concern over issues affecting the James River may have been partly selfish given that his farm lay along the banks of the James.

Shortly before he died, Ruffin corresponded with Joseph Bryan, who among other things was the President of the Virginia Historical Society. Bryan held a high opinion of Ruffin's abilities and was trying to persuade Ruffin to write

---

[64]Ibid.

[65]Ibid.

articles for his newspaper. Bryan wrote:

> I have the favor of the 6th and while I regret your inability to give me the information I want, I still appreciate your position as disclosed by you. I shall await with interest the message of the Governor. Whatever you write is always interesting reading, and (always reserving the function of an editor) I know of nothing that would be more attractive to the readers of "The Times" than to have its columns include articles from you . . . .[66]

Just over a month later, Bryan again wrote Ruffin:

> No man enjoys what you write more than I do, provided always it is not directed against myself. I would be very glad to read your communication, and if it were not too long to publish it, but I think that the West Virginia matter is a mere abstraction with us, and the sooner we pass such legislation as will relieve this State of all further responsibility or obligation in the matter the better for us. I am cordially in favor of passing this legislation on to those who will see it through without cost or charge to us, and who would be entirely satisfied with our action . . . .[67]

The West Virginia matter referred to in the letter was a bone of contention with many Virginians. They argued that West Virginia, while it was still part of Virginia, contributed to the State debt. Yet after it became a separate state in 1863, it was not obligated to help repay that debt. The Supreme Court finally ruled in 1918 that West Virginia should, indeed, help Virginia put the debt to rest.[68]

Frank Ruffin was very much interested in finding or

---

[66]Letter from Joseph Bryan to Frank Ruffin, Letterbook Number 10, p. 223, 7 January 1892. Joseph Bryan Letterbooks, Manuscripts Division, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

[67]Bryan to Ruffin, Letterbook Number 10, p. 420, 29 February 1892.

[68]Moger, 41.

building a structure that would house the Virginia State Library. Joseph Bryan was also interested in this, especially since it affected plans for the Virginia Historical Society. This led Bryan to write to Ruffin:

> You have shown such a lively and effective interest in securing the State Library Building as also to secure the gratitude of everyone who wishes security for our invaluable records and papers. Please inform me as to the probability of an early construction of that building. I am anxious to get the best advice in this matter as I had been authorized to make a tender of the house no. 707 E. Franklin to the Virginia Historical Society, as a home and place of deposit for its papers, but if they are to have rooms in the new library building and if that building will be constructed within a few years it will be a question for the Society to determine whether they will make the move to 707, or remain where they are until the new building is erected, if indeed they are to have any part of it at all. This matter is of considerable importance to Mr. W. O. English, who now occupies no. 707 and who wishes to know whether he shall make other arrangements or whether he can stay where he is. The determination of this remains entirely with the Virginia Historical Society, and they will in turn be governed by the facts that I have asked for . . . .[69]

Reconstruction was hard on conservative whites such as Frank Ruffin. The Civil War had been a bitter lesson, but in many ways it only served as a warning of things to come. Confederate veterans, including Ruffin, came dangerously close to losing the right to vote. Had this happened, a bitter irony would have resulted. Within the span of a single decade, blacks would have gone from slaves who were considered property, and, therefore, had no rights, to being American citizens with the right to vote. Slave owners, however, would

---

[69]Bryan to Ruffin, Letterbook Number 10, p. 466, 15 March 1892.

have found themselves second class citizens who had lost the right to vote. The lesson was not lost on Ruffin, and he set out to see that this never happened. All of Frank Ruffin's activities were geared toward a single end - to keep blacks out of politics and elevate the status of white farmers. As a type, men such as Ruffin were quickly disappearing. He spent his old age championing the ideals of his youth.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Frank Ruffin deserves to be remembered both as a type and as a person. As a type, he represented a lost generation. His was the last to know slavery. His was the last to get a glimpse of Jefferson's dream for a nation of small farmers. And at an age when most men reflect on their lives, Ruffin's generation fought for theirs. After losing a war to preserve a lost way of life, uncomfortable and unfamiliar ways were thrust upon them. Slaves who were once considered property were now equals. Industry was the path to success, not prudent farming. Instead of looking back fondly on a long life, Ruffin's generation was desperately trying to reconcile the world as it had become and the life they knew before.

In many ways Frank Ruffin was a contradiction in terms. He was a member of an old and distinguished Virginia family, yet he did not do things simply on the basis of tradition. Ruffin was not afraid to point out ways the Commonwealth could be improved. Even though he spent the last twenty-five years of his life showing Virginians how the state had deteriorated since the war, he saw promise for the future if Virginia would only remain true to herself. This can be seen in Ruffin's comment that Virginia had been ruined in "character and tone"

by the northern conquest.[1] Rather than merely complaining about the moral and political climate in Virginia, he was a constant contributor to Richmond papers, particularly in the Readjuster period. Even those who did not agree with what Ruffin had to say generally agreed that few people in Virginia expressed themselves better.

The ideal for Ruffin was a combination of an old Dominion and a new Virginia. Obviously, Ruffin did not like the enfranchisement of blacks, and in this sense he longed for the Virginia of his youth. After all, Ruffin had known the institution of slavery for well over half his life. Following the war, improved agricultural practices were essential if southern farmers were to survive without slave labor. Frank Ruffin was keenly aware of this new reality, and worked to bring about an agrarian revival, though his success was limited. If farming were to compete with business, it had to be efficient and profitable.

The race pamphlets that Frank Ruffin authored were meant to show that blacks could enable a party or a candidate to get elected, but their contributions to the maintenance and improvement of the state were minimal, at best. Ruffin's views on race were like many other Virginians. However, it was Ruffin who felt strongly enough to speak his mind publicly and sign his name proudly. For this reason, Ruffin is

---

[1]Letter from Frank Ruffin to Lewis E. Harvie, 9 August, 1876, Lewis E. Harvie papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

important to the student of race relations. The reality was that war did not change racial views in the South by and large. Through Ruffin's pamphlets, one is able to get a sense of the sincerity and emotion he possessed.

Ruffin also resented the decline in morals and values among his fellow citizens. Mahone's takeover of the Readjusters illustrates this. Ruffin saw much in the Old Dominion that alarmed him. The influence of the North particularly galled Ruffin. Honor and duty were traits that ran strong through Ruffin.[2]

Frank Ruffin was trapped between an old Virginia and a new South. Because he favored funding for education and public institutions such as the state library, he would have been considered quite progressive in antebellum Virginia. On the other hand, his racial beliefs and his desire to have a society that was based on farming and not business kept him at odds with the goals of a new South but very much in keeping with Jefferson's legacy.

Through Ruffin, one is also able to re-evaluate the Confederate Commissary Department. Traditional studies have made Lucius Northrup and his staff out to be incompetent. By analyzing the investigations Ruffin underwent while serving under Northrup, it can be seen that this was not the case. One could blame President Davis and his cotton policy for

---

[2]Raymond H. Pulley, Old Virginia Restored, 1870-1930, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 38-39.

causing the hunger of Confederate troops. Ruffin certainly did. The documents Ruffin left behind illustrated that the commissariat worked efficiently and diligently to acquire the necessary rations. There is certainly enough evidence to justify a re-evaluation of the positive role Frank Ruffin and the Commissariat played in the Confederate effort.

After the Civil War, Ruffin showed that the northern victory had done little to change his views and outlook on life. He still championed the farmer; he still believed in slavery; and he still distrusted business and industry. Virginia, however, was moving further and further away from those who thought like him. This caused Ruffin to help create a movement. One might argue that Ruffin hoped his party would readjust the state as much as the debt. The pamphlets he wrote throughout the readjuster period illustrate the intensity with which the issues were felt.

Following his death, Frank Ruffin received tribute in the Richmond papers. The Richmond Dispatch may have said it best:

> Colonel Ruffin was an able man. In his controversies in the newspapers he preferred foes that were "worthy of his steel." He always felt that he knew what was right, and so always felt that he was thrice armed. He took no mean advantage of anybody. He relied upon the strength of his argument and the force of his truth. He was never unduly exalted by success nor depressed by failure . . . . Colonel Ruffin was the best conversationalist of his day. We know of no man who could equal him in entertaining the most select crowds or excel him in 'all-round talk.' He was so thoroughly equipped by a fine education, by a long association with the great men of the country, by a natural talent for conversation, by a never failing memory, and by courtesy, that he could never be taken unawares. But he never overwhelmed his less educated

competitor. He was too magnanimous for that.[3]

While obituaries usually present the deceased in glowing terms, the obituary that appeared in the Dispatch contained the same attributes that people spoke of throughout Ruffin's life. At times Ruffin must have felt that he was fighting a lonely and losing battle to preserve the best aspects of Virginia. Although exactly one hundred years have passed since his death, it is clear that Francis Gildart Ruffin was, above all else, devoted to Virginia.

---

[3]Whitmore, 80.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Primary Sources

A. Manuscripts:

Commissary Department Papers, C.S.A. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Confederate States of America, Subsistence Department Scrapbook. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Francis Gildart Ruffin. Compiled service record. United States Archives, Washington, D. C.

Francis Gildart Ruffin Papers. Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Francis Gildart Ruffin Papers. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

John Marshall Papers. Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

Joseph Bryan Letterbooks. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Lewis E. Harvie Papers. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

B. Published Material:

Allmendinger, David F., Jr., ed., Incidents of My Life: Edmund Ruffin's Autobiographical Essays. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1990.

Confederate States of America. Report on Committee on Quartermaster and Commissary Departments on Case of Major Frank G. Ruffin. Richmond: n.p., 1863.

Davis, Jefferson. The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881.

Freeman, Douglas S., ed. Southern Historical Society Papers. Richmond: Southern Historical Society, 1941.

Hamilton, J. DeRoulhac, ed. The Papers of Thomas Ruffin. 4 vols. Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission and Edwards and Broughton State Printers, 1918.

Hancock, Elizabeth H., ed. John E. Massey: An Autobiography. New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1909.

Peden, William, ed. Thomas Jefferson's Notes on the State of Virginia. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1954.

Ruffin, Frank G. An Appeal to the 31,527 Readjuster Democrats of Virginia. Richmond: n.p., n.d.

_____. Facts, Thoughts and Conclusions in Regard to the Public Debt of Virginia. Richmond: John and Goolsby Job and Book Printers, 1885.

_____. Mahoneism Unveiled. Richmond: n.p., 1882.

_____. The Negro as a Political and Social Factor. Richmond: J. W. Randolph Publishers, 1888.

_____. A Reply to General Mahone's Assault on the Democratic Party and the Roanoke Platform. Richmond: n.p., 1887.

_____. White or Mongrel. Richmond: n.p., n.d.

Scarborough, William, ed. The Diary of Edmund Ruffin. 3 vols. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972.

Whitmore, Madeline McMurdo. The Collected Papers of the Monticello Association. 2 vols. Charlottesville: Monticello Association, 1984.

Wise, John S. The Lion's Skin: A Historical Novel and a Novel History. New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1905.

Woodward, C. Vann, ed. Mary Chesnut's Civil War. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

Younger, Edward, ed. Inside the Confederate Government: The Diary of Robert Garlick Hill Kean. New York: Oxford University Press, 1957.

C. Periodicals:

Southern Planter.

D. Newspapers:

The Alexandria Gazette.

Daily Richmond Whig.

Harrisonburg Rockingham Register.

Richmond Daily Dispatch.

Richmond Dispatch.

Richmond Examiner.

The State.

E. Government Records:

Herbert, H. A., ed. Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894-1927.

II. Secondary Sources

A. Books:

Ashe, Samuel A., et al., eds. Biographical History of North Carolina from Colonial Times to The Present. 20 vols. Greensboro: Charles Van Noppen Publishers, 1907.

Craven, Avery O. Edmund Ruffin: Southerner. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966.

_____. Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860. Gloucester: Peter Smith Printers, 1965.

Dabney, Virginius. Virginia: The New Dominion. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1971.

Dictionary of American Biography. 20 vols. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1963.

Faust, Drew Gilpin. A Sacred Circle. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Gilder, R. W., et al., eds. Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. 4 vols. Secaucus, N.J.: Castle Publishers, n.d.

Goff, Richard D. Confederate Supply. Durham: Duke University Press, 1969.

Hill, C. William, Jr. The Political Theory of John Taylor of Caroline. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1977.

McEwan, Barbara. Thomas Jefferson: Farmer. Jefferson: McFarland and Company, 1991.

McLaughlin, Jack. Jefferson and Monticello: The Biography of a Builder. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988.

Maddex, Jack P., Jr. The Virginia Conservatives 1867-1879: A Study in Reconstruction Politics. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970.

Miller, John C. The Wolf By the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery. New York: Free Press, 1977.

Moger, Allen. Virginia: Bourbonsim to Byrd, 1870-1925. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968.

Newby, I. A. The South: A History. United States of America: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Pearson, Charles Chilton. The Readjuster Movement in Virginia. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917.

Phillips, Ulrich B. Life and Labor in the Old South. Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1963.

Pulley, Raymond H. Old Virginia Restored, 1870-1930. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968.

Shackelford, George Green. George Wythe Randolph and the Confederate Elite. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988.

Squires, W. H. T. Unleashed At Long Last: Reconstruction in Virginia, April 9, 1865 - January 26, 1870. New York: Negro University Press, 1939.

Stuart, Alexander H. H. A Narrative of the Leading Incidents of the Organization of the First Popular Movement in Virginia. Richmond: William Ellis Jones Printer, 1888.

Thomas, Emory M. The Confederate Nation: 1861-1865. New York: Harper and Row, 1979.

Turner, Charles W. Virginia's Green Revolution. Waynesboro, Va.: Humphries Press, 1986.

Warner, Ezra J. Biographical Register of the Confederate Congress. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975.

Williamson, Joel. The Crucible of Race. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Woodward, C. Vann. Origins of the New South. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971.

Wynes, Charles E. Race Relations in Virginia, 1870-1902. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1961.

Zweig, Stefan. The Queen of Scots. London: Cassell and Company, 1936.

B. Articles:

Druyvesteyn, Kent. "With Great Vision: The James River and Kanawha Canal, A Pictorial Essay." Virginia Cavalcade Volume 21, Number 3 (Winter 1972): 22-37.

Hay, Thomas Robson. "Lucius B. Northrop: Commissary General of the Confederacy." Civil War History 9 (March 1963): 5-23.

Johnson, Ludwell. "Beverley Tucker's Canadian Mission: 1864-1865." Journal of Southern History 29 (February 1963): 88-99.

Moore, James Tice. "The University and the Readjusters." The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 88 (1970): 88-101.

Tyler, Lyon G., ed. "A Ruffin Genealogy." William and Mary Quarterly 18 (1909-1910): 251-58.

C. Miscellaneous:

Virginia Business Directory and Gazetteer and Richmond City Directory. Richmond: J. W. Randolph and English Printers, 1877.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Eighth Federal Census, 1860 Slave Schedule for Chesterfield County, Virginia, 9 July 1860.