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## NEW JERSEY GOES TO WAR

BY EARL SCHENCK MIERS

A war clouds gathered over the land, New Jersey quaked in its political boots. Conciliation, compromise, even outspoken sympathy for secession characterized the sentiments of the state's delegates to the so-called Peace Conference in Washington assembled at the call of Virginia. Democrats, dominating the political institutions of a state in which Negroes still were held in slavery, took their cue from the President's message when Congress had reconvened in December; "the long-continued and intemperate interference of the Northern people with the question of slavery in the Southern states," Buchanan had said then, "has at last produced its natural effects," and the remarkable Mr. Buchanan, apparently swallowing every wild rumor of "the immediate perils" inherent in stirring within slaves "vague notions of freedom," blanched to think of how "many a matron throughout the South retires at night in dread of what may befall herself and her children before morning." If such feelings should intensify, the President insisted (and, clearly, he believed that they would under Black Republicanism), then "disunion will become inevitable," for "self-preservation is the first law of nature."

And also the first law of politics, Mr. Buchanan might have added. In stating, as titular head of his party, a creed with which neither confirmed secessionist nor budding Copperhead could for a moment disagree, the President had left Democrats, in the neat phrase of South Carolina's Congressman Keitt, to "wait for contingencies." In New Jersey the critical day came on February 21, 1861, when Mr. Lincoln, en route to his inaugural, passed through the state. For seven hours the President-elect was on New Jersey soil where the people could see this man whom Democratic stump speakers had variously labeled a buffoon, a baboon, and the Illinois ape; and,

awaiting the President-elect's appearance before the New Jersey Assembly, the Democrats, in a plainly unruly mood, sought to keep the disagreeable image alive by introducing derisive resolutions concerning Mr. Lincoln's physical ugliness and ungainly stature. The resolutions were tabled, but a buzz of angry rebellion still filled the Assembly when Mr. Lincoln appeared. Next day the *New York Tribune* reported the complete turn-about in the tone of that body as Mr. Lincoln ended his brief remarks:

I shall endeavor to take the ground I deem most just to the North, the East, the West, the South, and the whole country. I take it, I hope, in good temper—certainly no malice toward any section. I shall do all that may be in my power to promote a peaceful settlement of all our difficulties. The man does not live who is more devoted to peace than I am. [Cheers.] None who would do more to preserve it. But it may be necessary to put the foot down firmly. [Here the audience broke out into cheers so loud and long that for some moments it was impossible to hear Mr. L.'s voice.] He continued: And if I do my duty, and do right, you will sustain me, will you not? [Loud cheers, and cries of "Yes," "Yes," "We will."]

For the first time, really, New Jersey was coming face to face with the Lincoln that Illinois had known since the famous debates with Senator Douglas; and one witness to this dramatic scene described how the President-elect's "shoulders seemed to straighten and his eyes to kindle," and that "he stood so during the fierce applause, as if unconscious of any emotion save his own expressed resolution." Here was the Lincoln revealed in New Jersey who, the same witness realized, confounded his political opponents with a "*naïveté* too powerful to be artful"; here in New Jersey stood the Lincoln well known to his law partner, Herndon, who a short time before had written Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts: "when on justice, right, liberty, the Government, the Constitution, and the Union, then you may all stand aside; he [Lincoln] will rule then, and no man can move him—no set of men can do it. There is no fail here. This is Lincoln, and you mark my prediction. You and I must keep the people right; God will keep Lincoln right."

The crowds that had come out to see, cheer, and listen to Mr. Lincoln in Jersey City and Newark, Elizabeth and Rahway, New Brunswick, Princeton, and Trenton provided far more than a happy hunting ground for pickpockets that twenty-first of February, 1861; they provided also a clue to how much more profoundly than his professional opponents he trusted the people of the North to sustain the verdict of the ballot box. Because New Jersey had gone against

Lincoln at the polls, for which it had received paeans of praise in the Democratic press North and South, its behavior in the hours of crisis could not but have deep psychological impact. Seven weeks and one day after Mr. Lincoln visited New Jersey the awesome echo of a mortar rolling across Charleston Harbor posed the fearful challenge; and without a moment of hesitation New Jersey responded.

"We have never witnessed such intense excitement as was manifested in this city on Saturday evening and Sunday," reported the Newark *Daily Advertiser* on April 15th. When, finally, there seemed to be substance to the dispatches announcing the capitulation of Fort Sumter the news spread "with electric rapidity, causing a most painful sensation." On streets throughout the city people gathered in "agitated groups," still arguing that the dispatches from Charleston could not be trusted, and on Sunday newspapers "were sold in the city by the thousands." Even then, though the papers confirmed the fall of Sumter, Newarkers argued that the bulletins were "contradictory and improbable."

Many actually believed that no conflict had taken place [continued the *Daily Advertiser*], and that the secessionists were telegraphing the various announcements only to alarm the North. The final confirmation this morning [Monday, April 15] produced feelings of acutest grief, and at the same time the sternest determination to sustain and reestablish the honor of the country. These feelings are almost unanimous. Whatever may have been the former political divisions, there are but few sympathizers with the rebels in this community, and a deep seated indignation is felt against them, which, it is not unlikely, will exhibit itself before long in public reprobation.

The following day a correspondent to the *Daily Advertiser* took exception to this cheerful view:

MR. EDITOR:—I have good reason for saying that I know it to be true, that recruiting for the rebel army is going on in our midst. Is it not time then for those who profess to be loyal to the Union, to take some immediate measures to put down this Treason? It will not answer in these perilous times to simply bear sentiments true to our country in our hearts, but we should come out and boldly declare them and act upon them.

I therefore propose that there be a meeting in some large Hall of our city of our Union loving men, and then and there *organize* for the protection of our lives, the lives of our families, *for the life of our country*, and if when we get together it is thought best, appoint a Vigilance Committee to "*spot*" and hang "Traitors in our midst."

Meetings of "Union loving men" swept the state. By April 18, for example, the Mount Holly *Mirror* reported "an immense and

enthusiastic Union meeting" in the Court House two nights before which adopted the following resolutions:

*Resolved*, That next to *God*—in adoration—is our Country.

*Resolved*, That our beloved Country, is the whole "United States."

*Resolved*, That the *Forts* and *Arsenals*, built by, belong to, the United States.

*Resolved*, That the *Capitol*—founded by Washington—is the sacred home and stand-point of the Government.

*Resolved*, That the *Constitution* and the *Union*, have made us what we are, great and powerful at home—honored and respected abroad.

*Resolved*, That the *Institutions* of our Fathers, are a priceless heritage—venerated and revered.

*Resolved*, That the glorious "*Stars and Stripes*," are the only emblem of our sovereignty.

*Resolved*, That in defense of these and all of these, (as our fathers did of old) we pledge "our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor."

The meeting, reported the Mount Holly *Mirror*, "was a demonstration of no ordinary character"; speaking for those who attended, the editor declared: "The people will not rest, the nation will not be satisfied, while a traitor is left in arms." The same issue carried the account of "a tremendous Union meeting" in Bordentown at which "men of all parties were present"; and a week later the *Mirror* complimented Bordentown on raising "about \$2000. . . for the equipment of volunteers and to assist in the support of their families." Burlington raised \$1000 for the same purpose, and the town turned out to cheer the thirteen railroad cars that bore Massachusetts troops on their way to the defense of the national capital. In the *Mirror* for April 25th, a correspondent from Bordentown, who signed himself "A Descendent of 1776," spoke proudly of how "our citizens of all parties are vieing with each other in manifesting their love and devotion for their country," adding:

Whilst we in all our principal towns are thus doing our duty, the people in the rural districts of our county, should not remain passive or indifferent, but by liberal contributions, [should] keep up and extend this patriotic fire. It is only in this way, that this wicked conspiracy and war, commenced by Southern Traitors and Rebels, can be speedily ended.

The New Brunswick *Fredonian* for April 18th rather joyously reported the following, under the heading "Served Him Right":

A man from East-Brunswick dropped into a shop in this City to make some purchases on Monday afternoon and began to rejoice over the fall of Fort

Sumter, saying he was glad of it, and hoped a company would be formed in this State to go and help the Secessionists break up the Union. This last sentence was too much for the patriotism of the shop-keeper, and the traitor had hardly got the words out of his mouth before he measured his length on the floor.

A week later, clearly in an exuberant mood, the editors of the *Fredonian* chronicled that "the price of American flags has risen four hundred per ct. within the last ten days; and bunting, which two weeks ago found few buyers at seven dollars a bale, is now hard to get at twenty." With equal exuberance the *Fredonian* noted that "A lady, who displayed a secession flag in a Sunday School in Jersey City on Sunday, was compelled to leave the building." Patriotism, which "overwhelms everything else in our City just now," also invaded the premises of the *Fredonian*:

The hands in our office have become so demoralized with the war spirit that we can get but little work out of them now-a-days, and therefore we have serious thoughts of sending them all off to the wars, and of employing girls hereafter to do our work.—Those who want to enlist a likely set of young soldiers should apply soon, as we don't think we shall be able to keep them on hand long. They will be disposed of at a low price. Who'll make the first bid? Going! going! Bid quick, or you'll lose!

P.S.—If our paper comes out late to-day our readers will know the reason from the above.

But there was another reason—three days previously New Brunswick had held "the greatest popular demonstration" the city ever had known. The scene of this Union meeting was the First Reformed Dutch Church; ladies filled the gallery an hour before the starting time, and a choir of fifty ladies and gentlemen, "hurriedly collected together," enlivened the occasion with patriotic songs. The Honorable John Van Dyke occupied the chair, and everybody of importance in the city was there. The Reverend Dr. Campbell "of the Theological Seminary" minced no words over the nature of the emergency: "Money is needed, men are needed, and mothers, sisters and wives must be willing to give up their sons, brothers and husbands to this work"; but, judging by the account in the *Fredonian*, the real rabble-rouser was the Honorable Garnet B. Adrain, "late Member of Congress from this District," who said in part:

It was declared by Floyd that before the first of May next the flag of the traitors would float over the National Capitol, and Jeff. Davis says that in less than three months it shall wave over Faneuil Hall in Boston. Will it ever

float over the Capitol? Will it ever wave over Faneuil Hall? The last drop of blood will be shed in New-Jersey before it [the army of the Confederacy] shall ever cross her soil, or be allowed to approach it. Remember that there is no other State that suffered so much for liberty as New Jersey did in the Revolution. Let us emulate our fathers in their efforts to establish this Union. We are satisfied with our Government, and will we permit it to be destroyed? —[Cries of “Never!” “Never!”] Our glorious banner shall ever float over all the States of this Union, and will be sustained by every brave heart in the land.

The New Brunswick *Times*, strongly anti-Lincoln and inclined in its issue of April 25th to “hold the Republican party responsible for the existing sectional agitation and for bringing the nation to the brink of ruin,” still found space in its columns for printing a “patriotic letter” from Commodore Robert F. Stockton:

To His Excellency, Charles S. Olden:

Princeton, April 20, 1861.

My dear Sir,—You are aware that I have for months, without regard to personal reproach or convenience, done but little to use my best efforts to preserve the peace of the country. In spite, however, of my efforts, and your efforts, and the best efforts of the whole people of New Jersey, War is upon us. My apprehensions often expressed to you are realized. Civil War is now raging in Baltimore.

I will therefore take the liberty to suggest, that after you have complied with the requisition of the National Government for troops, you consider the best means to preserve our own State from aggression. You remember that it is only the river Delaware that separates New Jersey from the Slave States. If you should see fit to call upon me for any aid that I can render, it is freely tendered.

This is no time to palter about past differences of opinion, or to criticize the administration of public affairs. We are in the presence of an awful danger. We feel throes of political convulsion, which threaten to bring down to ruins the noblest fabric of Government ever constructed for the purposes of civilization and humanity.

Every citizen should feel that any sacrifice which he is called upon to make in such a crisis is as of nothing. I am ready to do all I can to maintain our own rights and to preserve peace.

I will hoist the Star Spangled Banner at Morven, the former residence of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. That flag, which, when a boy, I nailed to the masthead of the Frigate President—that flag whose honor I have maintained in more than one personal combat—that flag which I have carried, honored and respected in every clime—which I hoisted on Cape Messurado in Africa, and carried through the territory of California,—that identical flag which I bore across the Rio San Gabriel and over the plains of Mesa, and hoisted in triumph in the City De Los Angeles, in the face of

a despotic foe—that flag which the immortal Washington, in the name of our Country *our whole Country*, planted on the ramparts of Liberty.

Faithfully,  
Your ob't servant,  
R. F. Stockton.

Thus spoke Robert Field Stockton, whose family reached New Jersey in 1696; whose grandfather Richard had signed the Declaration of Independence and whose father, "Richard the Duke," had served in the United States Senate; who at the age of thirteen had entered Princeton and who had served with distinction in the navy since the War of 1812. Commodore Stockton had inherited the family homestead, "Morven," in 1828; and in later years—from 1853 to 1866—was president of the Delaware & Raritan Canal Company. In 1856 he had been considered a possible presidential candidate by the American Party; and, at the outbreak of war, had returned as a member of the New Jersey delegation to the Peace Conference in Washington.

"... it may be necessary to put the foot down firmly," Mr. Lincoln had told the New Jersey Assembly on February 21, 1861, and now, less than two months later, the cheers in that chamber had become the hard fact of life. Before the tragic years of conflict ended, in all classifications New Jersey would supply 88,305 men—10,057 more than called for—to the nation's military services; in round figures, it would pay over \$2,275,000 in pensions and allotments and more than \$23,000,000 in local bounties; its soldiers, fighting on every major field of battle, would count 6300 who died in service (including 218 officers). It was, truly, a proud record, and one, let us hope, that justified the prayer which from Burlington on April 17, 1861, Bishop Odenheimer authorized for "the Clergy and Laity of the Diocese of New-Jersey" during "the period of our country's troubles":

Oh most powerful and glorious Lord God, the Lord of hosts, that rules and commandest all things; Thou sittest on the Throne, judging right; and therefore we make our address to Thy Divine Majesty in this our necessity, that Thou wouldst take the cause of our Country in Thine own Hand.

Thou alone makest man to be of one mind in an house, and pourest into their hearts the most excellent gift of charity. Appease, we humbly beseech Thee, the tumults which exist among us. Give peace in our times, O Lord; and grant to all of us grace, that we may henceforth obediently walk in Thy holy commandments; and leading a quiet and peaceful life in all godliness and honesty, may continually offer unto Thee our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for these Thy mercies toward us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Amen.*