

**THE
ALABAMA HISTORICAL
QUARTERLY**

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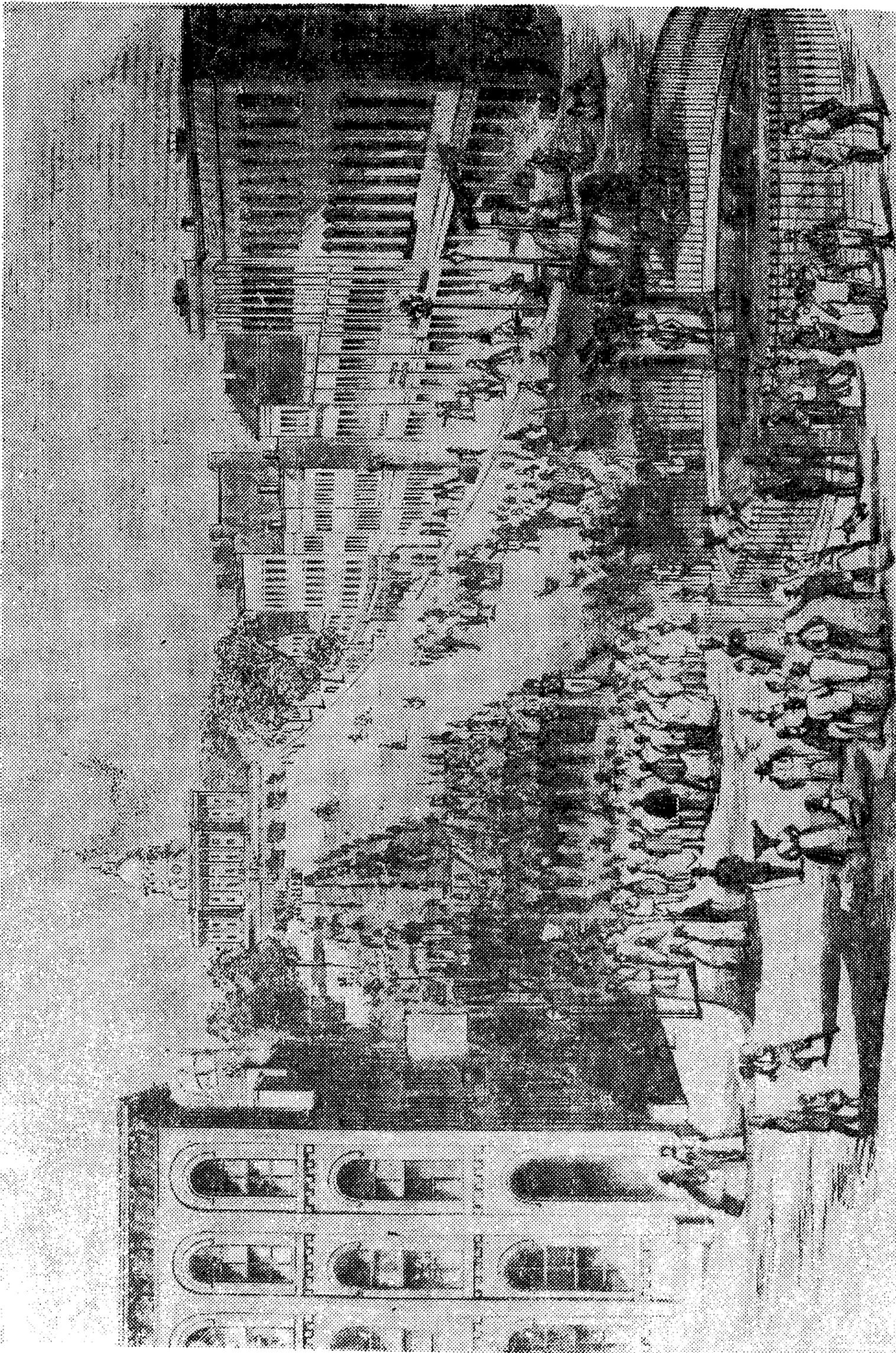
Published by the
State Department
of
Archives and History

Vol. 26

No. 1

SPRING 1964





THE CITY OF MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, SHOWING THE STATE HOUSE WHERE THE CONGRESS OF THE SOUTHERN CONFEDERACY MET IN FEBRUARY, 1862

MONTGOMERY AS THE CONFEDERATE CAPITAL:
VIEW OF A NEW NATION

Edited With An Introductory Chapter By
James P. Jones and William Warren Rogers

EDITORIAL

This issue of the *Alabama Historical Quarterly* is devoted entirely to a compilation of reports printed in the *Charleston Courier* written from Montgomery during the four months it was the Confederate capital. It is intended as a complement to the other sources which give at least passing note to life in a town which briefly enjoyed the role of a nation's capital. Dr. Jones and Dr. Rogers, both members of the history faculty of Florida State University, have made sufficient reference to those sources in their footnotes and bibliography to obviate the necessity of mentioning them further. It is sufficient to say that the viewpoint of representatives of the press of another Southern city is somewhat different from that of other observers of the scene, and is therefore deemed worthy of an entire issue of the *Quarterly*.—P.A.B.

PREFACE

As the first capital of the Confederate States of America, Montgomery, Alabama, was the scene of crucial military and political decisions in the winter and spring of 1861. The small city found itself in an unaccustomed whirl of activity. On hand to record the events of the day was a small army of newspapermen. This study contains several accounts of life in the capital as seen by a four-man press corps representing the *Charleston Daily Courier*. Their writings have all the verve and enthusiasm of the new nation about which they wrote. The editors intend the work for the scholar and the general reader and hope that the spontaneous, close-range accounts of the *Courier's* journalists will hold the interest of both.

The editors are grateful to Mr. Peter A. Brannon, Director of the State Department of Archives and History of Alabama, for his interest in the project. Mr. Milo B. Howard of the Department of Archives and History supplied useful information concerning Alabama personalities. Mrs. Granville T. Prior, of the South Carolina Historical Society kindly aided with material pertaining to South Carolina. Thomas R. Waring, Editor of the *Charleston News and Courier*, permitted the use of the *Courier* files in which the accounts originally appeared. Professor J. Cutler Andrews of Chatham College offered helpful suggestions. Also, Professor Weymouth T. Jordan of Florida State University gave encouragement and advice during the time the manuscript was being prepared.

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CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Early in the mild winter of 1861 Thomas C. DeLeon resigned his position as clerk in the bureau of topographical engineers and went South. His destination was Montgomery, Alabama, and he wrote, "The city is picturesque in perch upon bold, high bluffs, which, on the city side, cut sheer down to the Alabama river . . . From the opposite bank spread great flat stretches of marsh and meadow land, while on the other side, behind the town, the formation swells and undulates with gentle rise. As in most southern inland towns, its one great artery, [Market Street], runs from the river bluffs to the Capitol, perched on a high hill a full mile away."¹ DeLeon was but one of many persons drawn to the small southern town because of its sudden rise to prominence as the provisional capital of the Confederate States of America.

After the 1860 election returns revealed that Lincoln would be the next president, the South prepared for action. Montgomery was chosen as the meeting place for a southern convention. Here, it was hoped, a plan of union might be perfected. The selection of Montgomery was not illogical. William Lowndes Yancey promoted southern nationalism in Alabama as effectively as had Robert Barnwell Rhett in South Carolina. The meeting at Montgomery would guarantee South Carolina support in carrying out secession. Furthermore, the city was in a centrally located lower South cotton state.² South Carolina seceded on December 20, 1860, and by February 1, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had also withdrawn from the Union. The date set for the southern convention was February 4, 1861, exactly one month before Lincoln's inauguration.

¹ T[homas] C. DeLeon, **Four Years in Rebel Capitals: An Inside View Of Life In The Southern Confederacy, From Birth To Death** (Mobile, 1890), 23.

² For the selection of the site see Armand J. Gerson, "The Inception of the Montgomery Convention," **Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1910**, 181-187; Laura A. White, **Robert Barnwell Rhett: Father of Secession** (New York, 1931), 191-192; John Witherspoon DuBose, **The Life And Times of William Lowndes Yancey, II** (New York, 1942), 581; Burton J. Hendrick, **Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis And His Cabinet** (New York, 1939), 87-90.

Soon delegates and curiosity seekers began converging on Montgomery. They found a town forty years removed from the frontier, rough and crude yet incongruously sophisticated. Situated at a large bend in the Alabama River, some 331 steamboat miles above Mobile and 839 overland miles from Washington, Montgomery had been an early location for Indian villages and a landing site for eighteenth century traders. Its real growth began after the War of 1812 with the creation of the Alabama Territory in 1817 and the rush to take up the rich lands of this new cotton kingdom.

The town was founded by Georgians and real estate speculators from the North. The land that ultimately became the site of Montgomery was purchased at the federal land sales held at Milledgeville, Georgia, in August 1817. Among the principal buyers were the Georgians General John B. Scott and Dr. Charles Williamson, who were members of the "Alabama Company," and Andrew Dexter, a native of Massachusetts. Within a week Scott and his company were advertising the sale of lots in the "Town of Alabama." Dexter arrived shortly to inspect his purchase before the land was laid off. With the financial assistance of two other easterners, John Falconer and James G. Klinck, Dexter laid off lots a mile east of the prospective "Town of Alabama" and named the new village "Philadelphia." The two settlements became rivals, although Dexter's town was located on higher ground and attracted more immigrants.³

In 1818 a new Alabama Company was formed and founded "East Alabama," another town adjacent to Philadelphia. The rivalry continued for another year, but a movement for unification was successful and both towns were incorporated under the name "Montgomery" on December 3, 1819.⁴ After this Mont-

³ Clanton W. Williams has done important research in the early history of Montgomery. Of special interest are his "Early Ante-Bellum Montgomery: A Black-Belt Constituency," *Journal of Southern History*, VII (November, 1941), 495-525; "Extracts From The Records Of The City Of Montgomery, Alabama, 1820-1821," *The Alabama Review*, I (April, 1948), 79-90; and "Conservatism in Old Montgomery, 1817-1861," *The Alabama Review*, X (April, 1957), 96-110.

⁴ Through the years there has been a controversy concerning the origin of Montgomery's name. There is general agreement that the town was named for Brig. Gen. Richard Montgomery of Revolutionary War fame, while the county was named for Major Lemeul Purnell Montgomery, who was killed at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. Conflicting arguments are presented in *Montgomery Advertiser*, December 13, 16, 1875.

gomery advanced to a position of economic, cultural, and political dominance over the "Black Belt." This region extended across the central part of the state and became famous for its dark, rich soil and heavy concentration of Negroes. For the most part the city and surrounding Montgomery County were populated by economically stable groups. Many settlers were of sufficient affluence to bring their slaves with them and, as a student of the period has shown, ". . . the city never passed through a period of raucous lawlessness such as characterized some pioneer towns of other American frontiers."⁵

By 1846 the Black Belt with the aid of South Alabama was powerful enough to cause the removal of the capital from Tuscaloosa to Montgomery. The struggle, which had been long and bitter, was a sectional victory for the city. Montgomery businessmen built a capitol with privately raised funds, and the public records were moved there in 1847.⁶ The second session of the legislature was abruptly interrupted in December 1849, when the capitol caught fire and was completely destroyed. Proposals to remove the seat of government were overcome, and by 1852 a new state house was in use on Capitol Hill.⁷

Thus, in early 1861 all roads, rough and unpaved as they were, and all railroads, unfinished lines and different gauges to the contrary, led to Montgomery. The most comfortable route was to proceed to Mobile and then take a steamboat up the river to Montgomery. The capital city, normally populated by

⁵ Williams, "Conservatism in Old Montgomery," 100. But see also Warren I. Smith, "Land Patterns in Ante-Bellum Montgomery County, Alabama," *The Alabama Review*, VIII (July, 1955), 196-208.

⁶ Malcolm Cook McMillan, "The Selection of Montgomery as Alabama's Capital," *The Alabama Review*, I (April, 1948), 79-90.

⁷ In 1898 a brochure by James B. Simpson entitled "The Alabama State Capitol An Historical Sketch" was published. Simpson was a longtime resident of Montgomery and knew a great amount of local history. His brochure is republished in *The Alabama Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (Spring, 1956), 81-125. This issue of the journal is devoted entirely to Montgomery history.

Supposedly Andrew Dexter believed from the first that Montgomery would eventually become the state capital and refused to sell the location on which the capitol was constructed. The hill was called "Goat Hill" because it served as a congregating place for that type of animal. When the Marquis de Lafayette visited the city in 1825 an unsuccessful attempt was made to rename the spot "Lafayette Hill." Not until after 1846 did the location achieve the dignified title "Capitol Hill." See *Grove Hill Clarke County Democrat*, May 30, 1877, quoting *Montgomery Advertiser*.

8,843 people, had only three hotels: the Exchange which was equipped for three hundred guests, Montgomery Hall, and Madison House, each constructed to house 150 persons. The crowded situation was partially relieved by private boarding houses scattered throughout the city. Hotel rooms were at a premium and frequently six persons were crowded into a room with accommodations for three. The inability of the town to supply its increased population with adequate living and eating facilities was a source of constant complaint and no small factor in deliberations to remove the capital.

Montgomery was by no means devoid of attractions. Mobile was the largest city in the state, but Montgomery ranked second and had a number of well stocked stores. The population was literate enough to support four newspapers, wicked enough to patronize the theatre (a local thespian society presented "Julius Caesar" as early as 1822 and a theatre opened in 1830), and religious enough to attend any one of a number of churches. All Montgomerians did not consider their new position an unmixed blessing. Mary Boykin Chesnut, whose husband James Chesnut, Jr., was a delegate from South Carolina, conversed with a Montgomery lady who feared the worldly dissipation of Washington and believed Montgomery might become similarly tainted.⁸ DeLeon noted that some Montgomerians "could not get rid of their ideas that odum had come to be imposed on them."⁹

Yet, for the most part, the citizens were pleased to have the capital. What was essentially a provincial society was suddenly transformed into a center of international attention. It was only natural for the citizens to regard the future potential of their city as unlimited. Later Mrs. Chesnut recalled "how exciting it all was there" with "clever men and women congregated from every part of the South."¹⁰

A considerable part of Montgomery's new population was made up of newspapermen. Correspondents were present from southern journals as well as the major northern and European papers. They ranged in prominence from William Howard Rus-

⁸ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary From Dixie* (Edited by Ben Ames Williams) (New York, 1949) 13.

⁹ DeLeon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, 40.

¹⁰ Chesnut, *Diary From Dixie*, 78.

sell of the London *Times* to unknown reporters for weekly journals. Regardless of prestige, these reporters sent their home papers lengthy accounts of the new government's activities. Their reports were frequently inaccurate, although the secret sessions of the convention prompted speculation. Many of these reporters possessed considerable political and philosophical insight and nearly all were imaginative writers.

No newspaper was better represented at Montgomery than the Charleston *Daily Courier*. The newspaper had been founded in 1803 and for years had been one of the leading southern journals. Keeping the Charlestonians informed on affairs at Montgomery became the task of four reporters who signed themselves "Sigma," "Quod," "Sprite," and "Palmetto." This book contains forty-one of their articles. On February 4, the *Courier* announced that it had made arrangements "to receive . . . full reports of the proceedings of the Southern Congress, to be opened this day in Montgomery, Ala.,"¹¹ but further than this, did not identify the writers. On February 13 a Montgomery newspaper mentioned the presence in the city of two *Courier* reporters, N. E. Foard and Henry Sparnick.¹² Sparnick had been an undergraduate at the College of Charleston, and later had been a special correspondent for the *Courier* at Columbia, the state capital. Sparnick followed the Confederate government from Montgomery to Richmond and reported the news from there.¹³ To date, the editors have been unable to identify the real names of the other writers.¹⁴

With a story as important as the birth of a nation, and the attendant elections of a president and vice president, adoption of a constitution, and final resort to war, even the dullest reporter could write interesting accounts. The *Courier's* writers

¹¹Charleston **Daily Courier**, February 4, 1861. For a history of the newspaper see Herbert Ravenal Sass, **Outspoken: 150 Years of The News and Courier** (Columbia, South Carolina, 1953).

¹²Montgomery **Weekly Advertiser**, February 13, 1861.

¹³William L. King, **The Newspaper Press of Charleston, S. C.** (Charleston, 1872), 142.

¹⁴It seems probable that Sparnick was "Sigma." The other journalists, however, remain unknown. Mrs. Granville T. Prior of the South Carolina Historical Society to James P. Jones, January 12, 1961, stated that a search of the Society's files failed to reveal any information on Sparnick or Foard. Thomas R. Waring to William W. Rogers, January 6, 1961, remarked that the present-day Charleston **News and Courier** has no record of the correspondents.

were far from dull. Each was a cultured man whose polished writings had genuine literary merit. Each adopted a sweeping style liberally sprinkled with classical allusions. Nor were they above the frequent use of puns, and their flowing Victorian prose was apparently as effortless as it was interesting. As reporters they reflect much of what was typically southern: extreme patriotism, unwarranted confidence, warmth, impatience, optimism, and a sense of history. They reported the mundane and the significant. They wrote of social affairs, local problems, political issues, military events, both current and impending, and of personalities. What they knew to be true, they reported. As a last resort, they were hardly above recording what they thought to be true. Their guesses, however, were educated ones and frequently proved correct. As South Carolinians they did not slight their home state and frequently the reports were slanted toward their Charleston readers.

Of the included articles, "Sigma" wrote twenty-four, "Sprite" ten, "Palmetto" four, and "Quod" three. None of the writers reported the inauguration of President Davis, and in order to give the narrative continuity, this event, as described by the *Montgomery Advertiser*, is included. All of the reports are unchanged, although the editors have taken the liberty of deleting repetitious material and a few matters so local in nature as to be of limited interest. From their vantage point in the eye of the storm, these four southern writers watched the first important months of their nation's existence.

CHAPTER II

A NEW NATION IS BORN

Immediately after the convention assembled on February 4, the delegates commenced the business of state-making. Despite various inconveniences, the people, old citizens and new arrivals, refused to be completely serious and Montgomery assumed a festive air. The necessity of finding new places to live, the problems of adjustment to a new city, and the renewals of old Washington friendships with the subsequent whirl of social life were matters of importance. Of primary significance, however, was the establishment of a government. The climax to the first phase of the new nation's activities was the presidential inauguration of Jefferson Davis on February 18. "Sigma" arrived at Montgomery early and began dispatching reports to the *Courier*.

Montgomery, February 2, 1861

Although we left Chattanooga on a day propitious to *improper fractions*, through rail road courtesies we were agreeably disappointed in reaching this place in full possession of bodily faculties, for once escaping the mysterious prognostications which append to the name of Friday. Thanks to kind fortune, we were conducted away under the auspices of the genial, popular and gentlemanly JAMES W. MEREDITH, whose name is associated with all the pleasant recollections of the South Carolina Rail Road. At the termination of his route he exhibited to us his far-famed jackass train, the locomotive facilities of which are in competition with the other institution over which he so well presides. From him we parted with regret, which was only mitigated by the kind attentions and facilities afforded us by his successors, Messrs JOHN F. CREWS, Wm. Q. FULLER, and Geo. W. PYLES of the Georgia Rail Road. The system of travel by the latter road is superior in many respects to the revered style of our own roads, particularly with regard to the time of passage. Perhaps we adhere to the cautious system because the security of life and limb is in proportion to the number of miles traveled per hour.¹

¹ Apparently "Sigma" was at Chattanooga when ordered to Montgomery. His circuitous railroad journey, humorously described, became a major military problem later when fast transportation became necessary. See Robert C. Black, *The Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, 1952), *passim*.

The monotony of our thirty hours' journey was at times relieved by halting at the various palatial hotels along the road, where one is informed, by enormous post bills, that all the glittering and seductive viands which might tempt the most epicurean *bon vivants*, could there be obtained by the exhibition of that peculiarly American institution—the half dollar. Into the inmost recesses of these temples of happiness one rushes at a given signal, and makes desperate and futile efforts to comfort his internals by the falsely represented forage. There one exercises a vigorous imagination to believe the difference between the innocent pullet and the diseased, though still pugilistic, twelve-year-old cock. There one, after devouring the so-called tender fowl, has to retire with mouth closed in order to prevent his fellow passengers from being disturbed by the crow of the half-digested rooster. There one perceives inland oysters which, like the sensitive plant, wither at being touched; cheese which recalls the memory of certain towns taken by storm with Dutch cheeses, biscuits so useful as teeth-sharpeners, and coffee which, indeed, is a Mocha-ry. But, if abstinence be a virtue, then were we, by necessity, examples of it uncorrupted. But 'virtue has its own reward,' and if our present host realizes but little in our entertainment, he must charge the difference to the wayside hotels.

Montgomery has a perfect Columbian appearance, bedewed with those moist sprinklings, so favorable to asthma, in the latter town [Columbia, South Carolina], and known as legislative rains. The streets are, through a wise provision of municipal legislation, devoid of crossings, they being dispensed with as superfluous luxuries. The sidewalks by a similar provision, are constructed in a fantastic and irregular manner, so that one navigating thereon must either be regardless of life or must either be constantly on the *qui vive* lest at any time he be precipitated from some huge hill to a bottomless abyss. In fact, there must be a wide field for so much of the practice of law as relates to the suit for damages. The streets were apparently laid out before the surveyor[']s compass was in use and in traversing them I feel the necessity for *Appleton's Guide*, being momentarily in danger of missing my landmarks and fetch-

ing up in Georgia or Mississippi.² The general effect of sandy roads and daily rains is palpably evident upon the structure of the hackney coach cattle. The animals when in motion are constrained by tightened reins, and when stopped are tied to posts to keep . . . their dignity from lowering itself to the level of the dust.

The private residences are generally exceedingly beautiful, the majority being constructed in the style of the Italian villa, surrounded by expensive and carefully kept gardens. In this respect private taste and skill seems to have surpassed the public enterprise. Of the manners of the citizens, it is unnecessary for me to speak. I find the same attachments and attentions which are cordially lavished upon a visitor in any Southern city, and once in Montgomery, one feels immediately at home.³

The Capitol being the place of the meeting of the first Southern Congress, is deserving of notice. It is located on an eminence immediately in front of a main street, and commanding a surview of the whole city. It is built of brick some-

² The reference here was to the widely popular **Appleton's Companion Hand-Book of Travel: Containing A Full Description of the Principal Cities, Towns, and Places of Interest, Together With Hotels and Routes of Travel Through the United States and the Canadas** (New York, 1860). Montgomery's irregular streets prompted a Georgia correspondent from the **Augusta Republic** to write, "an itinerant may easily lose his reckonings in rambling over it." The **Montgomery Weekly Advertiser**, February 27, 1861, did not hesitate to reprint this criticism. It was not long before correspondents had nicknamed Montgomery as the "City of Dogs and Dust." See article by "Secession" writing in **Savannah Republican**, May 11, 1861.

³ Despite certain drawbacks, many visitors were charmed by the city. Jefferson Davis later wrote his wife, "This is a gay and handsome town . . . and will not be an unpleasant residence." See Varina Howell Davis, **Jefferson Davis Ex-President of The Confederate States of America A Memoir By His Wife**, II (New York, 1890), 4. Mrs. Louis Trezevant Wigfall, wife of Louis T. Wigfall of the Texas delegation, recorded, "There are a great many gardens, and as beautiful flowers as I ever saw anywhere. See Mrs. D. Giraud Wright, **A Southern Girl in '61 The War-Time Memories of a Confederate Senator's Daughter** (New York, 1905), 49. William Howard Russell wrote in the **London Times**, May 30, 1861, "... the city looks like a vast aggregate meeting of small country parsonages. The houses are of wood painted white, or of red brick, many only one story in height. The churches are numerous, small, and rather eccentric in the character of architecture." In his **My Diary North and South** (London, 1863), 242, Russell admired the residential areas that were "well-wooded, undulating, villas abounding public gardens, and [with] a large negro and mulatto suburb." The **New York Herald**, February 11, 1861, commented on the town's "numerous elegant stores and private residences."

what after the architectural order of your new Custom House, the exterior presenting the appearance of polished marble, and favors so much the design of the artist as to lend credit to the innocent deception. The main building is flanked by two enormous wings, which are used for legislative chambers, and the whole is surmounted by a graceful rotunda, at the front base of which stands the Town Clock. The right wing on the second floor, generally employed as the Senate Chamber of the Legislature, is being renovated and furnished for accommodation of Congress. In form it is octagonal and is peculiarly designed for its present purposes. Its construction affords the greatest facilities to persons situate[d] in its body for being heard by the chair, which commands the central point opposite the only entrance from the lobby.⁴

SIGMA

Montgomery, February 4, 1861

Today, destined to be the most memorable in the annals of the Gulf States, formerly constituting integral portions of the General Government, lately known as the United States of America, but now deceased, was ushered in under fair and brilliant omens. The glorious sun, whose appearance had been unmanifest for weeks past, now shines forth from silvery parting clouds with undimmed lustre, and the combination of sunshine and a clear, cold bracing air, has rendered exceedingly cheerful the otherwise unpleasant streets. From early morn could be seen gathering together at the public squares and along the most frequented highways, anxious knots of citizens, eagerly converging upon the great Convention which was to decide the destinies of the Southern States. As the hour of noon approached, the high hill upon which stands the Capitol, the compeer of Independence Hall, might have been seen blackened with the dense streams of human life. Vehicle after vehicle, loaded with animate cargoes, deposited their burdens at the same location and lent their numberless inmates to the unnumbered throng. The aged patriot, whose silvery hairs dated

⁴The colorful pro-southern Philadelphian, John Beauchamp Jones, called the capitol "a fine structure with massive columns, on a beautiful elevation..." See his account as most recently edited by Earl Schenck Miers, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary* (New York, 1958), 15.

back to the inception of the first Revolution, and whose tottering footsteps were guided by the hands of filial affection, the inspired mother, whose bosom, inhaling the breath of patriotism, was ready to sacrifice her first born upon her country's altar, the fair girl, whose smile and encouragement were directed to spur on her fond allied to deeds of valor and honor, and the rosy cheeked child, whose first lesson had been learned under the portrait of Washington, these were all there, and . . . one could mark upon their outlines the expression of resolute determination and unsullied patriotism. As we enter the right wing, let us note the appearance of the Chamber and the distribution of its contents.

Immediately opposite the only entrance rises, in majestic grandeur, the dignified rostrum of the Speaker, and over which hangs in simple elegance an original painting of the great prototype of American liberty. Around and on each side of the almost circular apartment, are arranged at given intervals, the portraits of Jackson, Yancey, Clay, Calhoun, Lewis and the historian Pinckney, and beyond these the legendary inscriptions and reminiscences of the Palmetto Regiment, Marion's Dinner and a variety of other prints, calculated to entice memory back to the days of '76 and the modern chivalry of South Carolina.⁵ Clustering around the desk are groups of agile reporters, and on the main body of the floor are going about the ex-Washingtonian lion office-seekers, seeking whom they may devour.⁶ Desk after desk is being occupied by the different members of

⁵ The House Chamber was decorated for the Congress with pictures borrowed from residents. The *Montgomery Weekly Advertiser*, February 6, 1861, remarked that the entrance of the Hall had, on the extreme left, a list of the men in South Carolina's Palmetto Regiment. The regiment had served in the Mexican War. Next there was a picture of George Washington delivering his inaugural address. There were two other pictures of Washington, one a Gilbert Stuart original, hung immediately over the President's desk. Other portraits were of Senator Dixon H. Lewis, a prominent Alabama politician; John C. Calhoun; William L. Yancey; Andrew Jackson; Henry Clay; General Francis Marion, of South Carolina; and Albert J. Pickett, an Alabama writer, whom "Sigma" erroneously identified as the "historian Pinckney."

⁶ The motives of those desiring offices or commissions were undoubtedly mixed and varied. The patriotic motivation was forwarded by President Davis' wife who argued "Very few battled for rank; they were there for service." See Davis, *Memoir By His Wife*, II, 37. Another point of view was that of DeLeon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals*, 24, who wrote "Montgomery was Washington over again; only on a smaller scale, and with the avidity and agility in pursuit of the spoils somewhat enhanced by the freshness of scent."