

The Civil War in Arkansas Research Paper

Nathan Hartzell

University of Arkansas at Little Rock

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### The Civil War in Arkansas

The Civil War took place between 1861 and 1865. Arkansas played a crucial role in this war. Arkansas is located in the South which meant it had large slave populations to work on plantations. The state was divided between the plantation owners in the South and those who lived in the northern parts of the state. This paper will detail the events that unfolded in the state during the war. Primary sources used in this paper include two illustrations of battles that occurred during the war that were created as the war was raging on and a map that was drawn by Union troops occupying parts of Arkansas. Using both primary and secondary sources this paper will educate readers on life in Arkansas from 1861 to 1865.

#### **1860 to 1861**

In the 1850s, most Arkansans were subsistence farmers. However, due to fertile lands in the state's southern and eastern lowlands, a plantation-style system of agriculture began developing. The workers on these plantations were slaves. The expansion of cotton production lead to a massive growth in slavery throughout the state. By 1860, Arkansas was home to more than 110,000 slaves, and "one in five white citizens was a slave owner"(Deblack, 2018). The rising price of cotton brought economic prosperity to the state. There was however a clear gap between the gains being made between the plantation regions in the southeast and northeast parts of the state and other regions. This gap created a division within the state which grew throughout the 1850s. At the time, state politics was dominated by a "Democratic Party machine known as 'The Family'"(Deblack, 2018). These political leaders were in favor of southern rights while the majority of Arkansans were loyal to the union and hoped for a peaceful solution to slavery. The

election of Abraham Lincoln in 1960 is what drew Arkansas into the national crisis. In March 1861, state voters held a convention to consider joining the seven other southern states that had seceded as a result of Abraham Lincoln's anti-slavery platform(see Appendix A). Despite heavy secessionist pressure, the majority of voters rejected all acts of secession. On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina was attacked by Confederate troops. President Lincoln then called for troops from Arkansas to aid in suppressing these attacks. Arkansas was then forced to choose which side they were going to fight for. On May 6, 1861, delegates voted almost unanimously in favor of secession. By 4:00 p.m. that day, Arkansas renounced its affiliation with the United States(Deblack 2018).

## **1862**

Aside from the northern and northwestern parts of the state, the majority of Arkansans were supportive and enthusiastic about the decision to secede. In February 1862, fighting began in the state. A 12,000-man Union army chased confederate troops out of Missouri and crossed the border into Arkansas. The two armies fought for two day near a Plateau called Pea Ridge in northwest Arkansas(see Appendix B). By the end of the second day, it was clear that Union troops had won the battle. "Running short of ammunition, Van Dorn abandoned the battlefield"("Civil War Battles in Arkansas", n.d.). Confederate Major General Earl Van Dorn took his troops east of the Mississippi River and the Union controlled Missouri for the next few years to come. The removal of his troops left Arkansas defenseless. In May, a union army moving south from Missouri was threatening to take the state capital of Little Rock. However, local militia and Texas cavalrymen forced the Union troops to abandon their plan. The troops instead headed eastward across the state freeing slaves and destroying property. In late May,

Thomas Hindman was sent to Arkansas by the Confederate high command to take command of the region. Upon arrival, Hindman “declared martial law, established factories, strictly enforced the conscription act, executed deserters, and ordered the immediate burning of all cotton that might be seized by “the Federals”(Deblack, 2018). Hindman also established groups of guerilla fighters who were to raid Union troops and interfere with their lines of supply. These fighters contributed to the eventual break down of law and order within the state. Hindman’s harsh actions gave him a bad reputation with both Confederate sympathizers and Unionists. This led to him being stripped of his role of commander of the region. Hindman did manage to create an army with a fighting chance within the state. On December 7, 1862, Hindman moved 12,000 troops from Fort Smith to Prairie Grove in northwest Arkansas. Here, the Confederate troops fought three divisions of Union troops. Both sides suffered mass casualties and the battle ended in a draw. Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove were important parts of securing Missouri for the Union, but the Union still had much to do in order to regain control of Arkansas. This first year of war seriously disrupted civil society within the state. Local governments failed, crime increased, and items such as coffee, tea, and salt had disappeared in the Southern regions. The struggle would continue in the state the way no one could’ve predicted for the next two and a half years. The fight for southern rights would quickly become the fight for survival for many Arkansans.

### **1863**

In January of 1863, a 50,000-man union army from Vicksburg, MS came up the Arkansas River and attacked the 5,000 confederate soldiers stationed at Arkansas Post(see Appendix C). Almost all soldiers were taken prisoner and large amounts of weapons, supplies, and ammo were lost. By the summer of 1863, it was clear that a major victory was needed to turn things around

for the confederate forces. Major General Theophilus Holmes came up with such a plan. His troops were to attack Helena, a busy commercial and agricultural center that had been taken by Union forces the previous July. The attack began the morning of July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1863. Like most of their previous attacks, it was a colossal failure. 1,600 confederate troops were killed and the city was not successfully captured. The timing couldn't have been worse for the Confederacy because just a day before, General Robert E. Lee's troops were driven out of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania suffering major casualties. Additionally, on the same day as the attack on Helena, confederate troops surrendered at the confederate stronghold in Vicksburg. In August, a 6,000-man Union army moved west from Helena toward Little Rock. Along the way they were joined by 6,000 cavalry soldiers. By the time the troops neared Little Rock, the number of soldiers had risen to nearly 14,000. On September 10<sup>th</sup>, the troops moved into the vicinity of the city. Confederate soldiers were forced to leave the city later that afternoon. Other soldiers also retreated from outposts in Fort Smith and Pine Bluff and re-stationed themselves along with the state's government in the town of Washington. This town would be state's confederate capital for the rest of the war. In October, Confederate troops tried once again to gain the upper hand in the war. 2,000 troops moved north from Princeton to attack a 550-man Union army in Pine Bluff. The attack took place on the morning of October 24<sup>th</sup>. Despite a valiant effort, the Confederate troops were unable to retake the city. This was the last military campaign in the state in 1863.

### **1864**

After Little Rock was lost to the Unionists, General Frederick Steele prepared to establish a loyal state government. In January 1864, state Unionists drafted a new constitution. Little changed in this new constitution except for the outlawing of slavery and repudiation of

secession. In March, Union forces began a military campaign known as the Red River Expedition(see Appendix D). The goal of the operation was to destroy remaining Confederate forces in southern Arkansas and take millions of dollars' worth of Confederate cotton and supplies. The operation was a disaster as both Arkansas and Louisiana Union armies were defeated in pursuit. General Steele was forced to halt his advance on Shreveport, LA due to lack of supplies and increased resistance. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, his troops occupied the recently abandoned town of Camden. His troops remained there until April 26<sup>th</sup>. In September, General Sterling Price commanded a 12,000-man army into Missouri. The troops were defeated near the Kansas border on October 23<sup>rd</sup> and were forced to retreat south. This was the last major military campaign in the state during the Civil War. In November, Abraham Lincoln was re-elected for a second term as President. It wasn't until June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1865, that the war officially ended in the state but by then there was no Confederate presence remaining.

The Civil War in Arkansas was a huge disaster. Over 10,000 people lost their lives with thousands of others injured. The state was devastated as millions of dollars in property loss was dealt. Without the disastrous Confederate campaign failures in Arkansas, there is potential that the outcome of the war could have been impacted. It's safe to say that the failure of the Confederate presence in Arkansas aided the Union in their victory. Had the Union not won the war, it's scary to think where the United States would currently stand on the practice of slavery.

### References

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Resolutions Passed by the Convention of the People of Arkansas. (1861, March 20). *The Democrat Print*.

## Appendix A

**RESOLUTIONS**  
—PASSED BY THE—  
**CONVENTION OF THE PEOPLE OF ARKANSAS,**  
On the 20th day of March, 1861.

We, the people of the State of Arkansas, in convention assembled, in view of the unfortunate and distracted condition of our once happy and prosperous country, and of the alarming dissensions existing between the northern and southern sections thereof, and desiring that a fair and equitable adjustment of the same may be made, do hereby declare the following to be just causes of complaint on the part of the people of the southern States against their brethren of the northern, or non-slaveholding States.

1. The people of the northern States have organized a political party, purely sectional in its character; the central and controlling idea of which is hostility to the institution of African slavery, as it exists in the southern States, and that party has elected a President and Vice President of the United States, pledged to administer the government upon principles inconsistent with the rights, and subversive of the interests of the people of the southern States.
2. They have denied to the people of the southern States the right to an equal participation in the benefits of the common territories of the Union by refusing them the same protection to their slave property therein that is afforded to other property, and by declaring that no more slave states shall be admitted into the Union. They have by their prominent men and leaders, declared the doctrine of the irrepressible conflict, or the assertion of the principle that the institution of slavery is incompatible with freedom, and that both cannot exist at once, that this continent must be wholly free or wholly slave. They have, in one or more instances, refused to surrender negro thieves to the constitutional demand of the constituted authority of a sovereign State.
3. They have declared that Congress possesses, under the constitution, and ought to exercise, the power to abolish slavery in the territories, in the District of Columbia, and in the forts, arsenals and dock-yards of the United States, within the limits of the slaveholding States.
4. They have, in disregard of their constitutional obligations, obstructed the faithful execution of the fugitive slave laws by enactments of their State legislatures.
5. They have denied the citizens of southern States the right of transit through non-slaveholding States with their slaves, and the right to hold them while temporarily sojourning therein.
6. They have degraded American citizens by placing them upon an equality with negroes at the ballot box.

To redress the grievances hereinbefore complained of, and as a means of restoring harmony and fraternal good will between the people of all the states, the following amendments to the constitution of the United States are proposed:

1. The President and Vice President of the United States shall each be chosen alternately from a slaveholding and non-slaveholding state—but, in no case, shall both be chosen from slaveholding or non-slaveholding states.
2. In all the territory of the United States now held, or which may hereafter be acquired, situate north of latitude 36 deg. 30 min., slavery, or involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime, is prohibited while such territory shall remain under territorial government. In all the territory now held, or which may hereafter be acquired, south of said line of latitude, slavery of the African race is hereby recognized as existing, and shall not be interfered with by Congress, but shall be protected as property by all the departments of the territorial government during its continuance. And when any territory, north or south of said line, within such boundaries as Congress may prescribe, shall contain the population requisite for a member of Congress, according to the then federal ratio of representation of the people of the United States, it shall, if its form of government be republican, be admitted into the Union on an equal footing with the original States, with or without slavery, as the constitution of such new State may provide.
3. Congress shall have no power to legislate upon the subject of slavery, except to protect the citizen in his right of property in slaves.
4. That in addition to the provisions of the third paragraph of the second section of the fourth article of the constitution of the United States, Congress shall have power to provide by law, and it shall be its duty so to provide, that the United States shall pay to the owner who shall apply for it, the full value of his fugitive slave in all cases when the marshal or other officer whose duty it was to arrest said fugitive was prevented from so doing by violence; or when, after arrest, said fugitive was rescued by force, and the owner thereby prevented and obstructed in the pursuit of his remedy for the recovery of his fugitive slave under the said clause of the constitution and the laws made in pursuance thereof. And in all such cases, when the United States shall pay for such fugitive, they shall have the right, in their own name, to sue the county in which said violence, intimidation, or rescue was committed, and to recover from it, with interest and damages, the amount paid by them for said fugitive slave. And the said county, after it has paid said amount to the United States, may, for its indemnity, sue and recover from the wrong doers or rescuers, by whom the owner was prevented from the recovery of his fugitive slave, in like manner as the owner himself might have sued and recovered.
5. The third paragraph of the second section of the fourth article of the constitution, shall not be construed to prevent any of the States from having concurrent jurisdiction with the United States, by appropriate legislation, and through the action of their judicial and ministerial officers, from enforcing the delivery of fugitives from labor to the person to whom such service or labor is due.
6. Citizens of slaveholding States when traveling through, or temporarily sojourning with their slaves in non-slaveholding States, shall be protected in their right of property in such slaves.
7. The elective franchise and the right to hold office, whether federal, State, territorial or municipal, shall not be exercised by persons of the African race, in whole or in part.
8. These amendments, and the third paragraph of the second section of the first article of the constitution, and the third paragraph of the second section of the fourth article thereof, shall not be amended or abolished without the consent of all the States.

That the sense of the people of the United States may be taken upon the amendments above proposed.

*Resolved, By the people of Arkansas in convention assembled.* That we recommend the calling of a convention of the States of the federal Union, at the earliest practicable day, in accordance with the provisions of the fifth article of the constitution of the United States.

*2. Resolved further,* That the President of this convention transmit to the President and Congress of the United States, and to the Governors and legislatures of the several States, a copy of these proceedings.

*3. Resolved further,* That looking to the call of a national convention, as recommended in the first resolution above, this convention elect five delegates to represent the State of Arkansas in such convention.

*4. Resolved further,* That a committee of five delegates of this convention be appointed to prepare an address to the people of the United States urging upon them the importance of a united effort on the part of the patriotic citizens of all sections and parties to save the country from the dangers which impend it, and which threaten its destruction—and especially, to arrest the reckless and fanatical spirit of sectionalism north and south, which, if not arrested, will inevitably involve us in a bloody civil war.

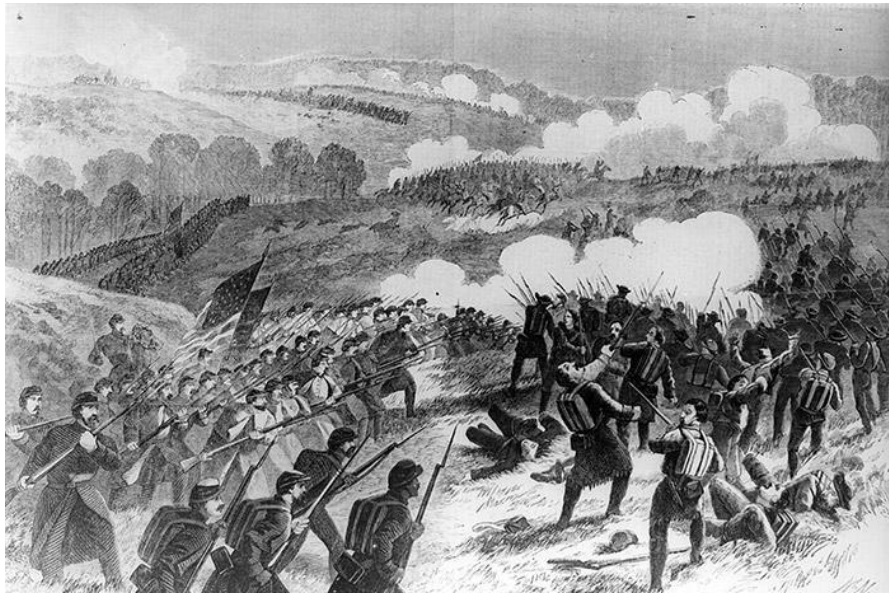
From Bancroft's Ann., 1861, Book, Ark.



This excerpt is from the first meeting of the secession convention shortly after the start of the war.

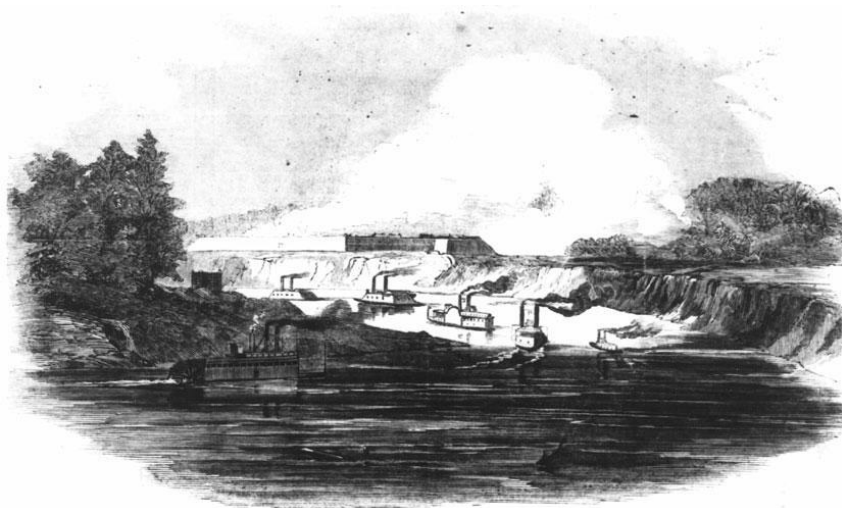
Members of the convention are defending the practice of slavery. (March 20<sup>th</sup>, 1861)

## Appendix B



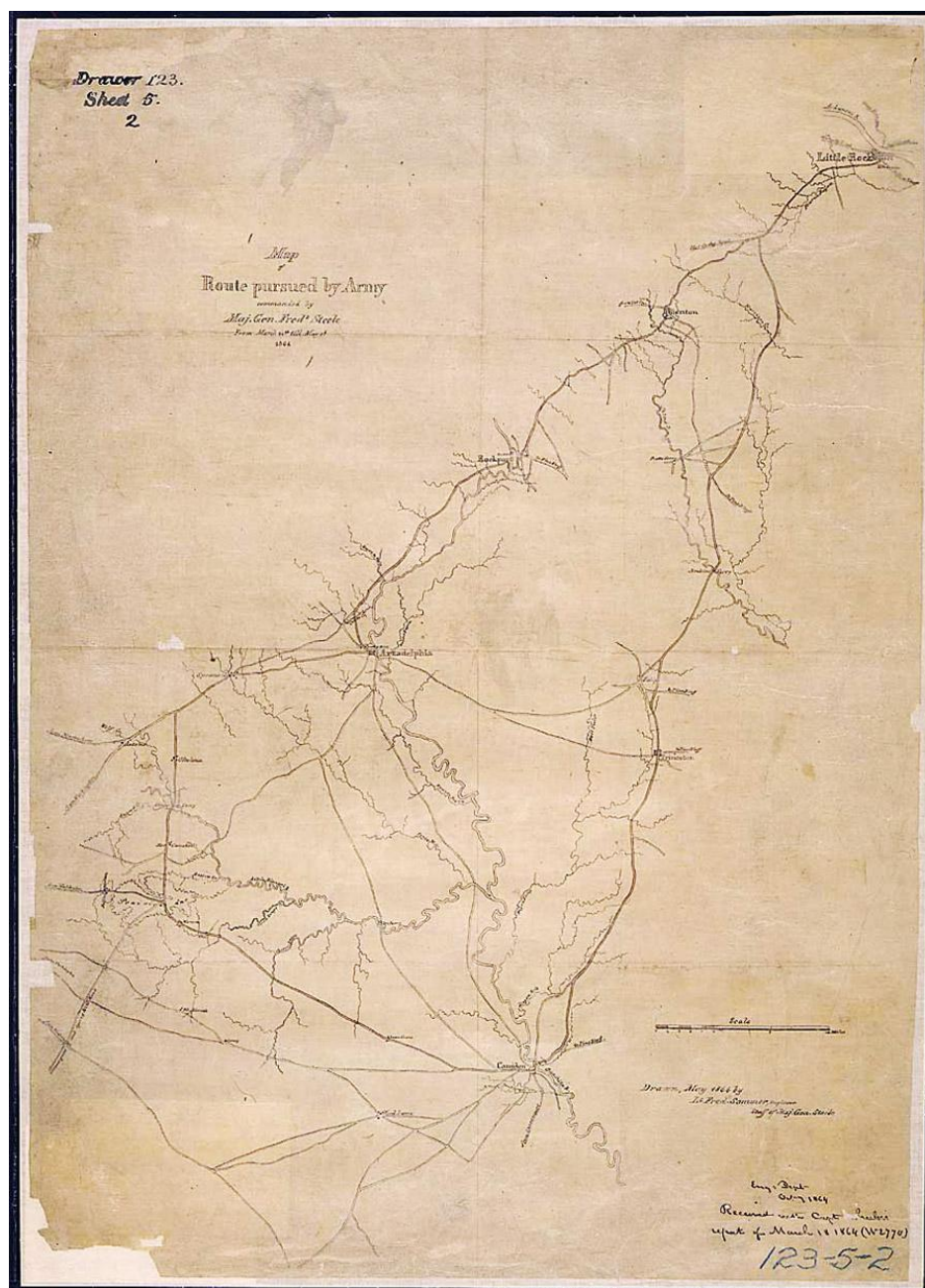
Depiction of the Battle of Pea Ridge that occurred on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1862. This photo was published in the May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1862 issue of *Harper's Ferry*.

## Appendix C



This image illustrates the attack on Arkansas Post that occurred in January of 1863. This image was published in the February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1863 issue of *Harper's Ferry*.

## Appendix D



Map of the route taken by General Steele's army from Little Rock to Camden from March 24<sup>th</sup> to May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1864. The map was drawn by a member of General Steele's engineer staff, Fredrick Sommer.