

**Volume 13**

**Number 050**

**Jamestown Journey: Decision, 1861 -**  
**II**

**Lead: In Spring 1861, the nation held its breath. Would Virginia remain with the union or become the leader of the Confederacy?**

**Intro.: Dan Roberts and *A Moment in Time* with *Jamestown - Journey of Democracy*, tracing the global advance of democratic ideals since the founding of Jamestown, Virginia in 1607.**

**Content: In that spring of great discontent, Virginians were in a quandary. While deep South sentiment had been more unified --**

**lopsided majorities have voted for leaving -- opinion was much more constructive in the Commonwealth. Many Virginians, primarily in some western counties, firmly opposed disunion.**

**Throughout the South there was a widespread belief that the threat of further secession would force the federal government to resolve festering issues in a way favorable to the south. Many also believe that the Yankees were cowards and never would go to war simply to preserve something as ephemeral as the Union. If the advocates for Southern Independence thought they were going to have an easy way out, they had not reckoned with President**

## **Lincoln.**

**Lincoln, however, had his own problems. The president had to forge a consensus in the North on how to deal with the deep South rebellion and not spoke with the rest of the South into doing the same. He was open to negotiation. By April, there was consensus in the cabinet for offering to trade a fork for state. Lincoln was willing to give up Fort Sumter to South Carolina if Virginia would stay in the Union.**

**Yet, in the days leading up to the attack on Fort Sumter, if the streets and the press in Richmond were any indication, calls for secession were accelerating. A vigorous campaign by**

**advocates of secession was suppressing an intimidating pro-Union sentiment in the state.**

**On April 4<sup>th</sup>, the Virginia convention had voted against secession 18 nine to 45 and to remain in the Union. Lincoln's attempt to resupply Fort Sumter prompted the Confederacy to take the first shot. Then, with an aroused northern public opinion and a suddenly focused cabinet Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the rebellion. For the remaining Virginians sitting on the fence and for many previous pro-unionist, Lincoln's action settled the issue a second vote was taken on April 17 and the Virginia convention voted 88 to 55 to**

**recommend secession. On May 23, 1861, Virginia officially decided on secession in a statewide referendum. The vote was 125,952 to 20,373.**

**Civil War historian Bruce Callahan, writing in *The Coming Fury*, confirmed as a “Virginia’s refusal to join the Confederacy during the winter had never meant anything more than a desire to wait and see, a thin hope that the deep South might yet get all it wanted without having to establish a brand-new nation.**

**"Having waited, Virginia now had seen; the thin little hope was dead; and Virginia would be out of the Union just as soon as the most meager**

**formalities could be attended to."**

**This series is supported by the Jamestown 400th Federal Commission with its International Conference Series on the Foundations and Future of Democracy, see [jamestownjourney.org](http://jamestownjourney.org), at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

#### Resources

**Catton, Bruce. *The Coming Fury*. New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1961.**

**Davis, William C. and James I. Robertson, Jr., eds. *Virginia War: 1861*.  
Lexington: the University of Kentucky Press, 2005.**

**A powerful new resource on the Civil War is now available to the listeners of *A Moment in Time*. In 2006 the American Civil War Center opened in the old Tredegar Iron Works near the Canal Walk in downtown Richmond, Virginia. Telling the story from the perspective of Blue, Gray and Black, the center will help visitors see the war as part of a national struggle to define the legacy of the American Revolution and that of the founders. See:**

**[www.tredegar.org](http://www.tredegar.org).**

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