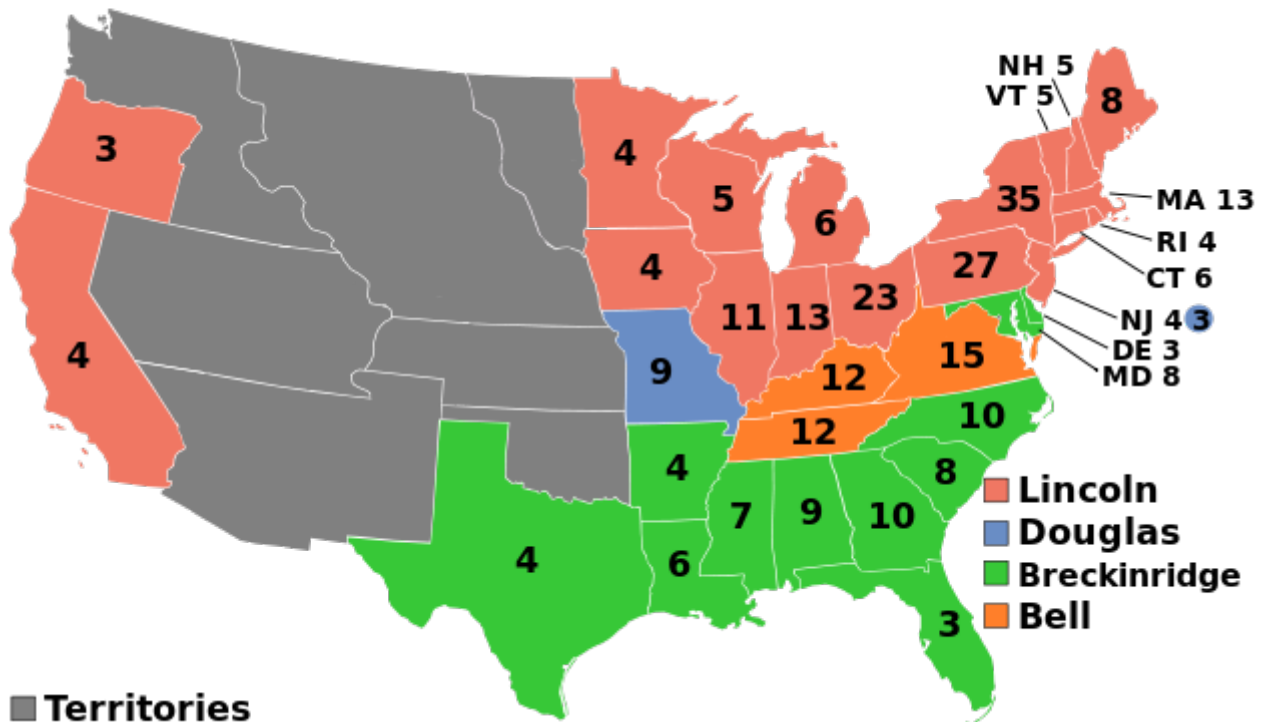


Six days after U.S. voters elected Abraham Lincoln to serve as America's 16th President, people in South Carolina held a meeting to endorse a call from the State's Legislature to hold a Secession Convention. Lincoln had not carried a single Southern state, as this 1860 election map depicts.



South Carolinians were very worried that the new President would not be supportive of South Carolina's right to run its own business, in its own state, including its slave-based plantation system. Perhaps the answer, to South Carolina's dilemma—whether to stay within the Union of States or to leave it—could be addressed (and answered) in a Secession Convention.

Around 2,500 individuals filled a gathering place in Charleston, known then as Institute Hall and later as Secession Hall, where a meeting was held on November 12, 1860. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* reported on the meeting in its November 24, 1860 issue. The centerfold—shown above—appearing between pages 8 and 9, has [this title](#):

Great mass meeting to endorse the call of the Legislature of South Carolina for a state convention to discuss the question of secession from the Union, held at Institute Hall, Charleston, S.C., on Monday, Nov. 12, 1860.

After the November 12th endorsement to move forward with a Secession Convention, South Carolina held a state-wide election—on December 6, 1860—to select delegates to that Convention. This was a mere thirty days after the 1860 presidential election had turned Abraham Lincoln into America's President-Elect.

The wheels were turning very fast on South Carolina's leave-the-Union vehicle. America's Founding Fathers had built-in a mechanism by which States could leave the Union. This is the question that the 170 delegates, to

South Carolina's Secession Convention, would have to decide: Should South Carolina stay or leave?

Answering the question was not as simple as one might think, looking back with 21st-century eyes. If South Carolina seceded from the Union, for example, what would happen to the federal-government employees who were currently working in South Carolina?

One of those federal employees was a U.S. District-Court Judge, [Andrew Gordon Magrath](#), who chaired the November 12th meeting at Institute Hall. He had walked out of his courtroom the day after Lincoln was elected.

Magrath wasn't the only federal employee to resign from his job. Even [James Henry Hammond](#), one of South Carolina's U.S. Senators, had decided to join the rebel cause.

Hammond did not take this step easily and did not consider it lightly. He had once observed, in his private diary, that if he had to choose between saving the Union and saving slavery, he would save the Union. When the time came for his decision, however, he resigned his office as U.S. Senator.

The Secession-Convention delegates [initially met at the First Baptist Church of Columbia](#). It was the 17th of December, 1860, and the delegates were prepared to vote whether to leave or stay within the Union.

Then a confirmed case of smallpox caused the delegates to change their minds about the meeting place. Instead of continuing their discussion at Columbia's First Baptist Church, they moved the meeting to Charleston.

Arriving in Charleston, by train, the delegates formed a committee to draft a secession ordinance which all of the delegates could consider. John Inglis, from [Cheraw](#), was selected as [the committee's chair](#).

This was the Ordinance which the delegates considered on December 20, 1860:

At a Convention of the People of the State of South Carolina, begun and holden at Columbia on the Seventeenth day of December in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty and thence continued by adjournment to Charleston, and there by divers adjournments to the Twentieth day of December in the same year -

AN ORDINANCE to dissolve the union between the State of South Carolina and other States united with her under the compact entitled "The Constitution of the United States of America."

We, the people of the State of South Carolina, in convention assembled, do declare and ordain, and it is hereby declared and ordained, That the ordinance adopted by us in convention on the twenty-third day of May, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, whereby the Constitution of the United States of America was ratified, and also all acts and parts of acts of the General Assembly of this State ratifying amendments of the said Constitution, are hereby repealed; and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of the "United States of America," is hereby dissolved.

Done at Charleston the twentieth day of December, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty.

[signed] D.F. Jamison Delegate from Barnwell and President of the Convention

[signatures of delegates to the convention]

Attest: Benj. J. Arthur, Clerk of the Convention

Delegates to South Carolina's Secession Convention approved this Ordinance with a vote of 169 to 0.

Not every South Carolinian viewed this development with exuberance. [James L. Petigru](#), a Federal Judge who was born soon after George Washington's presidential inauguration (in 1789), was very concerned about the decision which his state had made to secede from the Union.

He wasn't circumspect when choosing his words to describe what was happening in South Carolina, however. He observed that:

South Carolina is too small for a republic and too large for a lunatic-asylum. (Quoted by Walter B. Edgar in *South Carolina: A History*, at [page 355](#).)

Journalists, in South Carolina, were waiting for the results of America's first-ever secession vote before spreading the likely news. The Library of Congress tells us that:

Within minutes of its passage the ordinance appeared as a Charleston Mercury extra edition.

What was the *Mercury's* headline, in its "Extra" edition?

The Union Is Dissolved!

CHARLESTON MERCURY

EXTRA:

*Passed unanimously at 1.15 o'clock, P. M. December
20th, 1860.*

AN ORDINANCE

*To dissolve the Union between the State of South Carolina and
other States united with her under the compact entitled "The
Constitution of the United States of America."*

*We, the People of the State of South Carolina, in Convention assembled, do declare and ordain, and
it is hereby declared and ordained,*

*That the Ordinance adopted by us in Convention, on the twenty-third day of May, in the
year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight, whereby the Constitution of the
United States of America was ratified, and also, all Acts and parts of Acts of the General
Assembly of this State, ratifying amendments of the said Constitution, are hereby repealed;
and that the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of
"The United States of America," is hereby dissolved.*

THE
UNION
IS
DISSOLVED!

Click on the top-of-the-page image for a full-page view.

Credits:

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