

# SC. Secession Convention

## They Say . . .

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Bits taken from our old files—  
History, Politics, Humor! Ori-  
gin Unknown; Contents Good.



"No greater calamity can befall a people than to break utterly with its past; and if we forget our ancestors we ourselves are unworthy to be remembered."

### THE SECESSION CONVENTION

Brief Sketch Prepared for The State in 1901 by Jos. Daniel Pope, at That Time One of Nine Survivors

The following sketch of the secession convention of South Carolina was prepared for The State by Col. Jos. Daniel Pope, who took a prominent part in those proceedings, the article having been published in The State of May 9, 1901:

"You ask me to tell you of the secession convention," said Col. Joseph Daniel Pope. "It would be with some diffidence that I should speak of that body, for I was one of its members, though one of the youngest and most conspicuous.

"That is a tremendous subject, and I do not know where to touch upon it. For you see the adoption of the ordinance of secession was merely an incident. The convention was in session at intervals covering a period of three years and had grave questions of State and vast issues before it. I would hardly know where to begin in giving my impression of that convention.

"Well, there is one rather important incident which I recall. A resolution had been introduced authorizing the election of a commission to communicate with other States and to urge them to join in the formation of a new union of States or a confederation. There was a great debate over the question of how or in what manner to proceed to form this government. The convention adopted a resolution, which I introduced, that the number of commissioners be equivalent to the number of congressmen from this State and that these commissioners together with those from other States compose the provisional congress of the Southern States, elect a president and vice president of the new federation and frame a constitution.

"I recall another incident which may be of historical value. I was a member of the legislature and

was chairman of the house committee on (federal) relations. There was no such committee in the convention, as there was no federal government just after the State divorced itself from the Union. But this committee which had to do with matters pertaining to the United States government was styled the committee on (foreign) relations. I was a member of this committee. Wm. Porcher Miles, afterwards president of the South Carolina college, was chairman. He died just a year ago.

"Within two days after the convention assembled, Mr. Miles proposed a resolution that the governor issue letters of marque and reprisal. This was referred to the committee on foreign relations. This was a very grave question and I opposed it on the ground that the letters should be issued by the government of the Southern States, not by the State. The committee divided, 5 to 4, and the majority favored Mr. Miles' proposition. The granting of letters of "marque and reprisal" would have meant that the owners of vessels be commissioned to go out upon the seas and capture merchantment belonging to citizens of the United States.

"We had a great fight over the question when it was reported to the convention. I submitted a minority report. The convention finally rejected the majority report.

Now, in retrospect, I can see that Mr. Miles was right and his course for-seeing was inevitable. The South had no navy. Had letters of marque been issued, the seas could have been scoured and wandering ships captured and brought into Charleston harbor. Then they could have been towed up the Cooper river, belted and plated with chains and metal and changed from harmless sailing vessels to men-of-war. I am quite sure that no less than 25 vessels could have been fitted out this way. In fact this was done later, but not until after the blockade when the Star of the West was

fired on as she was attempting to take supplies to the United States soldiers in Fort Sumter. The addition of 24 war vessels to our feeble navy might have changed the fortunes of war.

Was the ordinance of secession passed in compliance with the wishes of the people? Yes indeed. There was very little opposition. The desire to secede had been growing ever since 1852 when it had been strongly proposed. There were strong men who opposed secession, but had they been delegates they would, no doubt, have signed the ordinance in response to the wishes of the people. The leading opponents of secession were: Judge Geo. Bryan of Charleston, Gov. B. F. Perry of Greenville, and Mr. James L. Petigru, a very distinguished lawyer.

"Now as to the ordinance itself. A committee with Judge John A. Inglis as chairman was appointed to draw up a suitable instrument. By virtue of Chancellor Inglis rank on the committee it has been supposed that he wrote the ordinance. However, it has been shown on good authority and Chancellor Inglis himself gave due credit that Chancellor Francis Hugh Wardlaw wrote the ordinance.

"The convention was sitting in Charleston at the time, and the ordinance was adopted and signed about 9 o'clock at night. The news that this had been done was received with glad acclaim by the populace amid the ringing of bells and the shouting of women and children marching in a joyous frame of mind along with the men.

"There is little information to be gathered from the printed records, for there was the utmost caution and secrecy about the workings of the convention. It would not have done to let the Northern people know prematurely what was being planned. The convention met two or three times

a year for three years. The duties of the convention was manifold. It managed the government of the State. There was indeed a legislature, but its work was to look after domestic affairs. The convention was never dissolved. It was called to meet after the evacuation of Charleston, but did not do so, for Gov. McGrath was at that time made a prisoner of war and the State was demoralized.

"In the little State of South Carolina two great bodies were in session at the same time, for the legislature, too, consisted of strong men. In the convention were some of the finest debates of which one can conceive—they had

grand themes, tremendous issues upon which to think and speak. In intelligence and in strength the convention has no superior body in the history of the country. All of the judges, the members of congress, ex-governors, learned divines and great legal lights went to make up its membership. It was in fact one of the grandest political bodies ever assembled in any nation."