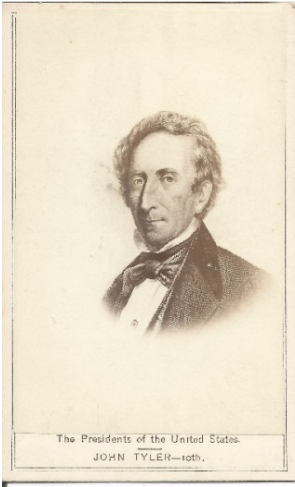


Chapter 274 - Ex-President John Tyler's National Peace Conference Meets In Washington

Time: February 4, 1861

The "Old Gentlemen's Convention" Opens



John Tyler (1790-1862)

On February 4, 1861 John Tyler's Peace Conference convenes in the capital, after being endorsed by Buchanan two weeks earlier.

All told, the event draws 131 men to the prestigious Willard Hotel, some four blocks east of the White House. The assembly is nothing if not prestigious, with a list of "former" elites including: 50 congressmen, 14 senators, 19 governors, 12 Supreme Court justices, 6 cabinet members and, of course, one former U.S. President, John Tyler.

Republicans initially plan to boycott the conference, but then decide they must appear in order to counter any possible stampede toward secession that might materialize. Thus the Northern attendees include party members such as Salmon Chase, William Fessenden, David Wilmot, Stephen Logan and others.

Fourteen Free States are represented along with seven Slave States.

Critics of the affair immediately christen it the "Old Gentlemen's Convention," with 74 attendees being fifty years or older, and 19 into their seventies.

Time: February 6, 1861

A Committee Is Formed To Save The Union By Saving The Upper South

The hope going into the convention is that Tyler will announce his plan for keeping his home state of Virginia in the Union.

In turn that outcome might suffice to keep the other seven states in the Upper South from exiting, and even convince the eight that have already left to return.

Secession Status As Of February 6, 1861

Already Out	Still In
South Carolina	Virginia
Mississippi	Delaware
Florida	Maryland
Alabama	North Carolina
Georgia	Kentucky
Louisiana	Tennessee
Texas	Missouri
	Arkansas
(7)	(8)

But no such proposal comes from Tyler in his opening remarks to the attendees.

Instead he offers a perfunctory statement that his intent is not to bury the Union but to save it:

The country is in danger (and) one must take the place assigned him in the great work of reconciliation and adjustment....You have before you, gentlemen, a task...to snatch from ruin a great and glorious Confederation, to preserve the Government, and to renew and invigorate the Constitution.

With that said, administrative matters follow leading predictably to the formation of yet another committee to search for a fresh solution.

The chairman is James Guthrie of Kentucky, ex-Treasury Secretary under Pierce and Buchanan and a dedicated Union man.

He is joined by one representative from each of the twenty other attending states. Together they will spend the next two weeks going back and forth, getting nowhere.