

Chapter 152 - Pro-Unionists Prevail At the Nashville Convention

Time: June 3, 1850

The Southern Convention Opens In Nashville

John C. Calhoun's final speech to the Senate, before his death on March 31, 1850, calls for the South to gather together to address the obvious threats he sees to the region's well-being.

This results in a convention held at the McKendree Methodist Church in Nashville to discuss Southern grievances related to slavery and try to arrive at a coordinated plan of resistance against the perceived threats from the North.

Attendance, however, is uneven and foreshadows the outcome.

Only five of the fifteen total "slave states" send official representatives: Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia, Georgia and Texas. Four others (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida and Tennessee) send "observers" – while the remaining six states (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina and Louisiana) stay home.

Still a total of 196 delegates do appear, including members of both the Democratic and Whig parties.

The agenda is dominated by the "Fire-eaters," among them Governor John Quitman of Mississippi who hopes that Nashville will lead to the South's "constitutional right" to secede.

That in effect becomes the "test" for the outcome: can the Fire-eaters of the deep South convince their colleagues to at least threaten disunion?

Time: June 3-11, 1849

The Moderates Reject The Fire-eater's Proposals

At the convention, the Fire-Eaters ring the alarms of Southern disaster on the horizon:

- The future economic prosperity of the South rests on the demand for, and prices of, their cotton and their slaves.
- The only path to securing this demand lies in extending slavery into the west.
- The North is now firmly committed to opposing this expansion.

- To avoid this looming economic disaster the South must threaten to secede.

Their pleas, however, are met once again by Unionists who regard secession as too extreme – even traitorous – and instead want to keep pushing for compromise.

The meeting drags on over nine days, before it closes with 28 resolutions, among them assertions that:

- Slavery is indeed sanctioned by the Constitution;
- Clay's Compromise Bill is to be resisted; and
- The best option lies in extending the 36°30' Missouri Line to the Pacific.

Finally agreement is reached to reconvene if Congress fails to arrive at proper accommodations before the current session adjourns.

This outcome is a far cry from what the Fire-eaters wanted to achieve.

Instead it signals that the majority of Southerners retain some hope that a new Compromise Bill can be passed to save the Union.