

A Tale of Two Cities

What's in a Capital City?

*"We have a fine climate, a productive country, and a virtuous and intelligent population ...
[W]e can supply all the officers of the government with old bacon and fresh greens and a cigar and bottle of old
Bourbon or Tice's Best on Saturday nights."
Editor of the Upson Pilot in Thomaston, Georgia
in a public bid to become the Confederate capital, February 16, 1861*

Every nation has the right to choose its capital city. The USA chose Philadelphia as its temporary capital as Washington, DC was being built. Similarly, Montgomery became the provisional capital of the Confederacy until a permanent capital was identified. Why did the Confederacy choose Montgomery and, later, Richmond? Why not Atlanta or Charleston; or Columbia, New Orleans, or Mobile? All are fine cities, and each could have served as the Confederacy's capital.

Keep in mind that at the time of secession, few expected armed conflict with the Union, and none expected conflict on the scale to come. Also, at the time it was formed, February 4, 1861, the Confederacy consisted of only seven states: (in order of secession) South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas (it had passed its ordinance of secession on February 1 but was awaiting the results of a referendum vote on February 23). More were expected but were not guaranteed. They were joined a few months later by Virginia (April 17), Arkansas (May 6), North Carolina (May 21), and Tennessee (June 8). Other hopefuls didn't make it: Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri.

Let's consider what might go into selecting a city to be the Confederacy's capital – the selection criteria, as it were:

- First and foremost: political utility – will the selection serve to better unite the nation and advance its interests? What is the city's value – the role it would play – in building, administering, and defending the new nation? Deciding upon a capital was a strategic political decision that would have long-ranging effect.
- Commercial (suitable lodging, eating, and social establishments – reputable and some perhaps not-so-reputable) and administrative (political) infrastructure sufficient to support a national government. This was no small consideration. In Montgomery, for example, the Confederate Congress met in the Alabama statehouse. The Montgomery Insurance Building was turned into the Government House and given over for cabinet offices. The city was swamped with office seekers, coming by the hundreds. The operations of the Confederate government grew so rapidly that by March, the postal department was moved to another building. Military companies filled Montgomery as well as the Confederate Army organized. And, of course, a "White House" for President Davis had to be found. Montgomery's population doubled in the spring of 1861. Richmond later underwent a similar expansion. Its population is estimated to have quadrupled during the war.

- Lines of Communication (LOC) network — road (stagecoach and wagon), rail, water, topography (mountains, swamps), and climate (including availability of natural resources, seasonal and permanent). To be effective, a capital city must be easily accessible. The city must also facilitate expected growth due to becoming a capital. This extends to news outlets, printing and publishing capabilities, and public utilities such as telegraphy.
- Presence of strategic (wartime) industry and manufacturing facilities. The nearness of the national capital could serve as a stiffener in the region's defense, and proximity would give better control over vital resources. Overall, Confederate industrial and manufacturing capability was scattered across the Southern states. All would be important to the war effort, but the relative concentration in some areas heightened their strategic value. Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, for example, was the largest of its kind in the south, but there were other areas that had strategically significant industrial and manufacturing facilities, such as central Georgia, Nashville, Mobile, and New Orleans. (For example, much of Nashville's manufacturing moved to Atlanta and vicinity before it fell on February 25, 1862, but much was left behind. This cost the Confederacy the TM Brennan cannon foundry, the Nashville Plow Works, and more.) Mineral resources would play critical roles in the war effort, as would certain agricultural regions, but these did not enter into the calculus in the same way. (Note, for example, that with the surrender of Ft. Donelson on February 16, 1862, the South lost its largest iron producing region.)
- Some include the idea of location with respect to the Union; i.e., distance, particularly in the interior, means less direct threat from enemy forces. (This was the principal reason Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas placed and relocated most of the South's arms and ammunition manufacturing in the Deep South.) What was the likelihood this was a serious consideration early on, though, since no one on either side expected armed struggle? Once the likelihood of sustained combat operations became real, this factor would loom larger.

What cities best met these criteria? State capitals? Each had civic infrastructure to support at least state governments, so perhaps some consideration could be given to their capability to expand their infrastructures to accommodate a national government. Rule out Austin, Texas, though. Its utility as a capital was compromised by its location west of the Mississippi River. Economically and politically, it was a regional city simply too far from the mainstems of Confederate activity – geographically undesirable, as it were.

Baton Rouge was not quite as remote. It was on the eastern side of the Mississippi River in southeastern Louisiana, situated above the river on the first set of bluffs north of the Mississippi River Delta's coastal plains. It had a population of some 5,500 at the beginning of the war.¹ While it had a relatively new state capital building that likely could accommodate an early Confederate administration, the city itself was relatively small. It had no rail connections (save for a short line across the river into part of Louisiana), relying instead on the Mississippi River as its main transportation capability.² Moreover, Baton Rouge was not strategically significant and in the event was abandoned to Union occupation on August 25, 1862, four days before New Orleans fell. It had an arsenal, for example, that closed when the Union approached.

Located on the Pearl River, Jackson, Mississippi's state capital, was a small town east of Vicksburg. In 1860 it boasted a total population (free and slave, at a 2:1 ratio) of 3,200. It is at the intersection of rail lines that link it with Memphis and Corinth to the north, and New Orleans and Mobile (via Meridian, Mississippi) to the south. The Pearl River offered limited river transport to the Gulf, primarily for cotton. The area's industrial and manufacturing capability was negligible (there have been references to weapons cast in Jackson, but so specific foundry mentioned), as was its commercial and administrative infrastructure. Jackson played a role in the Vicksburg campaign, but was too far removed from the mainstreams of Confederate activity to effectively serve as the Confederate capital. Politically and economically, it was strictly regional.

Milledgeville, the capital of Georgia, was an even smaller town. It had a total population of 2,480 (free and slave, at a 2:1 ratio) in 1860. It stands on the edge of the frontier at the Atlantic fall line, where the Upper Coastal Plain meets the foothills and plateau of the Piedmont. It is on a rail line running from Atlanta to Macon and is on the Oconee River. There was some nascent industry locally (such as Georgia Armory), but the closest important industrial capability was over at Macon (Macon Arsenal), Columbus (e.g., the Columbus Arsenal and Armory, and the Columbus Naval Iron Works), and Augusta (Augusta Arsenal, Augusta Foundry and Machine Works, and Georgia Railroad Machine Shop). Established as the state capital on December 12, 1804, it struggled economically and by 1847 some were unhappy with Milledgeville and called for an election to move the capital to Atlanta. During the 1850's Atlanta eclipsed every other Georgia town in most categories (shipping by boat is one example where it did *not* eclipse Savannah). Still, in general the move was opposed, with major opposition coming from Macon, who felt they were more centrally located for the state capital. In 1868 Georgia's military governors simply ordered the capital moved to Atlanta. Politically and economically, it was strictly regional.

We can rule out Tallahassee, Florida in a similar fashion. It was the heart of Florida's Cotton Belt and the center of its slave trade but was too small. Its total population in 1860 (free and slave, at a little of 1:1 ratio) was 1,932. It's wealth (and thus, its importance) was tied up in the assessed value of its slaves and livestock. Moreover, it was not strategically located. It was the only Confederate state capital east of the Mississippi that was never occupied by Union forces. It was linked by rail to the rest of the Confederacy, but only by being at the end of a meandering rail network linking it with St. Marks (a small port on the Wakulla River) and Cedar Keys to the south, to Jacksonville and Fernandina (today Fernandina Beach) in northeastern Florida, and through Lawton, in southern Georgia, to Savannah. It was a plantation town, not conducive to expanding into a national capital. Politically and economically, it was strictly regional.

In 1860 Columbia, South Carolina, was the largest inland city in the Carolinas. Rail transportation spurred population growth in the 1850s and 1860s. Cotton was the lifeblood of the Columbia community; industrial and manufacturing capabilities were light. It had some capability for strategic manufacturing (John Alexander & Co. that cast church bells into howitzers, and Palmetto Iron Works. The city is located on the Congaree River, a principal tributary of the Santee River, which makes its way to the Atlantic. The Santee River is the second largest river on the eastern coast of the United States,

second only to the Susquehanna River in drainage area and flow. I have no population figures for Columbia itself, but Richland County (of which Columbia was the county seat) was just over 18,300 in 1860, over half of whom were slaves. It had the potential to be the Confederacy's capital.

So, from a quick tour of these Southern state capitals, it looks like only two – Montgomery, Alabama and Columbia, South Carolina – do justice to our selection criteria. Before we focus on why Montgomery was chosen, let's look at four other possibilities: New Orleans, Mobile, Atlanta, and Charleston.

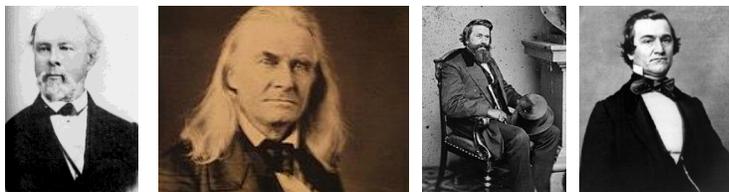
New Orleans was a bustling port city (the largest city in the Confederacy and its second leading port) with a total population of 168,675 (free and slave, at an 11:1 ratio) in 1860. At the mouth of the Mississippi River delta, it was the leading commercial center of the Deep South with rail and road connections and extensive commercial and administrative facilities. Almost half of all cotton grown in the North America was shipped down the Mississippi and exported through New Orleans. Nonetheless, being in the southwest portion of the Deep South, it was geographically undesirable as a capital – but important militarily. It was the southern anchor in the chain of defense of the Mississippi River that ran north all the way to New Madrid and Island No. 10. Being in a position to control access to the Mississippi River from the Gulf, it was a key objective in the Union's plan to divide the South via control of the river. Surprisingly, Confederate leadership felt its defense would be difficult, and in the event, it easily fell to a combined arms Union force on May 1, 1862. Making it the national capital surely would have stimulated a stronger Confederate military presence and preparations in the area, but its heightened strategic military value would just as surely have invited a quicker, stronger Union effort.

Mobile was another bustling port (the fourth largest city in the Confederacy) with a bit over 29,000 population (free and slave, at a 3:1 ratio) in 1860. It had a large commercial infrastructure, certainly expandable to accommodate the administrative and logistical needs of a national capital. Located on the western side of the Mobile River at the head of Mobile Bay, it had rail access east and west, but the line was intersected by the Mobile River – through-traffic required cross-bay transport. Its port was one of the busiest for blockade runners. It was better defensible than New Orleans and other Confederate ports. While the US Navy attempted blockade early on, Mobile Bay was not fully secured by the Union until August 4, 1864 (the Battle of Mobile Bay), and the city was not captured until after Lee surrendered. (That said, one must speculate, as with Charleston, SC, the likelihood of a more pronounced Union effort to capture it were it the Confederacy's capital). Central longitudinally within the Confederacy, it was on the far southern side, on the Gulf of Mexico (albeit not quite as far as New Orleans). It had substantial industrial and manufacturing capability (such as Skates & Co.), supplemented by significant wartime facilities upriver in Mount Vernon (e.g., the Mount Vernon Arsenal) and in Selma (e.g., the Selma Ordnance and Naval Foundry complex and the Selma Powder Works). While it equaled or exceeded Montgomery, Alabama and Columbia, South Carolina in some respects, it simply wasn't as centrally located and it contributed little in term of political utility.

Atlanta, with a total population of just over 9,500 (free and slave, at a 4:1 ratio), made a bid to be the Confederate capital in 1861. Its advantages were a better climate than Montgomery and far better railroad connections that anywhere in the South as four lines converged there, and the tracks ran

through the city rather than stop on one side and start again on the other (like Mobile and Richmond, for example). These were all the same gauge, as well (five feet). From a strategic standpoint, Atlanta was centrally located, as were Montgomery, Alabama and Columbia, South Carolina, and deeper in the South than Richmond. Atlanta was home to the largest of Georgia's arsenals and also housed ironworks such as the Atlanta Machine Works, the Atlanta Naval Ordnance Works, and the Atlanta Foundry and Machine Works, which produced cannons, rails, and armor plate. (Josiah Gorgas, the brilliant leader of the CS Ordnance Bureau, moved most of the Confederate industrial base into the Deep South (mainly Georgia and Alabama) to keep it safer than having it in Nashville.) But, while Georgia was the Confederacy's top food growing state and Number 2 industrial state, Atlanta was not its state capital. There was serious political wrangling within the state over this – a fight the Confederate government was better off avoiding. Still, it had significant potential to be the Confederacy's capital.

That brings us to Charleston, the birthplace of secession. What better place for the capital? It certainly had the physical capacity – a bustling port city with a total population just over 40,500 (free and slave, at a 47:53 ratio) and the second largest city in the Confederacy. It was well connected by rail and river to the interior and served as the center for the slave trade in the South. It had established the first dedicated slave markets and became a leader in the coastwise slave trade, connecting with such ports as Mobile and New Orleans (as well as a center for the smuggling of international slaves). Probably the most pro-slavery city in the nation at the time, it was the only major city in the nation that had a majority-slave population. There was little in the way of strategic industry and manufacturing (e.g., the Vulcan Iron Works, Cameron & Company, a minor manufacturer of heavy cannon and artillery projectiles, but quantity and quality were low, Cameron, Taylor & Johnson, which made a very limited number of wrought iron guns, J. M. Eason Brothers, which made a limited number of rifled canon, Charleston Arsenal, and the nearby Beaufort Arsenal), it's economy revolved around cotton and the slave trade. While it was on the Atlantic coast, it was defensible.³



Rhett

Ruffin

Wigfall

Yancey

Charleston was politically active, having hosted on April 23, 1860 the first of three Democratic National Conventions – a contentious affair that saw the split-off of the so called Fire-Eaters (Robert Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina, Edmund Ruffin of Virginia, Louis T. Wigfall of Texas, and William Yancey of Alabama, among others) who urged the separation of Southern states into a new nation.⁴ The Fire-Eaters helped to unleash a chain reaction that eventually led to the formation of the Confederate States of America.

Many wanted Charleston to be the capitol; but there was a push for moderation after secession. A large group wanted to avoid war. Charleston may have been seen as perhaps too much on the "Fire-Eater"

side. The Confederacy wanted to be recognized by foreign powers and a more "modern" city might better represent it on the European stage. In this sense, the preponderance of slave ownership and the active slave trade may have made Charleston politically less suitable to be the capital of the Confederacy – too aggressive, too hard over.

Let's now look at Montgomery. Located in the middle of Alabama, it had a total population of 8,843 (free and slave, at a 1:1 ratio – in the county at large, the ratio was 1:2) in 1860. It was the second largest city in Alabama, second only to Mobile. Cotton was king in its economy and made it one of the richest cities in the South. Montgomery was in the center of the nascent Confederacy (which, recall, at this point consisted of the southern tier of states – the Cotton Belt), easily accessible by rail and water. It had access to some strategic industry (e.g., the Shelby Iron Works, the Montgomery Arsenal, and the Montgomery Powder Magazine), but no port facilities and little lodging – it had just three hotels, and only the Exchange offered first-class accommodations. Moreover, the local population was lukewarm about being a national capital. A state capital, it had the infrastructure, albeit limited, to support the administrative and logistics burden of being a national capital. Additional development and building would be needed to make it a viable capital long-term.

This brings the eligible cities to three: Montgomery, Atlanta, and Columbia, South Carolina. Each were centers of strategic industry, manufacturing, and trade, had growing, active populations, and were centrally located in the heartland of the Confederacy, protected by distance from Union incursion, and supported by rail and water communications. So, how did Montgomery come to be selected?

To understand, we must go back to the Fire-Eaters. Secession was an appealing idea throughout the South, but not to everyone. Among its proponents, there was concern that secession, to succeed, had to involve at least four states – preferably more. Fewer and the effort might die aborning. And while the several southern states were preparing secession ordinances, some were skittish at the gate when it came to making secession happen. William C. Davis captures it well: "In South Carolina, at the forefront of extremism for more than a generation, Governor William H. Gist decided to be prepared. Yet he feared that his state might act alone and find itself isolated and without support from sister states of the South. Early in October he addressed fellow governors to ask what they felt should be the response to a Lincoln victory, and clearly hinted that he did not want to be the first to secede. The replies came in through the next month and showed more trepidation than unity of resolve. John Ellis frankly admitted North Carolina's reluctance. From Alabama Andrew B. Moore said his state would go out, but not by itself. John Pettus suggested that Mississippi would want a council of the Southern states first, in order that all should act in concert. Louisiana's Thomas O. Moore said the same thing, but then added that he doubted harmony could be achieved. Georgia would not secede on her own without some overt act of aggression by Lincoln, but Joseph E. Brown added his voice to the call for a convention. Only Milton Perry [having waited until after Lincoln's election to respond] showed some inclination to adopt a less passive stance. His Florida would not secede on her own, but she would follow South Carolina or any other state. Moreover, he said, 'if there is sufficient manliness at the South to strike for our rights, honor and safety, in God's name let it be done before the inauguration of Lincoln.'"⁵

Strong words and thought, reined by hesitation. How to move things forward? And where? Charleston seemed likely as a spring board from the Democratic National Convention back in April, but politically was it the ideal choice? Would a centralized location be better – a location that would be convenient to the traveling delegations yet support the same political fire? Montgomery fit the bill. It was in the center of the nascent Confederacy (which, recall, at this point consisted only of the southern tier of states) and with the likes of William Yancey was virtually South Carolina’s sister in the Fire-Eaters’ desire for action.

The South Carolina secession convention in December 1860 recommended a meeting of Southern states take place in Montgomery prior to Lincoln’s inauguration (scheduled for March 4). They elected commissioners to go to the other Southern states in January 1861 to encourage them to adopt their



respective secession ordinances and to attend the proposed multi-state convention. When Alabama passed its ordinance of secession, there was a resolution officially inviting the other states to meet on February 4 in Montgomery. Things were moving forward.

A convention on secession was called by South Carolina. It sent out the initial invitation and fixed the topic. Alabama’s acceptance fixed the time and place.

The convention began in Montgomery at noon on Friday, February 4, 1861, with delegates from the six states that had passed secession ordinances convening in the Alabama statehouse. (Texas, which awaited its referendum, was not involved in the early deliberations.) The delegates had been chosen largely by the state conventions. A distinguished group of southern leaders, many ardent secessionists had been passed over in favor of more moderate men.

After electing Howell Cobb⁶ as “permanent president” of the convention and a few other officials needed to run the convention, they needed to develop a set of rules for the convention. Alexander Stevens of Georgia (to his dismay) was assigned this task.⁷ Given his ten years of United States Congressional experience, he chose the US House Rules as his model. He turned in his draft the following day, entitled “Government of this Congress, Rules for the Government of this Congress”. Up to this point this had been a *convention*; now it was a *congress*. The rules were adopted that day (February 5), followed quickly by a motion to form a committee to frame a provisional government. This is what a congress would do, not a mere convention. Work proceeded over the next few days, and on February 10 a Provisional Constitution was approved, and on February 18 Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was sworn in as the first Provisional President at the statehouse in Montgomery.

Thus, Montgomery became the first, provisional capital of the new Confederate States of America. (It’s interesting to note that while this was going on, the Virginia state legislature had convened the Washington Conference Convention, meant to draft and propose one or more amendments to the US Constitution to save the Union and avert secession.)

So, we have Montgomery the capital of the provisional government of the Confederacy out of political utility. Why didn't it stay the capital?

As described by Michael C. Hardy, "There were many sites vying to become the permanent capital of the Confederacy. In March [1861], the Alabama General Assembly proposed giving the Confederacy a ten-mile square piece of property near Montgomery for the capital. One editor from New Orleans believed the area should be christened the "District of Davis" and be an independent district. He believed that it would take six years to construct the necessary infrastructure for the new capital complex. Huntsville was deemed a "formidable rival" to the Montgomery location, as were Tuscaloosa, Selma, Shelby Spring, and Spring Hill (all in Alabama). Tuscaloosa went so far as to send a delegation to Montgomery, offering to the Confederate government the buildings that once housed the Alabama capital. Atlanta was advanced more than once, and also in the mix were Nashville and Memphis in Tennessee; Pendleton, South Carolina; as well as Alexandria, Virginia, just across the Potomac River from Washington, D.C. On April 27, John Janney, president of Virginia's secession convention, sent Davis a copy of a resolution, inviting Davis and the "constituted authorities of the Confederacy" "to make Richmond...the seat of the Government of the Confederacy." Several resolutions were made in the provisional Congress to accept Virginia's offer, culminating in the Congress voting on May 21 to accept the move (and appropriated some \$40,000 to cover the cost of the move. With that, Congress adjourned, and the delegates boarded trains or steamboats and headed out of town.⁸

Richmond was an enticement to Virginia to join the Confederacy. Mississippi's Jefferson Davis, seen by many as a moderate, was selected as the Provisional President of the Confederacy at least in part in hopes that he could coax border states, principally Virginia, into the new CSA. The so-called "Cotton States" had been the first to leave the Union, and they maintained that a "Cotton Confederacy" should have its capital there, but Richmond seemed better suited to the task.



Richmond's population in 1860 was 38,000 (third largest city in the Confederacy, and Virginia would be its largest state), over 60% of which was white. It was well serviced by five railroads (although they were gapped inside the city, and connections to the south and southwest were of a different gauge) and had good access to the Atlantic Ocean via the James River (which, of course, would be blocked from the get go by Union forces in Newport News and Hampton Roads). Steamboats connected it to Washington and Baltimore. It had plenty of commercial accommodations, plus the heritage of the Founding Fathers. It was a center for industry and business, including the second largest slave market on the continent. Twelve flour (including the world's largest) and corn meal mills produced necessary food for the civilian and the soon-to-be large military population. had spacious halls, good hotels and

restaurants, and the heritage of the Founding Fathers. Richmond was far larger than Montgomery and could provide whatever accommodations the national capital needed.

Moreover, if Virginia or Maryland was going to be the site of the main military action, then Richmond was a better place to direct that confrontation.⁹ At this point, the Civil War had started (Ft. Sumter, April 11), and both sides were mobilizing. While few, if any, contemplated the scope and dreadfulness of what lay in front of them, those in Montgomery – President Davis in the forefront – were aware that serious military action was forthcoming. When Virginia joined the Confederacy, its border moved to the gates of Washington, DC and to the Ohio River to the west (with, of course, the West Virginia kerfuffle to come). Northern Virginia would become a battleground.

Richmond was one of the (if not “the”) leading industrial centers in the South, with impressive strategic manufacturing facilities such as the Richmond Armory, the Tredegar Foundry/Iron Works (the foremost cannon manufacturer in the South), the Richmond Naval Ordnance Works, and the nearby Petersburg Iron Works, Tappey & Lumsden, and Bellona Arsenal. This resource would be critical to the war effort and had to be protected. As John Marzalek has observed, “It might be argued that, based on strictly military considerations, the Confederacy would have been wiser to have stayed in Montgomery or some other interior location. However, the Confederacy had little real choice but to unite its political and industrial capitals. Richmond was that place. Montgomery was not.”



Tredegar Iron Works

Atlanta was the strongest rival to Richmond as the choice for a permanent national capital. It was centrally located and less vulnerable than most cities. It was in the heart of Georgia’s strong industrial and agriculture region and had a rail network to support it. As opined by Greg Biggs, being more central to the nation, and particularly with its location at the southeast base of the Appalachian Mountains, it would have mitigated the Eastern-centric orientation driven by locating the capital in Richmond in favor of a more wholistic strategic view vis-à-vis the Western Theater (particularly the Nashville-Chattanooga axis). Be that as it may, Richmond was the prize.

As Howell Cobb explained to a crowd in Atlanta that May, “If you wish to know why the Government was removed to Richmond, I can say, circumstances have arisen that have rendered it proper. We have received the Old Dominion into our Confederacy. Her soil will, perhaps, be the battle ground of this struggle. Her enemies are gathered around her to force her into subjection to their foul dictates. We felt it our duty to be at the seat of war. We wanted to let Virginia know that whatever threats or dangers were presented to her, filled our hearts with sympathy for her, which we are willing to exhibit, to show that there was not a man in the Confederacy who was afraid to be at his post on Virginia soil. We also wanted to be near our brave boys, so that when we threw off the badge of Legislators, we might take up arms and share with them the fortunes of war. We felt the cause of Virginia to be the cause of us all. If she falls, we shall all fall; and we were willing to be at the spot to be among the first victims. We are ready to say to Lincoln, when he attempts to put his foot on Virginia soil, ‘Thus far shalt thou come, no farther.’”¹⁰

So, it was not by happenstance that Montgomery and Richmond came to be capitals of the Confederacy. Meeting certain characteristics was important, but not deciding. They became capitals because they fit the political dynamic — political utility, as it were. The Fire Eaters at the Democratic National Convention in Charleston were determined the South should secede, but it had to be a multi-state move. They conceived a convention to galvanize action and dangled Montgomery as the location as a way to garner momentum. Once convened — while the iron was hot — they moved immediately to form a government. Viola! Montgomery becomes the first, provisional capital. But they needed to strengthen the Confederacy by bringing in more states, and the prize was Virginia. Once it voted to secede, they moved to cement the relationship — there was to be no turning back. Viola! Richmond is made the permanent capital of the Confederacy. Like all good real estate decisions, it came down to “location, location, location”. Charleston provided the spark for the Confederate States of America, Montgomery was its birthplace, and Richmond its shield. Game on!

Postscript: In his book *The Capitals of the Confederacy*, Michael Hardy speaks to three other Confederate capitals — Danville, Virginia (April 3-10, 1865), Greensboro, North Carolina (April 14-15, 1865), and Charlotte, North Carolina (April 19-26, 1865). He refers to them as such because President Davis and what was left of his government conducted business in each after having evacuated Richmond. That is a reach. They were on the run, soon to be captured, so these three cities were more refuges or waystations than capital cities per se.

“Noise of drums, tramp of marching regiments all day long; rattling of artillery wagons, bands of music, friends from every quarter coming in. We ought to be miserable and anxious, and yet these are pleasant days.”

Mary Boykin Chesnut from Richmond, June 29, 1861



Many thanks to Greg Biggs, David Lady, John Mason, and Mike Coker for their valuable guidance and editorial support. --Emil

Notes –

¹ *All population estimates are drawn from the report of the 1860 census.*

² *Interestingly, an early idea in the formation of the Confederacy was to make the Mississippi an open river with access by the Union. How this might have come into play is speculation since it never came to pass.*

³ *Arguably, this could have been a negative consideration. As Mike Coker once opined to me, the Union struck at Port Royal (November 1, 1861) because Charleston was more heavily defended. Port Royal defenses were hasty (newer) and less extensive. If Charleston had been the Confederate capital, would that have prompted a direct assault? In the event, Port Royal was developed into a significant logistics base, but never used as a springboard for a subsequent land campaign. Again, had Charleston been the capital, would a land campaign to capture or otherwise neutralize it have been attempted?*

⁴ Robert Barnwell Rhett had been a six-term member of the US House of Representatives from South Carolina (1837-1849) and a US Senator from South Carolina (December 1850 – May 1852, completing the term of John C. Calhoun). Edmund Ruffin was a politically active, wealthy Virginia planter and slaveholder. Louis Wigfall was a political activist and US Senator from Texas (December 1859 – March 1861, completing the term of James Pinckney Henderson). Willian Yancey was a political activities and one-term member of the US House of Representatives from Alabama (1844-1846).

⁵ "A Government of Our Own": The Making of the Confederacy, William C. Davis, New York: The Free Press, 1994, pg. 7.

⁶ Thomas Howell Cobb had been the Governor of Georgia (1851-1853), a five-term member of the US House of Representatives from Georgia (1843-1857), during which time he served as Speaker of the House (Dec 1849 – Mar 1851), and Secretary of the Treasury 1857-1860. He later served as the President of the Provisional Congress of the Confederate States (Feb 1861 – Feb 1862)



⁷ Alexander Stevens would go on to be the first and only Vice President of the Confederacy, sworn in at the statehouse in Montgomery on February 11, with a tenure that ultimately would be eight days longer than President Jefferson Davis'.

⁸ The Capitals of the Confederacy: A History, Michael C. Hardy, Charleston: The History Press, 2015, Chapter 1, Kindle Edition.

⁹ With Virginia expected to be the decisive theater, Richmond also facilitated a forward defense posture and lent itself to President Davis' "defend everywhere" strategy and his micro-management style of military operations,. More about this in a future article.

¹⁰ Richmond Dispatch, May 30, 1861]