

West Virginia Sesquicentennial Exhibit June 20, 2013

Gallery 1:
Pre-Statehood Tension

West Virginia and Regional History Center
WVU Libraries

The Deakins Line

The borders of western Virginia were under constant dispute throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The borders between Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Maryland in particular were hotly contested during the mid and late 18th century. While the Mason-Dixon Line resolved the issues between Pennsylvania and Maryland in the 1760s, the line's western limit failed to resolve the issue of Virginia's claim to lands west of the Youghioghny River extending as far as Pittsburgh.

Map Showing the Deakins Line



The Compass that Surveyed the Deakins Line

The clash over Maryland's western border with Virginia was resolved when both sides agreed to a boundary line extending due north from the Fairfax Stone to the Mason-Dixon Line. The eminent surveyor Francis Deakins surveyed the line in 1788 using this very compass, made by one of America's scientific instrument makers, Benjamin Rittenhouse. This is the sole surviving example of a surveyor's compass that actually bears Rittenhouse's signature.

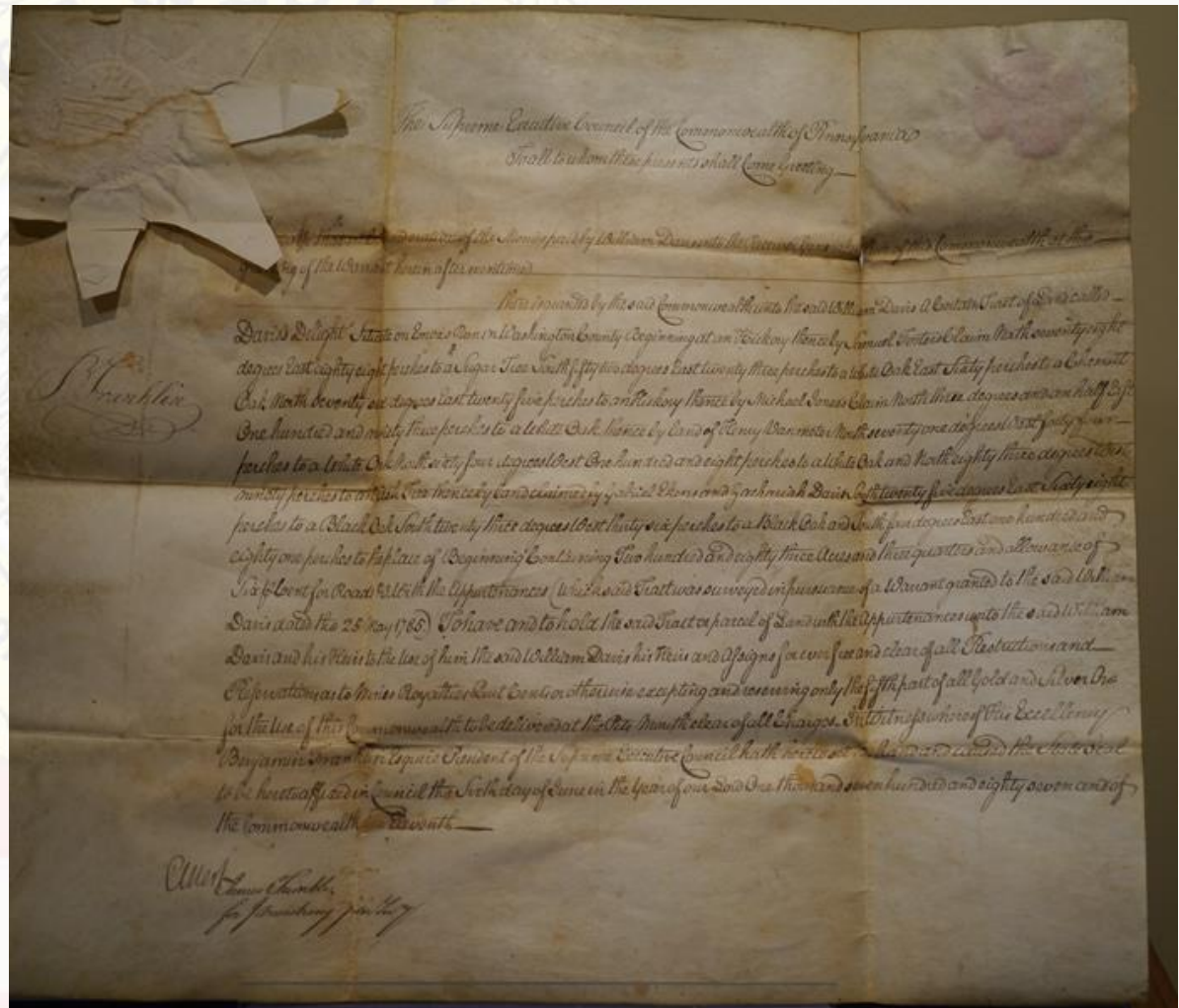
The Two Virginias

While West Virginia owes its existence to the Civil War, the notion of separating Trans-Allegheny Virginia from eastern Virginia dates back to the colonial era. The region almost became a separate colony in the years leading up to the American Revolution. On that occasion, war led to the preservation of Virginia rather than to its division. Though the state remained politically whole, many factors contributed to a relationship between the two distinct regions of Virginia that was strained at best in the ensuing decades.

The Allegheny Mountains represented a natural barrier between the two sections of the state that made western Virginia a far away frontier, out of sight and out of mind to most Virginians, including the vast majority of the state's legislators, during the late 18th century. As the 19th century progressed, western Virginians grew increasingly dissatisfied with the state government's inattention to their interests. Improvements in transportation infrastructure were sorely needed, as was increased access to public education. Perhaps above all, westerners were angered by the way taxation and representation favored the east. Due to these and other concerns, calls for the separation of western Virginia from eastern Virginia arose periodically throughout the first half of the 19th century.

Benjamin Franklin Grants Land ... in Monongalia County?

Virginia once claimed a section of southwestern Pennsylvania that included Fort Pitt, with a boundary line that ran north from the Deakins Line, east of the Monongahela River, to a point roughly on the same latitude as the confluence of Pittsburgh's three rivers. Just seven years before this grant was issued, the tract of land described within, in present-day Greene County, was part of Monongalia County.

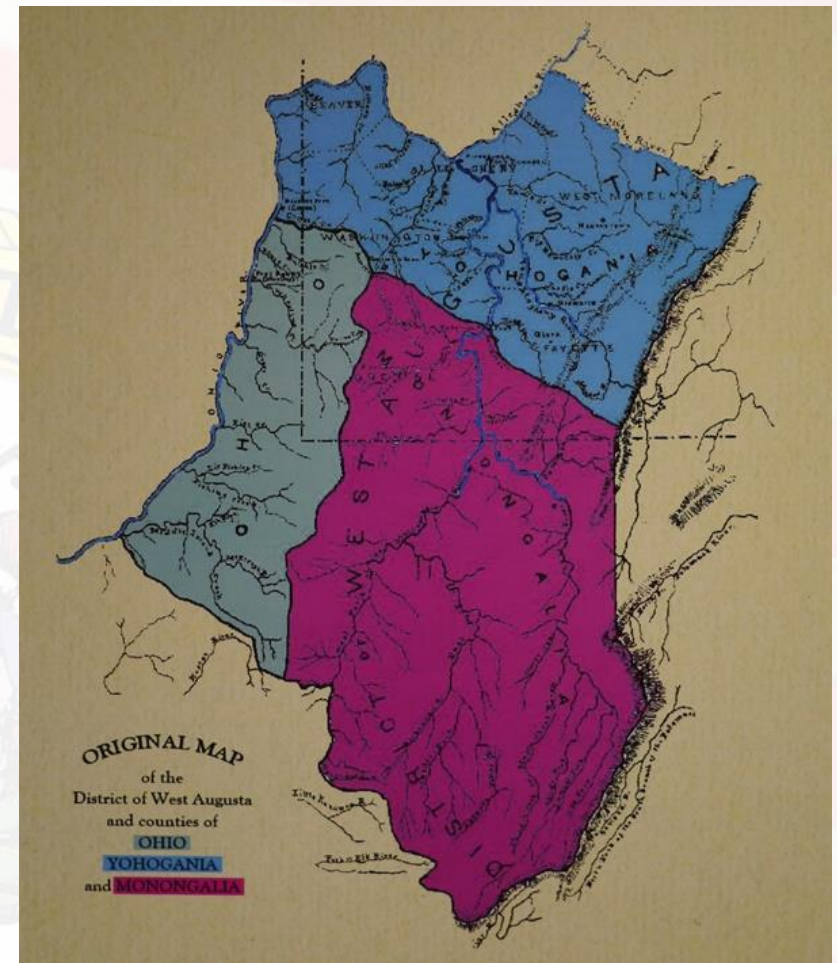


Geography



Vandalia Colony

Present-day West Virginia almost became a 14th British colony in the years immediately prior to the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Franklin was among a group of investors who petitioned King George III to create the colony “Vandalia,” which would have included nearly all of western Virginia along with parts of southwestern Pennsylvania and eastern Kentucky. Ironically, war led to the prevention of the “rending” (or breaking apart) of Virginia in this instance. King George’s authority to sanction the new colony ceased when the colonies declared independence in 1776.



Map of Virginia’s District of West Augusta

The district of West Augusta included territory that was broken up in 1776 to form three counties – Monongalia, Ohio, and Yohogania. The small part of Yohogania that Virginia retained after 1780 was added to Ohio County.

Transportation

No issue vexed western Virginians more than the lack of state support for improving transportation in Trans-Allegheny Virginia. Roadways were few and far between and stagecoach service non-existent in the late 18th century and well into the following century. The state government also did its best to impede the development of for-profit turnpikes, canals, and railroads. The lack of access to transportation was devastating to the region's economy and contributed immensely to both a sense of isolation and alienation from eastern Virginia.

Vance Young Map of Virginia, 1826
While only a handful of roads existed in Virginia when the Fry Jefferson map was drawn (see 8th slide), by 1826 eastern Virginia was crisscrossed with roadways. In comparison, Trans-Allegheny roads were literally few and far between. Residents complained that the few that did exist were often impassable.



Posted Broadside Announcing Bids Sought for Road Building Contact near Morgantown, 1827 (bottom right)

Transportation

Tourist's Pocket Map, 1849 (top)

This "Tourist's Pocket Map" of Virginia offered little hope for travelers wishing to explore Virginia's western regions. Other than Harpers Ferry, which was accessible by federal roads, only Lewisburg could be reached by stagecoach. Wheeling fared much better in terms of accessibility, not due to the efforts of Virginia, but to its situation on the Ohio River.

"I shall leave no stone unturned to affect our object." (left)

In 1829, Thomas Ray of Morgantown wrote to Harrison Hagans in Preston County regarding his determination to see money appropriated for a road connecting Winchester to Clarksburg and Marietta.

Road Maintenance (center)

Throughout western Virginia, as in many things, citizens were forced to fend for themselves. This included undertaking major internal improvements with their own labor and funds. This 1848 document records a citizens' contract to pay John Scott for the upkeep of "the road" in their district.

1854 Stock Certificate for Shares in the Clarksburg and Philippi Turnpike Company (right)

John Stealey paid \$50.00 for two shares of stock to provide funds for the road construction.



The Fry Jefferson Map of the Most Inhabited Part of Virginia

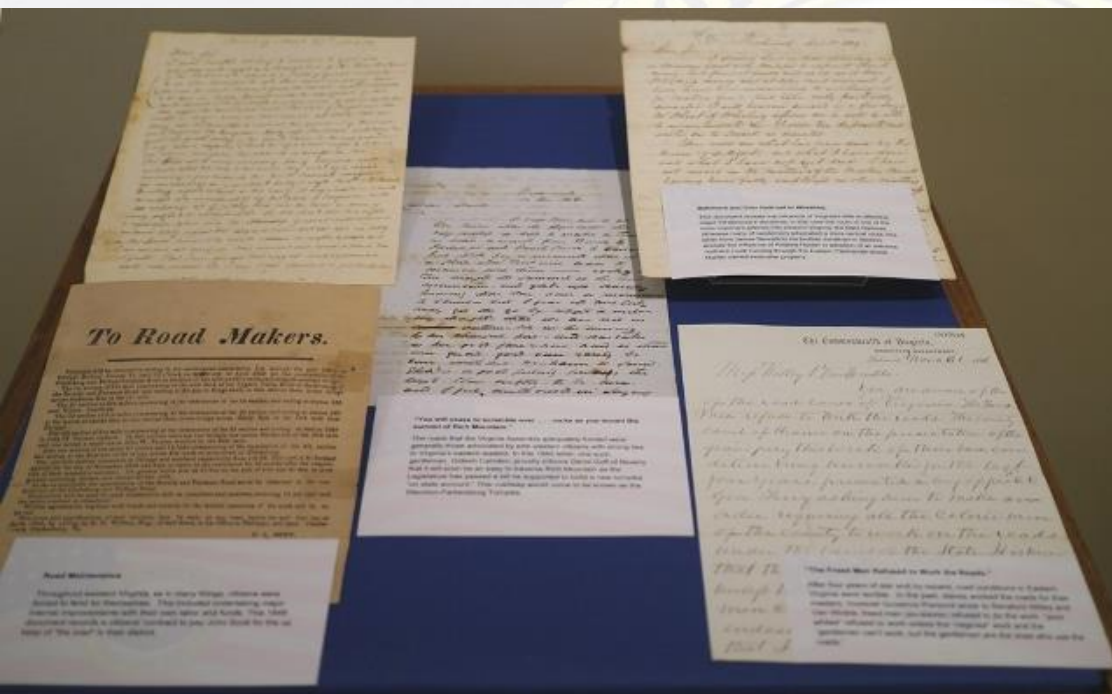


One of the most famous of American maps, this was the preeminent map of Virginia and Maryland for decades after its creation.

Commissioned by the English government as part of the comprehensive mapping of the British colonies, the map was initially published in 1753, but was reissued later with improvements in the western portion of the map. Created by Peter Jefferson (Thomas Jefferson's father), and Joshua Fry, a mathematician at the College of William and Mary (and Thomas Jefferson's tutor), the map was based on actual surveys and other first-hand information. This map was a watershed in the history of the mapping of Virginia and remained the prototype for the region for the second half of the century. Not only was it the first map to show with some accuracy the western parts of Virginia, but it was the first to depict the road system in the colony.

Internal Improvements

Lack of adequate transportation arteries in western Virginia was a major impediment to the region's economic growth during the early nineteenth century. Unfortunately, the Virginia Legislature did little to remedy the problem and in some instances intentionally impeded progress by denying charters to proposed road, canal, and railroad ventures. Projects that were approved were generally inadequately funded, leaving the brunt of the burden on private financing and tolls. Citizens were routinely forced to buy stock and pay tolls to help fund construction, and often had to provide for road maintenance with their own labor. Many projects were canceled or "delayed" because the residents could not fund them. Projects that did succeed often had the backing of elite citizens who enjoyed close ties with the east.



"You will cease to scramble over . . . rocks as you mount the summit of Rich Mountain." (center)

The roads that the Virginia Assembly adequately funded were generally those advocated by elite western citizens with strong ties to Virginia's eastern leaders. In this 1849 letter, one such gentleman, Gideon Camden, proudly informs David Goff of Beverly that it will soon be easy to traverse Rich Mountain as the Legislature has passed a bill he supported to build a new turnpike, "on state account." This roadway would come to be known as the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike.

Baltimore and Ohio Railroad to Wheeling (top right)

This document reveals the influence of Virginia's elite in affecting major infrastructure decisions, in this case the route of one of the most important arteries into western Virginia, the B&O Railroad. Whereas many westerners advocated a more central route, this letter from James Bennett to his brother Jonathan, in Weston, reveals the influence of Andrew Hunter in adoption of an extreme northern route running through the Eastern Panhandle where Hunter owned extensive property.

"A matter of great importance to us . . ." (top left)

The Chesapeake and Ohio Canal followed a northern route that did little to assist the economy of Virginia's interior sections. In this 1830 letter, William Naylor of Romney complains to his State Senator, Charles Faulkner, about the decision causing the C&O to bypass the South Branch of the Potomac. That decision was devastating to commerce in Hampshire, Hardy, Pendleton and surrounding counties.

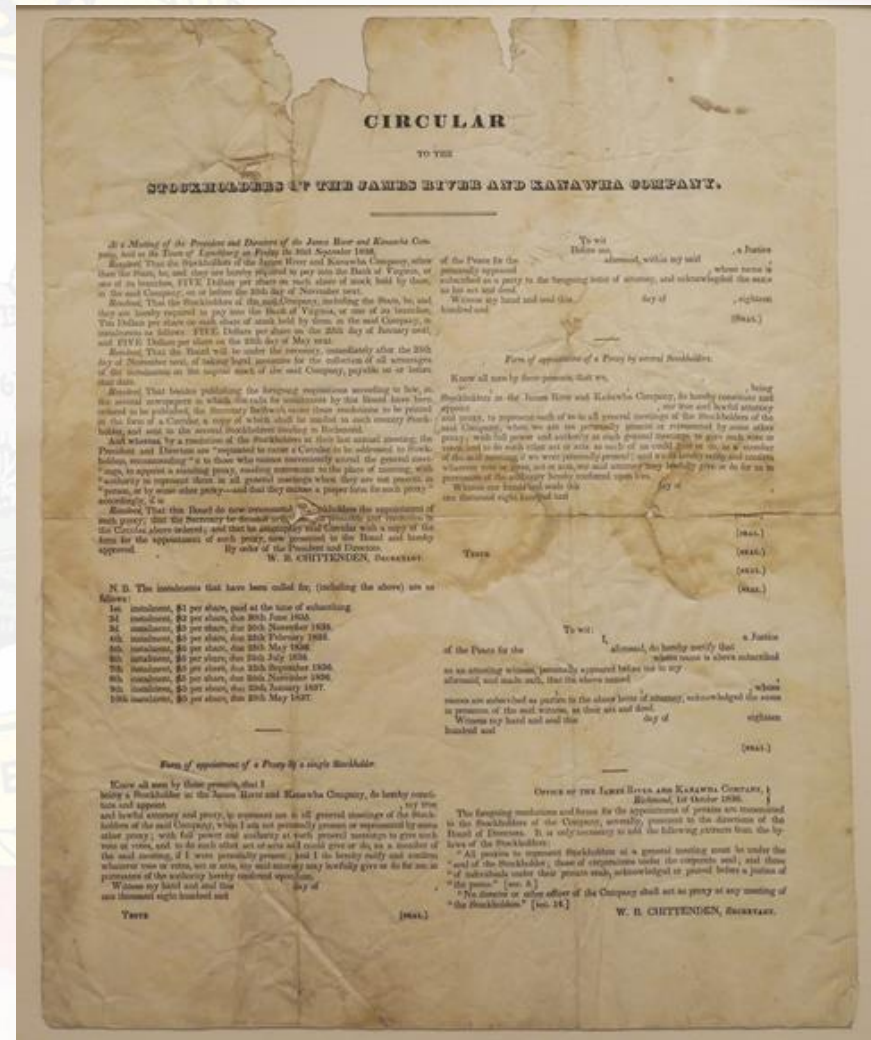
"The Freed Men Refused to Work the Roads." (bottom right)

After four years of war and no repairs, road conditions in Eastern Virginia were terrible. In the past, slaves worked the roads for their masters, however Governor Pierpont wrote to Senators Willey and Van Winkle that freed men (ex-slaves) refused to do the work, "poor whites" refused to work unless the "negroes" work, and the "gentlemen can't work, but the gentlemen are the ones who use the roads."

Posted Broadside Announcing Proposals Sought for Road Construction Contacts in Philippi, 1850 (bottom left)

James River and Kanawha Company Circular, 1836

Intended as a major artery connecting western Virginia with eastern markets, the James River and Kanawha Canal was considered essential to the economic growth of the heart of western Virginia. Though the project was successful in gaining a charter from the Virginia Legislature, funding was inadequate for its completion and the project was eventually abandoned. This document informs stockholders about the schedule for making payment installments into the Bank of Virginia.



Frontier Life at the Turn of the Century

Currency Issued by Banks in Western Virginia (top)

Another way in which eastern leaders impeded economic development in western Virginia was via banking. The Virginia Legislature repeatedly refused requests to authorize the establishment of western banks. Those banks that were established suffered the insult of having the currency they issued devalued by eastern banks by 10% or even more. The 1856 \$10 note from the Northwestern Bank in Wellsburg and 1845 \$5 note from the Merchants & Mechanics Bank in Wheeling would have been worth less in eastern Virginia than in their own communities.

American Long Rifle, ca. 1800 (center)

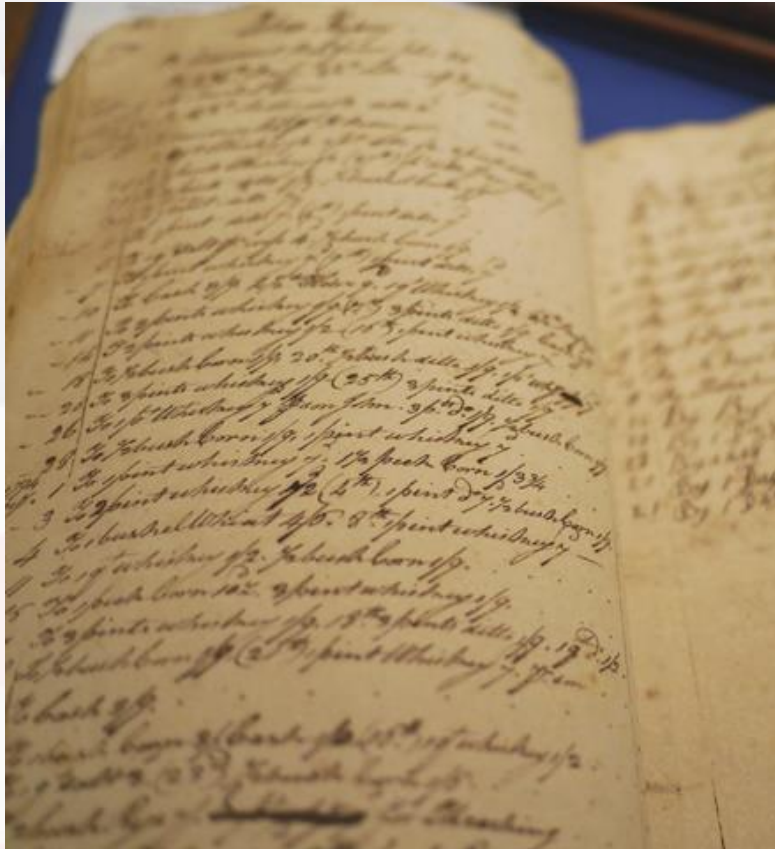
The muzzle-loading Kentucky Long Rifle (also known as the Pennsylvania Long Rifle) was the weapon of choice on the western Virginia frontier throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Unlike the standard smooth-bore musket of the age, the long rifle had a grooved barrel that imparted a spin on its projectiles that resulted in both increased distance and accuracy. In addition to its use for protection and food, the rifle was key to frontier economy which included a lively trade in wild-game meats and furs.



"I believe a national institution capable of regulating the currency and exchanges should be created" (bottom)

Peter Van Winkle of Wood County addressed several issues in this 1842 letter regarding the financial crisis in the country and the state of Virginia including the need for a national bank "so that a dollar in New Orleans will be worth a dollar in...Parkersburg." The devaluation of western Virginia currency by eastern Virginia banks was one of many ways in which western Virginia's economic growth was checked by eastern rivals.

Frontier Economics at the Turn of the Century



This ledger documents transactions in the area of Shepherdstown and Martinsburg, in present-day Jefferson and Berkeley Counties, and shows a brisk whiskey trade in 1791. Transactions are recorded in the currency of Britain: pounds, shillings, and pence.

Item	Price	Total
Cash	35.10.8	
2 sugar scoop	1/6	3.0
8 horns	1/6	12.0
9 ladles	1/6	13.6
2 1/2 pint cups	1/6	7.0
Milk strainers	1/4	9.4
1 lantern	2/6	10.0
Lantern box		1.6
Total		£35.7.0
paid for the above with		
25 fur skins	8.15	
17 1/4 lb hemp	118.79	
	127.46	
74 in cash	15.29	
	121.17	

The Woodbridge Mercantile Company operated in the Ohio Valley area in the 1800s, based near present-day Wood County, WV. This ledger shows that the economy was partially based on a barter system, with one customer offering fur skins as partial payment for goods like sugar and ladles in 1803. Transactions are also recorded in British currency.

Life in Eastern Virginia

vs.

Life in Western Virginia



These sketches, from Henry Howe's *Historical Collections of Virginia*, published in 1845, illustrate the differences between eastern Virginia's agriculture-based, slave-supported lifestyle, and the more rugged lifestyle of the western mountaineers. While these stereotypical images represent an oversimplification, the economic differences between the two regions were, in fact, quite pronounced. Economic prosperity, and consequently political power, in the east rested in the hands of a comparatively small group of large-scale plantation owners and speculators. Western Virginia's population was composed mostly of small-scale yeoman farmers, laborers, and frontiersmen.

Education



The Monongalia Academy Minute Book (top left)

Western Virginians who desired more than rudimentary education for their children had little choice but to band together and pool their resources to create local academies. The Monongalia Academy, established in Morgantown in 1814, provided education to sons of upper class northwestern Virginians who could afford to pay tuition. This minute book shows the trustees' efforts to choose a site for a building, which was constructed in 1831 on the northeast corner of Spruce and Walnut streets.

Do you know how to play? (top right)

We don't! This antebellum boyhood game belonged to future West Virginia governor A. B. Fleming. The attached note reads, "Resolved that the undersigned abstain from falsehood, stealing, biscuits, sausage & wood from the 1st April 1860. J.C. Simms, A.B. Fleming, C.L. Davis, Esq."

Early Regional Textbooks (middle right)

These textbooks were published in Buffalo and Wheeling, in 1824 and 1844, respectively. The books were intended for use by younger students studying reading and writing.

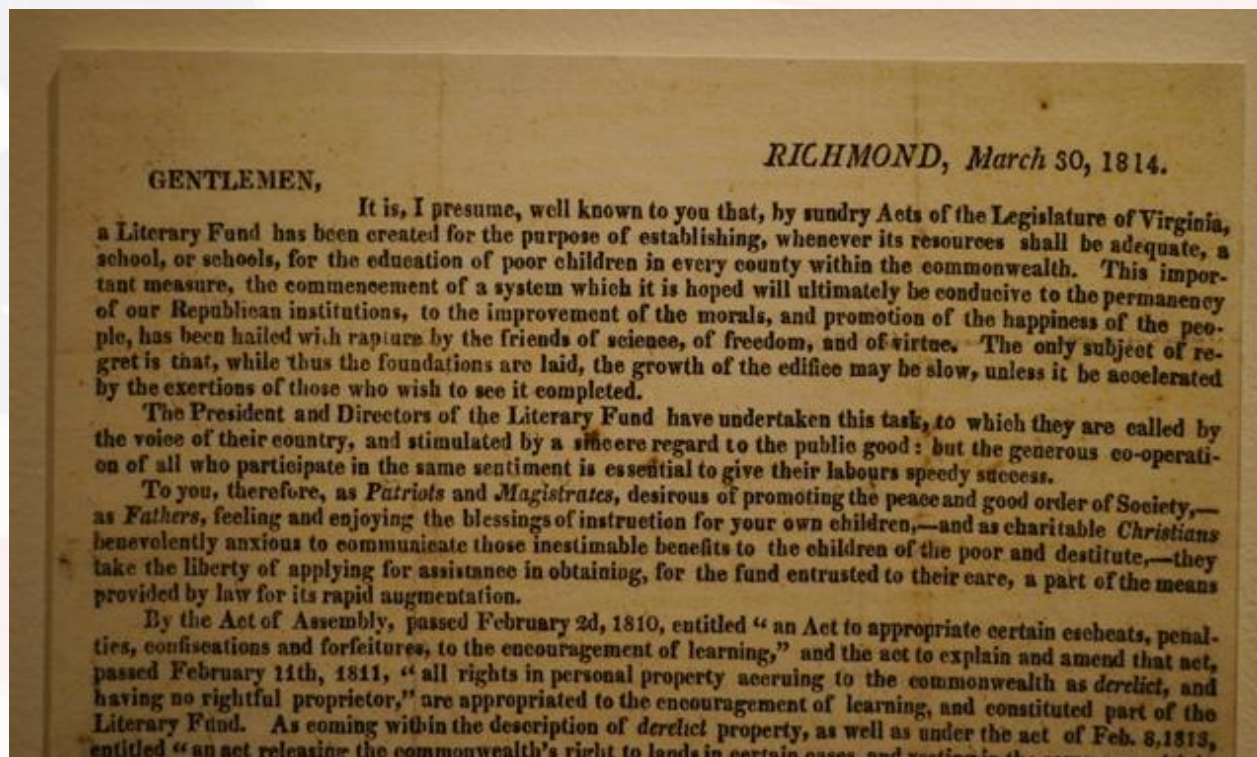
John J. Davis School Slate, ca. 1845 (bottom right)

In place of paper, which was a luxury in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slate boards like this one were commonly used by school children. Rather than chalk, most students wrote their lessons with a slate pencil.

1830 Monroe County School Ledger (bottom left)

This ledger contains student records, including the tuition they were charged for the number of days they attended school.

“The People Must Be Educated”

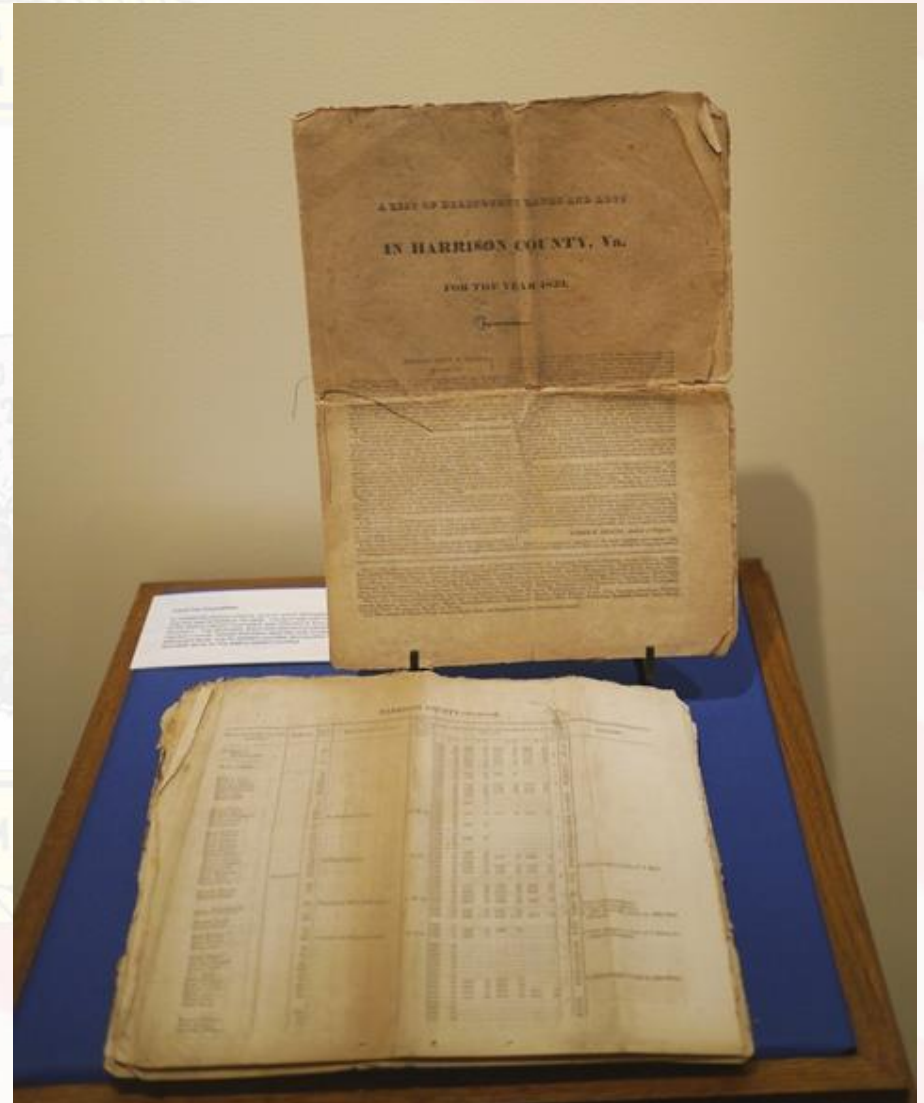


Education in antebellum Virginia was largely reserved for those who could afford tutors and private schools. While attempts were made to provide free public education, they were either defeated or hindered by the legislature and the county courts. Opposition was partly fueled by a disdain for evangelical clergymen who made up a large portion of the advocates for free schools.

A program that met with limited success was the Literary Fund, which was established by the Legislature in 1814. Unfortunately, funding was woefully inadequate and inequitably allocated. Only modest funds reached western Virginia where need was greatest. A sizeable percentage ended up going not to educating the masses but into the coffers of the University of Virginia.

Land Tax Inequalities

In nineteenth-century Virginia, land for which delinquent taxes were overdue was forfeited to the state. The land was sold for the benefit of the state's Literary Fund, which was intended to fund public education. This document, which lists delinquent parcels in Harrison County, reveals that there were two sets of laws regarding delinquent lands: one for western counties, and another with more favorable terms for the state's eastern counties.



“Our situation is indeed perilous”

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

The Constitution adopted by Virginia in 1776 was a rampart for eastern Virginia power. Drafted by Virginia's wealthiest men, the document specified that only landowners could vote. Western Virginians were designated as “peasants” and accorded a status similar to that of eastern Virginia's plantation slaves.

Providing no provision for amendment, the Constitution laid the foundation for a deep rooting of government operating under feudal rules. Jefferson recognized the Constitution's shortcomings and in 1801 called for a convention “to fix the constitution, to amend its defects....” Motivated by the fear of losing their slaves and power to “fanatic abolitionists” and “the peasantry” in the west, easterners constantly refused to heed Jefferson's advice.

“A crisis in the internal affairs of Virginia . . .”

Underpinned by the Jacksonian Democracy movement, agitation by western Virginia citizens for a convention to amend Virginia's constitution grew rapidly during the 1820s. Westerners pointed to the rights guaranteed to them in the United States Constitution to highlight the glaring injustices imposed upon them by Virginia's leaders. Among the foremost complaints was the fact that Virginia was one of only two states in the Union that still restricted voting privileges to landowners. As many western laborers and frontiersmen did not meet this basic qualification, they were effectively disenfranchised, thus enabling the continuing domination of the eastern “oligarchy.”



To the People of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

FELLOW CITIZENS,

There is no political nation whose track is more fully illustrated by experience, than our country in the distribution of rights of Virginia. "That no free government, or the blessing of liberty, can be preserved to any people but by a frequent recurrence to fundamental principles." The western region of this noble empire has produced a crisis in the internal affairs of Virginia, whose novelty and importance demand the earnest attention and consideration of every citizen of the state.

Thirty years have elapsed since the adoption of a constitution, which, though fraught with just considerations to every important particular, rendered us as the fortunate blessing of a free representative form of government. Although the right which the people universally possess, to be equally represented, was very considerably infringed by the provision of the constitution which numbered on each of the counties, houses differing in size and population, the same weight in the most important branch of the Legislature, as well as suffrage were, for a century, alike promised to result from the franchise. These rights, then, were parcelled, as western population and an equality of interests, as the population and the constitution, around such particular points of its formation.

But this original labouring of the right of the people to equal representation, aided by a series of accident in the Legislature, which has greatly increased the inequality, and still further, by the operations of natural and accidental causes, has at length produced a state of things which we are warranted in saying, that absolute necessity of the principles

of a minority inhabiting a particular portion of the State. Forty six counties, adjacent to each other, in the Eastern and Southern counties of the State, including three of the largest cities in this country, have a majority of the whole number of representatives in the most important branch of the Legislature; and these counties and cities together contain only two hundred and five thousand seven hundred and sixty six white inhabitants, which is less than one half of the population of the State; yet they elect two thousand and five hundred and thirty eight seats in each for the inequality of representation in the annual Legislature.

In the West, it is even more glaring. The constitution directs, that the different counties shall be divided into twenty four districts; from each of which a Senator shall be elected. The law of 1820 the territory west of the Blue Ridge of mountains was divided into five senatorial districts; and as it is means at the present day. Without stopping to inquire whether the division of 1820 was a fair one, it is obvious to the first relative population of mountain counties of the West, we shall be satisfied with showing that it is ever grossly unequal. The country west of the Blue Ridge has, as far, as half the weight it is entitled to in the Senate of the State.

The country just mentioned, notwithstanding about three fifths of the territory of Virginia, contains a white population of two hundred and twelve thousand six thousand souls. The whole white population of Virginia being no more than two hundred and fifty three thousand eight hundred and sixty three thousand eight hundred and sixty, it follows that the country west of the Blue Ridge is entitled to the majority instead of few.

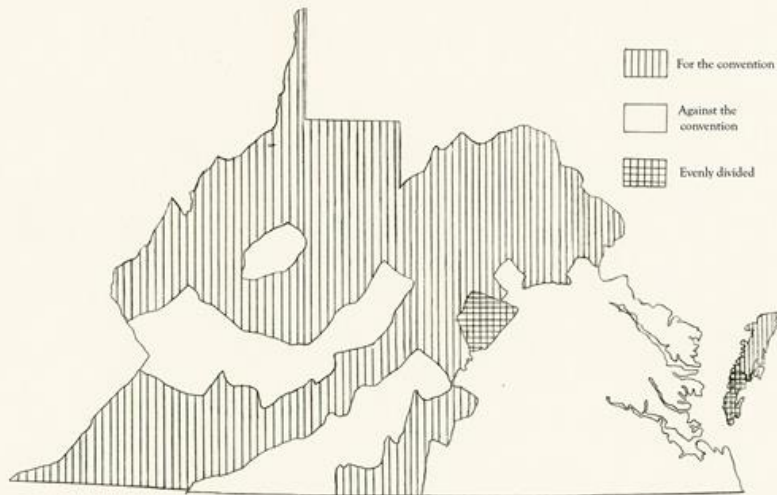
The practical result of this inequality of representation has been, a systematic disregard, by the Legislature, of the interests of the western and western people, and a systematic preference of the interests of the eastern and western people, and a systematic preference of the interests of the eastern and western people.

And is there no remedy for an evil of such alarming magnitude? Are the sufferings of the people to linger on, from year to year, in a state of hopeless political bondage?

There is, fellow citizens, but one remedy—it is pointed out by the declaration of rights—"In exercising the fundamental principles."—From a change of circumstances, operating an original defect, the representation of the state is no longer sufficient to protect the rights of the people. Its political results are at war with its elementary principles. Precluding an oppressive and unjust local the citizens, it leaves the majority of the state subject to the minority, and in a state of virtual disfranchisement.

The obvious remedy is, such as a modification of the Constitution, by a convention of the people, as well as to look to the principles of the people to effect a convention of the people in the great difficulty. The Legislature could find great facilities for amending the Constitution, but a systematic refusal to do so, because a majority of both its branches, representing a less territory of the people, are interested in perpetuating a state of things which serves to them all the purposes of government, with all its honors and emoluments. It is true that war is the position of the people, however it is in succeeding a convention. It has repeated petitions of this and without success. 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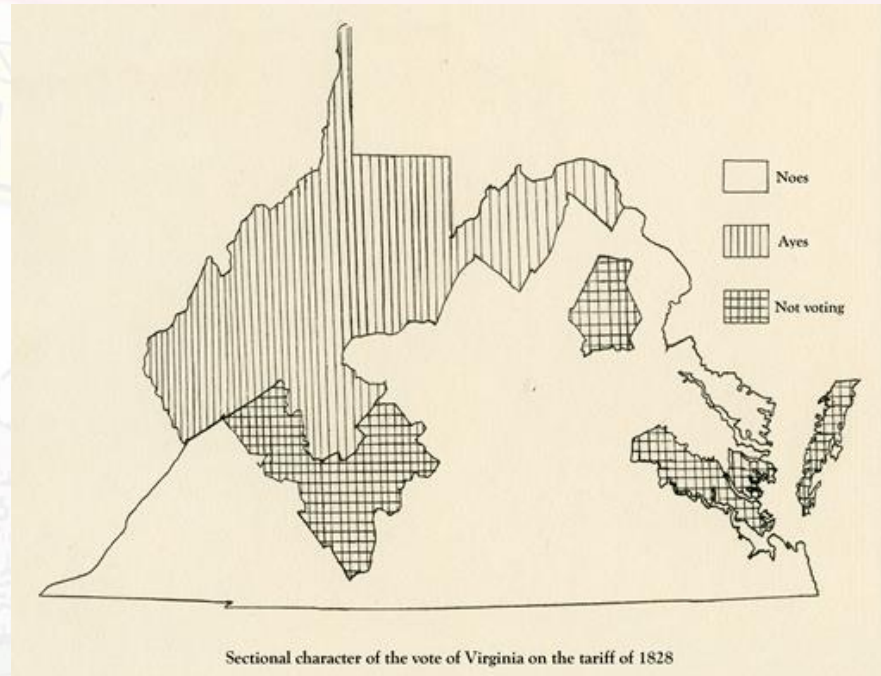
Sectionalism



Map showing the sectional character of the vote for and against a constitutional convention, 1828

Map Showing Sectional Character of Vote For and Against a Constitutional Convention, 1828 (from Ambler's *Sectionalism in Virginia*)

Due to the many inequities embedded in Virginia's 1776 constitution, western Virginians began repeated calls for constitutional reform during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Among the most vexing issues was the manner in which the state's population was calculated to determine representation of each county in the state legislature. While western counties favored the practice of counting all white population, eastern counties strove to preserve the historic practice of including slaves as a portion of the population. The latter practice increased eastern Virginia's representation in the legislature to far beyond what was warranted on the basis of white population alone. The few counties in the south of what is now West Virginia that voted against a constitutional convention may have done so because they had large numbers of slaves, mostly in the salt industry, to boost their population.

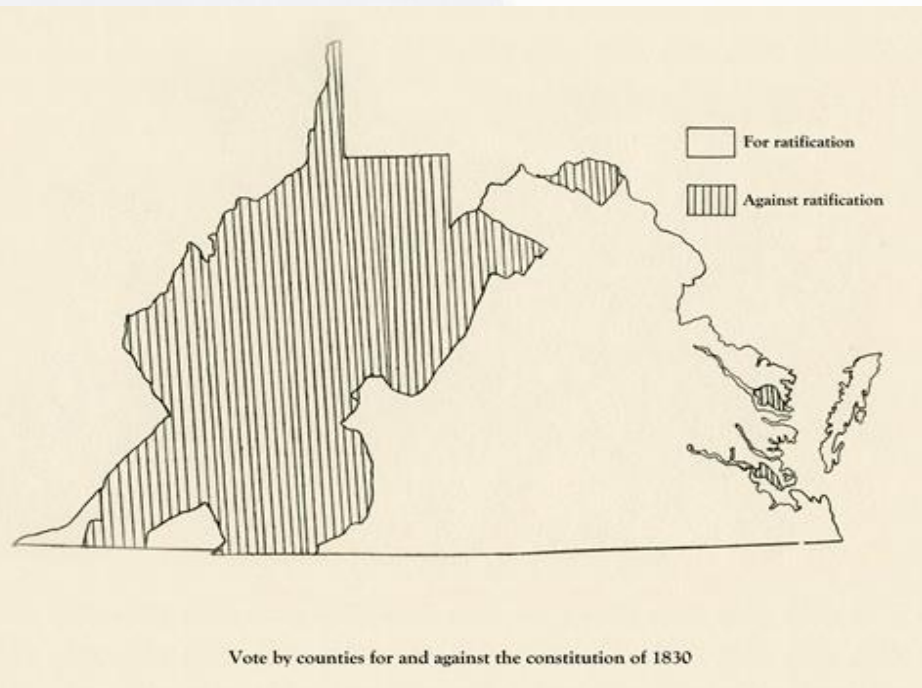


Sectional character of the vote of Virginia on the tariff of 1828

Map Showing the Sectional Character of the Vote of Virginia on the Tariff of 1828

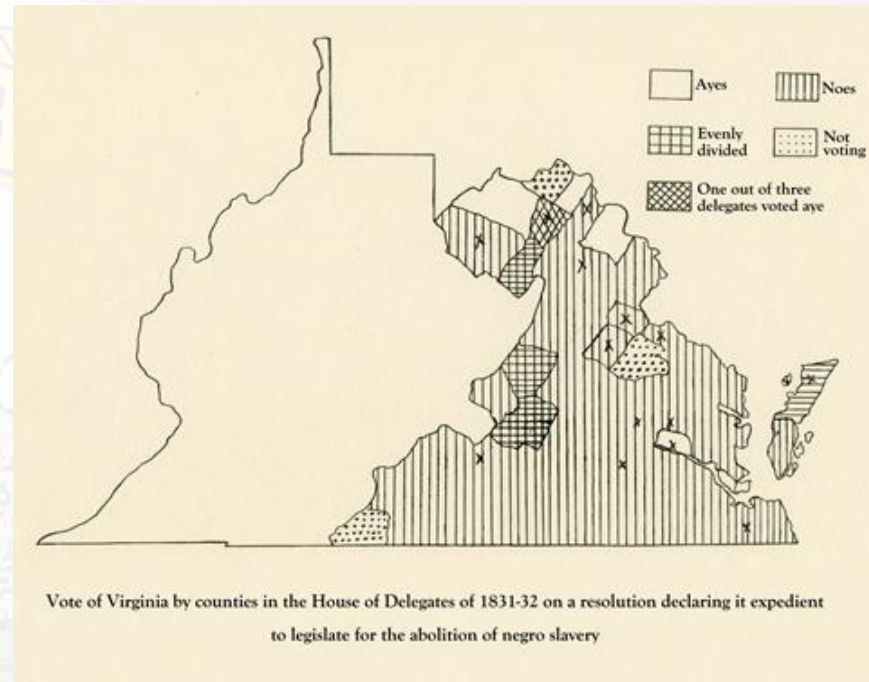
In 1828, the U.S. Congress passed a tariff bill that was intended to tax imports so that foreign products could not undercut the price of goods manufactured in America, mostly in the North. Western Virginians supported the bill. The eastern half of the state spurned the bill, which drove them to purchase more expensive domestic goods in place of heavily taxed imports. The bill indirectly caused Britain to import less U.S. cotton, which further weakened the southern economy and precipitated the Nullification Crisis.

Sectionalism



Map Showing the Vote by Counties For and Against the Constitution of 1830

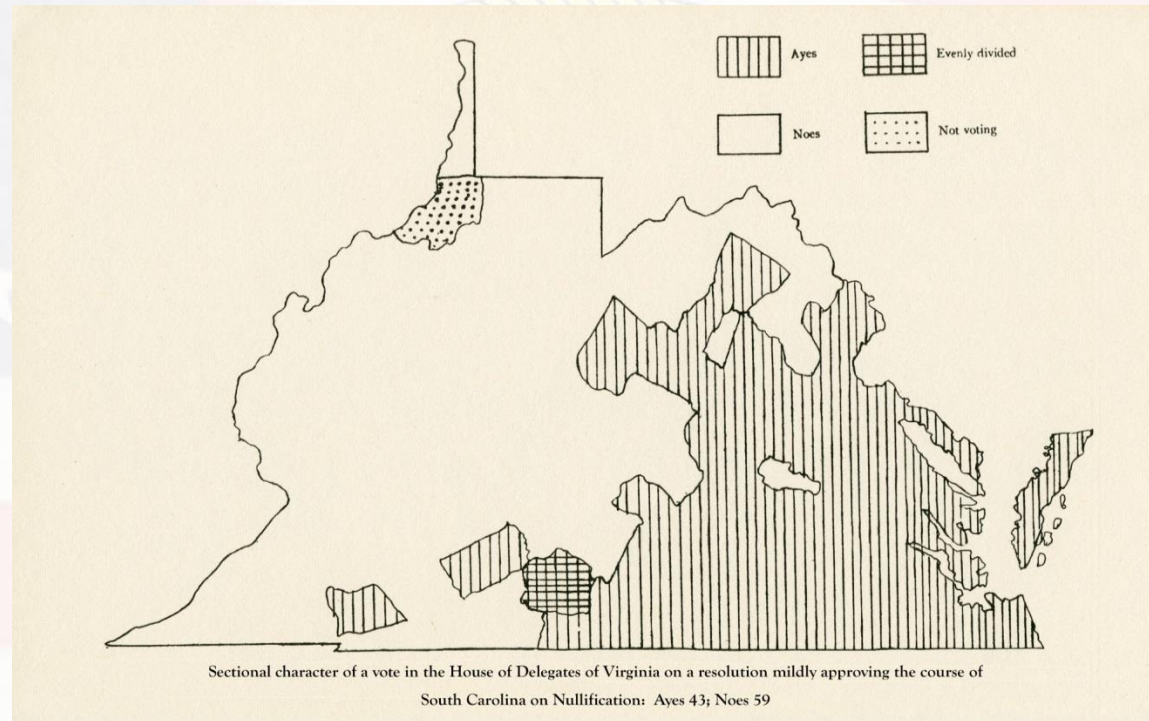
Western Virginia delegates were highly dissatisfied with the revised 1830 constitution, particularly in its failure to grant their region the level of representation it merited based on its current white population. This map demonstrates the overwhelming divide between eastern and western Virginia on this issue. Calls for a separation of the western part of the state were heard even at this early date.



Map Showing the Vote ... on a Resolution to Legislate for the Abolition of Negro Slavery

This map shows the division between eastern and western Virginia on the issue of slavery. Western Virginians, who had far less invested in slavery, generally viewed slavery as an economic and humanitarian evil. Eastern Virginians looked upon slaves as a valuable form of property.

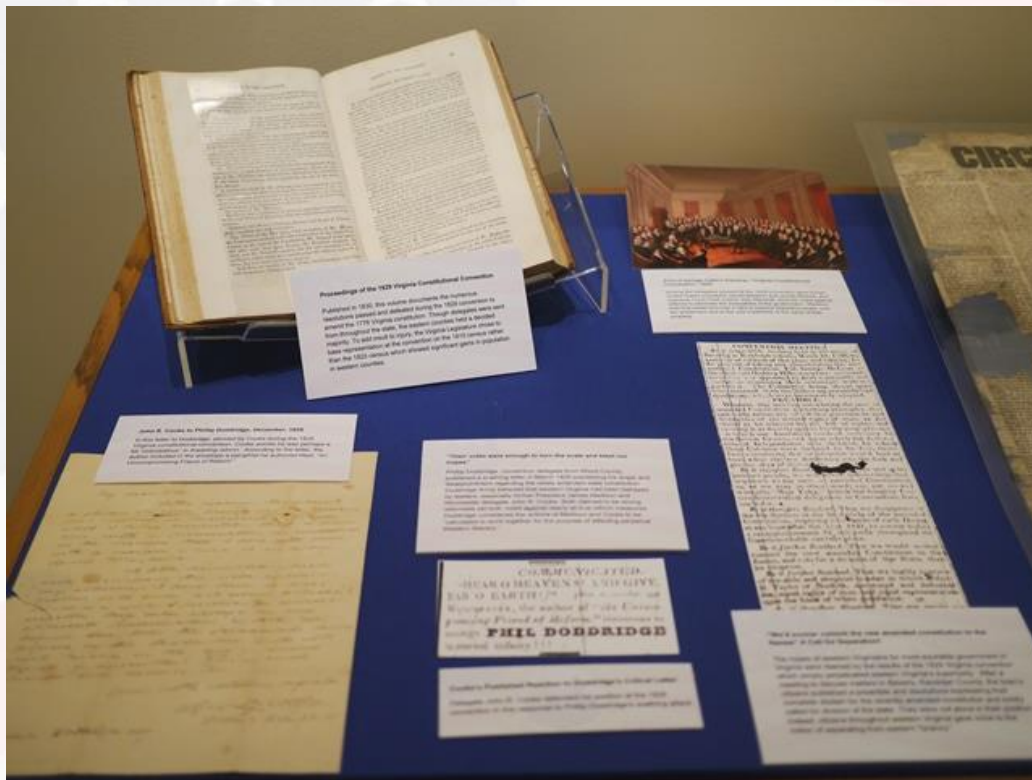
Sectionalism



Map Showing the Sectional Character of the Vote on Nullification

In a nutshell, “nullification” refers to a state’s right to nullify, or disregard, any law passed at the national level that conflicts with the state’s own interests. In this case, delegates were asked to vote on whether or not they approved of South Carolina’s 1832 Ordinance of Nullification, which declared the nationally imposed tariffs null and void within the “sovereign” boundaries of the state. This bold declaration that a state had the power to “nullify” national legislation had obvious implications as the battle over slavery escalated. This map demonstrates the east vs. west, Union vs. State-Rights political divisions in Virginia.

Virginia Constitutional Conventions



Proceedings of the 1829 Virginia Constitutional Convention (top left)

Published in 1830, this volume documents the numerous resolutions passed and defeated during the 1829 convention to amend the 1776 Virginia constitution. Though delegates were sent from throughout the state, the eastern counties held a decided majority. To add insult to injury, the Virginia Legislature chose to base representation at the convention on the 1810 census rather than the 1820 census which showed significant gains in population in western counties.

Print of George Catlin's Painting, "Virginia Constitutional Convention," 1829 (top right)

Among the delegates present at the 1829 convention were former United States presidents James Madison and James Monroe, and Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall. All three voted against reforms to eliminate the inequalities of the government. Madison held that easterners had a right to superior legislative power over the westerners due to the vast superiority of the value of their property.

"Their votes were enough to turn the scale and blast our hopes" (center)

Phillip Doddridge, convention delegate from Wood County, published a scathing letter in March 1830, expressing his anger and disappointment regarding the newly amended state constitution. Doddridge firmly believed that western Virginia had been betrayed by leaders, especially former President James Madison and Winchester delegate John R. Cooke. Both claimed to be strong reformists yet both voted against nearly all true reform measures. Doddridge considered the actions of Madison and Cooke to be "calculated to work together for the purpose of effecting perpetual Western Slavery."

John R. Cooke to Phillip Doddridge, December 1829 (bottom left)

Penned by Cooke, a delegate from Winchester, during the 1829 Virginia Constitutional Convention, Cooke enclosed in this missive a pamphlet he had authored titled, "An Uncompromising Friend." Cooke portrayed himself as an unwavering reformer.

Delegate John R. Cooke's Published Reaction to Phillip Doddridge's Critical Letter (bottom middle)

"We'd sooner commit the new amended constitution to the flames" A Call for Separation! (bottom right)

The hopes of western Virginians for more equitable government in Virginia were dashed by the results of the 1829 Virginia convention, which simply perpetuated eastern Virginia's superiority. After a meeting to discuss matters in Beverly, Randolph County, the town's citizens published a preamble and resolutions expressing their complete disdain for the recently amended constitution and boldly called for division of the state. They were not alone in their position. Indeed, citizens throughout western Virginia gave voice to the notion of separating from eastern "tyranny."

1855 Circular Published by Delegate S. M. Gallahu

S. M. Gallahu, a member of the Virginia Legislature from Jackson County, was evidently in league with eastern Virginia's ruling elite. In this letter to constituents, he explains his reasons for voting against the funding of a railroad that would have provided a sorely needed means of transportation in western Virginia. Shifting to the issue of taxation, he attempts to ease regional tension by promising that, while taxes may be unfair to the west at present, in ten years' time equity will be achieved by shifting representation solely to white population.



1855 Circular Published by Delegate S. M. Gallahu

S. M. Gallahu, a member of the Virginia Legislature from Jackson County, was evidently in league with eastern Virginia's ruling elite.

Virginia Constitutional Convention, 1850-1851

Proceedings of the 1850-1851 Constitutional Convention (top right)

Western Virginia's demand for constitutional reform led to another convention in 1850-1851. This time, the results were somewhat better. Among the changes were reapportionment for the House of Delegates (though not the Senate), universal white male suffrage, and the institution of direct elections (as opposed to appointments) for several state offices. On the negative side, taxes on slaves were lowered which had the effect of increasing the tax burden of non-slaveholding westerners.



Kanawha's George Summers' Address to the Convention (bottom right)

In this passionate address to the 1850-1851 convention, Kanawha County Delegate Summers chides the Virginia Legislature for having placed the power of government in the hands of a minority, thereby abandoning the "true principles of republicanism."

Young Waitman Willey Finds His Voice (top left)

Waitman T. Willey (1811-1900), who started his law career under the tutelage of 1829 Delegate Philip Doddridge, delivered a statistically fact-filled defense for reform at the 1850-1851 convention. Willey followed his report with a passionate declaration that if reform should fail again, "You will compel us to assume an attitude of antagonism towards you... We shall be forced to destroy our assailants to save our liberty." Such statements were tantamount to a threat of revolution.

Samuel Price's Convention Notes (bottom left)

Samuel Price represented Greenbrier County at the 1850-1851 constitutional convention. Price took these notes as various delegates spoke to the assembly. Despite being a western Virginian from a geographical standpoint, Price maintained close ties with eastern Virginia's ruling elite. In the following decade, he would win election to the post of Lieutenant Governor of the Confederate State of Virginia.

Slavery and Abolition



“The friends of gradual emancipation soon saw that of all the ill winds that would blow upon their cause, this storm of abolitionism was the worst.” (top left)

Henry Ruffner was one of Virginia’s leading educators as well as a prominent Presbyterian minister. He was also a slave holder, yet an abolitionist. In his famous 1847 pamphlet, “Address to the People of West Virginia,” Ruffner argues many points regarding the wisdom of ending slavery, attempting to bring a level of constructive sanity, as he sees it, to the issue. He points out that the extremism of northern abolitionists only hinders the efforts of more moderate anti-slavery advocates, and he argues for gradual emancipation for not only moral reasons but economic ones as well. Ruffner also decries the unfair political advantage accorded eastern Virginia by the “three-fifths rule,” which allows slaves to be counted as 3/5 of a person for the purpose of determining representation in the legislature.

Images of Eastern-Panhandle African Americans (bottom left)

The dates of these tintypes, and the names of the subjects, are unknown. All are thought to depict slaves or former slaves who resided in present-day West Virginia’s Eastern Panhandle during the Civil War era. The apparel depicted, and the very existence of the photographs themselves, suggest that the sitters were emancipated by the time these pictures were taken. All, however, had likely spent most of their lives in bondage. Note that the photograph in the center of this group contains the image of a young man with a bugle or trumpet. The subject’s military jacket and kepi hat suggest that he might have been a Union bugler or perhaps a member of a regimental band.

Abolitionist Hymnal (top right)

This book of songs, *The Liberty Minstrel*, published in 1844, exemplifies the strong feelings of those who wanted to abolish slavery and the religious themes in their arguments.

“Where is the preacher...that has the boldness to hold up these sins in their true light...” Francis H. Pierpont, February 9, 1858 (bottom right)

Francis Pierpont posed this question to Brother Reese, a fellow member of the Methodist Church, in this letter. Pierpont, referring to the slave market where men, women, and children were bought and sold, asked why “all the feelings of humanity were spurned” and “Godly reproof” was not “administered to the perpetrators” by church leaders.

Founding Father Waitman T. Willey



Delegate Waitman T. Willey, ca. 1850

Painted by the noted regional artist David Gilmour Blythe (1815-1865), this portrait was made just prior to Willey's departure from Morgantown for the 1850-1851 Virginia Convention. The portrait, which captures Willey's dashing and alert demeanor, was hanging in the Willey home (pictured at right) when Confederate raiders under General William E. "Grumble" Jones descended upon Morgantown in April 1863. Family legend holds that the portrait was slashed by Confederate bayonets when rebels entered Willey's house to arrest him but found him absent. The image above shows the recently restored painting.



Waitman T. Willey's Home in Morgantown, WV

Built ca. 1839-1842 in the Classic Revival style, Willey's home is now listed on the National Register of Historical Places. It still stands on Wagner Road in Morgantown.

Waitman T. Willey, Slave Master

Name	Property	Taxes
Wilson Ediza B	1 70	1 22 1/2
Weaver John	4 545	14 124 1/2
Wright James	1 65	3 28
Wright William D	1	3 68
Wright Peter J	3 85	6 48 1/2
Wright George	1	1 15
Wright Shelby P	4 160	5 78 1/2
Wright George	5 270	6 60 1/2
West James T	1 25	3 54 1/2
West Alexander L	1	2 72
William Thomas	1 50	1 12 1/2
Weaver Peter J	1	1 15
Wells Mrs S H	1	1 21
Wey Gibson	2 30	4 24
Weaver Joseph	1	2 30
Wells Alfred	1	1 16
Wells William H	1	1 16
Wells Charles D	1	1 16
Wells Elizabeth	1	1 20
Willey William B	1	1 20
Wallace James B	2	4 240
Walt Luther	1	1 24
Wagner William	2	1 1 24 1 240
Walt Mrs S H	1	1 18
Walt William D	1	1 24 1 24
Walt Alfred	1	1 24 1 240

It is hard today to understand the acceptance of slavery by otherwise enlightened citizens of 19th century America. A pillar of both church and community, Waitman T. Willey, author of a provision to gradually abolish slavery in West Virginia, was himself a slave owner. Willey revealed his attitudes towards slavery on many occasions during his life. It is clear that he shared the presumption of white superiority that was common throughout America, North and South, during his age, but he considered Southern claims that slavery was a natural order sanctioned by God to be "abhorrent blasphemy."

This 1863 Monongalia property tax book reveals that Willey owned two slaves in the year in which West Virginia achieved statehood.

Daniel Webster, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, Predicts the Separation of Virginia, 1851

Daniel Webster was one of relatively few northern politicians who supported a national compromise on the issue of slavery. The following remarks by Webster, delivered in Washington, D.C., in 1851, reveal his awareness of the possible “rending” (separation) of Virginia over slavery and other issues which emerged in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850-1851.

Ye Men of Western Virginia, who occupy the slope from the Alleghenies to the Ohio and Kentucky, what benefit do you propose to yourselves by disunion? Do you look for the current of the Ohio to change and bring you and your commerce to the tide-waters of Eastern rivers? What man in his senses would suppose that you would remain a part and parcel of Virginia a month after Virginia ceased to be a part and parcel of the United States?