GEORGE McCANDLESS PORTER
The Life and Times of a Front-runner of the State of West Virginia

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George McCandless Porter, an active figure in events leading to formation of the State of West Virginia, was a brilliant young legislator who crowded much living and accomplishment into a brief life span of only twenty-nine years. In the earlier years of its history West Virginia was often called the "Civil War State," because it had seemed to emerge from the wartime struggles. Now that the State is observing its centennial year, the actual events may be reviewed with interest and sometimes with surprise. Those events are often better understood when they are related to the lives of individual participants. Mr. Porter was one of many who lived in the midst of those happenings.

George Porter was born on May 29, 1835, at Freeman's Landing, Virginia, near the present New Cumberland, Hancock County, West Virginia. His parents, James Scott Porter and Elizabeth McCandless Porter, had moved to that Ohio River hamlet from Freeport, Pennsylvania, about three years before his birth. His father, born in Ireland, had come to America at the age of fourteen. His mother was born in Centre Township, Butler County, Pennsylvania, of early pioneer stock. George McC. Porter had seven sisters and brothers, including William David Porter, who was successively District Attorney of Allegheny County, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and Judge of the Superior Court of Pennsylvania. George was the grandfather of long-time Pittsburghers George McCandless Porter II and Morgan Porter and of the late Miss Emily Porter.

Little is recorded about George's childhood. The entire family connection was strongly Presbyterian, and there is no reason to doubt that he was carefully reared in a home which reflected that social and religious pattern. His father and other male relatives were pioneers in the manufacture of fire brick in that part of the Ohio Valley, and they engaged in river shipping. The bricks were carried to the

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foundries of Pittsburgh and Wheeling in the earlier days by keelboats which were poled or horse-drawn. Later the Porters operated steamboats and fleets of barges. All this gave George the strong interests in river commerce and in the lore of rivermen which were revealed in other correspondence.

At the age of fourteen George entered Wellsburg Academy, in the county seat of Brooke, the next Virginia county to the south. He travelled down the river by steamboat, working for his passage. On November 10, 1849, he indicated an early interest in public affairs in a letter to his sister, Mary. ‘Last night was particularly set apart for the meeting of the ‘Wellsburg Lyceum’ the question was ‘Was Public Spirit likely to have a bad effect on our Party institutions.’ Your humble servant (despite all his eloquence) being on the affirmative was used upp [sic].’ On December 10 he reported the ‘Subject for my next composition — Aristocracy.’ Writing again to his sister on March 16, 1850, he reported work on a composition, ‘The duty of a citizen of the United States, to his country, at the present time.’ At the Academy he studied Latin, algebra, geometry, bookkeeping, Greek and English grammar. He continued in attendance at Wellsburg until 1851. In the many letters written to his sister during these years at the Academy he displayed alert interests and much rollicking good humor. In the summer of 1851 he attended Chamberlain’s Business College in Pittsburgh.

That fall, at the age of sixteen, George enrolled in Washington College at Washington, Pennsylvania. There he studied Latin, Greek, German, algebra, Grecian antiquities, elocution and composition. On January 24, 1852, he wrote to his sister Mary that he was ‘middling busy being in a debate . . . . on the question ‘Is the United States indebted more to her soldiers than to her statesmen for her present condition.’ A number of other letters written to his sister in college days have been preserved. Apparently he mingled actively in the social life of the College and of the town. The datelines from Washington were continued until April 16, 1855.

In his letter of August 30, 1854, George wrote: ‘Tell father not to forget [that] I would like to take a jaunt some-place . . . and

1 The letters quoted in these pages, unless otherwise indicated, were preserved by the late William A. Crawford of Erie and by George McCandless Porter II and A. M. Crawford of Pittsburgh. They are now in the files of the senior author.

would like to know as soon as possible.” This seems to tie in with references to his health in both earlier and later letters. The idea of travelling for one’s health was rather well accepted in those days. George was never strong physically, and the tuberculosis which later took his life was probably incurred before he was twenty. That he could do so much in so few years is probably a comment on the relatively sparse population of his home county (4040 in the year 1850), and on the limited number receiving any considerable amount of formal education, as well as on his own apparent abilities.

During his residence in Washington, George became acquainted with Miss Sarah Lewis, whom he later married. She was the daughter of the Rev. David Lewis of Indiana County, Pennsylvania, who had recently died. Sarah and her three brothers accompanied their mother in a move to Washington in 1853. She entered The Washington Female Seminary and was graduated in 1855. George’s letters written from Washington portray an energetic and happy young man who, aside from the question of health which probably was not often raised, must have appeared as a very eligible suitor during those years.

From the record of his 25th class reunion we learn that “he made a profession of religion in the home church [New Cumberland] in 1853 while he was yet a student at College,” also that he was one of three honor graduates of Washington College in 1855. “After graduating he traveled for some months in the United States. The state of his health forbidding his pursuit of professional studies, he became associated with his father in business.” 3

The next glimpse of George Porter, in a letter written from New Orleans on January 9, 1857, reports to his sister: “I arrived here [by steamboat from Cairo, Ill.] on the evening of the 7th. Yesterday . . . was a great day in this city. Cannons were booming all day — flags hung over the streets, & floated from every steamboat & ship — and there was a procession of the military passing through the principal streets. Among those in the procession were the survivors of the battle of New Orleans . . . . Tomorrow at 4 P M I will bid farewell for a time to the United States of America. I will sail on the Schooner Wm. Clarke.”

In his next letter, written January 23, George described his arrival in Havana and his passage by rail to the interior town of Guinées, “45

3 H. F. Ward, Quarter Century Reunion of the Classes Graduated from Washington College and Jefferson College in 1855 held at Washington, Pa., Tuesday, June 29, 1880, Washington, Pa., 1881, 24-32. (Courtesy of President Boyd C. Patterson of Washington and Jefferson College.)
miles from Havana ... a town of about 3000 inhabitants ... a most delightful valley ... protected from the north wind by a range of mountains ... I was fortunate in meeting here with an American named Dr. Theodore Bland Dudley, the intimate friend & relative of John Randolph of Virginia, and one of the descendants of Pocahontas, the Indian Princess. He is compelled to stay in this climate & has been here so long that he speaks Spanish very well.”

Another letter written on January 31 continues the story: “After Mr. Dudley left this place the only Americans in the town beside myself were a small family consisting of husband, wife, child and servant ... . The man had taken sick ... on the third or fourth day — ... he died ... Then came a series of vexations, the difficulties of which you cannot even imagine ... . As I was the only American here all was thrown on me and I have learned the manner in which they treat a dead stranger.” George here gives a record of the fees paid to various church and civil officials. He continues: “All this was endured and it is fortunate that the lady is one of fortune and can pay these extortions ... . I have done all that I could do for her — but it was nothing more than my duty — a duty that I owed to my country and to humanity ... . I will remain here sometime longer and then go into the interior.”

Several letters continued to recount village happenings. Finally on February 24, 1857, he wrote in a letter mailed from San Felipe, Cuba, “This morning I bade farewell to the pleasant little village, where I have spent the last five weeks ... . I spent my time at Güines very pleasantly and during the last two days of my stay I witnessed the Carnival ... . I have been talking all afternoon with a Spaniard and managed to make myself understood very well ... . Everybody here smokes — young — and old, men and women ... . very pretty girls have offered me a cigar, but alas — alas! I have never learned to smoke or dance.”

Continuing in this same letter, he described travel complications: “This morning when I left Güines, it was necessary to obtain another passport — when I reach Trinidad it will be necessary to obtain another & when I go to Havana on my way home I must get still another. But my personal appearance is now described differently — from when I left New Orleans. Then it was put down — short beard — but now they dare not describe my beautiful mixture of red and brown in such a style — but put it down — whiskers all over the face ... . I may not be home so soon as I expected but will be there in
April.” Other letters reported his visits to . . . Cuban towns, and his return to New Orleans in March 1857.

In the class reunion record already mentioned it is reported that after returning from Cuba “to his home in the Spring, he was elected member for the county of Hancock in the House of Delegates of the state of Virginia, on the day before he was twenty-two years of age. He then went to Europe and spent the summer in travel. Returning in the fall, he devoted the winter to the discharge of his official duties in Richmond.” 4 The General Assembly was a biennial body. After taking the oath of office on December 7, 1857, George attended almost every session of the House of Delegates. More than 250 of his votes, resolutions and other actions were recorded between that day and April 8, 1858, when the legislature adjourned. 5 The positions taken revealed his concern for sound fiscal policy and for economy in government. He voted consistently for the levying of taxes needed to support and defend the state, for needed public improvements, for appropriate patriotic observances, for the payment of interest on municipal and other bonds guaranteed by the state, and on the state’s own treasury bonds. His actions often reflected regional interests. He voted often against the incorporation of new turnpike, railroad and navigation companies, proposals to increase the capitalization of existing companies, or their subsidization by commonwealth funds, especially if they were located in the more prosperous eastern counties. He sometimes supported such developments in the less prosperous mountain and Ohio river counties.

In March 1858 George was actively engaged in legislative maneuvers to permit construction by the Pittsburgh and Steubenville Rail Road Company, a Pennsylvania corporation, to extend its railroad through the narrow neck of Virginia to the Ohio River, and to erect a railroad bridge across the river at Steubenville. The development of this forerunner of the Panhandle Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad was opposed by downriver county delegates who were more

4 Ibid.

5 Comments made in this series of paragraphs on the legislative activities of George McC. Porter in Richmond, except where other references are listed, are based on a review of the Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia for the sessions of 1857-58, 1859-60, and the extra session of 1861, as well as on the pages of the Richmond Daily Dispatch for those same periods of time.

The general historical references made throughout this article, where not otherwise supported, are based on many records too numerous to mention, including U. S. documents and documents in the Archives of Virginia and of West Virginia.
interested in having commerce flow through the Wheeling and Wellsburg areas. An opponent promoted a bill "to prevent the unlawful bridging of the Ohio River near Steubenville and for that purpose to define and punish such offenses." After many frustrations and delays the plan of extending the railroad and bridging the river had to be carried over until the next session.

George Porter voted regularly for the numerous bills then required for the "relief" of individuals and groups from fines and taxes unjustly imposed, and of sheriffs having trouble with their collections. In several actions he supported the human rights of both slaves and free Negroes. Although he was a member of the Committee on Schools and Colleges, he often opposed grants or loans to educational institutions, especially if they were located in eastern counties. With more regard for private enterprise than for conservation, he voted against a bill to regulate the taking of oysters in waters of the Commonwealth. Although he was not pleased with the existing militia system, he opposed amendments for change unless these were to be referred to the qualified voters.

On August 30, 1859, George married his college sweetheart, Sarah Lewis, and a few months later took her with him to Richmond for the next legislative session. Among his more than 300 actions taken in this session, the first was recorded on December 16, 1859, and the last on April 2, 1860. This time he represented Brooke County as well as Hancock County, and he was very active in promoting the interests of his new constituents. (Hancock had been erected out of Brooke only eleven years before, to relieve the difficulties of travelling by road from northern townships to Wellsburg, the county seat of Brooke.) He was now a member of the Library Committee as well as the School and College Committee. The Speaker also appointed him to a special committee in reference to internal improvements of the state, and the propriety of selling the Commonwealth's interest therein. Toward the end of the session he was appointed to the Committee on Enrolled Bills.

George continued in active support of the plan authorizing extension of the railroad from the Pennsylvania line through Holliday's

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6 An extensive obituary of "Mrs. Sarah L. Porter, wife of George McC. Porter, Esq.," clipped from the N. Y. Observer following her death in 1864, said: "The first Winter of her married life was spent in Richmond... The fire of patriotism was stirred in her bosom by the project of secession, even then assuming shape and form in that proud center... She was in full sympathy with her husband in his effort to resist..."
Cove to the Ohio River, and eventually this was adopted with the aid of parallel action in the Senate. He voted more frequently than before for the incorporation and extension of railroad and turnpike companies throughout the state, but he still withheld approval from most of these. Perhaps he had found it expedient to trade votes at times in order to obtain the necessary support for the railroad project in his own county. On January 6 George had written a postscript on a letter addressed by his wife to his sister: "You may tell the Cove people that I am trying to compromise matters with the Wheeling delegation, and in that case will have but little trouble, but we can't tell for days yet whether we agree or not. They are waiting to hear from home." Newton observes that on March 30, 1860, the General Assembly of Virginia incorporated the Holliday's Cove Railroad Company "for the purpose of constructing a road from the Pennsylvania state line to — or near — the city of Steubenville, Ohio." This right-of-way followed approximately the boundary between Brooke and Hancock counties, lying at some points in the one, elsewhere in the other.

George consistently supported measures to meet the rising costs of providing arms and ammunition for the defense of the Commonwealth, including the costs of meeting "the aggression of John Brown and his associates upon the laws and dignity of our State" and other expenses "connected with the recent outrage at Harper's Ferry." He supported the tax bills necessary for the support of government, and resisted a move to reduce taxes to an inadequate level.

Among miscellaneous actions George opposed a bill which would have prevented a duelist from holding office; he joined a successful effort to limit the governor's power to appoint militia generals, believing that these selections should be ratified by the legislature; he resisted steps to appoint delegates to participate in a conference proposed by North Carolina and Mississippi to study the problems arising among the states, feeling that Virginia was not yet ready to face those problems.

South Carolina seceded from the Union on December 17, 1860, and other Southern states were considering such action. Virginia was in the position of being a border state, and tremendous pressure was being brought on Governor John Letcher, who doubtless felt that he must do something.

The General Assembly was summoned on short notice by the Governor to meet for an extra-ordinary session in Richmond on

January 7, 1861. The ostensible purpose was to consider the sale of a turnpike and canal company to a French concern, but it was widely understood that public affairs as they affected the Union were to be debated. Shanks reports that at this time "Unionists, such as Timothy Rives of Prince George, R. M. Bentley of London, Edwin Watson of Pulaski, and George M. Porter of Hancock, began extolling in their speeches in the legislature the 'glories' of the Union. At the same time they advertised the growing friendly sentiment of the North as expressed in meetings at Boston, Philadelphia and New York." 8

This extra session continued until April 4. George Porter again represented both Brooke and Hancock Counties. Although routine matters continued to be considered, more and more time was given to debates on the issue of the Commonwealth's relationships to the Federal Union, and on the proper structure of the Convention which would be called to face these problems. The Journal of the House of Delegates did not record these speeches made, and only the more eloquent ones or those of long-recognized leaders were condensed in the Richmond Dispatch. Increasingly, in these newspaper accounts, there were mentions of applause and shouting, and, on occasion, notations that the Speaker had threatened to have the galleries cleared. Day after day motions were made, debated, laid on the table, re-considered, replaced.

George Porter voted in a unanimous action appropriating one million dollars for the defense of the Commonwealth and for the issue of treasury bonds to provide this money. Usually he voted with small minorities against such motions as the one "that when any one or more of the states has determined or shall determine to withdraw from the Union, we are unalterably opposed to any attempt on the part of the Federal Government to coerce the same into reunion or submission, and that we will resist the same by all the means in our power," and the one that "no reconstruction of the Union between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding states can be permanent, just and satisfactory, which will not secure to each section a self-protecting power against any invasion, by the Federal Union, upon the reserved rights of either."

On the proposal that "if all efforts to reconcile the unhappy differences existing between the two sections of the country shall prove to be abortive, then, in the opinion of the general assembly, every consideration of honor and interest demand that Virginia shall unite her

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destiny with the slave states of the South," Porter was not recorded as voting. From every other evidence he would have opposed this resolution. No negative votes were tabulated, and conditions were such that it is not at all certain that any negative votes would have been recorded. Perhaps he was absent from the hall at the time of the vote. In the course of these continuing debates, George presented a petition of the 107th Militia Regiment which was referred to the Committee on Military Affairs, and the resolutions passed at a public meeting held in Brooke County, which were referred to the joint Committee on State and National Affairs. The debates were renewed daily, with relatively few decisions.

Meanwhile, an election had been called, on February 4th, for delegates to a State Convention which would meet in Richmond on February 13th. George Porter was elected to represent Hancock County in the Convention. For a time the activities of the legislature and of the Convention overlapped. In events leading up to these decisions George had voted in opposition to referring the main issues to the voters for direct action, but had joined the majority in agreeing that any vote taken in each county or election district should be considered only as declaratory of the popular vote of the electors "and as a popular instruction to their delegates."

It should be noted that this was not, at the beginning, a secession convention, nor was it meant to be a convention of unlimited powers. In electing delegates, the citizens had been asked to vote whether, if anything should be done affecting the relations of the State to the Federal Government, such action should be referred to the people for ratification before becoming effective, and this plan of "Reference" had been affirmed by nearly sixty thousand majority. The senior author has in his files a confidential handwritten memorandum of that day, purporting to show how individuals were supposed to have voted in one of the precincts of that county. In general, the secessionists had voted against referring the actions of the Convention back to the people, and the unionists had voted for reference, so that this had seemed to be a great Union victory.

Early in March there were debates described by George Porter as follows: "To have any influence in Richmond a man must talk and act like Hall of Wetzel [County] who said the people of Wetzel were in favor of the dissolution of the Union 'because there was an irrepressible conflict between free and slave labor.' Now, there were just seven slaves all told in Wetzel County, but for this specimen of
philosophic statesmanship the Richmond folks presented Hall a gold headed cane. It was inscribed ‘Presented to L. S. Hall of Wetzel for his vindication of the honor of Virginia.’" 9

For twenty-five years a political barrier had been rising between eastern and western Virginia. The slave-owning groups of the east were in position to enact laws and levy taxes which the less influential west bore with increasing impatience. George Porter’s legislative record as reported above reflected the strong feelings of the western partisans. The approach of the Civil War provided the opportunity for which western Virginians had been waiting, and they grasped it without hesitation. Before the Convention was a month old, events had transpired which served speedily to crystallize public sentiment in the home counties, both east and west.

The main group moving toward secession in the Convention was the Committee on Federal Relations, on which the Unionists had only seven members out of twenty-one. On March 9th it made three reports. One of the declarations urged that "a pacific policy be adopted toward the seceded states, and that no attempt be made to subject them to the Federal authority." Mr. John S. Carlile moved to strike out this language. The motion received only 17 supporting votes, including that of George McC. Porter, out of 121 votes cast.10 This motion dealt with the crucial issue and the vote showed that in effect the original State of Virginia already was lost to the Union. The question continued to arise in different forms. On March 28 George Porter voted against a proposal "reserving to the State of Virginia the powers heretofore delegated by her to the Federal government."

Although a very large majority of those chosen as convention delegates had in their candidacy been listed in support of the Union, and although they had been selected on the basis of such pledges, the Convention passed an ordinance of secession on April 17th. Then, without waiting for the reference of their action to the voters of the state, as would have been anticipated, they ratified on April 25th a secret agreement made the day before with the Vice-President of the Southern Confederacy, whereby all the military forces and resources of the Commonwealth were to be placed immediately at the command of the President of the Confederate States. Even before the passage of the secession ordinance, the authorities at Richmond had made war-like moves by the seizure of United States property at Harper's Ferry,

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9 Granville Davison Hall, The Rending of Virginia (Chicago, 1902), 150-151. 10 Ibid., 158-159.
and the Federal buildings at Richmond, Norfolk and Portsmouth, and by other measures. George Porter was among those who voted against the secession ordinance on April 17th.\textsuperscript{11}

George's impressions of the happenings of these days are vividly expressed in three letters written by him from Richmond to his wife, Sarah, who was at home in New Cumberland in Hancock County, as quoted by Mrs. Anna Pierpont Siviter. Mrs. Siviter was the daughter of Francis H. Pierpont, a leader with whom George was often associated and who was later elected Governor of the "Restored State of Virginia."\textsuperscript{12} On March 5 he wrote: "We, last evening ... voted down a secession resolution, offered as a test by a vote of 90 to 45 — just two to one .... We went to the Convention at 10 AM Saturday, and continued in session, only adjourning for dinner, and a half hour for tea, until half after five Sunday morning. I never saw such a scene in my life. The doors were closed and no one was permitted to go out." On April 17 he added: "We have been in secret session two or three days; so I cannot tell you what has occurred. War has broken out and all is lost. I cannot tell you when I can leave here. How I am to get home I do not know. I hope it will be soon, because no more good can be accomplished by staying. I send this by Mr. [Campbell] Tarr." On April 19 he continued: "The application of secrecy has been removed and a revolution has been inaugurated here. I suppose they are now fighting at Norfolk. The ordinance of secession must be ratified by the people, but no vote against it will be permitted in eastern Virginia. I cannot describe to you the terrible solemnity of the closing scenes of the convention. It was the darkest hour I ever saw. Men wept like children .... God seems to have deserted us and given us over to the control of our own folly and madness."

Of the 152 delegates in attendance, only 88 had voted for the Secession Ordinance. The men from west of the Alleghenies had fought the plot almost to a man. There were the greatest tensions in the hall, and outside there was much disorder.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{12} Siviter, \textit{op. cit.}, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Ibid.}, 49; James Clyde McGregor, \textit{The Disruption of Virginia} (New York, 1922), 164-166; Edward C. Smith, \textit{The Borderland in the Civil War} (New York, 1927), 162; John M. Hagans, \textit{Brief Sketch of the Erection and Formation of the State of West Virginia from the Territory of Virginia} (Charleston, W. Va., 1891), 24, 25.
Late in the afternoon on April 20 someone made the suggestion that the Union members from the northwestern part of the state who had opposed the Secession Ordinance get together for consultation. Most of them had lingered in Richmond, hoping for a more happy turn of events. These men had incurred much opposition in Richmond not only because they had just opposed the will of the majority, but because the old antipathies between the peoples of the eastern and western sections of the Commonwealth had become so much inflamed. After careful deliberation it was agreed that almost all of them (leaving only two in the convention to give information), should quietly withdraw from Richmond, go home to their constituents, call public meetings, and put on foot measures to resist secession. A few Union members had already left the city, fleeing the espionage system set up against them. It had by then become necessary for those seeking railway tickets to obtain permission from Governor Letcher. Eight members went in a body to the Governor, for this purpose, and after being sharply interrogated, they received a permit signed by him.14

On the 21st, a party of fourteen (including two ladies) after encountering some difficulty, got out of Richmond by two railroads. When they arrived at Alexandria in the afternoon, they found that city in an uproar — streets guarded and all public conveyance by land and water discontinued. (These arrangements were related to the defense of Washington.) The travellers decided to remain overnight and await developments. On the next day they were required to turn back toward Richmond. When they reached Manassas Junction, however, they left the train and hired conveyances across the mountain to Winchester, where they travelled by rail to Harper’s Ferry and so on home. At many points they had narrow escapes from mobs.15

George Porter was for at least part of the time a member of this party.16 The late William A. Crawford of Erie, Pennsylvania, quotes his mother, George’s sister Mary, as remembering that George had found it expedient to swim the James River at night to get out of Richmond, and to keep well under cover until he got some distance away. She said that those at home were much worried about his safety, because they did not hear from him for so long after the seces-

14 Hall, op. cit., 528-530 gives James C. McGrew’s recollections of the events of April 20 and 21, which are condensed here.
15 William P. Willey, Formation of the State of West Virginia (Wheeling, 1901), 51-53.
16 Hall, op. cit., 530; McGregor, op. cit., 183-184; Smith, op. cit., 188; West Virginia Department of Archives and History, Second Biennial Report, 159.
sion vote was taken, until he came walking home one evening more than a week later.  

Describing the disorders at Richmond just before the passage of the ordinance of secession, George Porter said in a speech at Wheeling on May 5th: "After the attack at Sumter, the mob in Richmond seized the artillery. They ran howling through the streets. They broke through the doors of your State house. They tore down the stars and stripes and hoisted in its place the flag of the Confederate States. The ordinance of secession was passed . . . and one thing more, which you doubtless already know, that I did not vote for it. I would have suffered this right arm to be cut off before I would have signed that ordinance."  

Out of that May 5 Wheeling meeting came a declaration that "the action of the Richmond Convention purporting to have dissolved the connection of Virginia with the Union was, in respect both to the act itself and the manner of doing, an unwarranted and dangerous usurpation of power, illegal, unconstitutional, and utterly null and void."  

The Richmond action on secession was popular in eastern Virginia but generally unpopular in the west. Five days after the ordinance was adopted, 1200 western Virginians had met at Clarksburg in a convention which resolved that all counties of northwestern Virginia should appoint delegates, "their wisest, best and most discreet men" to meet in convention on May 13 to determine what action should be taken in the emergency. A special edition of The West Virginia Guard published at Clarksburg, reporting this decision, was delivered in quantity by volunteer horsemen to many other towns of the area and by train to the eastern counties.  

Northwestern Virginians, indignant and disturbed, assembled the planned convention at Wheeling on May 13th, 1861, to consider measures for the public safety. Francis H. Pierpont, soon to be elected Governor, generously records that this gathering was called "under the auspices of Hon. John S. Carlisle [sic]." This Wheeling con-

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17 Letters written by William A. Crawford to G. M. Crawford on December 17, 1924, and to S. C. Crawford on June 7, 1939, and May 23, 1940.
18 Hall, op. cit., 180. (A portrait on that page shows the luxuriant beard which George mentioned in his letter of February 24, 1857, written from Cuba.)
19 Ibid., 222.
21 Francis Harrison Pierpont, Letter to his excellency the President and the honorable Congress of the United States, on the subject of abuse of military
vention was popularly called the "Mass Convention" and the "First Convention of the People of Northwestern Virginia." Representatives from the western counties came in large numbers to confer and determine a course of action. Twenty-seven counties were represented. There were 436 "delegates," of whom 162 came from the Panhandle counties. All of the counties represented, except Frederick, are now in West Virginia. Thirty-two men came from Hancock County alone. These included George McC. Porter, his father, J. S. Porter, his brother-in-law, J. C. Crawford, and the latter's cousin and brother-in-law, William L. Crawford.

No law or constitution authorized or gave jurisdiction to the Wheeling convention. It emanated directly from the people. Groups of determined men gathered together and undertook the development of a plan for immediate action. The more radical members demanded the immediate formation of a new state, the more conservative desired to hold to legal procedures. Mr. Pierpont, representing Marion County, was a leader of the conservative group, which included George McC. Porter.

In view of the large number of delegates (more than 400) in the first session it was agreed that one member for each county represented would be appointed by the president to a Committee on State and Federal Relations, to which should be referred all resolutions looking to action by the convention. George McCandless Porter was appointed to represent Hancock County. On the afternoon of the 14th, as the designated spokesman, he reported on behalf of the Committee a series of resolutions. After debate these were recommitted to the Committee, which continued work throughout the next day. On the evening of the 15th, Campbell Tarr read the revised Committee report, and it was adopted. In these resolutions the delegates declared their adherence to the United States, denounced the action at Richmond as usurpation, illegal and void, appointed a Central Committee to exercise their powers in organizing resistance to the usurpation of the State government and in supporting the Federal government, and provided for the election on June 4th of a delegate convention

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power in the command of General Butler in Virginia and North Carolina (Washington, 1864), 5-7.
22 Lewis, op. cit., 35-76.
23 Callahan, op. cit., 345; Hall, op. cit., 244.
24 Hall, op. cit., 252; Willey, op. cit., 60.
to meet June 11th. This First Wheeling Convention after three days of intensive work adjourned May 15th.  

On May 23rd occurred the general spring elections, at which were chosen members of the General Assembly, also members of Congress (although this had been forbidden by the government at Richmond). On this same day a convention committee of which Francis Pierpont was a member sent out a stirring 2000 word address to the people of northwest Virginia. The advance of United States troops simultaneously from Parkersburg and Wheeling on May 27th cleared the southern raiding parties out of the northern and western Virginia counties and left the people free to organize.

On June 4th, on a call issued by the Central Committee and addressed to all the loyal people of Virginia, elections were held for delegates to a convention to meet at Wheeling on June 11th. This “Second Wheeling Convention” convened at the appointed time. Its membership, including George McCandless Porter, embraced the delegates specially chosen on the 4th and also the members of both houses of Assembly as chosen on May 23rd to the extent that they supported the Union.

A controversy as to who had written the resolution providing for the convention of June 11 is reported in conflicting reports quoted from Granville Hall as follows. Governor Pierpont wrote: “Daniel Lamb, George McC. Porter and myself were made a sub-committee of the Committee on State and Federal Relations to make a report on the resolutions submitted . . . . Lamb and Porter took the resolutions and I made out the report of the Committee. I drew up the resolution providing for a convention to assemble on the 11th day of June, fixing the representation; providing for an executive committee and also requiring the executive committee to appoint a central committee in each county to superintend and certify the election of delegates to the Convention. These resolutions I read to Lamb and Porter, and put them in my pocket. They were not reported to the Convention by the Committee . . . . The time, in my opinion, had not arrived for their presentation to the Convention.” He continues: “Messrs. Lamb and Porter completed their report [on other matters] and submitted it to the Convention some time in the afternoon of the second day . . . . I think it is proper for me to state in this connection that the subject

26 Ibid., 265-270; also, Smith, op. cit., 166.
27 James Morton Callahan, Semi-Centennial History of West Virginia (Charleston, 1913), 142-151; Granville Parker, The Formation of the State of West Virginia (Wellsburg, 1875), 44; Evans, op. cit., 10-11.
of a future Convention was not discussed in the Convention; neither Mr. Lamb nor Mr. Porter had addressed the Convention; they were the only persons except myself that knew that such a proposal would be made." 

Mr. Hall notes that a legislative colleague, John H. Atkinson, who represented Hancock County along with George Porter and William L. Crawford, had also written: "It is true that in the May convention at Wheeling, in 1861, I drafted the resolution of which you write . . . . During the recess on the second day, the delegation from Hancock was called together, and I laid before them the following resolution, which was unanimously adopted and sent to George McC. Porter, our member upon the Committee." By either account, George Porter was close to the center of action.

In the convention of June 11 a Committee on Rules was set up, and George McC. Porter was one of the members. The next day a Committee on Business, to whom should be referred all resolutions in reference to State and Federal relations, was appointed, again including George Porter.

On June 17th this convention adopted a declaration asserting that the usurpation at Richmond had driven the loyal people of Virginia to resume their original rights and to "restore" the Commonwealth to its proper relation to the United States Government, and declaring vacant the offices of all who had adhered to the secession convention. Ordinances were passed to provide for emergencies and to put the machinery of the State in motion. This declaration of the reorganization of the Commonwealth on a loyal basis was signed on June 19 by George McC. Porter, W. L. Crawford, and 82 other delegates. The effect of this proposition was to reorganize a new Virginia government out of the loyal counties, and to call this new organization the State of Virginia, wholly independent of the organization that was "purporting to be the government of Virginia at the city of Richmond."

Meanwhile, at Richmond, the western delegates who had departed after the secession vote had been taken were legally from the old

28 Hall, op. cit., 275.
30 Hall, op. cit., 298.
31 Ibid., 304; Hagans, op. cit., 57.
32 Hall, op. cit., 330.
33 Charles H. Ambler, West Virginia, the Mountain State (New York, 1940), 309-342; Lewis, op. cit., 78-137.
legislature. On June 12 the ordinance of secession was formally signed, with only two or three signatures of delegates from western counties. On June 14 a resolution was adopted instructing the Committee on Election "to enquire and make report of the number and names of members whose seats were vacant and the cause of such vacancies." Six days later, the chairman reported the names, including that of George McC. Porter. It was resolved that these "be and are hereby expelled from the convention." Thereupon new persons were declared elected to fill the vacancies at Richmond thus created. These new members then signed the secession ordinance. The names of these newly elected replacements were listed on the numerous copies of the ordinance distributed throughout the country as though they had been the original delegates of the western counties.

At Wheeling, on June 20, Daniel Lamb of Ohio County nominated Francis H. Pierpont to be Governor of the "Restored State of Virginia." There were no other nominations, and he was unanimously elected to serve until such time as an "election can properly be held." He appointed a Secretary of the Commonwealth and wrote President Lincoln that an insurrection (secession) existed in Virginia which he was unable to suppress. He called upon the United States Government for aid and asked for a military force if needed. Four days later Secretary of War Simon Cameron replied, promised him assistance, and addressed him as the "Governor of Virginia." Then he called an extra-ordinary session of the Assembly on July 1, 1861. The Second Wheeling Convention adjourned on July 25, after two weeks of intensive work.

Accordingly, the first Legislature or General Assembly under the "reorganized government of Virginia" met at Wheeling on the first day of July 1861. They elected two United States Senators, John S. Carlile and Waitman T. Willey, to fill the places vacated by seceding members. These Senators were in due time admitted to seats in Washington as were the members of the House of Representatives chosen in the three northwestern Virginia districts in May. Meanwhile the President of the United States had, in several official communications through his cabinet, recognized the Governor of the "restored" State government as the rightful executive of Virginia.

34 Hall, op. cit., 530-531; Willey, op. cit., 49.
Thus both houses of the United States Congress, as well as the Executive, had accepted the acts of the "reinstated" government based at Wheeling, and its recognition as the constitutional government of Virginia was authoritative and complete. Eight volunteer regiments were soon recruited for the Union Army. This reorganized state government continued to function from Wheeling for two years, until June 20, 1863.

The June convention took a recess on July 26, 1861, during the sitting of the General Assembly and reassembled on August 6th. On August 20th, it passed an ordinance authorizing an election in certain counties in western Virginia on the question of a separation from Virginia, and for the election of delegates at the same time to a convention to frame a constitution for a separate state if that plan should prevail. Successively, the names New Virginia, Allegheny and Kanawha were considered for the new state, and the name West Virginia emerged much later, in the constitutional convention. There was much interesting debate and revealing official correspondence which cannot be discussed in this brief paper. The convention adjourned on August 25 with the understanding that it could be reconvened at any time prior to January 1, 1862.37

The referendum occurred October 24th; the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of establishing a new state. The tally was 18,408 for and 781 against. In Hancock County the vote was 263 for and 78 against. Delegates to the constitutional convention were elected at this same time.

The convention to frame a constitution for the new State met at Wheeling November 26, 1861, and adjourned February 18, 1862. On January 6, 1862, Governor Letcher of the seceded state, in an address to the "Legislature of Virginia," said: "President Lincoln has plundered the public treasury and has delivered at least $40,000 to Pierpont to enable him and his treacherous associates in the Commonwealth of Virginia to overthrow the State government and to organize within the limits of this State a new government."38

Pierpont's task was indeed not simple. Ambler in summarizing the events of those months writes that "a few days after the Constitutional Convention met in his capital city, the general assembly met in the same city and in the same building, thus producing another of those

37 Parker, op. cit., 47.
anomalies with which he had to deal during his entire public life. His was a coordinate department of the Restored Government, which had the approval of President Lincoln, of Congress, and of the Federal Military power.” Ambler observes further that “Consequently, he had some hesitation in going along with those whose main purpose was to supersede the Restored Government and to substitute therefor another of undetermined legality and expediency . . . . In a number of instances members of the general assembly were at the same time delegates to the Convention. This made for common purposes and harmonious actions, and thanks to Pierpoint’s [sic] resourcefulness, did not deplete the new state treasury.”

The constitution of the new state was ratified by the people within the territory for which it had been made, on April 3rd, by a vote that was practically unanimous.

The General Assembly of the “restored” state was reconvened May 6th. Ambler reports that “The legislators were greeted by a message from Governor Pierpont in which he accepted the ‘new’ state and denied current assertions to the effect that its formation was revolutionary. Instead, critics were informed that ‘history, geography and social relations’ had conspired to make such a course inevitable.”

On the 13th the Assembly which was still based at Wheeling took the next necessary step and passed an act giving the formal consent of “Restored Virginia” to the establishment of the “new” state.

As for George Porter, in January 1862 he had been named Brigadier General of the 25th regiment, “Virginia Militia.” He received felicitations from relatives and neighbors on this honor when he was called home by the birth of his first son, Edwin, January 25th. (See a later reference to the Panhandle Greys.)

George Porter was not so active in the more recent political developments. He and many others had been much more interested in re-

40 Ambler, Pierpont, 174.
41 Letters written by Fannie Porter to Mary, the sister of George McC. Porter. This probably was an honorary award, in recognition of his services in raising funds for the armed forces. No confirming record has been found in military archives. Indirect evidence that this brigade may have been an inactive one, appears in the Acts of General Assembly, Wheeling, regular session beginning December 2, 1861, page 94, to the effect that on January 17, 1862, by joint resolution, it was “Resolved, That this House, the Senate concurring, will proceed on Wednesday the 22nd-inst. to elect Brigadier Generals for the tenth, twentieth, twenty-second, twenty-third, twenty-fourth and twenty-seventh Brigades of the State Militia.” The time was the same, and the omission of the twenty-fifth brigade from this series may have significance.
instating a Virginia government loyal to the Union and in getting recognition for the interests of the western part of Virginia than in forming a new state, and it is doubtful if he had much enthusiasm for this emerging plan. Hence it is not surprising that in spite of all the earlier participation outlined above, he is not generally recognized as one of the founders of the State of West Virginia. He is reported to have opposed precipitate action in the House of Delegates at Wheeling. It is believed that his personal sentiments were rather accurately reflected in the moderate resolutions which he had supported in both the First and the Second Wheeling Conventions. An interesting, and at the time influential, view had been promoted by John G. Jacob, editor of the Wellsburg Herald, published in the town where George had attended the Academy before going to college. Instead of discrediting and discouraging the Restored Government, he wished to use it as a means to an end, the restoration of the Union. This achieved, he was not opposed to the ultimate dismemberment of Virginia. Temporarily, he thought “new state” enthusiasts could better occupy themselves in organizing a respectable military force than in continuing their agitation. It seems likely that this was also George Porter’s view.

The act authorizing separation of the new state from the restored state was certified by Governor Pierpont and forwarded, with a certified copy of the constitution and a memorial asking the admission of the new state, to Senator Willey, by whom the papers were presented in the United States Senate May 29th.

A bill for the admission of West Virginia passed the Senate July 14th, and the House of Representatives on December 10th. After much discussion and political maneuvering the bill was signed by the President on December 31, 1862. The Constitutional Convention of the new state reassembled February 12, 1863, and worked out an amendment on slavery. The amended constitution was presented to the voters on March 26 and was approved. The President of the United States issued his proclamation April 20 declaring the admission of West Virginia as the thirty-fifth state in the union complete sixty days thereafter. Thus was born the “Civil War State.”

Meanwhile, under provision made by the convention on May 28,
elections had been held and state officers and members of the legislature for the new state chosen. On June 20, 1863, West Virginia was formally inaugurated at the Linsley Institute building, in the city of Wheeling. After the division of Virginia became final and Arthur I. Boreman had been elected the first governor of the new state, Pierpont on July 16 removed his office and the archives of the "reorganized" state to Alexandria, as had been authorized by the Wheeling legislature on February 5, 1863. He there convened the "restored" legislature and governed the remaining loyal eastern counties from this temporary capital. In 1864 he called a convention which voted to abolish slavery in the "State of Virginia."

After a few months when Federal troops took Richmond, Pierpont moved the seat of the "restored government" from Alexandria to Richmond. The records of actions taken by the Wheeling, Alexandria and interim Richmond governments were later made part of the regular Virginia archives, and the continuity of the legal entity of the old state as a member of the Union thus was provided.\[46\] Needless to say, these activities and these interpretations were not acceptable at the time to the people of Richmond and to many others. Pierpont's administration continued to be difficult, although he seems to have had the support of President Lincoln and of most of the members of his cabinet throughout. On April 9, 1865, Edwin M. Stanton had addressed Pierpont at Alexandria as Governor of Virginia in a telegram to announce Lee's surrender to Grant. Pierpont's effective term as Governor of the "restored" state continued until April 1868. The old state was readmitted to the Union in 1870.

In his home community, between legislative sessions, George Porter was active in many ways. In the college class reunion statement already cited it is said that whenever he returned to New Cumberland from Richmond or Wheeling "he would be seen in the house of God, at the head of his Bible class of young men which he had taught for several years, or in the meetings for social prayers, as well as at every service for public worship."

On July 24, 1862, George wrote to Adjutant General H. J. Samuels at Wheeling that Hancock County had decided to give a bounty of sixty dollars for volunteers, "the same as Brooke and Ohio Counties," and that having a man who will go into service as second lieutenant, it wished to know the terms attached to the position and

how many men must be raised. On October 6 of that year he again wrote to General Samuels, asking advice on how to assist some neighbors in securing bounty and back pay for services in the army. "In Ohio the state government takes care of such matters... we ought to have a claim agent." 48

There had been occasional raiding and guerilla warfare by the Confederacy in northwest Virginia. To meet this threat the chief dependence was on vigilance committees and homeguards. In 1861 George Porter organized a state militia company, the Panhandle Greys. This company was mustered on July 4, with himself as Captain, John C. Crawford as First Lieutenant and Alfred Smith as Second Lieutenant. There were nine days of "service" in July, August, September and October, for which the Captain received $26.10, the First Lieutenant $23.10, the Second Lieutenant $21.60. Non-commissioned officers drew from $6.60 down to $4.50. Privates received a total of $3.90 for the nine days. Absentees from the Saturday drills were fined fifty cents. Excuses accepted and recorded included "down river," "war," "sick," "Pittsburgh," "gone to Ohio." George "reported to the Adjt. Genrl. Oct 3rd 1861 — 89 men were sworn in — 91 in all — 1 removed from State — one provided a substitute — three joined a Penna. Regt. — two enlisted in Ohio & thirteen in the 1st Va. Regt. leaving 72 members on the Company." On August 5th he had recorded that he had sent five men "to compel the delivery up of state arms & they rode all day on horseback." 50

The muster of July 4, 1862, showed the same officers, except that B. J. Smith had replaced Alfred Smith as Second Lieutenant. The story of this year was well summarized in Capt. Porter's letter of September 4, written to the Adjutant General at Wheeling. "Since the call of the President of the U. S. for 300,000 volunteers, some eighteen of the Company have gone into the U.S. Service, making 43 in all that we have forwarded to the Country. Our member now is fifty nine, rank and file including two or three not sworn in & many who are too old, crippled and otherwise exempt and unfitted for protracted service. We are armed with percussion muskets and have almost exhausted our ammunition. I expect to recruit as soon as I can and keep

48 Ibid., 202.
49 Hall, op. cit., 510-512.
50 These handwritten records made by Capt. George Porter in 1861, 1862 and 1863 are among the original papers preserved in the files of the senior author.
our numbers between sixty and seventy. I would have done so already, but have had a severe hemorrhage within a week which has taken away so much strength and voice that I am completely 'hors de combat.' Please give the bearer Lieut. B. J. Smith, about 65 rifles to exchange for our muskets. The Govr. promised them. We will return the muskets at once."

In 1863 the muster of July 4 showed the same officers continuing, and 62 men. Capt. Porter's report made on November 25 at the end of the drilling season showed "57 men, ½ keg powder, 300 caps & 10 lbs. lead." It would seem that they were still using the old muskets. A "certificate of service" given at Wheeling on November 5, 1864, to John C. Crawford, First Lieutenant of the Greys, indicates that this was a Company of the First Regiment, West Virginia Militia.

We have found few additional statements about the activities of George Porter. In retrospect it appears that he had suffered from tuberculosis throughout his whole mature career, beginning in college. Granville Davison Hall, author of The Rending of Virginia, speaks as follows: "George McC. Porter, who had distinguished himself in the Richmond Convention as a loyalist of unflinching courage, was a young man of talents and personal graces, fated to an early death. It was he who first suggested to [me] to preserve documentary and other material and write the history of the events then transpiring around us. 'Why not do this yourself?' I asked Mr. Porter. There was a prescient sadness in his reply: 'I shall not be here.'" 51

George's diary covering the last six months of his life has been preserved by his grandson, a resident of Pittsburgh, who bears the same name. It was written at his home in New Cumberland, West Virginia. Most of the entries are of a private nature, and they reflect an active man of keen ability, strong purpose, and warm feeling. A few are quoted here.

January 4, 1864. I am taking the following periodicals this year:

- New York Observer
- American Agriculturist
- Wheeling Daily Intelligencer
- Wellsburg Weekly Herald
- Middlebourne Weekly Plaindealer
- Fairmont Weekly National
- Washn. Pa., Reporter & Tribune

Then we get the numbers of the Atlantic each month. Some of our...
weeklies are of no use to us & are taken because they are loyal papers in the interior of the new state and need support.

January 7, 1864. This morning Howard McCandless Porter was born.52

January 14 [written in Pittsburgh]. there is an election at home for a County Treasurer and Township officers.

January 15. Election news: Cumberland or Clay Township, the Union men will make a clean sweep by very small majorities — 11 the highest.

January 18. Settle [accounts] with Mr. Smith . . . . Receive from him a check for $200.00 furnished for bounty to volunteers.

January 22. Have received a paper which is good for $144.00 & belongs to Mrs. Sarah Wilson. More than a year ago I sent in her application for back pay and bounty due her son John who belonged to a Colorado Regt. & was killed accidentally in New Mexico. The old lady has lost two more sons since then, but they were married & she is not entitled to anything on their account.53

From this point on the entries become less frequent and their burden more grim. His beloved wife died on February 13, apparently from puerperal fever. There were several diary references to his own debilitating hemorrhages. On March 19 he attended a township meeting to deal with road business, and after that a meeting to nominate county and township officers. “Was made chairman of meeting against my will & served I think for the last time till my health improves.” On March 20 he mentions another hemorrhage, “the result probably of presiding over that meeting. Feel more and more the necessity of giving up all public life & participation in public meetings.”

George McCandless Porter died on July 8, 1864, at the age of twenty-nine years and two months, and was buried in the cemetery at New Cumberland. A modest estate was bequeathed to his minor son, Edwin. Brief as it was, his career had found him associated with three States of Virginia. In the original State, of which John Letcher was governor, he was a member of the House of Delegates from his election in 1857 until his expulsion on June 20, 1861, as recorded above. He was active, beginning in May 1861, in the formation of the “Restored” State of Virginia, of which Francis H. Pierpont was governor from June of that year until April 1868. Somewhat apprehensively, George saw unfolding after August 1861 the steps which led to the formation of the new State of West Virginia, of which

52 A second son who died that same year, a few weeks after his father. The first child, born in 1862, was Edwin Lewis Porter, the father of George McCandless Porter (II) who now resides in Pittsburgh.

Arthur I. Boreman became governor in May 1863. He nevertheless participated actively in local government affairs under the new state organization of which his native Hancock County had become a constituent part. Once the wheels had started to turn, they had ground out more changes than he had anticipated, but he accepted these as valid products of the democratic process.

The school textbooks have not said much about the fact that these three state governments were in coexistence within the boundaries of the original Commonwealth throughout a period of about five years, approximately the first five in the history of the new state, but all three states were very real parts of the life of this young citizen. Now, following the final reunion of the "Restored" State and the Old Dominion which took place in 1868, four years after George's death, there have been for ninety-five years the two states, the historic Virginia, and the new "West Virginia."