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Into the Vortex of a Maelstrom: The Art of Municipal Governance in Confederate Richmond

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at
Virginia Commonwealth University

by

Joshua Daniel Shaffer
Bachelor of Arts, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, 2009

Director: Dr. Kathryn S. Meier
Assistant Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University Department of History

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
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Abstract

INTO THE VORTEX OF A MAELSTROM: THE ART OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE IN CONFEDERATE RICHMOND

By Joshua Daniel Shaffer, M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015

Major Director: Dr. Kathryn S. Meier

Assistant Professor, Virginia Commonwealth University Department of History

From May 1861 until April 1865 the city of Richmond, Virginia served as the capital of the Confederate States of America, during the American Civil War. Throughout the course of the war it operated alongside the established governments of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the County of Henrico, and Richmond City. The body that experienced the greatest fluctuation and change was the municipal government, which consisted of a city council, mayor, and hustings court. The city government faced existential challenges that included an increase in its population, an influx of Confederate soldiers, and the constant threat of the Union army. While developing and implementing policies that responded to these situations, it refused to neglect or yield the duties that it had always performed. This included maintaining the gas and water works, funding police and fire departments, providing land for burial in cemeteries, and ensuring basic resources were available to its denizens.

INTRODUCTION

*“Into the Vortex of a Maelstrom”*¹

Since the cessation of hostilities that marked the end of the American Civil War nearly every aspect of its existence has been researched, debated, and contested. Generations of scholars have proven the war to be a transformative moment in the history of the United States of America, in nearly every respect; this includes the very nature of political philosophy and its practical application. Many historians have focused their attention on the growth of power at the national level, as this aspect of governance most directly affected the outcome of the war.² Fewer scholars, such as Michael F. Holt, have done important work concerning political interactions of state government.³ Municipal government is almost always left out of these analyses.

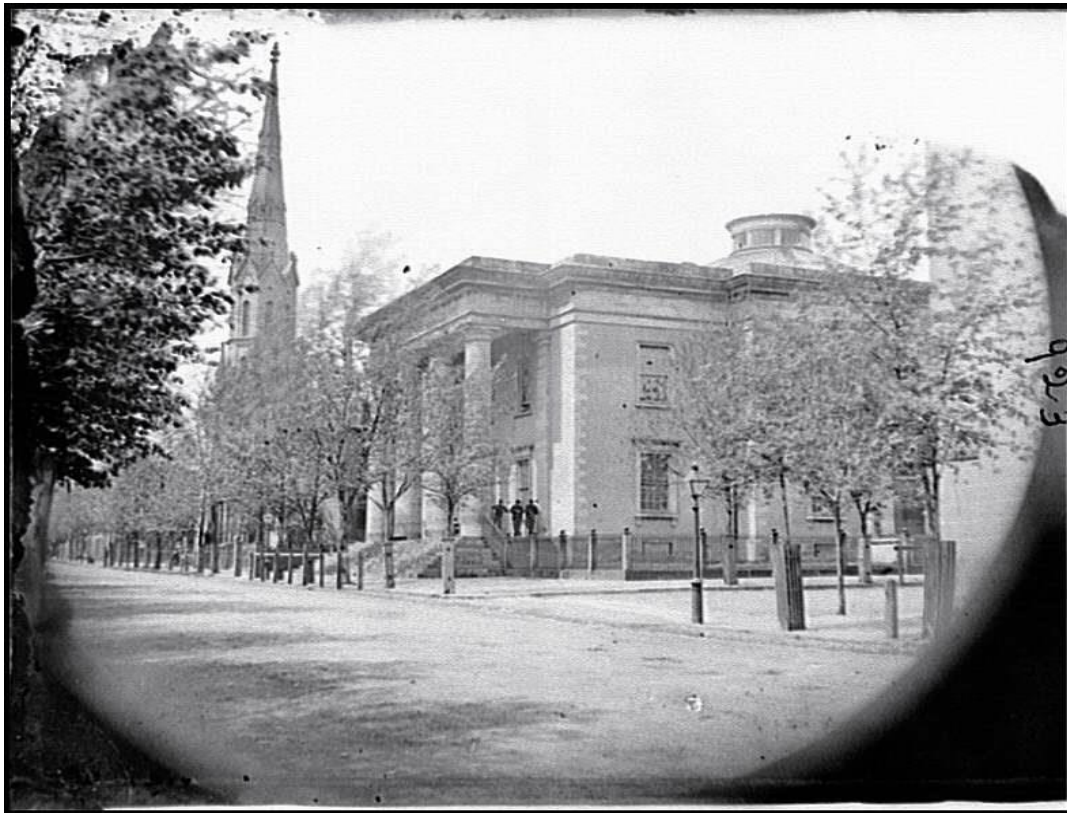
Yet throughout the war both Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis spent copious amounts of time working in concert with local governments, within their respective nations. As a consequence of these interactions, their relationships can tell historians much about how each level of government cultivated the scope of its power, often at the expense of the other. It can also teach about the inner mechanisms of local governance, such as the daily tasks and expectations found in the experience of a municipality. Studying this base level of the political

¹ *Richmond Daily Examiner*, February 4, 1864. The quotation comes from an *Examiner* article discussing how absurdly crowded the city now felt. “Foolish people,” it observed, “rush into Richmond like a crazy craft into the vortex of a maelstrom.”

² In no way does this statement mean that politicians were greater players than soldiers. Ultimately, wars are won and lost on the field of battle. What is being stated is that politicians on each side appointed and dismissed military commanders, as well as helped to influence military campaigns and policy, and therefore, shaped their side’s prosecution.

³ Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

hierarchy, the one most in touch with the daily lives of Civil War Americans, offers the chance to explore how the various war related duties expected of a municipality, balanced with its obligations to its constituents, were conducted. A municipality's proximity to the seat of the national capital greatly impacted the amount of interaction its governing body developed with the national government. No city, at least in the Confederacy, throughout the Civil War stood more in the shadow of its national government than Richmond, Virginia.



Richmond City Hall, 1865- Longtime home of the city's municipal government. *Library of Congress*

During its tenure as the capital city of the Confederate States of American, from the time of its May 1861 designation until its capture by the Union Army of the James in April 1865, Richmond serves as an excellent case study not only for how a local government is dramatically

affected by wartime, but also in its mandatory interactions with the national Confederate government, as well as with that of the Commonwealth of Virginia, for whom the city also served as its capital. For the better part of four years these three governments resided in the same place. During the Civil War, the municipal government of Richmond consequently expanded its expected priorities of daily administering the city, such as providing some assistance to the poor and keeping the peace, to now addressing wartime needs, from erecting fortifications to providing for the massive influx of migrants. With so many responsibilities it would have been understandable if the city had neglected some or passed others on to another authority, such as the state. Richmond chose to concern itself with as much as possible. This does not mean that the path it chose was the correct one, nor was everything it did performed efficiently. The municipal government simply felt itself compelled to act as much as it could. The city authorities further became embroiled in issues of national government, such as the effects of tobacco burning and conscription, and state government, such as the issuing of a city currency. In several of these situations the city ably asserted its priorities over those of the other governments. Through all of these events and crises the city persevered, even as the Confederacy rotted away around it. When its atrophied military forces could finally no longer protect the capital, the national government at last abandoned its host. Alone to surrender city, the municipal government would be on hand when the forces of the United States entered Richmond on April 3, 1865. As they had for the entire war, the residents of the city would still look to its mayor and city council for guidance, order, and protection, long after the Confederacy's demise.

Municipal government existed in Richmond since its founding in 1737, and therefore predated the move of the commonwealth's capital there from Williamsburg, in 1779. By the time that the Confederate capital arrived in 1861, the city government consisted of an elected fifteen

member council, five men from each of the city's three wards. Invested in this body were all of the legislative powers of city governance, with the ability to make laws, raise revenue, and provide municipal services. A mayor elected from the city's entire populous administered the ordinances passed by the council, headed the city police force, and adjudicated minor crimes in a special mayor's court. More serious infractions of the law were heard in the city hustings court, populated by elected aldermen. On the whole, the municipal government was well regarded by the citizens of Richmond, and performed their enumerated duties, as prescribed by the City Charter, with competency and efficiency.

Upon its May 29, 1861 arrival, the Confederate authorities found their local brethren firmly entrenched and operating within an established system and culture. The existence of the capital within its borders would force the city government outside of its familiar domain. Being the capital meant that Richmond would have to accommodate the greater war effort, regardless of preference. Initially, the city authorities proved receptive to these expectations, as evidenced in the funding of defensive earthworks about the city and furnishing various military companies in service to the national military. They rightly knew that their fate was bound to that of the national government; ensuring that the Confederacy could survive helped guide much of the city's decision making process. Over time, though, it became evident that what the city believed to be of importance did not always align the national and state government objectives. During the course of the war, Richmond discovered that it sometimes had to protect its constituents from its own national government. Local authorities understood that they had to balance serving the Confederacy's war aims with their own concerns over public safety. In the end, the municipal government firmly decided against forgoing its duty to its citizens. Consequently, nearly every

aspect of individual life would occupy debate during the approximately 157 meetings that the city council held from April of 1861 to April of 1865.

As the capital city of one of the two belligerents, Richmond has deservedly found a place in the scholarship of the Civil War. While not always achieving top billing, it at least is discussed in the vast majority of monographs to one degree or another, owing to its importance of the Confederate capital. Several works have been written that chronicle the hierarchies, relationships, legislation, and actions of the Confederate government, as well as fine studies about Virginia political leaders and commonwealth-wide politics.⁴ Yet political histories of the war and the Confederacy do not tend to dwell on the local side of governing, and there are no comprehensive analyses of the municipal government during the war. The mayor and city council do make appearances in the only two biographies of the war time city- *The Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital*, by Emory Thomas, and *Ashes of Glory: Richmond at War*, by Ernest B. Furgurson. The former argues that “Richmond underwent major transformations as a result of the Confederacy and its war,” devoting more attention to a comprehensive history of capital than just local politics.⁵ In a separate article, “To Feed the Citizens: Welfare in Wartime Richmond,” Thomas details in greater depth the level of financial support undertaken by the municipal government for the care of its destitute citizens. He argues that the level of this sort provided by legislation undertaken by the city could be seen as foreshadowing the welfare states of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries. The

⁴ Wilfred Buck Years, *The Confederate Congress*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960); Mary Spencer Ringold, *The Role of the State Legislatures in the Confederacy*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966); Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); William Blair, *Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Brent Tarter, *The Grandees of Government: The Origins and Persistence of Undemocratic Politics in Virginia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

⁵ Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) viii.

work is illuminating but only covers one facet of the municipal government's wartime policy. Furgurson's work makes use of much of the same primary and secondary sources found in Thomas' works, yet it draws more heavily from prominent diary and journal publications from such well known Richmonders as Sally Brock Putnam, Phoebe Yates Pember, and John B. Jones. Like Thomas, Furgurson only gives cursory attention to city politics. Apart from these works, there are general histories of Richmond, but nothing specific to what this thesis addresses.⁶ In preparation for the Civil War centennial Louis H. Manarin transcribed the minutes of the war time city council, and while his introduction provides an instructive overview of the actions taken by the city in response to the various war related situations, his work does not provide copious analysis.

Manarin's efforts, published as *Richmond at War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, is the most instructive source into understanding the municipal government during the war, and it constitutes the major source base for this thesis. The minutes are a minute account of debates and votes regarding the daily operations of the city in wartime as well as the council's interactions with state and national governments. Additionally, because many of these interactions, the different minutes of these respective bodies have been consulted whenever necessary. Occasionally, too, consultation of *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* has helped to augment the understanding of military events and considerations. As Richmond maintained an active and colorful wartime press, newspapers offer further insight into the daily debates within the city, as well as provide

⁶ Marie Tyler-McGraw, *At the Falls: Richmond, Virginia and Its People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Michael B. Chesson, *Richmond After the War, 1865-1890* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981); Thomas Cooper DeLeon, *Four Years in Rebel Capitals: An Inside View of Life in the Southern Confederacy, from Birth to Death* (New York: Collier Books, 1962); William J. Kimball, "War Time Richmond," *Virginia Cavalcade* (Spring 1962), 33-40; Nelson Lankford, *Richmond Burning: The Last Days of the Confederate Capital* (New York: Penguin, 2002).

some measure of the opinions held by the city populous. In addition, I make use of the various published letters and journals of various Richmond residents, as well as manuscript collections the Library of Virginia and the Valentine Richmond History Center. Like the newspaper articles and editorials, these contemporary words may help to illuminate political and public opinion, reveal individual understandings of city affairs, and offer arguments for or against the policies of the day.

Because the city's response to resident needs and interactions with the upper levels of government changed over time, this thesis employs a chronological rather than thematic approach. Chapter one begins with the secession of the Commonwealth of Virginia from the United States and covers the experience of the city until the winter of 1862-1863. During the first year and a half of war, Richmond experienced tremendous change and turbulent growth, including the establishment of the capital within the city, the effects of the Battle of First Manassas, and the Peninsula Campaign and Seven Days. These events more than any others forced the city to adapt to the turbulent nature of the war, and they presented the municipal government with the challenge of meeting its obligations as a local government and supporting the struggle for Confederate independence. The second chapter begins with the smallpox epidemic and continues until the surrender of the city on April 3, 1865. During this time Richmond still faced the external threats from the enemy, like during the battle and subsequent siege of Petersburg, and had to struggle with the consequences of the Confederacy's war prosecution on the citizens of the capital. These issues ranged from the possibility of conscripting municipal workers to blunting the ferocity of inflation. The thesis conclusion sets the stage for another transition of governmental cooperation, this time between the city and occupying Union forces.

CHAPTER ONE: Spring 1861-Fall 1862

“Richmond Is a Hard Road to Travel”

As the denizens of Richmond left their church services on Sunday, April 21, 1861, they were greeted by the capital square tocsin, sounding the alarm that trouble was afoot. Rumors “spread over the city that a steamer, with Federal troops, was coming up the river, to seize the ammunition brought here on the evening previous, from Norfolk.”¹ Hysteria compelled the populous to gather at ideal vantage points close to within site of the water. Local militia units and artillery companies marshaled at Rockett’s Warf; women and children congregated along the hill sides, all anxious to see the would-be invaders repelled. The rogue gunboat, thought to be the *U.S.S. Pawnee*, never actually made an appearance, and as this reality started to sink in, many Richmonders began to relax and find amusement in their panic. Most, though, did find the exercise instructive, including the editors of the *Daily Dispatch*, Richmond’s only penny daily. In an article published the following day, the paper recounted the events of “*Pawnee* Sunday,” as it would come to be remembered, and concluded its commentary with a recommendation that Richmonders practice prudence: “In times like these we must be prepared for any emergency, and every rumor deserves careful and considerate attention.”²

Even though the Confederate government had yet to migrate to Richmond, the events of “*Pawnee* Sunday” revealed important things for the city and its leaders. Chiefly, it demonstrated, in the words of historian Emory Thomas, “a very uncomical state of unreadiness.”³ As a mature

¹ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, April 22, 1861.

² *Ibid.*

³ Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998, 35.

city, state capital, and site of established and vital industry, Richmond would have been an attractive target to Union forces even if it never became the Confederate capital. Additionally, its close proximity to the U.S. frontier, as well as the City of Washington, all but guaranteed it would become an integral site in the unfolding events. The importance of the city became immeasurably compounded when the Montgomery government, on May 20, elected to relocate there. Nearly one month before this had taken place, five respectable Virginians had been appointed by the state's Secession Convention to represent the Old Dominion's interests at the Provisional Confederate Congress: Robert M. T. Hunter, William C. Rives, Gideon D. Camden, Waller R. Staples, and J. W. Brockenbrough.⁴

These delegates helped to persuade the majority of those assembled that Virginia, and Richmond specifically, would make for a more suitable location for the seat of the nascent government. The city on the James River offered the Confederacy greater industrial and manufacturing capacity, a major rail center in nearby Petersburg, and an established municipal infrastructure that could access the Chesapeake Bay and foreign ports beyond. More broadly, Virginia offered better logistical contact to what many believed would become a prominent theater of war; located just across the Potomac River from Washington and the United States, the commonwealth seemed the logical entry point of a potential Union invasion, thus necessitating the placement of defensive armies within its confines. Positioning the capital so close to such a force could allow the Confederacy's military commanders to facilitate better communication. Finally, Virginia's secession brought with it the symbolic prestige of obtaining the cradle of several of the United States' most revered founders.⁵ Regardless, the city required special

⁴ *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, April 30, 1861. Cited in Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond*, 32.

⁵ William C. Davis, "Richmond Becomes the Capital," *Virginia at War: 1861*, William C. Davis and James I. Robertson Jr., eds., Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005, 114-119. For a more thorough

protection, and designating it as the capital would achieve this necessity. The pitch proved successful, and the provisional government voted for the move to the city it would call home for virtually the entirety of the war.⁶

From the secession of Virginia in 1861 until the winter of 1862-63, the permanent Confederate capital underwent a remarkable and turbulent metamorphosis. With the rapid migration of people and property to the city, those entrusted to govern it faced the choice of ceding its heretofore enumerated responsibilities, such as ensuring that Richmond's citizens were provided with the numerous services and resources expected of a municipal government, and concerning itself wholly with aiding in the prosecution of the war effort, such as providing the Confederate government with the kind of financial, material, and personnel support that it would need to help achieve the ultimate goal of independence.

Richmond's municipal government chose to do both. In regards to assisting the war effort, the City Council did not have many attractive choices; ostensibly little could stop the national government from using the municipality's resources if it chose to do so. Therefore, it behooved the local government to work in concert with both the state and federal authorities to ensure that such resources were utilized as efficiently as possible. Working with the larger governments, the city authorities saw their power augmented even as they continued to perform their normal duties to the city's denizens. During the period of 1861-1862, these effects could be linked to three major events: the naming of Richmond as the permanent capital of the Confederate States of America; the First Battle of Manassas and the visceral realities that its

investigation of the change of capitals, as well as an analysis of the time spent in Montgomery, Alabama, please refer to William C. Davis, *A Government of Our Own: The Making of the Confederacy*, New York: Free Press, 1994.

⁶ U.S. Congress, *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America*, Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1904, I, 254-255.

outcome brought to Richmond; and the effects of the Peninsula Campaign, including the Seven Days Battles.⁷ Much of what the Richmond government did can be interpreted as a reaction, however tangential, to one or more of these examples. Put another way, the chain reaction wrought by these events extended to nearly every aspect of life within the city and, consequently, compelled and inspired action on the part of the City Council and Mayor Joseph C. Mayo. Some of the most important debates prompted by these events would concern the provision of the city's citizen-soldiers and defense, the housing and care of wounded soldiers, guaranteeing the general safety of citizens, shielding the city from potentially destructive actions taken by the Confederate government, and struggling to find a way to pay for everything from obstructing the James River to the removal of dead animals from the city streets. At times these debates put the city in concord with the Confederate and Virginia governments, and, at others, it put them at odds. Above all, the municipal government strove to maintain the health and stability of its city at all hazards.

Well aware of the city's importance and vulnerability during the Civil War's nascent days, Richmond's municipal government had already taken preemptive measures to support local defense militias and erect earthworks outside the city's limits. These defensive tasks had been undertaken in the wake of the altercation at Fort Sumter. On April 15, 1861, three days after the war's opening salvo, but still two days before the Virginia Session Convention affirmatively voted to part company with the United States, Councilman Nathaneal B. Hill had recalled a previously tabled resolution, "for appropriating \$50,000. to arm and equip volunteer companies."⁸ When the motion originally came before the council in January, during the

⁷ For purposes of this thesis, the battle will be referred to as First Manassas, not First Bull Run. The same will be true for any mention of Second Manassas.

⁸ *City Council Minutes*, April 15, 1861.

secession winter of 1860-61, Virginia was still a unionist state and still sought to avoid war. Therefore, allocating precious resources for such a cause seemed unnecessary.⁹ The situation in April was radically different, and the council affirmed its duty to provide for its militia, whose services looked more likely to be engaged. In reporting the council's affirmation of this measure, the *Daily Dispatch* recalled the resolution's January tabling, but now, "in consequence of the exigencies of the times, and recent war news, it was called up and unanimously adopted." Additionally, the paper detailed that the "resolution provided that a committee, and, if necessary, uniforms for the volunteer companies of this city."¹⁰

In matters concerning the local militia, the City Council acted well within its established parameters. The City Charter, under which it operated, permitted that the "Council may grant aid to military companies and regiments organized within the city."¹¹ Indeed, this kind of action would have been expected of the body, and, during the first several months of the war, the council dutifully fulfilled this obligation, often times at the behest of the militia units themselves. Even after Governor John Letcher transferred control over Virginia's military organization to the Confederate government on June 8, the allocation of funds to local outfits would continue. Throughout the war the city government would always feel compelled to help furnish units and soldiers from the city. Not only did it speak to the sense of duty to provide for one's constituents, it also could be considered a source of pride knowing that "their" soldiers were cared for. Examples of this occurred at the very next council meeting after Letcher's transferal when a communication from Colonel Patrick Moore of the First Regiment of Virginia Volunteers was

⁹ *City Council Minutes*, January 14, 1861.

¹⁰ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, April 17, 1861.

¹¹ *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1861, in the Eighty-Fifth Year of the Commonwealth*, Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1861. Cited in Louis H. Manarin, ed., *Richmond At War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966, 615.

received, “concerning the wants of the regiment.” Of specific need to the troops would be tents, “articles of clothing, or shoes, pants, &c.”¹² Later, at the same meeting, Finance Committee Chairman Peachy Grattan offered a resolution that the “Chairman of the Committee on Arms be authorized to draw in favor of Captain [John] Caskie’s Company of Mounted Rangers for the sum of \$2,500.”¹³ The necessary funds for each of these resolutions would be drawn from the previously allocated \$50,000 from April 15, 1861. Another \$2,959.41 would be charged to the council for the equipment of the Richmond Light Infantry Blues.¹⁴ In anticipation of the winter’s cold weather, yet another \$50,000 was approved for the procurement of proper clothing for soldiers from both Richmond and Henrico County.¹⁵ “Before the winter sets in,” the *Daily Dispatch* declared, “our volunteers, we doubt not, will be comfortably clad and prepared to resist the inclemencies of cold weather.”¹⁶

Of all the early outfitting of local units, the most important was arguably that of the Richmond Home Artillery, because of its position as first line defense of the city. Commanded by Thomas H. Ellis, colonel of the Fourth Regiment of Artillery, the unit comprised three eighty-man companies. As early as summer of 1861 the battery had been issued “guns, howitzers, carriages, and artillery equipment” from “the authorities of Virginia,” and ammunition from “the Confederate authorities.” One month later, before the Richmond City Council, it additionally asked for fifty horses, with adequate harness and stables for all, with an estimated cost of \$11,000. This particular unit had been formed for the express defense of the capital, by individuals “who earnestly desire to render military service in the present emergency, but who

¹² *City Council Minutes*, June 10, 1861.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *City Council Minutes*, July 8, 1861.

¹⁵ *City Council Minutes*, September 9, 1861.

¹⁶ *Daily Dispatch*, September 20, 1861. Quoted in Louis H. Manarin, ed. *Richmond At War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966, 73.

are prevented from volunteering unconditionally.” They so formed the battery with the “understanding that they are not to be ordered from Richmond, or its immediate vicinity, unless on some special occasion of attack or defence, and then only to a convenient distance and for a short time.”¹⁷ Their reasoning for expecting such provision came from the argument that the city should bear some of the burden of its own defense. This point is critically important, because it provides some context as to why the city council swiftly granted requests for such funding. It spoke to the aforementioned sense of responsibility to provide for constituents; service to them being the paramount concern of the civic institutions entrusted to govern a given area. Indeed, to many, providing for the safety and defense of a populous undergirded all of its other expected duties; failure in this obligation may render moot all other expectations. Because this funding came directly from the city coffers, the municipal government did not feel that it needed to defer to any of the other nearby governments.

From this philosophical departure point, Richmond’s municipal government also concerned itself with the exterior defenses of the city. The duty to construct permanent earthworks was not stipulated in the city’s charter, but municipal government could not stand idly by when it resided so close to the United States and rallying points for its army. In this matter, protecting the city’s residents compelled it to invest in such necessary defenses. Ostensibly, provisions for the defense of the capital would be provided by the national government, but Richmond could not afford to wait for this to happen. In this moment of potential peril the city turned to the only other governmental entity with long established jurisdiction in the area to provide financial assistance: the Commonwealth of Virginia. The Virginia State Convention had allocated \$100,000 for the defenses of the state within the same

¹⁷ *City Council Minutes*, July 8, 1861. This citation is applied to previous quotations in the paragraph.

day as their 88-55 vote in favor of secession.¹⁸ Along with instructing militia to seize Norfolk's Gosport Navy Yard and the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, the convention also appointed former U.S. Army Colonel Robert E. Lee as commander of the commonwealth's military forces. Among now-Major General Lee's expected duties would be the preparation of the commonwealth for defense.

The designation of Lee, as well as the prompt response from the commonwealth's government, reassured the city that it could act on behalf of its own safety, even if did involve something as unknown as erecting fortifications. With this in mind Councilman Thomas H. Wynne, at the city council meeting of May 9, 1861, recommended that a special committee "be appointed to wait on Major General Lee to ask his advice in regard to the expediency of taking steps to put this City in a state of defence by erecting batteries around, or otherwise."¹⁹ Per the council's inquiry, Lee tasked the Engineer of Virginia Forces, Colonel Andrew Talcott, with designing the city's fortifications. By the meeting of May 25, Councilman Wynne, who also served as chairman of the city council's "Committee of Defence," presented selections from Lee as to appropriate locations for fortifications located south of the city. Two earthworks were to be erected, "so arranged as to prevent the approach of troops marching against the City by the old Osborne Turnpike and the Darbytown Road."²⁰ These two redoubts were positioned on the city's south eastern approach from the York-James Peninsula, and the direction of Union controlled Fortress Monroe.

¹⁸ Virginia State Library, *Proceedings of the Virginia State Convention of 1861*, Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1965, IV, 356; James I. Robertson Jr., "The Virginia State Convention," *Virginia at War: 1861*, William C. Davis and James I. Robertson Jr., eds., Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2005, 17-18.

¹⁹ *City Council Minutes*, May 9, 1861,

²⁰ *City Council Minutes*, May 25, 1861.



Richmond area fortifications. *Library of Congress*

Additionally, by this point, the city had been made aware of the Confederate government's intention to remove to Richmond; thus, preparing the new capital for suitable defense had to be as thorough as possible. Continued funding for these crucial endeavors was appropriated numerous times during the war.²¹

As important as coordination with the state government was, the municipal government faced the issue of manpower: who would build the earthworks? Engineers and carpenters could be more easily procured, as there would not a need for such a large number of them, but with many men flocking to local military organizations, there appeared to be a dearth of able bodied individuals to actually raise the earthworks. More than any other demographic, black men proved to be the most available. Within her 2013 work, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South*, historian Jaime Amanda Martinez discusses the importance of slaves in the construction of fortifications in Richmond, as they were impressed to do in many other crucial areas of the Confederacy's war prosecution. This practice of slave impressment placed the city in accord with the national and state governments in coordinating such activities.²² Additionally, Martinez details that another specific group used were "black convicts from Richmond's penitentiaries." These individuals, whose employment was granted by the Commonwealth of Virginia, could be used "for long periods of time and without any interference from slaveholders"; the same could not be said for the numerous slaves whose service, at that point, was conditional upon their master's permission.²³

²¹ *City Council Minutes*, June 3, 1861; November 4, 1861;

²² Jaime Amanda Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013, 18-21.

²³ *Ibid*, 21.

From the municipal government's perspective, though, the most abundant and accessible source of labor came from the city's unemployed free black men. During the same meeting that proposed inquiring with Lee as to the most strategic places for fortifications, the council also passed a resolution which stipulated that "in the event of such works being constructed, the Mayor of this City be requested to furnish, so far as possible, the necessary labor from among the unemployed Negroes now in the city."²⁴ This demographic could not shoulder arms for the Confederate army and, therefore, appeared to be an attractive source to supplement others. Yet over the next several weeks, Mayor Mayo's progress was not seen as satisfactory and was rebuked for its lack of results. "Not a single free Negro of Richmond has done a stroke of work on these or any other fortifications," thundered the *Richmond Examiner*, "we meet them at every turn in the streets and see them lounging lazily in the shade, and yet the Mayor and Council are too respectful to their feelings to disturb them."²⁵ On July 8, the council again compelled the mayor to "impress the services of such free Negroes as he may think proper," for labor on Richmond's ever growing defenses.²⁶

This delay not only had been identified and admonished by the local press, but it now commanded the attention of Virginia and the Confederate government. In a letter to Governor Letcher, Lee impressed upon him the need to prompt the city council to action. A lack of suitable laborers appeared to be the main reason that such work had been "progressing so slowly."²⁷ "The Confederate Government, of course, takes the deepest possible interest in this city... because it is part of the Confederate States," wrote Secretary of War Leroy P. Walker to the council, also

²⁴ *City Council Minutes*, May 9, 1861.

²⁵ *Richmond Daily Examiner*, June 17, 1861.

²⁶ *City Council Minutes*, July 8, 1861.

²⁷ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, vol. 2, p. 926. Hereafter referred to *O.R.* Cited in Manarin, *Richmond At War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, 62.

suggesting that the sooner the fortifications could be erected the better. To that end, he went on, “there will be no difficulty... in having the expense of the construction of earth works divided between the [Confederate] Government and the City in such proportion as will be, under all circumstances, equitable and just.” Such work “should be promptly attended to,” Walker concluded his missive, “so that the city should be prepared for any contingency that might arise under the fortunes of war.”²⁸ Shortly thereafter Mayor Mayo succeeded in finding an acceptable number of free blacks willing to lend their services to the aforementioned defenses. Neither the council minutes nor the local papers specify exactly how the Mayor successfully achieved this feat or if these men were even paid; regardless, men were found and the fortifications erected. In comparison with the means of the state and national government, Richmond seemingly did not have the same kind of resources at their disposal. Yet the city still found a way to provide labor for its protection.

Funding the construction of the city’s defense proved to be an aspect the municipal government could more readily perform. This fact, too, echoes the city’s heretofore established protocol of contributing financially to the nascent war effort. Again, the city felt that it should bear at least some of the responsibility of protecting its constituents. Periodically, throughout the summer months, the city council appropriated money as needed to the cause. At the meeting following the expression of Lee’s first recommendations, Councilman Hill offered a successful resolution appropriating \$5,000 “for the defense of the city.”²⁹ In August, the council contributed another \$10,000 more to the construction of the ever expanding fortifications.³⁰ By the late summer progress now proceeded at an acceptable rate, which garnered the approval of the *Daily*

²⁸ Leroy P. Walker to Thomas H. Wynne, printed in the *Richmond Daily Examiner*, July 13, 1861.

²⁹ *City Council Minutes*, June 3, 1861.

³⁰ *City Council Minutes*, August, 12, 1861; *Richmond Daily Examiner*, August 13, 1861.

Whig. “The fortifications erected around the city are of the most complete and formidable character,” it lauded, “and... would render the march of a hostile army hitherward an undertaking of great peril.”³¹ While Richmond did not yet have to worry about its defenses being threatened by a “hostile army,” the council continued to appropriate funds to prove correct the *Whig’s* prediction. This would include another \$15,000, the single largest allocation for defenses up to that point, approved in November.³² Over the next three plus years, this type of municipal commitment continued, and the surrounding fortifications came to symbolize the most tangible example of the city’s commitment to protect its citizens, who, during the summer of 1861, were increasing at an extraordinary rate.

As the exterior earthworks continued to grow and strengthen around the city, the Richmond City Council confronted one of the most consequential aspects corresponding to the relocation of the capital: the tremendous influx of new Confederates to the city. Not only did the municipal government have to care for the well-being of its present citizens during this dramatic influx, but it would now have to worry about the well-being of the arriving migrants, many of whom would remain Richmond residents throughout the war. First to the city came the soldiers; these men arrived from areas throughout the Confederacy, including from elsewhere in the Commonwealth of Virginia. As a staging point for deployment to the front, Richmond received thousands of soldiers before their departure. “Throughout May and June of 1861,” Emory Thomas writes, “the troops poured into the city. Volunteers came armed with shotguns, bowie knives, muskets or squirrel guns. As soon as practicable the companies were mustered into the Confederate service. Then the men drilled, loafed, and awaited orders dispatching them to the

³¹ *Richmond Daily Whig*, August 21, 1861.

³² *City Council Minutes*, November 4, 1861.

probable front.”³³ While these individuals posed a burden to the city, their presence would be mostly ephemeral compared to those that followed.

Soldiers were not the only people who moved to the new capital; in the wake of the Confederate government’s relocation came thousands of individuals to the city for purposes other than waiting for deployment. Bureaucrats in service to the Confederate government set up operation in many of the local buildings; wives and children came to see off their loved ones, and, consequently, many settled in the city for the mean time; and families of prominent politicians came to the city. All of these groups would place tremendous strain upon their new home, and all of whom would have to be served by the municipal government. In acts of preemption, the City Council passed two ordinances in April that attempted to ensure the security and order of Richmond. The first, “*An Ordinance Concerning Suspicious Persons*,” passed under the belief that opposition to secession would only fragment the city, the majority of which had only just recently embraced the idea. Therefore, unsupportive rhetoric and actions could undermine the war’s successful prosecution. This corresponded to article thirty-three of the Richmond City Charter, which granted the council the right to expel persons guilty of “lewd, indecent, or disorderly conduct... who shall not have resided therein as much as one year.”³⁴ Labeling such persons as social pariahs would ostensibly attach to them a stigma that others Richmonders would find repulsive, and thus influence them to support a seemingly united and stable government.

Among its prescriptions, the ordinance compelled loyal Richmonders to report to the Mayor those in the city they believe to be “entertaining or of having expressed sentiments that

³³ Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond*, 36-37.

³⁴ *The Charters and Ordinances of the City of Richmond with the Declaration of Rights, and Constitution of Virginia* (Richmond: Ellyson’s Steam Press, 1859), cited in Manarin, *Richmond At War*, 602.

render such person suspicious or unsafe to remain in the City.” Additionally, “such person shall be dealt with as a vagrant or person of evil fame.” Yet the measure did look to curb abuse when it charged the mayor to “suppress and put down all committees of vigilance or safety or other collection of men, who without authority arrest or threaten any person who may be suspected as aforesaid.”³⁵ This discouraged vigilantism towards those who may not have supported secession. Unionists could be allowed to remain in the city, as long as they did not blatantly undermine the government. In fact, Councilman Larkin W. Glazebrook had been an anti-secession Union Democrat yet reelected to the council throughout the war.³⁶

The second of the April 22 measures, “*An Ordinance Concerning the Good Order of the City of Richmond*,” meant to curtail sources of potential trouble. The ordinance mandated that “every hotel keeper, keepers of restaurants, keepers [of] lager beer saloons, or of any places where ardent spirits, porter, beer, or cider is sold or being given away, shall close his bar every evening at ten o’clock.” Those found in violation of the ordinance would be fined \$20 for each day offending.³⁷ While these preparations would not be universally obeyed, nor did such preparations completely control all rowdy behavior inflicted by the migrants to Richmond, they did, however, reflect the municipal government’s readiness in attempting to regulate said behavior. Such action would be considerably expanded upon before the fighting ended.

During the spring and summer of 1861 the city government not only strove to maintain the order of Richmond, but it also sought to provide for the care of its less fortunate citizens. This spirit of charity compelled them to try and ease whatever hardships may have been afflicting those who would be asked to sacrifice on behalf of the new country. On April 26, 1861,

³⁵ *City Council Minutes*, April 22, 1861.

³⁶ Manarin, *Richmond at War*, 629.

³⁷ *City Council Minutes*, April 22, 1861.

the City Council directed the city Auditor to “pay any bills properly certified, which may have been incurred under the direction of a member of the Council, for expenses connected with the military companies of [Virginia] coming to the City.”³⁸ Such local soldiers, when receiving treatment from civilian doctors within the city, would not have to bear their own medical care. Like the aforementioned outfitting of militia units, this action represented the importance of local care. So, too, would the families of Virginia’s receive municipal attention, when on June 3, at the recommendation of local doctors, the council passed a resolution stating if any city physician “who will attend the families of any soldiers in the service of the State, may send his prescriptions to any druggist in the City for medicines.” Said druggists would be “requested to put up all such prescriptions and charge the same to the City.”³⁹ Likewise, many impoverished families received free water from the city works.⁴⁰ These acts of charity and benevolence aptly demonstrated Richmond’s willingness to provide for Virginians now flowing into its confines.

This municipal spirit of benevolence, though, was not only provided to soldiers of the commonwealth. At the June 3, 1861, meeting the council expanded its focus to those from beyond Virginia’s borders; while in the city and away from home, these men should have at least some provision. Councilman Allen Y. Stokes proposed “that a sum not exceeding \$150 be appropriated to be expended by a committee... to the sick soldiers that may be in the different hospitals over which the Confederate States have no charge.”⁴¹ As they could not receive care from their own communities, Richmond served in a surrogate role. For many of these same sick soldiers, the council also authorized the Chairman of the Committee on Light to provide these

³⁸ *City Council Minutes*, April 26, 1861.

³⁹ *City Council Minutes*, June 3, 1861; *Daily Dispatch*, May 4, 1861.

⁴⁰ *City Council Minutes*, June 5, 1861.

⁴¹ *City Council Minutes*, June 3, 1861. To this committee, Council President David J. Saunders appointed Councilmen Fleming Griffin, David J. Burr, and the sponsor, Allen Y. Stokes. This committee comprised one member from each of the city’s three wards.

men with coke produced by the city Gas Works.⁴² During this phase of the war, at least, no one could accuse Richmond of neglecting the would be nation's soldiers.

The arrival of the official government from Montgomery brought in even more people to the rapidly expanding city; like the other migrants, these individuals also concerned the municipal government. Yet during the preparation for the inauguration of the Confederate government in Richmond, the City Council proclaimed that the decision "is accepted by the authorities and citizens with the liveliest satisfaction, and deserves the assurance, now given, that no proper efforts will be omitted to manifest the public sense of the high distinction."⁴³ To the majority of Richmonders, this was a great honor; hosting the capital would surely reward the city and state with power and prestige not seen since earlier in the century, during the days of the early republic. Virginia had once commanded grand attention as the birthplace of four of the United States's first five presidents. Yet as the United States matured and expanded, the Old Dominion lost some of its prominence and clout at the national level. With the inauguration of the Civil War and Richmond's appointment as capital, Virginia would once again be at the center of political power. Therefore, a boisterous welcome would greet President Jefferson Davis when he was due to arrive on May 29. The City Council had resolved to "tender to His Excellency... the hospitalities of the city, and assure him of the high consideration in which he is held, for his official and personal virtues and services."⁴⁴ His presence in the city had been greatly anticipated, as expressed in a May 30 article for the *Daily Dispatch*: "The public have been for several days past advised of the expected arrival of his Excellency, Hon. Jefferson Davis... on the arrival of the cars at the depot in this city, the air resounded with the most deafening cheers,

⁴² *City Council Minutes*, July 8, 1861.

⁴³ *City Council Minutes*, May 25, 1861.

⁴⁴ *City Council Minutes*, May 25, 1861.

oft repeated, for Davis and the Southern Confederacy, from several thousand willing mouths, honest hearts, and warm hands.”⁴⁵ Of all the new arrivals that came to Richmond during the war’s first summer, it would be Jefferson Davis and the Confederate government that imbued the new capital with a sense of permanence and legitimacy.

Serving the Confederate authorities would be different than providing for the soldiers and families arriving in the city. Their needs would be greater and more expensive, and, unlike the various common citizens, the national government could potentially take whatever it needed, though not without backlash. Therefore, in acceptance of this fact, as opposed to a spirit of charity, the city council and mayor offered their services to the president and new government. Because Richmond had never hosted a government so large, let alone a national one, the municipal authorities were forced to operate outside of their enumerated responsibilities. Amongst the first of many services that the council would directly provide to the Confederate government would be the accommodation of a proper and permanent residence for the president and his family. City Council President David J. Saunders and Councilmen Hill, Grattan, George K. Crutchfield, Larkin W. Glazebrook, and Samuel D. Denoon were tasked with obtaining such a place. The home of Lewis Dabney Crenshaw, a local flour magnate, proved to be most attractive. In total the home and chosen furnishing totaled \$42,894.97; once acquired the city offered it to the Confederate Congress as a gift for the Davis family. In a response that contained great irony, the gift was refused because the Congress did not wish to “accept any arrangement... which would tax exclusively a particular city.” Instead, the Confederate government would rent the

⁴⁵ *Daily Dispatch*, May 30, 1861.

home throughout the war's duration.⁴⁶ The City Council, too, offered the government the use of the City Alms House, opposite Shockoe Hill Cemetery, on Richmond's north side. The committee that directly governed the building had been authorized to make it available for a temporary hospital. Temporary, though, soon became permanent when the Alms House was renamed General Hospital Number One.⁴⁷ All these rapid changes certainly were cumbersome upon the city, as but from the time of Virginia's secession through mid-summer the general feeling was that of excitement and anticipation. Not yet acquainted to the grim realities that the Civil War would visit upon her, the ever burgeoning capital of the Confederate States of America proceeded with confident determination, fairly certain of its inevitable victory.

"The great fight has been fought," exclaimed John M. Daniel from the pages of his *Richmond Examiner*, on July 22, 1861, "and it has pleased Jehovah, the Lord of battles, to crown with victory the standard of the Confederacy."⁴⁸ The success at Manassas Junction even more thoroughly corroborated the belief that independence would indeed come, and it gave the capital an even greater sense of permanence. Because the experiment in secession no longer seemed fleeting, it allowed for the municipal government to solidify its actions thus far and hint at similar action to come. With this assurance, though, came the realities of armed conflict. People like Daniel could glory in the triumph, but as the battle's casualties began pouring into city it became abundantly clear that this endeavor was not going to be purchased without cost. Because the national capital sat in Richmond, and less than 100 miles from the battlefield, it became a logical place to send casualties. Its public and military hospitals were soon inundated, and

⁴⁶ *City Council Minutes*, June 8, 1861; *Ibid*, July 8, 1861; "W.C. Rives and C.G. Memminger to Messrs. L.W. Glazebrook, N.B. Hill, and Geo. K. Crutchfield," from *Daily Dispatch*, June 20, 1861, cited in Manarin, *Richmond at War*, 50, 57.

⁴⁷ *City Council Minutes*, June 5, 1861; Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond*, 57.

⁴⁸ *Daily Examiner*, July 22, 1861.

wounded men consequently found themselves conveyed to private hospitals and homes. Realizing the undue burden being applied to such individuals operating these places, the City Council resolved that medicine purchased for the treatment of their wounded patients should be charged to the city; this occurred in addition to similar legislation passed by the council earlier. This would assist them in providing an appropriate level of care and continue the practice of providing necessities for the disadvantaged.⁴⁹

As the wounded of First Manassas flowed back to the capital and sought accommodations, the city anxiously awaited the return of the battle's dead. On hand to caption the plight of loved ones, a reporter from the *Daily Dispatch* wrote: "The very painful anxiety which exists in the public mind in regard to the persons slain in Sunday's battle was abundantly shown by the assemblage of several thousands of our citizens of both sexes at the Central Depot yesterday evening, who listened with eager interest to the meager reports given in by arriving participants in the great fray."⁵⁰ These unfortunate souls, some of the Civil War's first victims, began to find interment in the city's cemeteries, including Hollywood and Shockoe Hill. This, too, became debate for the municipal government. During the same August 21 council meeting, at which the members approved coverage of medicinal costs for the wounded, the Committee on Oakwood Cemetery was instructed to "appropriate a lot for internment of such soldiers as may die in the City."⁵¹ As of yet there existed no misconception about space availability within Oakwood Cemetery, or any other, for that matter; that would come later. Now the city ably provided for the Confederate government by offering rest for its dead.

⁴⁹ *Daily Dispatch*, July 25, 1861; City Council Minutes, August 12, 1861.

⁵⁰ *Daily Dispatch*, July 24, 1861.

⁵¹ *City Council Minutes*, August 12, 1861.

The concern over internment, however, would present a problem to the city roughly one year later during the aftermath of the Peninsula Campaign. As the multitude of Confederate dead were brought into the city, in addition to the wounded soldiers who did not successfully convalesce, the availability of burial space became a more pressing concern for those in the city. As to be expected, many of the soldiers who expired within the capital found interment at one of Richmond's several cemeteries, but as the amount of deaths increased, the liberal influx of bodies made burial plots an ever scarcer commodity. Expansion of cemetery boundaries became the obvious remedy. In the case of Hollywood Cemetery, its administrators eyed an adjacent property known as Clarke Spring and, with approval from Confederate Secretary of War George W. Randolph, commenced interments therein. The *Daily Dispatch* applauded the action and justified the authorization, stating that "the portion of the cemetery heretofore devoted to the burial of the soldiers of the Confederate army has been fully occupied, and it became necessary to obtain additional ground for this purpose." "The friends of the soldiers may be assured," it boasted, "that every attention will be paid by this [Hollywood Cemetery] company to the speedy and appropriate interment of the dead of our army."⁵²

The Clarke Springs property, however, was not owned by the Confederate War Department, but by the City of Richmond, and, consequently, its usage fell under the jurisdiction of its municipal government. As detailed in the pages of the *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, "the [City Council] Committee on the Water Works, having, some time ago, perceived the necessity of adding a new reservoir to those now erected for the supply of the City, had purchased Clarke Spring property, adjoining, and comprising about twelve acres."⁵³ This parcel of land, then,

⁵² *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, July 12, 1862.

⁵³ *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, July 12, 1862.

would one day provide water to the city's inhabitants. Yet after the advent of war, the cemetery's needs proved far more pressing, and its officials believed that they could sufficiently inhumate the dead without compromising the quality of the land. This reasoning prompted the president of the Hollywood Cemetery Company, Thomas A. Ellis, to submit a memorial to the council the previous April, requesting to annex the land in question, but by mid-July no subsequent action had been taken.⁵⁴ In the meantime corpses rapidly accumulated and needed prompt burial, hence the appeal to Secretary Randolph and the subsequent possession.

The Richmond municipal government realized that swift action needed to be taken in order to save the land from being lost wholesale to the Confederate dead and called a special meeting the day following Randolph's action. Not only did the council express deep concern about the viability of the land once the cemetery expanded, but "enlarging the cemetery would deprive the City of the only eligible site which can be obtained for the erection of an additional reservoir."⁵⁵ Fortunately for all involved, the situation resolved itself during this July 11, 1862, meeting when the City Council instructed its Committee on Oakwood Cemetery to make available to Secretary Randolph and the war department "so much of the property under their charge as may be necessary for burying the soldiers dying in the service of the Confederate States."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *City Council Minutes*, April 14, 1861. The memorial had originally been submitted to the Committee on Public Grounds and Buildings. In his report to the council, the committee's chairman, David J. Burr, did not feel that he and his members could properly comment on such a request, nor did they have "requisite information at their command." He asked that the committee in question "be discharged from the further consideration of said memorials," and the situation transferred to the Committee on Water Works.

⁵⁵ *City Council Minutes*, July 11, 1862.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Apparently there existed a misconception that Oakwood Cemetery had ceased to receive deceased soldiers. In actuality, though, the staff employed by the cemetery was not large enough to dig singular graves to keep pace with the bodies being delivered. Once the cemetery transitioned to the more efficient system of digging trenches the staff erased the back log. According to Oakwood's committee, by July of 1862, "some five thousand soldiers... had been interred there, and there was room for thousands more."

The consequences of the first three months of Richmond's participation in the war cannot be overstated. The events that transpired during this time set an agenda for much of the next few years, especially from the perspective of the mayor and city council, the latter of which now increased its meetings from monthly to weekly. Faced with such fantastic change within such a short span of time, the council could not adjust in as prudent a manner that would have reconciled its actions with its enumerated responsibilities. Instead, during these paradigm shifting three months, the council legislated in ways that kept pace with the dramatically accelerating events. This often meant acting to address pressing events, rather than thoughtfully debating items over several meetings. An example of this that can be seen in almost every meeting of the council that sat during the war. According to "Rule 13" of the *Rules for Regulating Proceedings of Council*: "No resolution appropriating money, not any ordinance shall pass on the day the same shall be introduced. And no ordinance shall be amended, suspended or repealed, except by ordinance regularly introduced and passed."⁵⁷ Yet the council routinely opted to suspend the rule and enacted during the meeting in which it was introduced. This was allowed by a subsequent rule permitting suspension for special occasions, and only if two-thirds of those present supported the measure. This was certainly the case when, on April 19, 1861, the council unanimously approved Councilman Peachy Grattan's *Ordinance for the Issue of Notes by the City*, after it was introduced at said meeting.⁵⁸

In the aftermath of Virginia's secession, and the subsequent strengthening of Richmond, the different governments operating within the city began to define themselves against one another. With the jurisdiction of the United States now voided within the commonwealth's

⁵⁷ *The Charters and Ordinances of the City of Richmond with the Declaration of Rights, and Constitution of Virginia*, Richmond: Ellyson's Steam Press, 1859, 49-53, cited in Manarin, *Richmond at War*, 624.

⁵⁸ *Daily Dispatch*, April 20, 1861; April 19, 1861.

borders, numerous decisions concerning governance had to be made extemporaneously. Much of this would be of a financial dilemma. Richmond faced uncertain times and the municipal government had to prepare. Not only would the city have to quickly purchase items such as blankets and uniforms and fund many unique projects like earthworks, it would also have to draw that money from a solvent source. Therefore, as per Councilman Grattan's ordinance, the city of Richmond began to issue its own currency, independent of state and national governments, for the purposes of covering "any debt due or payable to the City of Richmond." In denominations of one dollar, fifty cents, and twenty-five cents, the council issued \$300,000 worth of notes.⁵⁹ Throughout the subsequent months, the city authorized the issuance of even more. Much of the aforementioned allocation for supplies, defenses, and citizen welfare would be drawn from this fund. The council president, David J. Saunders, and the city chamberlain would sign the bills and would commence their distribution on May 1, 1861. By enacting this policy, the City Council signaled that it would actively contribute to the war's prosecution, at least as it pertained to Richmond well-being. As a city initially conflicted by the prospect of secession, it would be understandable if the city fathers had taken a more passive role; they could have stood aside for Governor John Letcher and the Commonwealth of Virginia to perform these various duties while the Confederate government prepared its migration. Instead, they acted swiftly and boldly, believing that the sustainability of the city depended on it. Throughout the summer and early fall of 1861, the Richmond government confidently paid its expenses and debts in municipal currency without harassment.

In actuality, though, the type of currency issuing undertaken by the council was illegal under Virginia law, and, on November 1, 1861, the Grand Jury of the Superior Court of

⁵⁹ *City Council Minutes*, April 19, 1861.

Richmond ordered President Saunders to cease the issuance of the notes. The infraction dealt with municipalities being prohibited from issuing notes valued at less than one dollar, denominations claimed to be the most needed. By the November 4 council meeting the practice had temporarily ceased. In a frustrated defense of the council's actions, President Saunders stated on record just exactly how much had been issued and for what specific purpose: \$100,000 for city volunteers in the Confederate army; \$15,000 of an expected (at that time) \$100,000 for city fortifications; \$5,000 for the support of volunteers' families; \$7,000 for the initial payment of Lewis Crenshaw's home, and \$7,942.34 for his furniture; \$3,288.99 to the Spotswood Hotel covering board of the Confederate officials; and \$50,000 loaned to the Confederate government, which had been done in the wake of Manassas.⁶⁰

Up to this point, the actions of the Richmond municipal government had passed outside scrutiny and continued apace. While the burdens of war and the hosting of a national government had been inconvenient to the city, the City Council thus far had avoided sparring with the other authorities. This rebuke from the Commonwealth of Virginia, in the light of all that the City Council had thus far contributed to the war effort, served as an effrontery, and its members took umbrage. In his message to the council, President Saunders requested that a committee be formed to petition the State Convention to legalize the council's actions. A week later Councilman Grattan presented the council's official response in the form of a memorial. "The Common Council of the City of Richmond would respectfully represent that the difficulties growing out of our new relations to the late United States during the last spring," Grattan's memorial began.⁶¹ Noting the unique financial condition that existed following secession, it

⁶⁰ *City Council Minutes*, November 4, 1861.

⁶¹ *City Council Minutes*, November 11, 1861.

seemed necessary that the city make some provision in this vacuum. This necessity increased when the decision was made to place the seat of Confederate power within its limits. This fact demonstrated that “the expenses which must be borne by [Richmond’s] people would be great; and, therefore, the Council were compelled to consider what were the resources from which these expenses might be met.”⁶² Selling city bonds was deemed impossible and taxes were already believed to be high enough. The city had ceased all unnecessary expenditures on its behalf, save for improvements to the Alms House, “which has been surrendered to the Confederate government free of rent, to be used as a hospital.”⁶³ The memorial acknowledged that what it did had been prohibited under Virginia law, and, generally, approved of the rationale. Yet the council judged “that the law... ought not to be permitted to stand in the way of providing the resources which were necessary to protect our homes and defend our liberties against our ruthless and unscrupulous enemies.”⁶⁴

In remembering those who defended the nascent nation, the memorial noted that with this revenue the council had armed and clothed those Richmond soldiers who were now serving in the Confederate army; contributed provisions for the sick soldiers cared for in the city, from hither and yon; and allocated a kind of supplemental income to wives and children of soldiers, whose regular income has been lost due to military service. After such charity and forbearance, “are we to be told that the families of our volunteers, now standing in our defence against invasion, shall suffer for bread to eat and a fire to warm them, rather than the City of Richmond shall issue a one dollar or two dollar note, as good and safe a currency as any bank in the State

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

can issue.”⁶⁵ On the subject of fortifications, the memorial labored to point out that other localities that boasted such defenses had them paid for by their states and the Confederate government. The city of Richmond, being an exception, had contributed \$30,000 toward the erection of its own, “whist the thousands of soldiers encamped around us have been permitted to lounge idly in their camps or wander as idly through our streets.”⁶⁶ All of these contributions happened while the city invested \$50,000 in Confederate bonds.⁶⁷

The memorial ended its argument with a simple declaration: “If the Council is to continue to meet the demands that shall be made upon them we much have the means to do it. A small paper currency is not the only evil that can befall us.”⁶⁸ The cooperation of the body would be essential to maintain the semblance of solidarity, both in Virginia and the Confederacy. The memorial’s words ably listed the instances where it was compelled to act for the good of all. Grattan did season the memorial with some hyperbole, as in the discussion of fortifications; Richmond had begun to erect theirs before it ever became the capital. Regardless, though, the veracity of the piece was evident, and the municipal government asserted that it had been in the right.

The General Assembly, as it turned out, agreed with the memorial’s persuasive arguments and voted to legalize the City Council’s ability to issue notes under the value of one dollar with the passage of *An Act to Provide a Currency of Less Denomination Than One Dollar*.⁶⁹ A crisis had been successfully diverted, though it took until spring of 1862, but in

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *City Council Minutes*, November 11, 1861.

⁶⁹ Virginia General Assembly, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1861-2, in the Eighty-sixth Year of the Commonwealth*, chap. 67. The General Assembly had been forced to comment on the issue after the State Convention declined to act.

doing so it made clear that governance would not proceed in the traditional manner. Laws and policies that had been written and cultivated within the jurisdiction of the United States could not always be successfully grafted onto the new Confederate governments. Alterations had to be made, yet the question became who decided such changes? In winning this legal point, the City Council positioned itself to broaden the definitions of its powers; it set a precedent for expansion into areas heretofore envisioned. In this way, the Grattan memorial justified the permissibility for the council to act as it saw fit when confronted by future situations.

As the city contested the commonwealth of Virginia over the issuance of notes, the Union's Army of the Potomac began transporting its forces down to Fortress Monroe, at the tip of the York-James Peninsula, preparing for a march on Richmond. Thus far during the war, Richmond had been spared any major confrontation with the Union forces. The Army of the Potomac's Peninsula Campaign, begun during the spring of 1862, confronted the city with its first encounter with the enemy. Maj. General George B. McClellan's intention would be to attack Richmond from the east. In mid-April, Confederate Gen. Joseph E. Johnston moved his army through Richmond out to the Peninsula to meet the Union host. In keeping with its earlier commitment to defend the city from invasion by land or water, the council created a Committee Safety of the City of Richmond, made of nongovernment affiliated citizens.⁷⁰ Said committee was appropriated \$50,000 and later used it "for the purpose of securing the obstruction of the river to prevent the enemy's gunboats from approaching the City."⁷¹ In March, the city engineer was excused from normal duties in order to contribute all energy to attending the city's river defenses.⁷² By the end of April, another \$50,000 was appropriated to support Richmond soldiers

⁷⁰ *City Council Minutes*, February, 24, 1861.

⁷¹ *City Council Minutes*, April 30, 1862.

⁷² *City Council Minutes*, March 5, 1862.

serving in the Confederate Army.⁷³ The city council also asked Governor Letcher to authorize Mayor Mayo to call upon local in-city units to “act as a military police in the event of any condition of the City in his opinoin requiring such notice.”⁷⁴ He would later be authorized to recruit men over thirty-five years of age to form a regimental home guard explicitly for the city’s defense.⁷⁵ Even with the main Confederate army standing between the enemy and Richmond, the city still felt compelled to play a part in its own defense. The municipal government stood ready to protect its constiuents at all costs, but while the Union army menaced the city, its most immediate danger came from the Confederate government itself.

On May 3, 1862, during a rare Saturday meeting of the Richmond City Council, President David J. Saunders presented a petition signed by numerous Richmonders concerning the municipality’s fate in case of Confederate defeat during the imminent fighting to the east of the city. “Gentlemen,” the peition began:

“the undersigned residents of the City and heads of families having learned that the Government authorities had selected the factory of William Greane, Esquire, as a place of deposit for tobacco to be burnt in case of approach of the enemy, and believing that a large portion of the City would be thereby endangered, respectfully beg that you will use your efforts to have some more isolated place selected.”⁷⁶

In preparing to face McClellan’s army, the Confederate government had placed massive quantities of valuable tobacco inside Richmond area warehouses; they planned to burn such stock in the event that the city would fall. As evidenced by the petition, Richmonders, including

⁷³ *City Council Minutes*, April 30, 1862.

⁷⁴ *City Council Minutes*, May 15, 1862. Amongst those suggested for duty was the local Tredegar Battalion, comprised of workers at Joseph R. Anderson’s Tredegar Iron Works.

⁷⁵ *City Council Minutes*, May 26, 1862.

⁷⁶ *City Council Minutes*, May 3, 1862.

those serving in municipal government strongly believed that this plan a dangerous one. The likelihood for the conflagration to burn out of control seemed too great; not only would the tobacco be destroyed but so potentially would untold amounts of property, not to mention lives. On May 14, the city passed a resolution that “respectfully” urged the “Confederate authorities that the tobacco be removede to places at which it may be burned with less danger of destruction of the City, or that it be destroyed in some other manner.”⁷⁷ That same day, a small committee met with Confederate Secretary of War Randolph to discuss the possibility of disposing the tobacco at more remote places or by other means. The secretary seemed receptive to the city’s concerns, though he did not sufficiently believe the burning would be as bad as council advertised, and advised them to experiment with placing small amounts of the tobacco in water to observe if this could effectively ruin it. Overall, though, Randolph exclaimed that “he would be pleased to adopt any plan,” which the local authorities proposed, “provided... it proved effectual and speedy.”⁷⁸ After prompt testing, the city found that water was in fact just as effective in destroying the tobacco.⁷⁹ By the next week, Randolph had permitted the city to relocate the tobacco from Seabrook’s warehouse, to various warehouses between the basin and the river, that way they could be destroyed in water with alacrity; other warehouses where tobacco had been stored were located closer to the water and, therefore, did not have to be moved.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ *City Council Minutes*, May 14, 1862.

⁷⁸ *City Council Minutes*, May 15, 1862.

⁷⁹ *Daily Examiner*, May 19, 1862.

⁸⁰ *Daily Examiner*, May 24, 1862.



Seabrook's Warehouse, Library of Congress

While this may have placated several members of the council and city, others were still suspicious of the final intentions for the tobacco in the basin area warehouses. Councilman Daniel Denoon had observed, as reported in the *Examiner*, Confederate authorities stocking “dry pine and buttonwood and barrels of tar” in the Shockoe warehouse. To him the danger had not been averted.⁸¹ Fellow member David Burr concurred, and stated his desire for the city to be responsible to pay for all tobacco in question, rather than risk. “Policy should be made to give way where it conflicts with humanity. To say nothing of the women and children, there were thousands of sick soldiers who could not be removed, and who must perish in the flames were this city destroyed by fire.”⁸² At a subsequent meeting with Randolph, during which the Secretary of War reaffirmed the necessity of destroying the held tobacco, again, Randolph repeated his belief that burning the tobacco would not endanger the neighborhood where it was stored. Yet if the city wished it to be destroyed in the manner of their choosing, then they would

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

have to make the arrangements. For those who believed the situation dire, Randolph's remarks must have seemed alarming; the Confederate government had been responsible for placing Richmond in this present situation, and now they were not sufficiently concerned enough to assist the municipal government in allaying their fears. Therefore, arrangements were made for the City Engineer to hire "one hundred laborers, either white or black, for the purpose of destroying the tobacco."⁸³ Upon review the council confirmed that there was, in fact, no suitable place in the city where the tobacco could be burned without significant damage and loss of life. To avert such a calamitous event, the council prepared to "give every aid and facility within their reach to this end."⁸⁴ In an act of defiance, the council instructed the city engineer to report only to the committee it had established for the tobacco disposal; he was to perform all duties without discussion with the Confederate authorities. If the national government could not rouse itself to seriously consider the worries of the municipal government, then the latter would have to assert its will to the former.

Fortunately for Richmond, it was spared the cost of a Union occupation, at least for the time being. The Confederate forces successfully defended the capital and the Army of the Potomac eventually withdrew back to Washington to contemplate other ways to achieve victory. Inside the nearby Confederate capital, "the result of the 'Seven Days' was to produce a profound joyousness... which lightened even those deep shadows that had fallen upon individuals; to raise the spirits of the whole people and to send into every heart that loved the cause a glow of

⁸³ *City Council Minutes*, May 26, 1862.

⁸⁴ *City Council Minutes*, May 27, 1862.

confident pride in the southern soldier.”⁸⁵ By mid-summer, the “everlasting tobacco question” had been mostly resolved, and the city avoided having to carrying out its destruction.⁸⁶

Yet the episode did open a rift between the Richmond municipal government and the national authorities. The fact that the Confederate government did not sufficiently heed the warnings of the municipality illustrates a divergence in primary concerns. For those elected to govern the capital, in place since before the war began, the safety of its citizens and property was paramount. This sentiment is best summarized in a November 12, 1862, editorial from the *Examiner*, when it asserted that “the City’s first duty is to its own citizens.”⁸⁷ While this could be achieved along side support for the Confederate war aims, it could be subservient to it. Thus, balancing these responsibilities gave the city council and mayor greater pause when considering its actions. Whether this be adequately providing water and burial spaces, or disposing of potential succor for the enemy without destroying the city itself, Richmond’s government placed upon its shoulders an enormous burden. As its described actions demonstrate, it consequently expanded its powers and created more, both out of perceived necessity or in reaction and resistance to state and national authorities. This occurring as the city government continued to preoccupy itself with the quotidian duties of municipal governance, including issues concerning unlicensed dogs, increases of city employee wages, contracting out for much needed salt, the furnishing of free coke to city buildings and reducing rates for benevolent societies, enlarging the city jail, increasing funding for the Female Orphan Asylum, and all the while allocating more

⁸⁵ Thomas Cooper DeLeon, *Four Year In Rebel Capitals: An Inside View of Life in the Southern Confederacy from Birth to Death*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, 237.

⁸⁶ *Daily Examiner*, June 16, 1862. As the date acknowledges, the fighting outside the city had not yet ended, but according to the reporter attending the June 14 meeting, the “everlasting tobacco question,” had since “lost its interest with the public.”

⁸⁷ *Daily Examiner*, November 12, 1862.

money to care for Richmond's soldiers and families while still investing in the Confederate States of America.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *City Council Minutes*, July 14, 1862; August 11, 1862; September 8, 1862; October 13, 1862; November 10, 1862; December 8, 1862.

CHAPTER TWO: Fall 1862-Spring 1865

“Life During Wartime”

The Richmond City Council did not normally convene on Thursdays; only extraordinary circumstances prompted them to deviate from their regular Monday gatherings. Yet during the evening of April 2, 1863, the members found themselves gathered for such an impromptu meeting, one called “for the purpose of taking some action in reference to the disgraceful riot which had taken place in the City this day.”¹ The evening before, a band of women, concerned about the declining economic situation and lack of affordable food plaguing the city, met at the Belvidere Hill Baptist Church in order to commiserate and discuss various avenues of action to remedy their grievances. While a transcript of their meeting does not exist, what is known is that they congregated the next morning with the intent of making their plight heard by those in authority.

The mob ventured toward Capitol Square and congregated at the base of the equestrian statue of George Washington. A contingent crossed the square to the Governor’s Mansion to seek out John Letcher and convey their discontent to him. Both he and his aide, Col. S. Bassett French, responded sympathetically to those gathered, but his words ultimately proved unsatisfying and did nothing to slake the crowd’s burgeoning rage. Incensed, the mob began to descend upon Main Street, one of Richmond’s more successful mercantile areas. As they went, interested spectators found themselves swept up by the rhetoric and increasingly began to join the parade. Now sheathed were the oratorical weapons originally wielded by the crowd; instead,

¹ *City Council Minutes*, April 2, 1863.

more deliberate instruments, like hatchets and knives, found their way into the dialogue. Perfect pandemonium engulfed the downtown. “More impudent and defiant robberies were never committed, than disgraced,” remembered Sallie Brock Putnam, a spectator to the riot, “the cry of bread with which this violence commenced was soon subdued, and instead of articles of food, the rioters directed their efforts to stores containing dry-goods, shoes, etc.”² Throughout the city’s business district the rioters visited various shops and relieved them of their inventories. As a woefully hopeless intervention to stay the riot, Mayor Joseph Mayo appeared atop a stool and desperately attempted to read the riot act. It would be to no avail.³ Any intervention by the city police, too, proved ineffective.

Governor Letcher, now sufficiently more alarmed than before, called out Richmond’s long established Public Guard, commanded by Lt. Edward S. Gay, to help contain the escalating damage and begin the herculean process of restoring order. Contemporary and secondary accounts differ as to whether Governor Letcher or Confederate President Jefferson Davis ultimately quelled the uproar, but, whomever it was did so with a grave ultimatum: should the mob fail to disperse of its own accord, it would be forcefully compelled to do so by the Public Guard. Several tense and anxious minutes passed before the assembly finally opted to disperse. The riot had been defused and blood-shed had been avoided, but while the entire episode itself took approximately two hours, the impact of the riot resonated deeply with the Richmond community.⁴

² Sallie Brock Putnam, *Richmond During the War: Four Years of Personal Observations*, (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 208-209.

³ Michael B. Chesson, “Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (Apr. 1984), 146.

⁴ Chesson, 131-175. Chesson’s article deftly details the causes and impacts of the famed “Bread Riot,” the various histories of which have often been conflicting and inaccurate. On the whole, Chesson’s article argues for greater understanding of the event’s participants and its place in the greater Confederate home front narrative.

At the aforementioned emergency meeting of the Richmond City Council, attended by both Mayor Mayo and Governor Letcher, the municipal government debated why such a stunning event had even transpired and, more importantly, how it could be avoided in the future. In the opinion of those assembled, as well as numerous others throughout the city, those persons who had taken part in the “disgraceful riot... ostensibly for want of provisions,” had really been inspired by “devilish and selfish motives.”⁵ In their esteemed eyes such an activity could not have been undertaken by patriotic and faithful citizens but only by “base and unworthy women instigated by worthless men who are a disgrace to the City and the community.”⁶ Consequently, the council passed a host of resolutions in response to these conclusions. Amongst these included commands for the mayor and police to craft regulations that would suppress all such future riots; to arrest and try anyone who participated in or aided and abetted the April 2 riot; to increase the police force number to over one hundred men, with the real potential to become armed; and “that the honor, dignity, and safety of the City shall be preserved at all hazards, and that no expense shall be spared to obtain the same.”⁷ As an added precaution the council instructed its Committee on Police to inquire as to how quickly it may draft an ordinance mandating all persons in the city less than twelve months to post bond vouching for their good behavior.⁸

The story of the “Richmond Bread Riot,” as it has come to be known, is an oft told one, meant to illustrate the hardships confronted by the civilian population of Richmond during the American Civil War. The exact circumstances surrounding its manifestation, as well as the composition of its participants, are difficult to discern, but what is clear is that the second winter

⁵ *City Council Minutes*, April 2, 1863.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.* At this same meeting, the council also debated the necessity of finding another place prisoners should the current City Jail become too full.

of the war found the Confederate capital in a tense state. Unprecedented numbers of migrants and refugees had nearly tripled the size of city, transforming Richmond into a Confederate metropolis. Yet for much of the first two years of war the municipal government had to preoccupy itself not just with the welfare of its constituents, but with the exterior threat posed by the Army of the Potomac. By serving these dual concerns, the city authorities had erected defensive earthworks; raised local military units and supplied existing ones; stifled and discouraged disloyal sentiments; made available city-owned buildings for various purposes, including medical; debated with the Virginia state legislature over the printing and issuance of a paper currency, which permitted the city to actually fund these endeavors; and battled the Confederate government over the safety of the city itself.

By the advent of 1863, however, the Army of the Potomac had vacated the area and found itself nursing wounds sustained during the Battle of Fredericksburg, fifty miles north of Richmond. It would be more than a year before the capital of the Confederate States of America found itself seriously threatened again. Such perseverance provided Richmond with a great sense of hope for ultimate Confederate independence, and a string of military successes only served to buoy this feeling. Now that Richmond was not imminently threatened, public focus turned to significant problems of daily living. These types of issues facing the capital would include a sudden outbreak of smallpox and an increasing dearth of necessary resources. The municipal government found itself confronted with the plight of its citizens and dutifully strove to allay their suffering. Yet like several events that arose during the first year and a half of war, it periodically entered into situations where it strongly disagreed over the proper response.

Confrontations over governing policy continued to burden the already strained relationship between the city and these other authorities. Chief among them was the exemption

of city employees from conscription, the individuals whose knowledge and skills helped to keep Richmond functioning efficiently throughout the war. Because there appeared to be a conflict in certain priorities, the municipal government, consequently, found itself open to contesting the Confederate government, even denying them certain requests. This kind of defiance, though, did have its limits as the municipal government was yoked to the Confederate war effort while still serving as the national capital. It would have to continue to sufficiently support the military while doing what it could to protect and serve the city and those who dwelled within.

Maintaining this balance, as in the first two years of the war, involved the city augmenting powers it already possessed and continuing to take on responsibilities heretofore unexpected of it. The city dutifully served both its masters until the Confederate government could no longer protect or maintain the capital. When of the Army of Northern Virginia, the military force chiefly responsible for the defense of the capital, could no longer defend its position around the nearby city of Petersburg, the protection of Richmond became untenable. As the army abandoned its trenches to head west, so, too, did the national authorities finally flee from Richmond on April 2, 1865. Because the Virginia government had also fled, the task of surrendering the city fell upon the shoulders of Mayor Joseph C. Mayo and the City Council. As they had been during the summer of 1861, so now were they on hand to negotiate a new political system. The one inaugurated by the arrival of the Union Army of the James would, for some years to come, include martial law, military occupation, and reconstruction.

In comparison to the state of affairs during the city's surrender, the end of 1862 seemed like a halcyon era. Militarily, the past year had been kind to the Confederate forces, at least those meant to guard the capital in the Civil War's eastern theater. After neutralizing the Union forces outside of the city during the Peninsula Campaign and Seven Days Battles, the Army of Northern

Virginia had successfully bested its opponent at Second Manassas, fought it to a virtual draw at Sharpsburg, and vanquished it at Fredericksburg during the Christmas season. During the reprieve in fighting, the two foes menaced each other from either side of the Rappahannock River, waiting for 1863 and campaigning season brought by fairer weather and stable roads. While the denizens of Richmond saw fit to rest upon these laurels, the municipal government faced more pressing challenges during the fall and winter seasons.

On November 24 the City Council convened for one of its final regular meetings of 1862, and, as usual they debated diverse and pertinent issues. At first the councilmen discussed the necessity of increasing the price of coal gas for its patrons. Greater demand from the city's burgeoning population, the exhausting of the available coal supply, and the strain on the aging infrastructure had made the current rate unsustainable. With these considerations, the council reluctantly voted to increase the cost of one thousand feet of gas by fifty cents, up to a total of \$3.50. Benevolent organizations, though, were granted a reduced rate at \$2.00 per one thousand feet.⁹ Their contribution to the well-being of the city's destitute would neither be forgotten nor taken for granted. Yet as much debate as this issue commanded, it did not compare to the discussion reserved to one of the most serious issues yet faced by the Confederate capital: the outbreak of a smallpox epidemic among the city's hospitals and poorer neighborhoods.

During the meeting, Council President David J. Saunders read a letter from Dr. Albert J. Snead, the city health officer and attendant physician at the main City Hospital, relating the supposed origins of the outbreak. In Snead's telling, the disease was introduced into Richmond sometime in mid-August 1862, by soldiers returning from the Union prison camp at Fort

⁹ *City Council Minutes*, November 24, 1862.

Delaware and that the “disease had gradually gained a foot-hold.”¹⁰ Under normal circumstances the city’s established Board of Health would have been tasked with confronting such a situation, but the loss of two of its members, Drs. Frederick W. Roddey and Frank W. Hancock, to Confederate service caused its response to be absent entirely. Consequently, Dr. Snead’s City Hospital became filled with many people stricken with the pox, and, in doing so, had greatly endangered the well-being of the city at large. The Confederate Surgeon General, Dr. Samuel P. Moore, had also converted a local factory into an additional smallpox hospital, which by the date of the council meeting had approximately seventy-five patients. In total, twenty-one patients had already died.¹¹ The session proved quite exhaustive, so much so that the *Richmond Daily Examiner*’s council reporter sarcastically remarked that the body “evidently being possessed with the idea that they had got hold of a good thing showed a disposition to argue it all night.”¹² Given the paramount importance of stemming this epidemic, though, the Council did eventually pause to pass a resolution that compelled Mayor Mayo and Dr. Snead to “make all necessary arrangements for removing out of the City all smallpox patients and provide for the same.”¹³ This command did not include any specifications as to how best to carry out the resolution, so, as seen illustrated in several of the previous examples, improvisation remained an important tool at the city’s disposal.

By early December, Mayor Mayo and Dr. Snead had entreated with appropriate Confederate authorities who assured these city representatives that they, too, saw the danger of housing smallpox patients within the city boundaries and would promptly move the afflicted to

¹⁰ *Richmond Daily Examiner*, November 25, 1862. Also quoted in Louis H. Manarin, *Richmond at War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 241-244.

¹¹ *Ibid.* The owner of the factory in question was none other than Mayor Joseph Mayo. Apparently, Surgeon General Moore had repurposed the space without informing its proprietor.

¹² *Richmond Daily Examiner*, November 25, 1862.

¹³ *City Council Minutes*, November 24, 1862.

more secure and secluded quarters where they could not as easily sicken others. The locations they had in mind included a new hospital being constructed outside the city at a place called Howard's Grove. Mayo and Snead believed the promises of the Confederate authorities and related the sentiments to the other city officials.¹⁴ Four days later the two men called for an extraordinary meeting of the council so that the municipal government could better formulate a plan to protect its constituents. During his opening remarks Mayor Mayo stated that smallpox cases were still on the rise in Richmond, and, unless something is done the city would be completely inundated. Therefore, the people of the city should be made aware of the full threat posed by the smallpox. To the council, though, Mayo recommended that if anyone should construct a plan it should be them. "Much can be done by legislation," he opined, and such activity resided under the prerogative of the Council, "the lawmakers of the city."¹⁵

After much contentious debate, "the lawmakers of the city" took the initiative and approved four resolutions to combat the epidemic. The first requested local physicians to report to Dr. Snead any cases of smallpox that may come through their practices; in so doing, the city could gain a handle on the extent of the epidemic and begin to stanch its spread. The second requested that the newly reconstituted Board of Health inquire into how hospital accommodations "may be speedily increased and generally what measures should be adopted to prevent the spread of the disease."¹⁶ The third made available to Dr. Snead and his assistants vaccinations to be administered, either voluntary or involuntary, to "all persons who are not able to pay for it themselves."¹⁷

¹⁴ *City Council Minutes*, December 8, 1862.

¹⁵ *City Council Minutes*, December 12, 1862; *Richmond Daily Examiner*, December 13, 1862.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The discussion of the council members had included statements made in favor of compulsory vaccinations, but, at least of this meeting, this feeling was not held by the majority present.



Richmond City Hospital, *Library of Congress*

The fact that the municipal government recognized that the epidemic mainly spread amongst the lower classes, as well as allocated funding for free vaccinations to those who could not pay for it themselves, further demonstrates the extent to which the city was willing to go in the protection of its citizens, especially those perceived as most vulnerable. If the account of Dr. Snead is valid, then the fault of the smallpox importation resides with the Confederate authorities and their health officials. Even if the story of the Fort Delaware soldiers is apocryphal, however, it does not dispel the fact that the municipal government firmly believed that some non-Richmonder, either soldier or citizen brought to the city for some kind of war related purpose. Regardless, it was an issue that had to be addressed in order to prevent a city-wide epidemic that could have debilitated Richmond entirely. With this assumption, the city authorities took it upon themselves to maintain the physical health of the capital. The fourth and final resolution of the December 25, 1862, meeting was specifically directed toward the Confederate government. As the council held

that body responsible for the present epidemic, it recommended to Surgeon General Moore that all patients under his care be removed from the city and suburbs with as much alacrity as possible, and they should be taken to some remote location in the country where they would not spread the disease.¹⁸ By the last council meeting of the year Dr. Snead reported that many of the soldiers had been removed from the city, with the rest to shortly follow. Yet still remaining within the city's care at its hospital were over one hundred black patients.¹⁹ These individuals mainly populated Richmond's poorer neighborhoods, which had become natural incubators for the smallpox. If left unchecked the epidemic, initially a soldier problem, threatened to spread into all sections of Richmond and infect potentially thousands of its residents, regardless of race.

During the next several weeks the members of the Committee on the City Hospital devoted themselves in earnest to realizing the resolutions passed by the whole council. With the help of Surgeon General Moore, the committee was able to obtain for use three wards at the Confederate government's Howard's Grove Hospital, located outside the city limits on the Mechanicsville Turnpike. Thomas Wynne, the committee's chairman, informed the council at the January 12, 1863, meeting, that the space had ninety-nine beds and would exclusively serve black patients, as they made up the vast majority of those infected.²⁰ This would allow for the City Hospital to cater solely to white smallpox patients. As the white population of infected was less than the black, the city believed that it could be safely maintained in a quarantined section of the city. Each location would be controlled by a head physician, Dr. Snead for the City Hospital and Dr. John P. Little at Howard's Grove, and would have proper nurses and attendants. While

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Dr. Albert J. Snead to Richmond City Council Committee on Hospitals, December 20, 1862. Cited in *Richmond Daily Examiner*, December 22, 1862; *City Council Minutes*, December 20, 1862.

²⁰ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 12, and February 12, 1863; *Richmond Whig*, January 13, 1863.

these actions would ameliorate the condition of those able to make it to the hospitals, it did nothing for those patients still in private homes and still posing a threat to the healthy public. To that end, the committee proposed that any city physician attending to an afflicted person must report in writing the name and location of said person to Mayor Mayo within twenty-four hours, and should likewise report the recovery or death of the patient. Failure to convey this information to the proper authorities would result in a ten dollar fine for each day that lapsed.²¹ In addition, they proposed that any building containing afflicted persons hang a white flag from the structure's exterior to notify all of the potential danger. The council thoroughly agreed with the recommendations and promptly passed an ordinance, after suspending the thirteenth rule.²²



Howards' Grove Hospital, *Chicago Historical Society*

²¹ *City Council Minutes*, January 13, 1863; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, January 13, 1863.

²² Committee on the City Hospital to the Richmond City Council, included in *City Council Minutes*, January 13, 1863. As stated in chapter one, the thirteenth rule stated that “no resolution appropriating money, not any ordinance shall pass on the day the same shall be introduced. And no ordinance shall be amended, suspended or repealed, except by ordinance regularly introduced and passed.” From *The Charters and Ordinances of the City of Richmond with the Declaration of Rights, and Constitution of Virginia*, (Richmond: Ellyson's Steam Press, 1859), 49-53, cited in Manarin, *Richmond at War*, 624.

As extraordinary as the smallpox incident was, outbreaks of diseases were not uncommon to nineteenth century Americans. This is evidenced by a provision in the Richmond city charter that permitted the council to establish quarantine areas in the event of such epidemics.²³ Consequently, many of the actions taken by the municipal government during the smallpox outbreak fell within its normal duties. The scale may have been greater than could normally be expected, but the council's reaction had been appropriate. What made this outbreak more unique in the eyes of the council was the predominant demographic of those Richmonders who had been afflicted: poor free blacks. In its letter to the council, the Committee on the City Hospital saw fit to point out that "many of the patients... have been free Negroes and that few of them have any property or any means of paying their hospital fees and they receive all requisite medical services and other attention without paying a cent."²⁴ In an already financially burdensome position, the committee did not believe that the city could and should fully bear the medical expenses of this population. Slaves could be impressed to work off a debt of this kind, but, as the committee noted, without any laws justifying the free blacks "being sold or hired out to pay for these expenses incurred by the City," losses could not be mitigated.²⁵ The city realized that the legality of enacting such a law was beyond its jurisdiction, even though it had not hesitated to act on its own in previous situations without approval from higher authorities. Instead, it would request the Virginia state legislature "to amend the laws relating to free Negroes, as to enable the authorities of [Richmond] to hire out free Negroes for the payment of hospital fees."²⁶ The fact

²³ *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1861, in the Eighty-Fifth Year of the Commonwealth*, (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1861). Cited in Louis H. Manarin, ed., *Richmond At War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 613.

²⁴ Committee on the City Hospital to the Richmond City Council, included in *City Council Minutes*, January 13, 1863.

²⁵ Committee on the City Hospital to the Richmond City Council, included in *City Council Minutes*, January 13, 1863; *Daily Dispatch*, January 16, 1863. For those patients that could afford to pay, the daily charge was \$4 for white patients and \$3 for black patients.

²⁶ *City Council Minutes*, January 13, 1863.

that the municipal government contemplated such a move signals that while they were willing to care for and provide assistance to the city's destitute, they had a greater tolerance for the majority, voting, race.

By February, the Committee on the City Hospital happily reported that the epidemic was on the decline within the city limits. At the City Hospital, Dr. Snead treated only twenty-nine smallpox patients, whereas before there had been over one hundred.²⁷ City physicians had successfully vaccinated seven hundred and four individuals, and the council voted to refund them \$1.50 per dosage to cover the mandate they made the previous December. The council also passed a resolution that charged Surgeon General Moore, on behalf of the Confederate government, a \$2.50 per diem fee for each affected soldier and employee that had been treated in city managed facilities without the acquiescence of the municipal authorities, as well as the burial costs of any who had died. The estimation for total number of days spent by these patients in city care numbered 2,988. According to Councilman Wynne, "their treatment has been the best that it was possible to secure to them and it has cost the City a very large amount of money," with the only present compensation being the three sheds at Howard's Grove, and only after the City Hospital had been filled past capacity.²⁸ Surgeon General Moore and the Confederate authorities did not act with the urgency the city had expected, and by the end of the year no compensation had yet been received. The city council resolved at its meeting of December 14, 1863, that it would send three of its members, along with Dr. Snead, to once again petition Moore and Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon.²⁹ Unlike prior petitions, this appeal

²⁷ *City Council Minutes*, February 17, 1863.

²⁸ *City Council Minutes*, February 17, 1863; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, March 10, 1863.

²⁹ *City Council Minutes*, December 14, 1863.

finally did result in the city receiving some compensation, as reported by City Hospital administrators to the council on January 11, 1864.³⁰

The municipal government could sympathize with the plight of the afflicted and graciously treat them if needed. Military hospitals, though, had been established for the treatment of soldiers and others in service to the nation. If it became necessary for these individuals to patronize Richmond's civilian hospitals then, in municipal government's opinion, the proper authorities should be notified. It was the least that could be done by the national government, as it had received the blame for bringing this epidemic to the city. In addition, by this juncture of the war the capital had already devoted large amounts of money and manpower to support the Confederacy's aim of independence, but there were certain limits to how much good will it could provide without adequate reciprocation. Therefore, the demand for some financial compensation could be considered a just and fair request on behalf of the city.

The smallpox epidemic of 1862-1863 forced the municipal government to assert its authority to adequately serve and protect its white population, but as this event transpired, Richmond's legislators found themselves fighting even more strenuously to ensure that the municipal government had competent individuals available to administer its various responsibilities. The issue of military conscription presented the city with its deepest philosophical dilemma of the war, and it brought the city council into greater conflict with the Confederate government than any other point of contention. Would Richmond's municipal workers, from administrative clerks to fire and policemen, be able to continue at their posts and serve the city, or would they be compelled into military ranks and serve the nation? The issue of

³⁰ *City Council Minutes*, January 11, 1864.

conscription illustrated the difference of opinion between the local and the national governments as to how best serve the capital city.

At the war's commencement the Confederacy was served by an entirely volunteer army, but with a sizeable majority its men only signed on for one year enlistments. Weeks of military engagements turned into months, and the prospect for a protracted war appeared increasingly likely. Just as the war neared the twelve month mark, the Confederate government was faced with a dire existential threat. Enlistees "times would begin to expire in early 1862," historian James M. McPherson notes in his work, *Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis As Commander in Chief*, "creating the prospect that the armies would melt away just as the Yankees were advancing on all fronts."³¹ The prospect of independence could very well be extinguished. To President Jefferson Davis and then-Secretary of War George Randolph it seemed that the only feasible remedy to ensure that the ranks of military remained at healthy levels was to institute a national conscription of white men, ages eighteen to thirty-five, for three year terms of service.³²

Secretary Randolph's conscription bill found opposition within the nation, with many charging that such an action defied the states' rights ethos. To its critics, compulsory military service exemplified, and, to many, went beyond, the very tyranny that the southern states had rebelled against. For the remainder of the war conscription remained extremely controversial was endlessly debated even amended several times. Yet at its passage military necessity trumped philosophical purity when both houses of the Confederate Congress passed the bill and sent it to

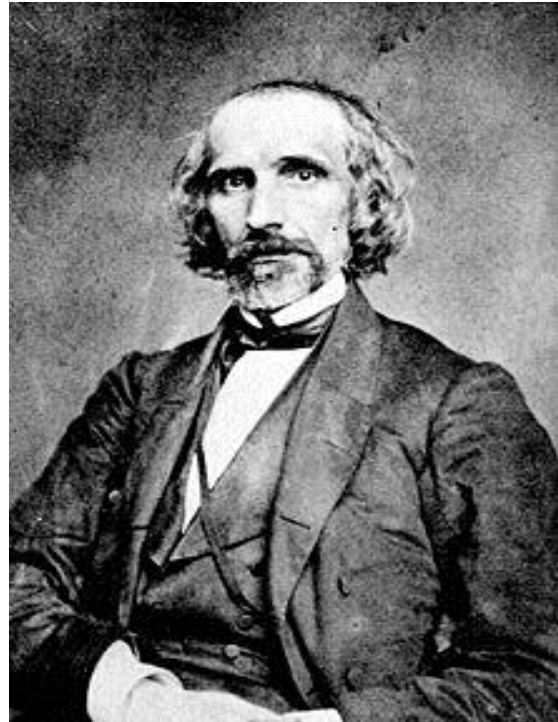
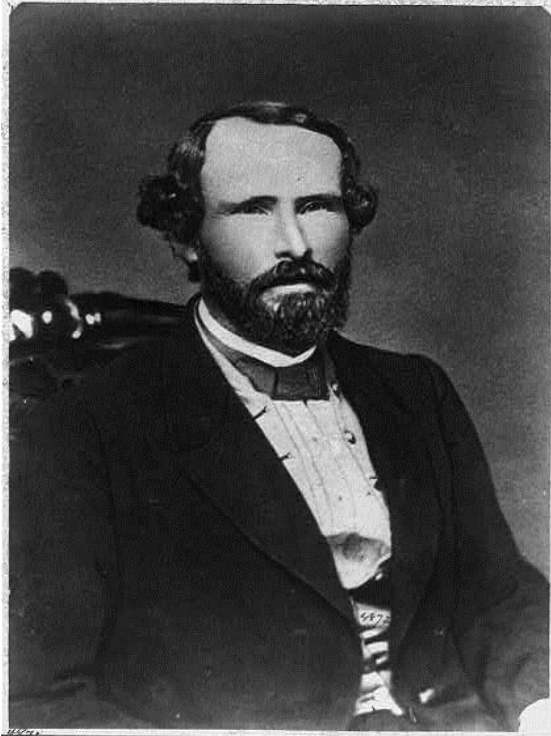
³¹ James M. McPherson, *Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis as Commander in Chief*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2014), 71.

³² *Ibid*, 70-74.

President Davis, which he signed on April 16, 1862.³³ Symbolically, the act made any state or local interests subordinate to the national ones. “Under ordinary circumstances the power thus delegated by Congress is scarcely felt by the States,” Davis wrote in a letter to Georgia Governor Joseph Brown, defending the legality of the act against the prerogative of the states, “at the present moment, when our very existence is threatened by armies vastly superior in numbers to ours, the necessity for defence has induced a call, not ‘for the whole military of all the States,’ not for any militia, but for men to compose *armies* for the Confederate States.”³⁴ Unity for a common purpose needed to become a primary priority at all levels of government. In its initial form application of the law was far from universal and exempted many professions, civil bureaucrats and skilled industrial workers, from being drafted into said armies. With each revision, however, came ever more restrictions on exemptions.

³³ James M. Matthews, ed. *Statues at Large of the Confederate States of America, Commencing with the First Session of the First Congress. Richmond: 1862-1864.* 1st Cong., 1st Sess., chap.31. This authorization marked the first national draft in American history.

³⁴ Jefferson Davis to Governor Joseph E. Brown, May 29, 1862, cited in William J. Cooper, Jr. ed., *Jefferson Davis: The Essential Writings*, (New York: The Modern Library, 2004), 246.



A Tale of Two Secretaries- George W. Randolph (left) proved to be a more sympathetic ally to the city than his successor, James Seddon (right) *Library of Congress*

As the law was still being debated, the Richmond municipal government immediately recognized the importance of such initial exemption loopholes. If a city were to run effectively and efficiently, it needed trained professionals to perform its various services. In this light, the council appointed several of its members to make an application to Governor Letcher for the exemption of numerous civil servants whose service was vital to the city's interests. Such requests included the superintendents of the gas and water works; police officers and night watchmen; and the city's auditor and chamberlain.³⁵ The council's appeal proved successful, and

³⁵ *City Council Minutes*, March 10, 1862. The Virginia legislature had passed an act requiring its municipalities to petition the governor for exemptions "within twenty days after a draft should be made."

the governor added the positions to his certificate of officers for exemption.³⁶ These exemptions were also approved of by Secretary of War George Randolph.³⁷

Because of the challenges facing the city in its second winter of the war, including the smallpox epidemic, it was vital to have competent workers and administrators in charge of the city's various services. Municipal facilities continued to need the expertise of engineers for proper maintenance, a larger population required a seasoned force of policemen and night watchmen to maintain vigilance and safety, and the enhanced patronage of Richmond's services brought more revenue into the chamberlain's office and increased the value of the clerks. All of these positions, and more, were viewed by the governing city authorities as vital to the proper administration of the capital. It was during this relatively bleak period that the Confederate government decided to enact a second conscription bill, one that expanded the age limit of those eligible for the draft and narrowed the amount of persons eligible for exemption.³⁸ Having successfully won exemptions for their coveted workers earlier in the year, the council convened at December's end to discuss making a similar appeal for exemptions under the new law. Given their past amicable experience with the war department, they saw no reason that this new petition should be any different.³⁹

Almost immediately, the municipal government discovered that this time around the process would not proceed with the same good faith. Councilmen Richard Haskins, James Scott, and Larkin Glazebrook had been appointed to meet with President Davis to impress upon him

³⁶ *City Council Minutes*, March 24, 1862. In a second petition to the governor, the council asked that Overseer of the City Hands and the High Constable of the City be added to his certificate of exemption.

³⁷ *City Council Minutes*, June 14, 1862.

³⁸ James M. Matthews, ed. *Statues at Large of the Confederate States of America, Commencing with the First Session of the First Congress. Richmond: 1862-1864.* 1st Cong., 2nd Sess., Chap. 80.

³⁹ *City Council Minutes*, December 20, 1862.

the necessity of exempting Richmond's numerous officials from military service. This proved impossible as Davis had departed for a tour of the western Confederacy. Consequently, they found themselves back before the whole council to await further instruction. After lengthy debate, the council passed another resolution to "memorialize Congress to exempt such City officials as the City Council may certify to the Secretary of War are indispensable to carry on the City government in its various branches."⁴⁰ Secretary Seddon granted an interview to members of the council but declined their request, stating that such exemption power did not belong to him but to President Davis, alone. Because the commander in chief was out travelling through the Confederacy's hinterlands, the council successfully appealed to local enrolling officer, Captain John A. Coke, to grant them a thirty day exemption while they sought out a permanent solution.⁴¹

When President Davis returned from his western tour, the previously appointed council members and Mayor Mayo eagerly secured an audience so that they could finally obtain the appropriate exemptions. Much to their disappointment, the president refused to acquiesce and directed them back to Seddon. The secretary of war again refused to act, stating his lack of congressional authorization as the reason. This time he advised them to petition congress to address this request, for they had the ability to grant him this power. Yet before they could adequately prepare a memorial for that body the temporary thirty day exemption expired, and so returned to Seddon, requesting that he grant them a simple ten day exemption extension. This would to give the city time to prepare its case before the national legislature. For a third time Seddon refused their request, even for this short stay, and further went on to notify the municipal

⁴⁰ *City Council Minutes*, January 14, 1863.

⁴¹ David J. Saunders to Richmond City Council, *City Council Minutes*, January 26, 1863.

government that even if congress granted him powers they sought, he would not use them to exempt the city's military age employees, including fifty-one firemen.⁴²

This obstinacy of Confederate national authorities infuriated the city officials, who could not understand “why it is that the President and Secretary of War has laid down such a strict and rigid rule in regard to the exemptions asked for by them.”⁴³ Other military age men are detailed by Confederate authorities to work in various other occupations, but “when the Council applies for a few men to be detailed for offices which are believed to be necessary and important both to the interest of the City and Government, they are met with the reply [to] get men who are not conscripts.”⁴⁴ To that cavalier suggestion, they did not have the power to force men into such civil positions “as the Government has to force conscripts into the army.”⁴⁵ The municipal government prided themselves on the skill and “long experience” of its workers and could not justify their not being exempted; failure to do this would not only jeopardize the efficiency of the city, but it could also potentially endanger the national government, too. “If the Gas Works and Water Works are left without officers, and the Fire Brigade disbanded,” Council President Saunders warned, then “between twenty and thirty millions of private property belonging to the citizens of Richmond, besides millions belonging to the Confederate Government are left unprotected, upon ...President [Davis] and Secretary of War must rest the weighty responsibility.”⁴⁶

⁴² *City Council Minutes*, January 26, 1863; Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 109-111.

⁴³ *City Council Minutes*, January 26, 1863.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* During this same debate, the council passed a resolution requesting the Committee on the Fire Department to make “such temporary arrangements as they can, for the safety of the engines and, if possible, provide some force to work them,” in case their exemption requests went unanswered.

Fortunately for the sake of the city's safety, the Virginia legislature passed a measure granting Governor Letcher the ability to exempt these men. The arguments within the memorial written to the Confederate Congress, too, proved persuasive. Apparently its body contained enough men who valued the internal safety of their capital and happily honored Richmond's request.⁴⁷ A potential crisis in loss of personnel had been averted, but the entire ordeal embittered the municipal government. In their opinion, having competent workers to serve the city was not just beneficial to its interests but to the national government's as well. As Saunders noted in his letter, any calamity that may befall the city would just as surely impact the national government as well, a fact that some members of the latter seemed to overlook. Having come to loggerheads already with the Confederate government while debating the tobacco disposal question of 1862, the municipal government now found itself possessing diminished good will. In response, it retaliated by passing a series of resolutions against the offending authorities. These included requesting that any prisoner held in the city jail for an offense against the Confederacy be removed at once, demanding the aforementioned payment for housing smallpox patients; and the commencement of charging \$7,000 in rent per annum for use of the city Alms House.⁴⁸ These measures demonstrated the city's willingness not only to challenge but also to punish the national government for hindering the proper execution of its duties. There would always be a limit as to how far Richmond could go in exacting this kind of damage without harming the cause of Confederate independence, but moving forward the municipal government ensured that its assistance would not come free of charge.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Council President Saunders' letter to the body made sure to note how George Randolph exempted the same men when he had headed the war department.

⁴⁸ *City Council Minutes*, February 9, 17, 23, 1863.

One of the main issues the city council confronted in 1863 was how to respond to the needs of Richmond's poor, a problem brought home by the April 2 "bread riot" described at the opening of this chapter. No councilman denied that there were many individuals who lived in a state of penury, but charitable resources had certainly been made available to them. To further reinforce this benevolent thinking, George W. Randolph, elected to serve on the city council just days before the riot, proposed a resolution to create a committee that would "enquire and report some plan for the relief of the meritorious poor of the City, and for excluding from such relief all who render themselves unworthy of it by riotous and disorderly conduct."⁴⁹ Further action on behalf of the "meritorious" poor, those deemed by the council as in real need of assistance, would be taken when Councilman Randolph's ad hoc committee presented to the council an ordinance entitled: *For the Relief of Poor Persons Not in the Poor House*.⁵⁰

The ordinance contained twelve separate recommendations that could be taken to ameliorate the condition of Richmond's less fortunate. The Overseers of the Poor, the twenty-four man body appointed by the council to manage the resources allocated for the care of the destitute, would be charged with establishing a "free market," where, once a week, fuel and provisions would be distributed to those presenting tickets given by the overseers. Such recipients would be evaluated by the body to properly determine their merit; only those who were "unable to procure subsistence or fuel, or if the application is in behalf of a family under such nor unless such family is under a like disability."⁵¹ Money would not be given in lieu of tickets. Prohibited from receiving tickets were those who participated in the riot, as they

⁴⁹ *City Council Minutes*, April 4, 1863. The city of Richmond held municipal elections on April 1, and the newly elected took their seats on the council April 4, including former Secretary of War George W. Randolph.

⁵⁰ *City Council Minutes*, April 13, 1863.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

embodied the antithesis of the “meritorious poor.” Able-bodied men, if there were any to be found still within the city, also found themselves excluded from the city’s free market system. Additionally, the council appointed an agent would scour the countryside for resources, such as meat or produce, to be brought into the city which would ostensibly increase city supplies and hopefully lower costs. Twenty thousand dollars comprised the council’s initial contribution to this effort.⁵² To prove that its commitment to the care of the destitute was genuine, the council would allocate thousands of dollars more to the Overseers of the Poor throughout the remainder of the war; each time the Overseers petitioned the council for help they always left with aid in hand.⁵³ At the same time, the municipal government still contributed to the city’s established private charities, such as the Union Benevolence Society.⁵⁴ The level of care even impressed the obstinate *Examiner*, who commended it for having “done its duty well in the matter of providing for the poor- not only well, but generously... if the poor have suffered, it has been because they have not applied for relief.”⁵⁵ While providing for the poor had always been a responsibility of the city council, its wartime support so exceeded prior efforts that it more closely resembled later welfare states. In an article entitled “To Feed the Citizens: Welfare in Wartime Richmond, 1861-1865,” Emory Thomas, while discussing the impact this mindset had, noted that at first twenty thousand tickets were distributed to those who met the criteria, with fifty thousand more coming later. Even if multiple tickets went to the same individual or families, it still marked a tremendous percentage of Richmond’s wartime population.⁵⁶

⁵² *Ibid*; *Richmond Daily Whig*, April 9, 1863; *City Council Minutes*, June 8, 1863.

⁵³ *City Council Minutes*, July 13, October 15, December 14, 1863, March 23, May 31, July 11, September 6, 1864.

⁵⁴ *City Council Minutes*, November 14, 1864; Emory M. Thomas, “To Feed the Citizens: Welfare in Wartime Richmond, 1861-1865,” *Virginia Cavalcade*, (Summer 1972), 27.

⁵⁵ *Richmond Daily Examiner*, April 10, 1863.

⁵⁶ Thomas, “To Feed the Citizens: Welfare in Wartime Richmond, 1861-1865.”

During much of the war's final two years it often did not matter how much the city could provide for its poor, the prices of various items only continued to increase, placing them out of financial reach for a great many Richmonders, even those still with money. Constant fighting across the commonwealth, foraging by troops, and impressment of resources by the Confederate armies throughout much of Virginia had depleted the availability of certain goods. In a city as strategically important and centrally located as Richmond, this dearth was only augmented. Inclement weather tended to result in impassable roads which further prevented items from being brought to market. Additionally, the Union blockade prevented necessary goods from being imported. By hoarding goods and selling them for higher prices, speculators, too, contributed to the problem of inflation.

Fixing the costs of goods appealed to several council members as a prompt remedy to ensure that goods remained at attainable prices. Richmond had briefly lived under this system in 1862, when the Henrico County Provost Marshal, General John H. Winder, enacted the policy during the period the capital had been placed under martial law. Its extreme unpopularity proved its undoing, and the debates concerning its reimplementation, in 1863, fared no better. Knowing that this bitter sentiment lingered prompted the city council conduct a city wide poll before any action was taken; the results found 867 votes against and 296 for the measure.⁵⁷ To the majority of those who voted against the resolution, maintaining fidelity to the idea of the free market superseded concerns about the costs of life's necessities. Consequently, the municipal authorities had to investigate other legislative means in attempt to control the price of goods within the city.

⁵⁷ *City Council Minutes*, October 19, 1863; *Richmond Whig*, October 23, 1863.

In October, 1863, and April, 1864, the city council attempted to cut down on speculation, which was perceived by its members as a contributor to inflation, amongst the city market vendors, especially those selling meat, by passing ordinances requiring them to “obtain a license from the Council, first having satisfied the Council as to his character and capability.”⁵⁸ Those found in violation would be fined. Additionally, the city council entered into a partnership with the Virginia Central and the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroads. Their mission would be to seek out available food supplies south of Virginia to send back up for use by Richmond’s needy.⁵⁹ In March the flour milling firm of Haxall and Crenshaw generously provided meal to the poor of the city, to which the *Daily Dispatch* resoundingly approved. This charity on the part of the firm deserved “to be held in grateful remembrance for their deeds during this trying period of war.”⁶⁰

Even with such ingenuity on the part of the city, benevolence from private charity, and a paid agent scouring the countryside vainly searching for sustenance, the cost of food and fuel rose ever higher. The best example illustrating this point comes from the city Gas Works. On November 24, 1862, the cost of coal gas per every thousand feet stood at \$3.50; during the city council meeting of January 9, 1865, the men present voted to raise the rate to \$50 per every thousand feet.⁶¹ Additionally, the council increased its powers over such affairs, when in September of 1864 they passed an ordinance that provided for the creation of a “Measurer of Wood in the City of Richmond.” Among the position’s prescribed duties included ensuring that

⁵⁸ *City Council Minutes*, October 12, 1863, April 20, 1864; *Richmond Daily Examiner*, April 21, 1864.

⁵⁹ *City Council Minutes*, March 24, 1864; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, March 24, 1864.

⁶⁰ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, March 14, 1864, cited in Emory M. Thomas, *The Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 168. Later the municipal government would compensate Haxall and Crenshaw \$35,000 for its generosity, *City Council Minutes*, June 13, 1864.

⁶¹ *City Council Minutes*, February 23, 1863, January 9, 1865; *Richmond Daily Examiner*, January 10, 1865; *Richmond Whig*, January 11, 1865.

wood purchased in the city was measured and distributed properly and that all vendors of wood complied with the ordinance. The measurer was to also inspect the city wood yards and to make “quarterly reports of the number of cords of wood measured by him.”⁶²

The inflation of prices for goods and services put additional strain on the income of those subjected to it. Previously, the city had fought the Confederate government to retain its municipal workers in order to maintain proper administration of Richmond’s various institutions, now, though, endeavored itself to ensure that the workers’ salaries could at least keep pace with the escalating inflation. Consequently, the municipal government raised the salaries of its workers on several occasions throughout the final two years of the war. Shortly before the April 2 riot, council passed an increase and explained that due to the “present extravagant prices which all articles are sold at... most city officers cannot support themselves and families on their present salaries.”⁶³ Under this proposal the annual salary of the mayor rose from \$3,000 to \$3,500; that of the superintendents of the gas and water works rose from \$1,800 to \$2,250; and that of the average city police officers and night watchmen rose from \$800 to \$1,500.⁶⁴ During a subsequent increase of municipal salaries in July, the *Daily Dispatch* lauded the fact that Richmond was attempting to care for its own workers. “Persons dependent on salaries find it exceedingly difficult to make both ends meet...however economical they may be, and many can scarcely live at all.”⁶⁵ Yet in the paper’s estimation more should be done for the servants of the city: “in purchasing the necessities of life now, \$100. will not go as far as \$10. would before the commencement of the war, and yet there are comparatively few employees whose salaries have

⁶² *City Council Minutes*, September 12, 1864. In a moment of possible nepotism, one John F. Glazebrook, relation of Councilman Larkin Glazebrook, was appointed to the position.

⁶³ *City Council Minutes*, March 9, 1863.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *City Council Minutes*, July 20, 1863; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, July 22, 1863.

been increased one hundred and fifty per cent.”⁶⁶ Before the war’s end the city council would address the *Dispatch*’s concern and raise employee salaries several more times.⁶⁷ It got to the point that by the increase debate of the February 3, 1865, council meeting, the annual amount to be given to Mayor Mayo was set at \$8,000, a full \$5,000 more than it had been two year earlier.⁶⁸ By this time, however, it no longer mattered what the mayor’s or any other city worker’s salary was; try as they might, the municipal government could not keep pace with the inflation that crippled the Confederate economy from 1863 to 1865.

In spite of the financial sink hole municipal government found itself in, the increasing rates of poverty swallowing up more and more of its constituents, and the fact that it occasionally sparred with the state and national governments over various issues while jealously protecting its own interests, the city of Richmond managed to continue in its duties, even while the fate of the Confederate States of America appeared overwhelmingly grim. On April 1, 1865, during the last wartime council meeting at which general business was discussed, the body concerned itself with a myriad of issues. The council allocated \$20,000 to the Richmond Soup Association, so that it may keep open the city Soup House and serve those in need; it allocated \$5,000 to the Male Orphan Society; it engaged in discussion concerning city auditor’s ledger in the recording of receipts to the gas works; it received a communication from Mayor Mayo about the expense of the destruction of wall on Main Street; it entertained complaints about the conduct the Keeper of Shockoe Hill Burying Ground in not providing proper clothing to the hired blacks working

⁶⁶ *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, July 22, 1863.

⁶⁷ *City Council Minutes*, February 8, March 14, August 8, September 20, 1864. During this same period the Confederate government, too, increased the wages of its employees operating in the capital city. All salaries below \$2,000 per year were increased one hundred percent, while any between \$2,000 and \$3,000 were increased by fifty percent. Matthews, ed. *Statues at Large of the Confederate States of America, Commencing with the First Session of the First Congress. Richmond: 1862-1864*. 1st Congress, 3d. Session, Chapter 16.

⁶⁸ *City Council Minutes*, February 3, 1865.

grounds; and an authorization to the Committee on the Fire Department to draw from the city Auditor “for seventy dollars per week in payment of the board of the Negroes attached to the steam fire engine.”⁶⁹ Not a single item foretold the fact that within seventy-two hours Richmond would be vacated as by the Confederate government, occupied by the Union army, and visited by President Abraham Lincoln. At that time, the municipal government would be forced to once again adapt to a new and revolutionary governing partnership.

⁶⁹ *City Council Minutes*, April 1, 1865.

EPILOGUE

“Deliverance”

By April 3, 1865, the government of the Confederate States of America had absconded under the cover of darkness the previous evening. For the first time in nearly four years Richmond could not claim to host the national capital. During the halcyon summer of 1861, the city had joyfully and proudly welcomed the nascent government to establish itself within its boundaries. Throughout its tenure in Richmond, the national government benefitted from the generosity and efficiency of the municipal government. The city had allocated precious resources to erect earthworks to provide protection, as well as clothe, house, and equip soldiers for the military. The city had allowed for the Confederate authorities to commandeer buildings for work and provided lodgings for many of its leaders, including President Jefferson Davis. To the army it gave men and to the treasury it gave needed funds. While it may be argued that the actions of this one city could not decide the war's eventual outcome, it is evident that the efficient administration of Richmond helped to facilitate the Confederacy's war prosecution. This meant following and expanding the powers enumerated to it in the Richmond City Charter, periodically sparring with and besting other governments over their respective interests, and, above all, providing for and defending the citizens it had been elected to represent.



Currier and Ives Depiction of the Fall of Richmond, April 2, 1865. *Library of Congress*

On the morning after the capital's evacuation, Mayor Joseph C. Mayo rode with his appointed entourage in an open carriage through the eastern end of the city and into the countryside. Behind him stood his city, part of which still fueled a grand conflagration commenced during the Confederate evacuation. In 1862 the city had warned the national authorities about the dangers of destroying tobacco and cotton stored in local warehouses, and now they were left to witness such a scenario as the instigators, the evacuating Confederate forces, of the blaze fled south across the James River. Ahead of Mayor Mayo lay the purpose for this excursion, the surrender of the city to the incoming Union army. His party had travelled three miles south east of the city when they encountered "a Federal cavalry detachment of

Majors A. H. Stevens and E.E. Graves.”¹ These men, part of the 4th Massachusetts Cavalry, had been sent by Maj. General Godfrey Weitzel to “receive the surrender of the city, to cause all the liquor to be determined, and to preserve order until the main body of troops arrived.”² To Major Graves Mayo offered a note of the city’s surrender:

To the General Commanding the United States
Army in front of Richmond:

General,

The Army of the Confederate States Government having abandoned the City of Richmond, I respectfully request that you will take possession of it with an organized force, preserve order and protect women and children and prosperity.

Respectfully,
Joseph Mayo, Mayor³



Richmond City Hall (right), with Union soldiers seated in foreground. *Library of Congress*

¹ Louis H. Manarin, *Richmond at War: The Minutes of the City Council, 1861-1865*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 595.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

After the delivery of this transmission, Mayo and his party made their way back to Richmond with the Union host at their back. Later, when Maj. Gen. Weitzel arrived in the city, he went over to City Hall to receive the formal surrender of the city. This meeting could be seen as symbolic given the fact that the municipal government of Richmond had been on hand to greet each subsequent newly established government within its jurisdiction over the years; now it would be on hand to inaugurate a radical new era in shared governance. In the short term, this would mean martial law, but with the municipal government allowed to still meet had hold elections. This municipal government, though, was not the same as the one that came before secession. Not only had it been forced to adapt to situations heretofore unconsidered by local government, but it had to reconcile them with their traditional responsibilities. In so doing, the municipal government of Richmond altered and redefined the relationship between a city and its constituents.

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