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WILLIAM H. MAHONE OF VIRGINIA: AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY, 1830-1890

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WILLIAM H. MAHONE OF VIRGINIA:
AN INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY, 1830-1890

by

John Fabian Chappo

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ABSTRACT

WILLIAM H. MAHONE OF VIRGINIA:
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by John Fabian Chappo

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William H. Mahone of Virginia is an intellectual history of ante and postbellum Virginia told through Mahone as a central figure. While much has been written about Mahone as leader of the Readjuster Party in Virginia in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the present study highlights how and why Mahone—a railroad man turned Confederate general turned prominent national political figure despite humble upbringing—came to be a leader of Virginia. Mahone lead a successful political revolt in the 1870s because he little forgot his rural, economically-disadvantaged childhood, as he campaigned for socially progressive change in the Old Dominion. His management skill and engineering erudition came to the forefront before the war. Mahone’s reputation as a leader expanded during the war, especially after his successful repulse of Federal troops at the Battle of the Crater. Feeding off public awareness and celebration of his managerial skills as displayed in business and on the battlefield, Mahone led a successful grassroots political revolt in an effort to rebuild the Republican Party in Virginia after Reconstruction and in an effort to maintain Virginia’s long-held republican character.
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INTRODUCTION

Both professional and casual students of the historical role Virginia's sons and daughters have played in the formation and overarching trajectory of the United States have had little to want by way of support from historians and historical scholarship in general. Scholars of varying subfields and disciplines have written numerous accounts—fiction and non-fiction alike—from a myriad of topics ranging from the first contact of Europeans and natives four hundred years ago to the present day administration of Governor Tim Kaine. Even today, a basic, yet semi-focused internet search of “Virginia in the nineteenth century” yields over 1.4 million links whereby one can find information from the early Jamestown Jubilees to the development of the Navy Hill district in Richmond to the formation of the Petersburg Garden Club in Gilded Age Virginia.

From all the aforementioned, there emerges an increasingly clearer portrait of the people, places, and episodic events that form the very bedrock of professional scholarship relative to the Old Dominion. Yet, despite all of the innovation and erudition, scholars have written little on an equally important and compelling subject of Virginia history: Virginia's commitment to create a liberal capitalist society within a republican framework of governance, and how the commonwealth's leaders, like William Mahone, espoused and advanced ideologies and policies that fostered the economic
and social development of the Old Dominion during the middle decades of
the nineteenth century.

What follows is an intellectual biography of William Mahone’s Virginia
from the twilight of Thomas Jefferson’s existence to the dawn of Jim Crow, or
roughly the years 1830 to 1890. Because this dissertation is, at base, the
story of one of Virginia’s less celebrated leaders, chronology has proved
most useful as an organizational method. Further, because of the absolute
dearth of information relative to Mahone through the antebellum period,
census records and newspapers have been mined more assiduously in the
early chapters, to help provide more context, than can be found in the closing
sections.

The dissertation begins with an account of Virginia’s political economy
from George Washington’s presidency to the advent of the second party
system, or the generation of William Mahone’s father, Fielding. Since the
beginning of the republic, Virginia’s political and intellectual leaders struggled
to develop a political economy that coalesced with a republican system of
government. Men like Jefferson took seriously the four stages theory of
government, as put forth by Thomas Malthus. Further, leading Virginians
paid particular political and intellectual attention to the final stage of the
theory, commercial development, because it (allegedly) marked the onset of
societal decay.

Nonetheless, despite the potential social damage of commerce, Jefferson
realized, as had Whigs and Democrats of Mahone’s Virginia, that without the
development of internal improvements and manufacturing social programs would largely go unfunded because of the absence of an economic infrastructure necessary to enhance profit margins and tax revenues, from artisans and husbandmen alike. Chapter one outlines, therefore, the intellectual push and pull factors associated with economic development in the Old Dominion, namely the Whig Party's proclivity toward manufacturing and the Democrat Party's faith in husbandry. It also highlights the struggle that leaders of both parties had relative to their desires to limit access to the franchise while concomitantly maintaining long-held systems of social deference, especially in lieu of the wave of democratization then sweeping the Union.

Chapter Two considers how Virginia's "plain folk" and burgeoning middle class viewed words like "virtue" and "liberty," especially in the wake of a tripartite of events: a constitutional convention, the Nat Turner slave revolt, and the Old Dominion's 1832 slavery debate. Mahone's home county of Southampton (also the scene of the Nat Turner revolt) revealed well the strain of a people and society as it came to terms with agencies--inside and outside of Virginia--that clamored for universal white male suffrage. While common Virginians were little pleased with the lack of meaningful reform as evidenced by their new constitution and their continued exclusion from the ballot box, they were equally anxious to join with planters and urban nabobs to squash the liberties of free blacks--as well as strengthen slave codes--in the wake of the Nat Turner revolt.
As planters and plain folk closed ranks in the aftermath of the Turner insurrection and debated both a continued subordination of the free black population as well as that of outright colonization, the commonwealth's preachers, too, were in a quandary following the revolt. Both the omnipresent rural evangelicals as well as the newly emerging urban pastors—those who catered to middle class professionals and planters and who were driven to build denominational bureaucracies to rival those in the colder climates of the country—were forced to either break ranks with their northern brethren or face alienation and accompanying empty collection plates from a lack of local congregational support. Thus, for all Virginians, whatever differences separated slaveholders and non-slaveholders, planters and plain folk, Nat Turner's uprising and the subsequent 1832 slavery debate caused them to disappear, at least for a time.

As Virginians looked for ways to ameliorate their psychological discomfort in the days following the Nat Turner revolt, they found little in the way of reprieve with the onset of the market revolution and its attendant economic and social impact on the early nineteenth century. Chapter Three, therefore, looks at Virginia's system of public works and the intellectual and political underpinnings of why the commonwealth developed and funded a mass system of internal improvements.

While most historians have agreed the market revolution brought about both structural changes to American economic systems like banking and transportation alongside psychological shifts in attitudes and values, the
changes were much less prohibitive and socially destructive than has been written and prescribed. Virginians from all classes, in fact, were committed to a system of internal improvements where the wheels of change were set into motion by their own desires and backed by their investment dollars. They applauded the funding and regulatory assistance the government provided in the construction of turnpikes, bridges, river and harbor improvements, and railroads, as they advanced a political economy of mixed enterprise.

Aside from the increased profit margins planters witnessed from reduced transportation costs and expedited trade, plain folk, too, experienced an upturn in their local economies and lives. Rail lines allowed them to ship their products more cheaply to larger markets in Richmond and Norfolk. Moreover, improved transit afforded greater accessibility of goods and services which, in turn, allowed competition to drive prices down for the average Virginia consumer thereby enabling many to seize opportunities to buy land.

With respect to land, those that already owned property saw a marked rise in their real estate values as rail lines, canals, and corduroy or plank roads were laid, dug, or erected on or near their homesteads. For the poor and transients both inside and outside the urban areas, increased business activity and public works projects offered them both job opportunities and, most importantly, a growth in real wages. The government, too, benefited as business activity and land values which, taken together, translated directly
into higher tax revenues. With increased tax receipts, social programs, like
the building of schools, could then receive adequate funding.

Aside from the changes that the market revolution brought to the
social and economic landscape in Virginia, Chapter Three also fully
introduces the central figure of the dissertation, William Mahone. It traces
"Little Billy" Mahone's path from his youth in Southampton County through
his years at the Virginia Military Institute and concludes on the eve of the
American Civil War in Norfolk with his appointment as President of the
Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad at the age of twenty-six.

Lest the reader in search of "drums and trumpets" history despair over
the social, economic, and intellectual bent of dissertation in the opening
section, Chapter Four should meet with their satisfaction. Utilizing primarily
personal papers and the United State War Department's Official Records as
source guides, the chapter highlights Mahone's march from his beginnings
as an inauspicious colonel of the Sixth Virginia Infantry to that of a much
celebrated "Hero of the Battle of the Crater" and promotion to Major General
prior to Appomattox. The last two years of the war receive special attention
and time because Mahone’s leadership abilities, popularity, and wholesale
respect came to the forefront during the final phase of the war—a respect
clearly evidenced by the fact that nearly half of all the Confederates that
stacked arms on Sunday, April 9, 1865, near Appomattox Court House were
soldiers under Mahone’s command and custodial care.
In the wake of Confederate defeat, the end of the war ushered in another transitory period for both Mahone and Virginia’s citizens. While Mahone had a much easier transition because of his pre-war occupation as an engineer and railroad magnate, Virginians, white and black, toiled as equally to survive as they did to define their roles and sense of social place within a larger collective body of free people. Chapter Five, then, utilizes the underlying theme of struggle as it focuses most specifically on Mahone’s fight to consolidate three of Virginia’s rail lines under his management. The proposed Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad, coupled with a planned steamship line with foreign ports of call, defines Mahone’s hope of linking trade markets in the western United States (via Bristol, Virginia) through Norfolk, Virginia, and his vision of creating an economic rival to cities like Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and New York.

Mahone’s belief in economic advancement and opportunity enabled him to view the Confederate defeat as a positive good. He firmly believed that the war and its attendant destruction actually provided Virginians with a clean slate (Aristotle’s *tabula rasa*) from which to frame and develop social and economic programs bent toward restoring Virginia to its once prominent place in the Union. To be sure, Mahone stood to gain financially from any success that came to his plans and vision for the commonwealth. Yet, unlike other industrial dandies in the soon to be styled Gilded Age, he cared less for self-promotion and more for the re-development and re-vitalization of his native home. His decidedly progressive vision, reminiscent of Jefferson’s,
had its taproot in Southampton County where, as a boy, he hawked newspapers in business partnership with a free black, despite the stigma associated with his entrepreneurial arrangement. Thus, through his formative years, Mahone realized that color or class mattered little. He understood empirically that energy and determination could overcome any rhetorical or stereotypical roadblocks to social betterment, and that economic opportunity was the great social leveling tool.

The final chapter continues the postbellum story of Mahone and Virginia begun in chapter five. Mahone’s consolidation fight against northern business interests of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad had been successful. Federal occupation of Virginia ended quickly and uneventfully, especially for white citizens of the commonwealth, and the economy improved as Virginians began to rebuild their roads and lives out of destruction and defeat.

After 1873, however, panic settled back into the Old Dominion. With the collapse of Jay Gould’s financial empire and the subsequent freefall of the national economy, Mahone’s days as a railroad tycoon, too, ended as his Atlantic, Mississippi and Ohio Railroad went into receivership. Embittered over the loss that he blamed on foreign (northern and European) combinations as well as political conservatives, or Redeemers, at home, Mahone formed a coalition of disaffected and disfranchised whites and blacks, and launched his political career as head of the Readjuster Party.
Following the war, Virginia's political leadership battled over how best to handle its debt obligations. Virginians initially had three choices: First, honor the debt and make the necessary budget decisions to see it settled. Second, repudiate the debt entirely as other Southern states had done. Third, readjust the debt to a manageable level given the financial strain of rebuilding from the war's destructive hard hand. In the immediate postbellum period, Conservative Party members, also known as Funders, swayed the General Assembly into embracing the first option because they believed that Virginians were duty bound to honor their war debt, as had the case with their revolutionary forebears. Yet, by 1870, the tax receipts that trickled into Richmond could little cover the interest payments alone on the debt. As a result, Virginia's war debt ballooned. In response, conservatives called for a moratorium on social spending, even going so far as to watch the state's school system grind to a halt and close their doors because of insufficient funding to pay teachers and administrators.

Moderate and progressive men like Mahone, most who came from the burgeoning professional class of doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, viewed the debt issue as a political opportunity. While little friendly to the idea of outright repudiation, moderates knew well and understood the plight of the plain folk of the commonwealth, and pushed for political change. Mahone, whose name recognition carried considerable weight, principally rallied support from the Old Dominion's plain folk in support of new compromise solution to the debt problem. With leaders of what would become the
Readjuster Party, he called for a readjustment of the debt so that the state could meet both its financial obligations to creditors yet also maintain its most basic social needs for its citizens, like schooling.

It is worth noting here that as the Readjuster Party took shape in the late 1870s, Mahone’s personal correspondence and papers reveal that he and other leaders of the movement little believed that they were building a third party as has been advanced by historians (and even by his previous biographer) in the past. Rather, Mahone and his moderate-minded colleagues remained firmly committed to a two-party system and sought only to revive the wounded Republican Party in Virginia. It should be little wonder, then, that upon his appointment to the Senate as a Readjuster following the party's successful elections in 1879, Mahone caucused with the Republicans.

Over the next several years, Readjusters held their majority position in the General Assembly largely because they legislated reforms that helped their political base (comprised of farmers, sharecroppers, urban transients, and aspiring middle-class entrepreneurs). The Readjusters rolled back property taxes, reassessed realty values, abolished the poll tax, appointed black Readjusters to leading municipal positions, outlawed convict labor, enabled local government officials to tax rail and telegraph companies in support of local school programs, aggressively pursued unpaid back taxes owed the state by railroad companies during the conservative-dominated years, and even attempted (unsuccessfully) to pass a graduated income tax.
By 1885, despite the successful social agenda of the Readjuster Party and the solid financial footing that their policies had placed the state, the Democrat Party successfully returned to power. While aided by the election of Grover Cleveland at the national level and a strong economy—historically financial “good times” caused whites and blacks to splinter—the Democrats were largely successful because of Mahone himself. The general’s independent-minded leadership, micro-managerial style, and strong-arm tactics had caused many of his former compatriots to bolt the party and fuse with the Democrats then in ascendancy throughout the South in general.

It is difficult to understand in hindsight, especially given Mahone’s considerable political skill, how the former general could have enabled his troops to splinter despite support from some of his most capable and respected captains, Republican and Democrat alike. Surely he must have known there would be fall-out in the wake of his more military-minded authoritarian style. Perhaps Mahone believed that he had succeeded so well and fully by striking the enemy’s flanks—with little input from subordinate commanders—in the past during the war that he simply planned his political attacks in the same way? The lack of personal reflection or correspondence leaves much to speculation in this regard. Yet, what is less open to speculation, however, was Mahone’s failure to discern that on the political battlefield it was the center—not the flanks—that held the key to victory. Thus, his alienation of political moderates, concomitant with an economic recovery and Democrat re-ascendancy throughout the South, enabled cracks and
breaks to form in his own party lines that ultimately cost him his party, his political future, and, most importantly for Mahone, his ability to continue to defend Virginia's republican character from outside invasion.
CHAPTER I

POLITICAL ECONOMY IN

FIELDING MAHONE’S VIRGINIA

By the late 1830s, after nearly ten score years of political, agricultural, financial, and intellectual ascendancy, few Virginians cared to imagine or admit that they had reached the crest of their influence and leadership. Financial panics and agricultural market meltdowns, abolitionist assaults on their domestic institutions and recent slave insurrections, depleted soils and systems of public works all led many Virginians to view the landscape around them in terms of degeneration.

Just as their forebears had tacked eastwardly across the Atlantic in defiance of nature and kings in search of happiness, so too had Virginia’s sons and daughters begun to hack their way westward across the mountains in defiance of familial competency and tradition. For Virginians, especially those from the Eastern Shore, Tidewater, and Piedmont regions, the outflow of capital, people, and power pointed to one thing: the decline of Southern civilization as they knew it.

Yet not all Virginians viewed the signs about them in such apocalyptic terms. Westerners, those that resided on the windward side of the Alleghany Mountains eastward to the spine of the Blue Ridge, witnessed a marked improvement in economic conditions. New settlers to the west began to exploit the region’s “untold natural resources,” particularly its timber, salt, and
bituminous coal. Especially after 1826 people found cheap lands and economic opportunity enhanced by improvements, however modest, in means of transportation. Corporations, like the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, began to supply a steady stream of investment and manpower into the area from Maryland, New York, New Jersey, and western Pennsylvania. With the influx of immigrants and capital, a prosperous iron industry emerged. While Richmond, Danville, and Petersburg “back east” continued to produce about three-fifths of the state’s manufactured goods, both Wheeling and Lynchburg emerged as rivals so that by the late antebellum period “Wheeling, . . . next to Richmond, was the largest manufacturing city of the state.”

Despite years of condescending rhetoric by easterners, travelers and new arrivals to western Virginia found much more in the land “than the panther or the bear.” They discovered a wild, natural habitat that housed an abundance of wildlife, especially white-tailed deer. Alongside the potential supply of venison, one could easily find streams full of trout and pickerel, brush-lines full of pheasant, partridge, and woodcock, and woodlands full of turkey. Put simply, the fish, fowl, and game of the west provided a vital supplement to many homesteads as western Virginians, like their fellow

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1 Charles H. Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia From 1776 to 1861 (New York, 1964), 134; U.S. Census, Compendium of the Sixth Census, 166-177.

easterners, searched for ways to increase their holdings and add to their competencies in a burgeoning market-oriented climate.\(^3\)

New immigrants also discovered vast, fertile valleys like the Kanawha, Tygart, and Shenandoah where the soil seemed as well-suited for the development of a sheep, swine, or cattle industry as much as it was for the production of mass quantities of cereal grains. Further, counties like Botetourte, Rockbridge, and Augusta were home to large stands of fruit and nut trees and hordes of berry bushes, particularly apples, pecans, and raspberries. All could easily be crated for sale, pressed for juice and cider, or distilled for wine, brandy, or into "white lightning, mountain dew, or bust-head" as was the western tradition.\(^4\) Thus like the fish, fowl, and game, the region's fruits, nuts, and berries also served as complementary commodities for market-minded westerners.\(^5\)

Small towns, too, dotted the various roads and waterways like those that traipsed up the Shenandoah Valley from Winchester to Lexington. Most of the towns had long been established by the English, German, Welsh, and

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\(^4\) Horace Kephart, Our Southern Highlanders (Knoxville, 2004), 112-136.

Scotch-Irish settlers when they entered the state by way of western Pennsylvania and western Maryland prior to the American Revolution. While the towns remained largely unimproved compared to those in Philadelphia, Richmond, or Baltimore—absent were the expansive marketplaces, grand hotels, parasols and broadcloth, cigar smoke and specialty shops, like Pizzini's the famous Richmond confectionery—most contained modest stores, mills, hotels, and an occasional military or educational institution. With the exception of industrial centers like Wheeling and Lynchburg, smaller towns were also generally without the teams of urban day laborers and transients that populated the larger cities. As a result they lacked the stigma of an "urban poor" or "backsliding sort" that the larger eastern towns housed and were forced to support. Most important for early Virginians, however, the towns provided ample means for one to escape eternal damnation, namely through the aid of the Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, or numerous other smaller denominations and congregations that populated western Virginia.

6 The growing industrial complex around Wheeling, however, did in fact have a number of "urban poor" among the largely white and recent immigrant population. See Charles H. Ambler and Festus P. Summers, West Virginia: The Mountain State (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1958), 124-130.

Yet beyond the region's natural beauty, seemingly endless supply of resources and humble towns, it was what new arrivals failed to see that was every bit as important: they saw few slaves compared to the Piedmont, Tidewater, and Eastern Shore. Moreover, they happened upon even fewer established or improved networks of transportation in the form of plank roads, rail lines, or canals. Internal improvements were sorely lacking compared to those back east and westerners worried, therefore, that without some degree of modification the movement of surplus goods to foreign markets would surely stifle and suffocate any continued economic growth.

The need for internal improvements was hardly a Valley or Trans-Alleghany regional issue. Westerners found support from struggling middle class merchants and artisans in the eastern seaboard towns like Norfolk. "Backwardness in internal improvements [had] contributed to and resulted in economic stagnation" eastern reformers reasoned. That Virginia, "which was the proudest and most powerful in the union, ... [now had] the meanest and most wretched highways in the world" proved to be an embarrassment to the

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8 It should be noted here that the Shenandoah Valley region by 1830 was slowly becoming more like the Piedmont, Tidewater, and Eastern Shore with respect to its attitude toward slavery as its slave population nearly doubled between 1800 and 1830. Nonetheless the number of slaves that resided west of the Blue Ridge by 1830 was still a mere 7.5% with the remainder being held in eastern Virginia. For greater detail see Alison Goodyear Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832, (Baton Rouge, 1982), 27, 33, 265-270.

state, an impediment to its import/export trade, and an anchor to its overall economic development, especially in the east.  

With a seemingly irreversible commitment to the "oald slow ways," eastern Virginians shunned the development of a manufacturing infrastructure and clung instead to their slaves, husbandry, and history. In Mahone's Southampton County, thousands of bushels of wheat, oats, and rye were produced annually alongside over 500 thousand bushels of corn. Cotton, too, took well to the fine sandy loam soils of Fielding Mahone's neighboring plantations where local nabobs could boast of their record production of the white gold over that of fellow Virginians.  

Southamptonites exported an average of over 850 thousand pounds per annum during the 1830s, and, with the exception of Greensville, Stafford, and Sussex, produced more cotton than all other Virginia counties combined. Yet despite being among the leading counties in the commonwealth in agricultural production, Mahone and his neighbors invested less than one percent, or merely six thousand of the state's more than seven million dollars, in manufactories and internal improvements. Further, they sported  

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11 U.S. Census, Compendium of the Sixth Census, 155-156.

12 U.S Census, Compendium of the Sixth Census, 165. Despite being the largest producer of cotton, Southampton County failed to invest any
fewer than twenty retailers of dry goods—a fact that Fielding Mahone, an owner himself, surely must have enjoyed from a competitive standpoint—thus placing them in the bottom half of Virginia’s counties relative to the development of any commercial infrastructure. Local planters made a conscious effort to ignore the potential improvements in efficiency that technology could bring and thus dedicated themselves and their politics to their system of labor and their unrelenting opposition to property taxes.13

By 1830 in the several states north of Virginia “the moneyed element in the cities” represented nearly twenty five percent of the general population, whereas in Virginia’s eastern cities only about one in twenty-five could be counted among the wealthy.14 The latter five percent constituted eastern Virginia’s “urban elite” and mirrored in lifestyle, if not always its politics, the wealthy mega-planters of the Eastern Shore, Tidewater, and Piedmont. Even more important than their collective manners, tastes, and commitment to social deference and order, Virginia’s urban and plantation elite shared a common interest and ideology: slavery served both as their principle source of labor and undergirded their wealth and competencies, therefore the institution had to be preserved from outside interferences, abolitionist and

13 U. S. Census, Compendium of the Sixth Census, 155-160.

reform-minded alike. Thus while political party differences existed between Whig and Democrat, urban elite and planter, "ending slavery in the foreseeable future was never an option" for either group that represented the wealthy few.\textsuperscript{15}

In matters commercial, however, urban elites did break ranks with planters in Virginia and joined middle class artisans, merchants, and industrial-minded entrepreneurs from all regions across the state. Politically they supported the Whig party because its platform largely mirrored that of Henry Clay's American System. The Virginia born and Kentucky reared Clay had long been a proponent of protective tariffs, internal improvements, and national banks to expedite trade and other commercial interests.\textsuperscript{16} For


\textsuperscript{16} Clay's "American System" had its genesis in Alexander Hamilton's "American school" or "National System" of economics. Located somewhere between British mercantilism and yet developed Keynesian economics it consisted of three overarching policies: (1) the protection of industry through
Whigs, particularly in Virginia, internal improvements were seen as vital to alleviating a perceived "economic vassalage to the North" with respect to manufactured goods, and the ability to effectively and efficiently bind together all regions of the state for future economic development.\(^{17}\) From a political aspect, they further reasoned that economic union would end the decades of elite conservative domination, and, by default, lead to an end to divisive sectional issues such as representation, suffrage, and reform of the county court system. Most important, Whigs lauded the social benefits associated with increased commercial activity. Like Alexander Hamilton, they believed that industrial development "would set the idle to work, draw out hidden wealth, ... revive drooping trade, ... and [ultimately] nurture virtue."\(^{18}\) Put simply, "theirs was a political economy of improvement."\(^{19}\)

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\(^{17}\) *Norfolk Herald*, Oct. 29, 1827.


Since the beginning of the republic, Virginia's political and intellectual leaders quickly recognized the moral dilemma that economic life posed for its citizens. Men like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison struggled to develop both a local and national political economy that effectively coalesced with a republican system of government. As Jefferson stated in his Notes on the State of Virginia, if "his countrymen foolishly and prematurely embraced manufacturing, . . . a consequent and inevitable corruption of morals would necessarily endanger the fabric of republican government . . . [and] soon eat to the heart of its laws and constitution."^{20}

Republicans like Jefferson and Madison, drawing in some measure from Old World moralists like Jean Jacques Rousseau--those that loathed greed, self promotion, and the general overall sickness that civilization seemed to contract every time commercial society coughed--began to "direct especially close attention" to the four stages theory of government and the "progress, growth, and decay of societies" that resulted from commercial development.^{21}

Put forth by Thomas Malthus, the four stages theory--hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce--held that societies progressed

^{20} Jefferson, Notes, 165.

through four stages of production. As they proceeded from the most primitive, hunting, to the most fully developed, commerce and its finer manufactures, advanced divisions of labor appeared alongside the luxury they produced. As luxury items became more readily available, men attached a special value to them. Once luxury items became a societal marker for status and/or success, the decay of society became imminent because the degree of separation between those that owned the wealth and those that produced it would be so great. Jefferson and Madison firmly believed, therefore, as had Rousseau before them, that "modern commercial society created a multitude of artificial needs and desires in men to which they became enslaved"—a notion quite antithetical to any republican form of government or classical republicanism in general.22

Beyond the avarice and greed that the final stage of Malthusian theory allegedly unleashed, Jeffersonians waxed hard about how best to deal with the specter of a swelling class of laboring poor that was rising, especially in the New England states, from large-scale manufacturing enterprises. Echoing the work of Scottish sociological historian Adam Ferguson, Jeffersonians, too, maintained that in "every commercial state, notwithstanding any pretension to equal rights, the exultation of the few must

They reasoned, therefore, that as commerce and industry expanded, husbandmen would be drawn away from their fields and light household manufactures—occupations deemed by them to be virtuous—into the towns and cities. Once drawn into the urban industrial complex, they would become part of a mega-machinery that extracted their sovereignty, led to their moral decline, and aged an otherwise youthful disposition within their communities.

Beyond their fears, however, Jeffersonian Republicans well-recognized, understood, and accepted the benefits that society derived from industry. They all supported some degree of manufacturing within the several rural households and among the artisans within the urban areas. And they knew that they had to seek overseas markets for surplus goods in order to provide the impetus for increased agricultural activity, thereby supporting an environment that spurned slothful behavior. Theirs was a difficult and near fatalistic predicament. Knowing well they could do little to stop the inevitable movement from the third to the fourth and final stage, their challenge was to find ways to slow the engine of production in order to scale down the rate of America’s natural decay.

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Republicans believed that the best answer could be found in the very land they desired their citizens to develop. The opening of western lands for settlement provided the most effective means for slowing large-scale industrial development because it offered a viable solution for the crowding of peoples, both immigrants and emigrants. Further, the prospect of land would restore hope and opportunity to the laborers caught in the coils of production by offering them a way out. As long as they continued to make land available, like Jefferson's successful purchase of the Louisiana Territory from Napoleonic France and James Monroe's acquisition of Florida from Spain, Virginians and Americans alike had a chance to remain in the third more virtuous and youth-like stage of development. Their decidedly more agrarian capitalist vision, therefore, was bent toward maintaining a classical republican character by developing the nation spatially over newly acquired lands.26

Jefferson, as with William Mahone in the postbellum period, believed in the perfectibility of mankind; that "equality, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were real and inseparable parts" and could be attained with continued economic growth and social development of both his native state and the nation across space.27 With respect to agriculture, Jefferson proposed a gradual diversification of crops to move away from a tobacco


culture, the application of small scale manufacturing, and the gradual emancipation of slavery. It was with the western farmer, eastern bondsmen, and Malthusian theory in mind that Jefferson laid the foundations for his national vision.  

Jefferson, the consummate social engineer, slowly came to understand, however, that without prosperity social programs and improvements would likely go unfunded. The trend toward industrialization that found its impetus in the Federalist policies of the 1790s had some merit if properly harnessed and directed. "To be independent for the comforts of life," Jefferson said, "we must fabricate for ourselves. We must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturalist... [as] experience has taught me that manufactures are now as necessary to our independence as to our comfort."  

Jefferson, as with William Mahone, recognized the changes over the land in both the physical and mental make-up of the people and how they interacted with the environment. His liberal philosophy enabled him to rethink earlier beliefs because he cared less for the past and more for the future. For Jefferson, balancing consideration for words like "virtue" within a burgeoning market environment, while important to many Republicans and

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28 Jefferson, *Writings*, 1141-1144 (on Malthus), and 1208-1210 (on manufactures).

some Federalists, mattered less because it largely mattered little to most ordinary people like Fielding Mahone.  

Aside from his contempt for both the Virginia and national constitutions, what clearly separated Jefferson from Washington, Hamilton, and even Madison, was his “confidence... in the natural integrity and discretion of the people” and “trust [in them] with a control over their government.” Thus Jefferson’s belief that America constituted a single people acting in concert with one another—prescribed from Saxon rather than Norman English tradition and as espoused in the Declaration of Independence—differed sharply from the views of other framers and intimated political struggles in the offing both inside and outside of Virginia, struggles William Mahone would confront and address in the postbellum period.

Political life in the “Era of Good Feelings” during the Monroe years, however, had decidedly shifted as more voices were being included in the democratic process. By the time Fielding and Otelia Mahone gave birth to the second of three children, William, in December 1826, the political landscape, as well as the economic, social, and physical setting of Virginia, had changed dramatically.

31 Jefferson, Writings, 1270.
32 Nelson Morehouse Blake, William Mahone of Virginia: Soldier and Political Insurgent (Richmond, 1935), 5-6; Biographical Information on
Fielding Mahone noticed a marked increase in business activity to his Monroe, Virginia, mercantile and tavern in the late 1820s which suggested to him and other fellow Virginians that the worst of the financial panic that started in 1819 had passed. Market prices, too, while anything but stable from year to year, began to rebound for the diverse staples that were cultivated on his fields. His commitment to multi-staple agriculture represented the trend of fellow Virginia agrarians across the state in their effort to mitigate the enormous tobacco market swings and boom and bust cycles that came with such fluctuations.

Mahone, like most farmers of his day, made considerable use of slaves hired out from the several surrounding plantations, cotton, tobacco, and otherwise. His corn fields took on the ever-present lattice-work pattern of intersecting plow rows. Unlike today, farmers in Fielding Mahone's time planted corn in hills, generally located where the plowed rows came together. Also unlike today and in the Native American tradition, farmers planted peas and beans—today known for their nitrogen fixing ability—at the base of the corn once it reached sufficient maturity to both support the vines of the crop and feed the root base of the corn concomitantly.33

Aside from his crops, general store, and tavern, Fielding Mahone also looked to maximize his profits, endear himself to the local planter elite, and

William Mahone, VMI Class of 1847 in Files of the Virginia Military Institute, Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia.

add to his children's competency through the produce and their byproducts from his orchards. Like many of his neighbors both in Southampton County and Virginia writ large, Mahone pressed his own fruit and distilled his own wines and brandy for personal consumption as well as at market in his own tavern and abroad. Temperance mattered little to Fielding Mahone as it would his son. It seemed to matter even less for his fellow Southamptonites, despite their religious predilections, as census records clearly show that they had the highest “value of product from the orchard” than any county in the state, and that they turned a healthy portion of it into spirits.34

While Mahone shared commonalties with husbandmen around him, he was anything but representative of their political orientation. Because nearly three-fourths of his neighbors owned neither land nor slaves, he cared little for men, both inside and outside of the Virginia, who espoused or embraced the democratic movement to open up the franchise to more white males. Mahone belonged to a small “upper middle class that had a substantial stake in supporting the status quo” because of the near monopoly they maintained together with planters with respect to agricultural commodities, localized trade, assessed values of property in both land and slaves, and political offices like the county court.35

By expanding the electorate, eastern elites feared that their material and social interests would be undermined and their way of life threatened

34 U.S. Census, Compendium of the Sixth Census, 157.
35 Crofts, Old Southampton, 19.
once seats they had long held in the legislative assembly disappeared to
western immigrants much like those pouring into the Shenandoah and Trans-
Alleghany regions. They feared that westerners, once in power because their
ever-expanding population far outstripped that of the east, would advance a
system of internal improvements. The improvements would be financed
through ad valorem taxes on property, especially that of slaves, and
therefore caused easterners to worry about the future of their civilization. The
determination of easterners to maintain the existing order is especially telling
when considering that nearly ninety percent of the state's 470,000 slaves
were located in eastern Virginia.\(^{36}\)

Beyond Fielding Mahone's agricultural pursuits, which by nature
should have pulled him into the Jackson fold, it appears that his business
ventures and faith in the emerging belief that "the internal improvements
movement was to provide [for] favorable conditions for private enterprise"\(^{37}\)
provided both his attraction and attachment to the Whig party. Comprised
mainly of former Republican Nationalists who sought to advance the tenets
of Henry Clay's American System as mentioned earlier, some eastern men
like Mahone joined western upper-middle class leaders because they shared
a common political vision and a common political economy. Both believed
that economic change and technological innovation—changes Democrats

\(^{36}\) U.S. Census, Compendium of the Fifth Census, Doc. No. 263, 16-
18. According to the census, of the 469,757 slaves in the state, 416,320 were
enslaved in Virginia's eastern counties in 1830.

\(^{37}\) Carter Goodrich, "The Virginia System of Mixed Enterprise," Political
Science Quarterly, 64 (September, 1949), 355.
scorned—could restore Virginia to its once prominent position as national leader, unite the eastern and western sections of the state for economic growth, and elevate them to a level of political equality with the nabobs of the Old Dominion.

While the Whigs were anything but solidified as a political force in the late 1820s in Virginia, the arrival of Jackson and a new party on the national scene presented a threat to men, like Fielding Mahone, who were committed to maintaining a stranglehold on economic development and profits. The Democrat Party, however, also provided hope for Virginia's disfranchised as they had long been denied a political voice or any form of access to economic opportunity in general in the commonwealth for generations. Naturally, then, Jacksonian Democrats received their support from agrarian outlays that were less fully integrated into the burgeoning market economy.

Yet as Democrat and Whig parties emerged in the 1830s, it was unclear how Virginia's smallholders, struggling yeoman, poor whites and blacks, day-laborers, transients, urban poor—the "bottom-railers" and "mudsills" of society to use C. Vann Woodward's phraseology—that comprised nearly three-fourths of the population would react to the winds of political change that were opening the franchise elsewhere throughout the United States? Moreover, it was even less clear what political life look like for the generation that grew up alongside William Mahone considering the "increasingly democratic" machinations of an emergent new middle class that was at odds with an "oligarchical social and economic structure." Further, few
seemed concerned what place, if any, republicanism had within the new political framework.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{38} Crofts, \textit{Old Southampton}, xii.
CHAPTER II
YOUNG WILLIAM MAHONE'S VIRGINIA

Despite decades of cerebral incantations from Virginia's political elite over how best to develop the commonwealth's citizenry, little consideration had been given to the mass of Virginia's denizens and what they thought in general. Had the elite asked, they would have found that the Old Dominion's "plain folk" were decidedly more concerned with gaining access to arable soil or keeping furrows straight than they were with the ideological trappings of words like "virtue" and "liberty" or concepts such as republicanism. Even for the very few plain folk who could read the editorials from men like Thomas Ritchie of the Richmond Enquirer or John Hampden Pleasants of the Richmond Constitutional Whig, the republican rhetoric of the elites little swayed their understanding of the class issues that existed within their respective communities and throughout Virginia as a whole.¹

The rise of Andrew Jackson and the Democrat Party, however, gave them hope. They recognized the trepidation behind the "speechifying of the big fellows" as one highlander put it, and they stood ready to challenge them

¹ U.S. Census, Compendium of the Sixth Census, 32-33, 39. According to census records, nearly 35 percent of the white population over the age of twenty in Southampton County was illiterate in 1840. The percentage is telling because it excludes free persons of color, slaves, or anyone else under the age of twenty, or those less likely to have received even the most basic educational instruction.
politically. Thus, when Virginia's ultra-conservative men like Benjamin Leigh declared that any able-bodied man “with honest labor and persevering industry” could acquire the requisite amount of soil to gain the franchise, the majority of Virginians--fully ninety percent of them did labor in the soil--well knew it was less an issue of their lack of determination or motivation to labor in the land and more an issue of being denied access to the land by men like Leigh himself. Plain folk knew that limited access to land equated to limited access to the franchise, and, more important, limited access to “freedom” as perceived and defined by Virginia’s white males.

Yet, the preaching by men like Leigh, as with their parsons and ministers, was anything but new to common Virginians as they had long been reared in fire, brimstone, and camp revivals. Plain folk cared less for leveling society as they did for gaining a political voice as free men. Thus, what urban artisans, rural yeoman smallholders, and the landless poor or transients that comprised the Democrat party’s core of Fielding Mahone’s Virginia wanted was simply to have a voice within the legislative process. While westerners may have contemplated revenge on eastern freeholders by taxing their property holdings to fund internal improvements and other social programs


\[3\] Virginia, Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention of 1829-1830 (Richmond, 1830), 402.

as men like Leigh feared, most Democrats simply wanted a say in the day-to-
day matters that affected their lives and that of their families.

Yet, just how the plain folk of the Old Dominion were to gain a greater
voice and be physically represented in the political process was yet
undetermined. Fielding Mahone and other more moderate and pro-business
minded men surely struggled to accept a Democrat party that supported a
system of patronage and rigid partisanship yet claimed to be more
universally inclusive than the Whigs. They surely questioned the truth behind
the Democrat party's message of inclusion when weighing the party's
support for a hard money currency, which, unlike paper currency and the
credit system of the Whig platform, better supported the financier than the
struggling farmer because it would tighten the supply of money and thereby
limit the farmer's access to credit. Urban artisans, too, wondered how
conservatives like Leigh could claim Democrat inclusiveness when the party
clearly supported a policy of free trade--a policy that by its very nature
effectively hamstrung small shopkeepers from competing with larger (and
foreign) firms and economies of scale both inside and outside the
commonwealth. These and other concerns left many common Virginians to
consider just how different the "new" Democrats were from the "new" Whigs,
especially as it related to economic development and opportunity.

To many disfranchised Virginians, it seemed as though both new
parties were merely two sides to the same old Jeffersonian Republican coin--
two sides that cared little, despite their rhetoric, for the differences in class as
evidenced by their unwillingness to share any political power. Little surprising to the plain folk of Virginia, then, they came to find that "the debates between Whigs and Democrats [took] place within the larger . . . context of ascendant capitalism." The debate would ultimately give rise to considerations a majority of the disfranchised wanted to address and Whigs (and some Democrats) cared little to face—the quandary of class.5

Three events in the early 1830s, however, soon detracted people's attention from the political changes that were creeping across the Union during the early stages of the second party system. They came to dominate the attention of all Virginians and serve as talking points in all social circles irrespective of class: a constitutional convention, the Nat Turner slave revolt, and the Old Dominion's 1832 slavery debate.

Since the founding of the Commonwealth, plain folk and western Virginians had played second economic, social, and political fiddle to the planter dominated aristocracy of the low-country. For decades, they called repeatedly for changes to the electoral process—complete with its attending system of property requirements—in order to enable all white men access to the franchise. They plucked long and hard on the political strings for a fairer and more balanced system of determining representation within the storied halls of Virginia's General Assembly. They clamored for a subsidized system—one that utilized federal and state funds—of internal improvements to augment the development of their burgeoning agricultural and industrial

5 Diggins, Lost Soul, 108.
counties. All the while and alongside the ever-increasing and aggregating cacophony of emotions, westerners and plain folk made known their collective belief that the eastern political establishment remained out of step, time, and tune with the changing political rhythm that was sweeping across the Union during the late 1820s and 1830s. Sooner or later, reformers argued, eastern conservatives had to accept Jefferson's faith and logic "that the mass of citizens [were] the safest depository of their own rights," and that "a government is [only] republican in proportion as every member composing it has an equal voice of its concerns."  

For the reform-minded, however, Jefferson's "equal voice" applied only to words uttered from a white man's voice. They, like their eastern counterparts, little cared for enabling the free black man, or any woman for that matter, the right to vote. By 1828, however, the Virginia legislature agreed to a popular referendum with respect to holding a new constitutional convention to address the changes—economic, demographic, and otherwise—inside the commonwealth. When the votes were tallied, reformers throughout the state had gained a clear-cut referendum to open the franchise and for political change in general. 

Until the Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830, relatively few Virginians had been permitted to vote. The Old Dominion clearly maintained one of the oldest and most conservative strongholds in the Union. Because

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7 Rice, *West Virginia*, 93. The vote was 21,896 to 16,464 in favor of political change.
Virginia was behind the political times and because of the quality of the men elected to the convention, reporters from across the several states converged on Richmond.

Arguably, the men who gathered to modify Virginia's constitution in 1829 comprised one of the most capable bodies of delegates ever assembled on American soil. Included in their delegation were two former presidents, Madison and Monroe, two United States senators, John Tyler (later to become president himself) and Littleton Tazewell, two prominent members of the courts, John Marshall (a former chief justice) and Abel Upshur (later to become secretary of war and secretary of state), as well as several prominent congressmen and lawyers, like John Randolph and Lewis Summers respectively.

Despite of the voters' desires, which had offered a clear referendum for reform, however, Virginia's conservatives moved quickly to defend their political hegemony from the growing threat posed by "king numbers." Because freeholders alone were responsible for most all of the revenue of the state in the form of taxes on property (thirty percent of the total from that on slaves alone), they believed that they alone should make political decisions. While conservatives clearly recognized that population change should and needed to be considered, they were little prepared to make it the lone consideration. Thus, they called for the combining of white population and taxation as a means of deciding representation in the legislature. The
conservative system for deciding representation was referred to as the "mixed basis."  

Reformers, conversely, maintained that white universal male suffrage alone should determine the composition of delegates in both bodies of Virginia's General Assembly. Called, quite appropriately, the "white basis" of representation, reformers, mostly from the west, moved equally as quick to garnish support in order to gain a more equal political footing. They invoked the rhetoric of the 1790s that easterners had long used as they claimed that the white basis system was the only one in keeping "with a republican form of government" and republicanism generally.  

While older conservatives like Madison and Monroe agreed with the reformers on principle, they remained suspicious of the growing power in the west largely because it was decidedly foreign. As for the mass of Virginia's citizenry, Madison and Monroe were not yet far enough removed from the days of Daniel Shays to have any newly acquired trust for them either. In order to check the burgeoning power of the more northern industrial-minded and immigrant-laden west and the masses in general, they called for compromise. Monroe offered to permit the lower house representation based upon universal white male suffrage, while he proposed to maintain a mixed basis for determining representation in the upper house or senate.  

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8 Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 47.

9 Virginia, Proceedings and Debates, 385-390, 399-402.

10 Ibid, 149-151.
Monroe's arrangement met with immediate opposition from conservatives and a few reformers alike. Because Virginia's senate could only approve or reject appropriation bills, conservatives argued that they would rather reverse Monroe's proposed plan and have the senate apportioned on the white basis and the house according to the mixed basis. Conservatives called for the house to be established on the mixed basis because they knew appropriations bills, the "real money power" as they called it, were created in lower body of Virginia's General Assembly and thus wanted to maintain a monopoly on how all money bills were written. Over the course of the debate, however, the true fears of the eastern slaveholding conservatives became readily apparent: they feared oppressive taxation, if "king numbers" came to power, by a people they condescendingly referred to as the "peasantry of the west."\(^{11}\)

Ardent western reformers, "speechifying big fellows" in their own right, responded vehemently to the slanderous rhetoric of the east. Phillip Doddridge challenged the eastern sponsored mixed basis as a clear and continued violation of Virginia's Declaration of Rights. He lashed out at conservatives who claimed that the west would embrace abolitionism and seek to destroy their property rights and "civilization." He confronted eastern ultras like Abel Upshur directly by questioning the logic of their promotion of a system that demanded that black slaves be counted and considered in their

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 158.
formula for representation when the political rights and numbers of western white men were omitted altogether. "So long as you hold political domination over me," he asserted, "I [too] am a slave."\footnote{Ibid, 88.}

As debate turned more heated and personal and with westerners openly talking about leaving the convention (and some about separating from Virginia altogether), moderate men like Madison and Monroe looked for a middle ground. Support came from Chapman Johnson of Augusta County in the Shenandoah Valley.

Johnson proceeded to steer delegates toward the center by recharacterizing the focus of the debate. Born in the central Piedmont, a schoolmate of eastern ultra conservative Benjamin Leigh and friend to many eastern and western men alike, Johnson maintained that "representation of property not only contravened democracy...[but] it also...posed a graver danger to slavery than majority rule." He called instead for a system that would apportion Virginia's house according to what he referred to as "qualified voters."\footnote{Ibid, 293; Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 58-62.}

Foreshadowing the later 1850-51 Virginia constitutional convention and the postbellum tactics of conservatives in the advance of Jim Crow, Johnson warned easterners that continued refusal to grant equal representation in defiance of the times or numbers would cause westerners to seek support in the lesser ranks of eastern urban society where an anti-
aristocratic spirit already existed. Not only would they inadvertently initiate
class warfare, but they would also jeopardize slavery itself by inviting
antislavery forces from within Virginia to gain both a seat and a voice in the
political arena. Further, their plan would only continue to create greater
divisions in Virginia, east from west, and thus undermine the economic
reason for which they had gathered in Richmond in the first place.

For Virginia’s eastern conservatives, the matter was very simple, they
had to yield ground and embrace some measure of democratization and
Lockean liberalism or find themselves forced to face the specter of both
abolitionism and class warfare. The choice for most eastern slaveholding
conservatives, however begrudgingly on the part of some, was obvious. In
the wake of Johnson’s logic and as the votes for both the mixed basis and
white basis had failed and debate stalled, Valley and Piedmont slaveholding
delegates were able to persuade conservatives to join them in opposition to
non-slaveholding reformers from the Trans-Alleghany region and thereby end
the impasse. By a vote of “fifty five to forty one, with most western members
in opposition,” a new constitution was ratified and a new proslavery bloc was
formed.14

While the new constitution was clearly more republican in that it
abrogated direct ownership of a fixed amount of acreage as the sole criterion
for voting, it still excluded roughly forty-five percent of the commonwealth’s
adult white males. With the eyes of the nation upon them, Virginians gained

14 Rice, West Virginia, 95.
for themselves the dubious distinction of joining the "Old North State" of North Carolina as the only two yet to abandon property qualifications as a requirement for voting. For all the time Virginia's delegates spent debating the merits of republicanism in the mixed and white basis systems of representation, as well as the requisite qualifications for gaining the franchise, the most interesting and curious outcome of Virginia's constitutional convention of 1829-1830 was that it "claimed no intellectual rationale at all." Thus leading men from both parties provided a revealing and decidedly un-Jeffersonian example for all disfranchised citizens in the commonwealth. Namely, that when it came to issues "related to representative democracy and political individualism--apportionment, suffrage, and popular election--[they] were not partisan matters," and that a continued commitment and maintenance of the aristocratic "old ways" would continue to take precedence.\textsuperscript{15}

If the plain folk of the commonwealth, like those who frequented Fielding Mahone's Southampton County mercantile, were at all dissatisfied or disgruntled with the dearth of political changes in the wake of the constitutional convention, then their frustrations were most surely short-lived.\textsuperscript{16} Within one year of the constitutional convention's adjournment an

\textsuperscript{15} Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 16, 65.

\textsuperscript{16} While newspapers like the Wheeling Compiler and the Wheeling Gazette clearly show their disdain for being politically snubbed by nearly all other regions of the state at the convention (see the Wheeling Compiler's December 23, 1829 and January 27, 1830 editions as well as the Wheeling Gazette's April 6, 1830 editorial as examples), papers east of the Blue Ridge
enormously unifying event took place for whites of varying political stripes across the commonwealth and across the South in general: the Nat Turner slave insurrection.

Whatever differences separated slaveholders and non-slaveholders, Nat Turner's uprising caused them to disappear, at least for a time. Arguably next to John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859, "General Nat" did more to solidify and mobilize Virginia's white citizens, in both thought and action, to the need for a common defense against both real and perceived interference with their institutions and their way of life. Nat Turner was nearly thirty one years old at the time of the insurrection; William H. Mahone was nearly five.

Such was the situation for a young, sandy-haired, freckled lad named "Billy" Mahone from Southampton County, Virginia. Located along the North Carolina border in southeastern Virginia, Southampton had been one of the original eight shires of the colony as established by the order of King Charles I of England in 1634. The county was separated geographically by the Nottoway River, which bisected the county, and spiritually by the Anglican Church, which divided it into two parishes: Nottoway parish to the north and east of the river that bears its name, and St. Luke's parish, settled much later than Nottoway, to the south and west of the river.17

generally had little bad to report, quite naturally as it favored their region, about the results.

Southampton was originally called Warrosquyoake Shire. Named for the local Native Americans, the shire or county was renamed to Isle of Wight when most of the Warrosquyoake had been displaced southward. In
Jerusalem, the county seat and boyhood home of Mahone, was situated in the center of the county along the north shore of the Nottoway. Whether by design or luck, the location of Jerusalem with its courthouse and justices of the peace—both centers of political power at the time—proved to be most beneficial because "the distinction between the two halves of the county was especially pronounced." The city served as a commercial hub, legal and political center, and, at times, a buffer between disparate and contending people and parties.¹⁸

While both sections of Mahone's home county shared a common religious founding, time and improper soil management eroded a once shared vision and spirit. It caused each section to develop its own distinct ideological pattern of development and religious undertaking. Never made to attend religious services in his formative years by either of his parents Fielding or Martha Drew, William Mahone hardly represented those around him at home in Virginia or throughout the South at large. Nonetheless, he, like most all other Southern boys, learned to function in a world where religious thought tugged at the heart and purse-strings on a diurnal basis.

Like the county courts, churches were important centers for community assembly in Virginia. "Central location and accessibility by road

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¹⁸ Crofts, Old Southampton, xiii, 49.
were the prime considerations for the siting of these edifices.”¹⁹ Beyond religious edification, churches accentuated and reinforced societal deference and order as Virginians took their place in church according to public rank. The organization of the church—with early parishes like Nottoway managed by a vestry of twelve and governed by a minister—undergirded and confirmed “definitions of authority within the rural community itself.”²⁰ Yet, if condescension had been a laudable quality for Virginia’s elite in the eighteenth century, it surely lost traction in the wake of the immigration and revivalism of young Mahone’s early nineteenth century.

Most rural Virginia evangelicals found “Anglican and the Episcopal services too formal and too ritualistic for their tastes.”²¹ Rather, rural Virginians, like their rural Southern evangelical brethren as a whole, generally attended a variety of services irrespective of their Baptist, Presbyterian, or Methodist upbringing. Because country churchgoers shared commonalities far more with one another than the dandies that filled the foremost pews of the Anglican and Episcopal assemblies, the differences of form, style, social acceptance, and ideology were far less the types of issues that exacerbated inter- and intra-sectional disparities as historians like Charles Ambler have implied. Rather, they were much more parochial--


²⁰ Ibid, 64.

country versus court one might argue—in nature, whereby homespun begat homespun, and broadcloth begat broadcloth.

The increased and ubiquitous "revivalism created an environment of religious populism that emphasized the individualism implicit in [the] free will" doctrine for Virginians and others, white and black, across the South and West. It revealed and represented the general trend toward democratization of the polity long associated with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828, and also highlighted the spirit behind "the antebellum movement away from an aristocratic republic of gentleman freeholders toward...democracy [that] focused on the rights and privileges of [all] white men."22 Thus, while Mahone may have cared less for organized religion in form, he did embrace and accept it in substance. It helped him recognize, as it must have those in the lesser ranks of society about him, the unifying and leveling effect religion had on all people in Jerusalem and elsewhere throughout the commonwealth, irrespective of color or caste. The upshot was that the ubiquitous revivalism of Mahone's life helped shape his view toward what it meant to be free and helped define his approach to politics and race—an approach that highlighted his belief in creating equality through opportunity.

Yet, just as the constitution of 1830 failed to level society for the common man in the commonwealth, so too would the changes in religious thought and organization fail to dismantle deference within the religious community as the sons of the Second Great Awakening pastors began to

22 Shade, Democratizing the Old Dominion, 49, 29.
replace their fathers. Largely confined to the urban areas, new Methodist and Baptist pastors began to build "denominational bureaucracies that [rivaled] the efficiency, wealth, and size of those in the North."23

While revivalism and camp meetings still remained near and dear to the hearts of many backwoods Bible-preaching parsons, Virginia's old time religion was slowly being supplanted by an "allure of respectability" among market-oriented middle-class minded congregations, especially in the towns and cities.24 After all, broadcloth looked pretty good to those that could afford it as it often meant acceptance into the upper ranks of society and brought with it political perks. It was a pattern that fit Virginia's preachers too because it also "made the pastorate an avenue for social mobility."25

Virginia's new parsons began to place greater emphasis on seminary degrees and professionalism. Urban "Methodists and Baptists," especially, "began to recast the social customs of their belief as the [older] appeal of alienation from society was [being] replaced by a desire to influence it."26 They traded in their saddles for studies and bridles for books as the new churches they erected reflected the refinement in taste of their newly formed congregations.


26 Ibid, 6.
Coming from families of generally professional means, the new urban pastors commanded healthy salaries and thus welcomed planters into their fold while regularly excluding slaves and free blacks, as well as whites from the “lesser ranks.” New pastors made it appear by 1830, then, that even God himself had endorsed segregation. Curiously, as the new urban religious leaders preached moral perfectibility and partnered with the plethora of newly emerging reform movements that marked the 1830s and 1840s, they seemed to retreat from one of the longest standing reform movements in the land: Christian conversion of the slave.27

Yet, if the Old Dominion's newer urban parsons moved away from camp meetings and their mission to witness to slaves in order to embrace other movements like temperance, sabbatarianism, reform of the insane, or (to varying degrees) women's rights, slaves and freedmen found that they still had a home in Virginia's countryside meeting houses. The new urban religious centers, with their swelling congregations of middle class entrepreneurs, also highlighted a social movement to re-define systems of deference based more on where an individual went to worship—with those of the same skin color and in like social classes—rather than what seat they had assigned them within the building's walls. In August 1831, however, rural preachers too were confronted and confounded with how best to handle the

members of their congregations with much darker complexions as news from Southampton County spread across the commonwealth.\textsuperscript{28}

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Nat Turner slave insurrection on Virginia's political and social trajectory. The greatest of all accumulated fears for Virginians and southerners alike was that of rebellious slaves rising up against their masters. Many a front porch rocking chair swayed to the story of the Stono Rebellion in South Carolina. Closer to home talk of Gabriel Prosser's foiled plan in Richmond city also colored many a conversation. But those threats seemed distant, like news of a hurricane, an Indian attack, or some other tempest that only befell the backsliding sort from some far-away place.

While the solar eclipse of the moon that occurred eight days before Nat Turner's attack should have heightened awareness for Southampton County whites of some ill portent in the offing, most men and boys like Fielding and his son William Mahone paid it little mind. In hindsight, Fielding Mahone would likely have considered him and his family fortunate that Nat Turner had selected an August Sunday evening to begin his mission.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{28} While the number of works on antebellum reform is far too exhaustive, the following should provide a point of reference: Bruce Dorsey, Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City (Ithaca, 2002); Robert Abzug, Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination (New York, 1994); Anne C. Rose, Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850 (New Haven, 1981); Ronald G. Walters, The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830 (Baltimore, 1976); David J. Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic (Boston, 1990).

\textsuperscript{29} Norfolk Herald, August 19, 1831.
Because Augusts were typically idle months for many Southside Virginia farmers, Lieutenant Colonel Fielding Mahone generally called drill in that month for the local militia he led. While surely some of his men were away on "jubilee" attending various camp meetings, those who remained were better prepared for real action than at most other times of the year. Further, with it being a Sunday and because Mahone and his family took little time out for "preachifying," he was with his family at their Monroe home the night Turner and his men struck the area.\textsuperscript{30}

As news of "General Nat's" massacre spread by the few who escaped the bloodbath, Mahone quickly removed his wife, Martha Drew, and their three children, Nancy, William, and Susanna first to the Nottoway River and then on to the nearby town of Jerusalem for safe harbor. While it is doubtful that "Fielding Mahone had a definite part in overthrowing the Nat Turner insurrection" as Nelson Blake attests, it is likely that a small group of his men were the first to encounter and do battle with Turner and roughly fifty of his followers.\textsuperscript{31}

The men of the Southampton militia let loose with a volley that killed many of Turner's men and dispersed the band. The following morning, "shortly after daybreak . . . Turner's forces met an immediate barrage of

\textsuperscript{30} William S. Drewry, \textit{Slave Insurrections in Virginia} (Washington, 1900), 22-26, 34; Blake, \textit{Mahone}, 6-8.

\textsuperscript{31} Richmond \textit{Constitutional Whig}, September 5, 1831; Blake, \textit{Mahone}, 7.
gunfire from both whites and slaves stationed inside the house” of Dr. Simon Blount. Turner and the few men who escaped the withering fire scattered like bees to smoke.32

While most all of Turner’s men were captured within a few days and well ahead of the arrival of nearly three thousand troops from Virginia, North Carolina and the Federal Navy Yard at Norfolk, Nat Turner himself would remain at large for another month and a half. On October 30, 1831, however, his luck ran short. Like John Brown nearly twenty years later, Nat Turner was tried and found guilty of “conspiring to rebel and make insurrection.” A Lynchburg newspaper reported of his November 11, 1831, execution, that “not a limb nor a muscle was observed to move” as his lifeless body swung from the gallows.33

Unlike the later Brown who had songs created for him and the label of martyr associated with his name, Turner, whose mutilation and even decapitation of fifty-five whites, largely women and children, drew mostly sympathy from northerners and both fear and recrimination from fellow southerners.34 “Every family that have slaves are in the power of those slaves,” said Robert Pollard of Virginia revealing the strain of the attack on

32 Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 4.
33 Lynchburg Virginian, November 21, 1831; Blake, Mahone, 8; Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 9.
34 Richmond Constitutional Whig, September 26, 1831.
the public's psyche, "they sleep in our houses--they in this way have the power of cutting our throats or knocking our brains out while we sleep."³⁵

Virginia's governor John Floyd responded to the crisis by calling for an end to black preaching from freedmen and slave alike, the establishment of laws bent toward greater subordination of slaves, and the colonization of free people of color.³⁶ Governor Floyd's call for marginalization and outright exclusion of free blacks highlighted the response of western men and others who supported reform during the constitutional convention. In response, conservatives, recognizing the absolute need of slave labor to support their agrarian economy, favored tougher restrictions and codes in order to affect more complete subordination of the free black population.³⁷

Conservatives understood well the exclusionist mindset. Advancing Jefferson's commitment to gradual emancipation, albeit in their own way via colonization, reformers looked to rid the commonwealth first of the free black population in order to set the stage for a larger, yet still gradual, emancipation of the entire black population at some point in the future. For


³⁷ Trenton E. Hizer, "'Virginia is Now Divided': Politics in the Old Dominion, 1820-1833" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 1997), 269-379.
conservatives like William and Mary College professor Thomas R. Dew, however, emancipation and colonization were sheer folly.

As some reformers from the farthest western reaches of Virginia called for immediate emancipation as a means to solving the menacing problem, Dew, quite reflective of most conservative Virginia thinkers in the 1830s, replied that emancipation would be disastrous for whites since “the slaves, in both an economical and moral point of view, [were] entirely unfit for a state of freedom among whites...[because they were] the very pests of society.” 38 Foreshadowing later appeals to “whiten” society with respect to social and political power, Dew further argued that any effort on the part of exclusionists to colonize blacks would merely result in increased taxes for all white Virginians, slaveholder and non-slaveholder alike. After all, someone was going to have to pay to relocate them to Africa and the federal government already had made it clear that they were little interested in the proposal.

Thus, for Dew and other conservatives in Virginia, social harmony and maintenance of the status quo could only be affected by convincing the “lesser ranks” of white society “that emancipation was not only undesirable, but an absolute impossibility.” 39 In the end, the conservative dominated


legislature reinforced Dew's rhetoric as they "failed to act to this end [emancipation], mainly because slaves were property." 40

The defeat of immediate abolition, nonetheless, did little to end debate on the issue. Reflective of much of the Upper South, many Virginians "remained committed to a conception of slavery as a necessary...evil--an evil that could be at odds with the ideals of white independence and equality over the long term." 41 Men like Samuel Moore, an outspoken representative from the Shenandoah Valley, called for the exclusion of slavery from the western regions of the state. Aside from destroying the independent yeomanry of the west through the introduction of the plantation system, it doomed the poor white population of the region because it forced them to wear a "mask of servitude." Free men, after all, could scarcely compete for jobs against slave labor. 42

Others, like those in Fielding Mahone's Southampton County, were less interested in legislating emancipation when self-interest and time could affect the same outcome. Because "slave labor was only profitable in growing tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar--staples that required a year-round labor force," they believed, then "the domestic slave trade would abolish slavery" over time. As more Virginia smallholders and planters turned to cereal grain production of corn and wheat because it had fewer market

40 Jackson, Free Negro Labor and Property, 9.


42 Richmond Enquirer, February 4, 1832.
swings than tobacco and a seemingly endless demand from Europe, then slaveholders would eventually have less need for slave labor. Because “slave staples” flourished in the Deep South, the sale of surplus labor would naturally affect a quasi-compensated emancipation for Virginia planters as they sold their slaves to fellow southerners in the Deep South.43

In response to the exclusionist and moderate subordinationist arguments, conservative proslavery advocates, many of whom were delegates to the constitutional convention of 1829-30 and the most recent legislature of 1831-32, continued to maintain a political advantage by posturing as defenders of the existing social order. While cool to the proslavery subordinationist argument and in their acceptance of the social status quo, most Virginians were still tied to the peculiar institution via market forces as well as to the understanding that removal of the free black population as advocated by exclusionists and as argued by men like Dew would be a monumental task and expense. Their response to the emancipationists and colonizers, therefore, remained tepid throughout the 1830s. As a result, proslavery forces in Virginia, while still apologetic about the institution, continued to implement subordinationist policies to limit the free black population’s movement and provide the legal apparatus for its control.44

43 Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 154-155.

44 Ibid, 229-235.
Just as the attempts to rid the Old Dominion of free blacks ran amuck in the failed colonization and emancipation movements, other restrictions were being drafted and adopted by the General Assembly in the early 1830s. In 1831 an Assembly act made it unlawful to teach free or enslaved persons of color to read or white. "All meetings of free Negroes or mullattoes," it read, "at any school house, church meeting house, or any other place for teaching them reading or writing...shall be deemed and considered an unlawful assembly." It was but the first of several measures that were to have a deleterious effect on the rights of free blacks in post-Nat Turner Virginia.45

While the intensification of subordination policies was largely influenced by the Turner insurrection, they were also aimed directly at northern white abolitionists. Measures passed by the commonwealth's General Assembly effectively closed the many schools and learning institutions that northern aid societies had established in the urban areas throughout the state.46

As schools were closed and preaching prohibited, free blacks were also stripped of other rights after 1832, some even foreshadowing the tactics of conservative whites in the postbellum period: the right to a trial by jury, except in criminal cases that were punishable by death, was revoked; the


ability to "keep or carry any firelock of any kind, any military weapon, or any powder or lead" ended; and the legal right of free blacks to own slaves was abolished thereby trampling on the property rights of the entire free black community.47

Beyond the legal ramifications, however, free blacks faced their greatest challenge from the extra-legal actions of the white community. Reminiscent of the later tactics, some white Virginians took it upon themselves to administer justice or aid in the whitening of society by "persuading" free blacks to relocate. "Who does not know that when a free Negro, by crime or otherwise, has rendered himself obnoxious to a neighborhood," reported the Richmond Enquirer, "how easy it is for a party to visit him one night, take him from his bed...apply to him...severe flagellation [and] induce him to go away. In a few nights the dose can be repeated, perhaps increased, until . . . the fellow becomes perfectly willing to go away."48

For Colonel Mahone, the events of the early 1830s caused him to rethink his position in Monroe and ponder a move to carry his family away as well. Southampton's free blacks, some of whom were undoubtedly patrons and debtors of Mahone's mercantile or laborers in his fields, were brutalized in the wake of the insurrection. Many fled the county while many others,


48 Richmond Enquirer, February 14, 1832.
“perhaps [as many as] one-fifth, . . . accepted transportation to Liberia” in the immediate aftermath of the insurrection.\textsuperscript{49}

As the labor market tightened and Mahone’s soils and mercantile business weakened, the General Assembly of Virginia passed yet another act in 1832 that would prove to have a major short-term impact on Fielding Mahone and an even more profound long-term impact on his son William. The General Assembly incorporated the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad.

\textsuperscript{49} Crofts, \textit{Old Southampton}, 17.
CHAPTER III
PUBLIC WORKS IN MAHONE’S VIRGINIA

When Fielding Mahone first learned that the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad had been laying track in Southampton County, he recognized that the once busy little river town of Monroe would soon decline. He well understood and subscribed to the rhetoric of the railroad promoters, Whigs and Democrats alike. They preached the gospel and theory of the rails as they hammered home their belief that the rail lines would create jobs, raise the values of land and wages, and mitigate intrastate and interstate rivalries. For the county commissioners and city aldermen the steam engine would aid in urban development via increases in the tax rolls as both land valuations increased and new business ventures were started.¹

The stock-in-trade of historians describing railroad development has long been that “roads were looked upon by the business groups in each large city chiefly as devices for forwarding their own personal interests,” and that rural slaveholding societies were “inherently incapable of financing and constructing a quality rail system.” Yet a purview of the records reveals that

these generalizations little represented the Virginia of Fielding or William Mahone.2

By the 1840s, calls for internal improvements were made across the Old Dominion from all political affiliations. Virginia's planters and urban elite came to realize that cheaper transportation costs translated into economic benefits and increased profit margins. In addition to releasing capital and labor for use elsewhere, internal improvements, like the railroad, "promoted greater efficiency and led to higher levels of production compared to the pre-railway situation."3 If opposition appeared anywhere from within Virginia to the system of internal improvements, it came mainly from "partisans of routes not selected" rather than citizens supposedly concerned about the "market revolution's" debilitating effects.4

Most historians have agreed that the "market revolution" of the early nineteenth-century brought about both structural changes to American economic systems like banking and transportation as well as psychological


shifts in attitude and values of people in response to those economic
changes. Yet some historians have interpreted the changes in a completely
pejorative way. They viewed the move from a simple more moral economy of
agricultural subsistence to that of a wrenching, unfettered, and rugged
individualism of the capitalist profit motive. They argued that urban business
leaders and agricultural entrepreneurs continuously sought ways to exploit
urban laborers and to thwart competition from among “virtuous” rural
yeoman. They have also maintained that emerging market forces led to the
creation of “mammoth corporations lacking all human sympathy and
conscience” and thus helped legitimize Malthus’s four stages theory.5

While undoubtedly there is truth to those arguments, they are
anachronistic to William Mahone’s generation, let alone that of his father’s.
Surely the business climate from the Gilded Age to the Great Depression
highlighted the deleterious effects of overproduction and the lack of
government intervention or outright abdication of its regulating power as is
customary today. Yet, the people and politics of the Jacksonian era in
Virginia, Whigs or Democrats, were anything but forces of opposition to the
market revolution. Quite conversely, Fielding and William Mahone’s

5 Harry S. Watson, Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian
America (New York, 1990), 62; Charles Sellers has also posited what he
calls the development of a “Kulturekampf” in his The Market Revolution:
Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (New York, 1991), 3-33; and Sean Wilentz
has maintained that a revolution of human relations took place during the
period. See both his “Society, Politics, and the Market Revolution, 1815-
1848,” in The New American History, edited by Eric Foner, 51-71, and his
Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working
Class, 1788-1850 (New York, 1984).
Virginians, urban and rural denizen alike, not only embraced the market revolution, they provided the impetus for its growth and expansion. Put simply, the citizens of the Old Dominion were committed to a system of internal improvements where the wheels of change were set into motion through their very own desires and their very own investment capital.\(^6\)

In 1840 Fielding Mahone relocated his family to Jerusalem where he re-established his mercantile, continued to farm his land holdings, and even purchased a tavern. His new neighbors and patrons supported in words and dollars the building of turnpikes, bridges, railroads, and river improvements. They also applauded the governmental assistance that aided in their development as they realized that the "demand for capital for railroad construction was . . . far beyond the ability of individual capitalists or associations of capitalists to supply."\(^7\) Thus, both the Commonwealth of Virginia and its citizens, like Fielding and William Mahone, "provided the capital . . . [by which the] transportation companies hoped that the projects would . . . stimulate the growth of market towns, and facilitate the flow of information and consumer goods."\(^8\)

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\(^6\) It should be noted here that even eastern Virginia's planters called for local systems of transportation improvement. They only tended to voice opposition when calls were made for intersectional improvements.

\(^7\) Frederick A. Cleveland and Fred W. Powell, Railroad Promotion and Capitalization in the United States (New York, 1909), 212.

\(^8\) Majewski, "Who Financed the Transportation Revolution?", 769; William A. Link, Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia (Chapel Hill, 2003), 29-35.
Like their fellow Virginians in Southampton County in 1840, the plain folk of Orange County also welcomed the Louisa Railroad that reached Gordonsville in their home county. It “allowed residents for the first time to ship their products cheaply to lucrative markets in Richmond and Alexandria.” The upturn in the local economy had a positive effect on all classes of Orange County as even the “poorer element of white society...seized the opportunity to buy land that arose.” Likewise citizens of Jefferson’s own Albemarle County, including a “large number of women,” invested in stock while also hoping to monopolize the “indirect benefits from improved transportation that included higher land values, increased local commerce, greater ability to market crops, and better access to consumer goods.”

Even western Virginians, especially after recovery from the financial panic of 1837, shared a common political economy with those from the Valley, Piedmont, and to a lesser degree the planter-dominated east. City managers from Lynchburg, Richmond, and Norfolk joined westerners in “their

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renewed agitation for better trade outlets. They joined southwestern counties in purchasing stock of internal improvement companies to better “tighten Virginia’s internal bonds” and to more fully “connect Virginia to her sister southern states” for economic and political purposes.

If cities rivaled one another so fiercely over rail lines, if Virginia’s planters and slaveholders were incapable of developing a “quality rail system,” if the market revolution resulted in turning people’s lives upside down, exploited the urban and rural less fortunate, and created “mammoth corporations lacking all human sympathy and conscience” as has been the previously mentioned argument by historians, why, then, did Virginia’s city leaders band together to pressure the General Assembly and Board of Public Works for increased funding of internal improvements? Why did Virginians “capitalize [their rail lines] to the extent of $53,400 per mile or over $12,000 per mile more than the national average”? Why did the Old Dominion’s citizens from across the social stratum call for, invest in, and reap the benefits—like a growth in wages—from the changes that the market revolution brought? It should be remembered that not only was the National Road a


13 Ibid, 17.


15 It has been argued by historians like Norman Ware, The Industrial Worker 1840-1860 (Chicago, 1964), 32; William A. Sullivan, The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840 (Harrisburg, 1955); and Sean Wilentz,
Jeffersonian project, but that the two foremost “comprehensive federal programs of improvement” were originated by prominent southerners, Albert Gallatin and John C. Calhoun, Jefferson’s Secretary of Treasury and Monroe’s Secretary of War respectively.\(^{16}\)

While “railroads did not . . . forge a national market” prior to the Civil War because there “were too few economies of scale in production, or distribution, to be reaped from direct rail contact,” they did provide farmers with a “choice not only of final production, but various routes to that point.”\(^{17}\) Railroads also “meant that ready-made goods could be brought in cheaply from outside the county.”\(^{18}\) While the import of goods did bring about a decline of some skilled artisans because of the effects of competition on pricing, it concomitantly fueled a corresponding increase in mercantile

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\(^{16}\) Carter Goodrich, Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads (Ithaca, 1960), 265-266.

\(^{17}\) Albert Fishlow, American Railroads and the Transformation of the Ante-bellum Economy (Cambridge, 1965), 297-298.

\(^{18}\) Benson, The Plain Folk of Orange, 63.
operations like that of Fielding Mahone's enterprises thus enabling more people to enjoy goods and services because of the lower pricing.\textsuperscript{19}

By the 1860s Virginia had been "conspicuous among the states which subsidized railroad construction by means of stock subscriptions . . . [as they] granted to railroads . . . over $21,000,000," much of that to subsidize lines that extended beyond the state's own boundaries.\textsuperscript{20} Using historical hindsight and realizing today what Mahone and his generation had little way of knowing at the time, namely that their efforts to fund internal improvements were losing money, it begs the most simple and obvious of questions to be asked: Why invest so much money in a system that failed to sustain itself? Further, what were the motivating reasons or theories behind the state's commitment to a failing system, and how and when did it all begin?

In the wake of the Panic of 1819, Virginians embraced a system of public works as a means to stave off recession and jumpstart an otherwise stagnant economy. Unlike their northern counterparts, the Old Dominion's planter dominated oligarchy looked to "combine the virtue of private enterprise . . . [with] the benefit of public works" in order to avoid the deleterious effects of both.\textsuperscript{21} Virginia's elites theorized that investors were unlikely to risk their capital on ventures that were anything but promising to

\textsuperscript{19} Blake, \textit{William Mahone}, 10-11.


\textsuperscript{21} Larson, \textit{Internal Improvement}, 91.
result in some form of appreciable return. State funding, therefore, should follow private capital. Together they could reap the benefits of what they called a mixed enterprise system whereby the state would see an increase in business activity netting greater tax revenues, and individuals would recognize a healthy return on investment while retaining managerial control.22

Beyond the financial win-win scenario that the system would create for the venture capitalists and the state alike, advocates of mixed enterprise claimed that it would also benefit the common Virginian. Mixed enterprise would increase property values, provide an economic stimulus and incentive for job growth, and, most important, balance the private sector’s proclivity toward greed and the state’s proclivity toward corruption through common ownership and oversight. Further, mixed enterprise, with management decisions left in the hands of the private sector’s owners, enabled the state to avoid awarding contracts between “contending interests” and thus provided for “better . . . execution.”23

As stated previously, in retrospect it would seem odd for Virginia’s leadership to put as much faith in the mixed enterprise system as business leaders and legislators today are anything but strange bedfellows. Yet the Madisons and Monroes (and later Mahones) of Virginia in the first decades of


23 Sixteenth Annual Report of the President and Directors of the Board of Public Works to the General Assembly of Virginia (Richmond, 1832), 376.
the nineteenth-century were more concerned about national systems of internal improvements and foreign capital invading their state than they were about varying degrees of self-interest among their fellow Virginians. Further their “preoccupation with . . . pristine republicanism” enabled them to embrace the system because it reflected a republican form of governance: local control and financial commitment for the betterment of the local population.24

On February 5, 1816, Virginia’s General Assembly created a Board of Public Works to aid in the implementation of a system of mixed enterprise by establishing a “Fund for Internal Improvement.” The Assembly instituted the act “for the purpose of preserving and improving this fund, and of disbursing such portions of it to be applied to any object of [future] internal improvement.”25

The need for internal improvements dated back to original settlement for Virginians. Because wealth had largely been determined and defined by one’s ability to trade, it soon became apparent that a comprehensive system of internal improvements including roads, river improvements, and canals was a necessity. Whether by arms or germs, removing roadblocks to commercial traffic like that of Native-American populations proved far easier for early Virginians than traversing its plethora of rivers and mountains. Local capital could little afford to finance the costs associated with the dredging of

24 Larson, Internal Improvement, 95.

25 Virginia, Acts of Assembly, 1815-1816 (Richmond, 1816), 35.
rivers and building of turnpikes, canals, and tunnels over great distances. The government would have to come to the aid of its citizens if it were to affect a more expeditious way to get goods and grains to market.

Yet because the leaders of the Old Dominion had a natural "revulsion against internal improvements" funded by any other entity other than its own citizens, they realized that the state itself had to take action to support its people. Virginia's political leaders, therefore, established the Board of Public Works with a mind toward financing future internal improvement operations from the investment income generated from the Board's Fund of Internal Improvement. 26

According to the act that created the Board of Public Works, once a company had subscriptions for three-fifths of its stock, with fully one-third paid for in currency or secured bonds, the state could then invest in the company by procuring its outstanding shares. Interestingly, the Board had been authorized by the Commonwealth to waive its share of dividends, if it was deemed necessary, in order to provide "added incentive to the private sector" for filling its portion of the stock subscriptions. Thus the Commonwealth "effectively subsidized profits" of private investors in order to insure improvement projects got off the ground. Further, the state required

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potential profiteering of corporations to be curtailed by fixing toll rates so that net profits would not exceed fifteen percent.27

Also contained within the Board’s founding act of 1816, were provisions for the chartering of both the Northwestern Bank of Virginia and the Bank of the Valley of Virginia where a large part of the fund, at least initially was comprised of bank stock.28 Virginia’s legislature quickly subscribed to bank stock offerings because their original charters—those of the Bank of Virginia in 1804 and Farmers’ Bank of Virginia in 1812—had produced reliable and increasing streams of revenue for the state. Because banking operations provided immediate income, investment in them fit well with the overall direction of the Board for the years of 1816 to 1831 that called for a revolving fund. The overarching theory of the early revolving fund system called for only the net income of the Fund to be used for future investment in improvement companies, hence its “revolving” nature.29

Yet even with the capital appreciation of the bank stock, dividend income from newer improvements like “the 180-odd turnpike companies in Virginia” did little to fill the Fund’s coffers for the newer projects,

27 Larson, Internal Improvement, 95. It should be noted


technologies, and investment opportunities, like the railroad, that were then in their infancy and in high demand. So poor, in fact, had been the market performance of these early joint-stock enterprises that immense pressure was brought to bear on the Board to forego its use of the revolving fund system to that of an actual lending model. Quite naturally, most of the pressure came from proponents of the railroad, like Mahone himself, and from western Virginians.

Community leaders throughout the commonwealth, especially the Trans-Alleghany region called for state aid via lending from the Board’s Fund. “In looking at the resources of the Commonwealth for the promotion of public works of general interest,” said one legislator in 1832, “and comparing them with those which others of this Union have successfully employed for similar purpose . . . [we] are struck with the remarkable fact, that all of them, without exception, have aided their public works by the public credit through the medium of loans.” Westerners, still bristling from the 1829-30 constitutional convention where they had been alienated and snubbed by their “fellow” delegates from the Valley, were more adamant in their call for

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improvements. "The preservation of the state we believe," the Winchester Republican editorialized, "will depend on this legislature. . . . Dispute the claims of the Trans-Alleghany counties to what they may deem a proper share of the fund for internal improvements and a division of the state must follow."33

In 1832, the legislature, perhaps much to the surprise of westerners, did act. They extended a line of state credit to the Board of Public Works and thus ushered in a policy directive of lending in support of improvements. The new system would last unto the eve of the Civil War. It is worth noting here, too, that while Democrats and Whigs would come to disagree over issues like slavery, the War with Mexico, and states' rights throughout the remainder of the antebellum period, a plurality in both parties "consistently favored government aid to transportation projects."34

In 1840 William Mahone began to come into contact with people and opinions in and around his father's tavern in Jerusalem that would have a major impact on his future and how it is he came to view the world around him. Whether in terms of slavery or politics, the disparity between Southampton County's Upper and Lower, northern and southern sections exposed impressionable young men like William Mahone to the contending ideologies that formed the collective mind of late antebellum Virginians. More

33 Winchester Republican, April 15, 1832.

importantly, it also revealed the visionary fissures of a people and a civilization in transition as they decided how to come to terms with the market revolution.

As Mahone delivered the mail via horseback to the local community for extra money, he also expanded his newspaper business. Foreshadowing future political alignments and his views on economics and race, Mahone and George Bragg, a free black, "together bought and sold newspapers."35 There is little doubt that William picked up on his father's Whiggish rhetoric, like his "defense of the credit system" that proved to be a truly national Whig tenet, in his conversations with friends and tavern guests.36 Aside from having his political views shaped by his father, William's more urban upbringing also impacted the future military and political battlefield leader's behavior.

Hardly one "to the manor born" as were many of the Old Dominion's leaders, Mahone grew up in an environment of modest means around people with questionable social graces and character. It is reported that he "smoked, chewed, and cussed like a pirate, and gambled like a Mississippi planter. [Further,] he was the leader of all deviltry, and the terror of all the good

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country mothers whose boys occasionally went to town."37 His rebellious
tableness, however objectionable, little differed from many other youths of his
day.38 His alleged social disparagements, therefore, are less important and
instructive as is the position he held as the leader of the band of "all deviltry."

If not out hawking newspapers, running the mail, or raising a raucous,
Mahone could be found perfecting the poker skills his father taught him while
playing with tavern guests. Beyond the few primary accounts of Mahone’s
youth that exist, it would seem only natural that his contact with travelers, as
well as the newspapers he delivered, would have provided him with a more
national or global view—a perspective little obtainable from the books which
the more affluent and sheltered of Virginia’s leadership had generally been
reared.39

Undoubtedly, too, he developed his decidedly left-brained fascination
with machines by watching the ferry boats funnel people and products along
the Nottoway River near his home or through his visits to the nearby town of

37 *Boston Traveler*, June 19, 1886.

38 While we need look no further for examples of outlandish behavior
than our own youthful stories, one such historical example from Mahone’s
day could be found in the figure of Robert Toombs of Georgia. Later to
become a prominent politician, Confederate presidential hopeful, and Civil
War general, Toombs had been thrown out of the University of Georgia as a
young man because he and his classmates found it entertaining to ride their
horses down the hallways of the college’s buildings. See William C. Davis,
*The Union That Shaped the Confederacy: Robert C. Toombs & Alexander
Stephens* (Lawrence, 2001), or William Y. Thompson, *Robert Toombs of
Georgia* (Baton Rouge, 1966).

Delaware as he caught glimpses of the Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad's steam locomotives. William's boyhood mechanical interests were further shaped and augmented by his father's firm grasp of mathematics. Thus, while Mahone readied himself for Littletown Academy, "his primary education" had been fairly well established by the tutoring he received from his father.⁴⁰

Mahone's fifteenth and sixteenth birthday would pass as a student at Littletown Academy in nearby Sussex County. The student body included the sons of many prominent local families and suggests that Fielding Mahone, while anything but a member of the urban or agrarian elite, did earn more than a modest living from which to send William to the school. It is difficult to determine how well or poorly the young Mahone did at the academy as records have long been lost. We do know, however, that the academy featured a dancing school as part of its curriculum. Because "dancing lessons were given each week [whereby] the belles from far and near attended," Mahone surely became exposed to a right-brained, more genteel "training [that] had a social and cultural" impact on him.⁴¹

In 1844 as the United States prepared for war with Mexico and with his father still in command of the Southampton Militia, the drums and trumpets began to call to Mahone. He determined to actively seek an

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⁴⁰ Mahone Biographical Information, Mahone Papers, V.M.I. Archives, Lexington, Virginia, 1.

⁴¹ Blake, William Mahone, 22.
appointment to the newly created Virginia Military Institute in Lexington. He later learned that he had procured support for his admission in quite an unexpected area considering his lack of Sunday school attendance and reputation as a young boy. "[O]ur faces are not [now] familiar to each other," wrote Reverend Edmund Withers in 1870, "[for] I have not seen you since . . . you set out as a State Cadet to the Institute with my recommendation as your passport to admission." Surely the preacher saw something in Mahone that caused him to support his candidacy. Mahone over time would prove Reverend Withers quite correct.42

With support for his application, Mahone secured an appointment as a State cadet. The appointment carried with it a tuition waiver and free room and board. In return for having his tuition waved, Mahone would be required to teach in the state for two years after his graduation. He began his studies in July, 1844. "I had a hard time there, the first year especially," he wrote later, "from the want of previous preparation . . . [but] I pulled through not without some credit to myself."43

As United States troops began to return home after the capture of Mexico City and defeat of Santa Anna's forces, Mahone had risen modestly

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42 Edmund Withers to William Mahone, September 29, 1870 in Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections, Duke University.

43 Boston Herald, October 9, 1895; Mahone Biographical Information, V.M.I. Archives, I.
in the ranks relative to his classmates at the end of his three year program.\textsuperscript{44}

Mahone stood eighth out of the thirteen that remained of his Class of 1847. Anything but impressive were his right-brained marks where he placed at the very bottom of his class in French, Latin, English, and Geography. Not coincidental to the way his mind worked, however, were his left-brained marks. He placed at the very top of his class in Tactics, Mathematics, Engineering, and Natural Philosophy (or what we call Astronomy today).\textsuperscript{45}

The bifurcation of Mahone's final grades are quite revealing as they would be reflective of his actions later in life both during the Civil War and later as a railroad magnate and politician: that there were few shades of gray for Mahone, and when he believed in something he displayed a dogged, determined, and single-minded purpose to achieving the goal—goals he seldom failed to attain.

Rather than returning home to Southampton County after his graduation in the summer as he had each previous year—he particularly enjoyed drilling the militia with his father—he stayed on at the Institute for the fall before reporting to the Rappahannock Academy for his two year teaching stint. Situated some twenty miles south and east of Fredericksburg along the Rappahannock River in Caroline County, Mahone reported for duty "so as to

\textsuperscript{44} While V.M.I. had been established by the General Assembly in 1839, Mahone and his classmates were fortunate as they were the last to undergo the original three year plan. Starting in 1845 the program was increased to its present day format of four years.

\textsuperscript{45} See Appendix A for results of Mahone and his classmates.
justify the pursuit of duties required of State Cadets.” At the Academy, Mahone actively taught in both the academic and military departments.46

The years 1848-1849 were transitory years for former conservative strongholds both within and without Virginia. The *ancien régime* of Europe had been tested yet again in revolution and so too would Virginia's conservative leaders as political participation neared all-time highs and as people began to call for another constitutional convention. The years also happened to be transitory ones for Mahone as he approached the fulfillment of his teaching commitment. As he considered a life of teaching, he came to the realization that to be "a mere Instructor in an academy, is not reconcilable to my disposition."47 He decided to turn to the subject that which he both enjoyed and excelled: engineering. “Now as Internal Improvements seem to be the order of the day far and wide,” he wrote in a letter to Colonel Francis H. Smith at V.M.I., “and as such must be the order of the times in the Old Dominion for years to come—I hardly think I can select for myself a more promising profession than ‘Engineering’.”48

Mahone well knew the spirit and pulse of the people as he had spent time in the East and the Valley, with Whigs and Democrats, and with people from varied and variegated socio-economic backgrounds. He well


47 William Mahone to Colonel F.H. Smith, March 15, 1849, Mahone Papers, V.M.I. Archives.

48 Ibid.
understood how his fellow Virginians changed politically over the first two decades of his life, where one's complete association with strict "party identification [came to] characterize the second party system." He recognized and embraced the changing face of the electorate and an emerging "American political nation" as women, while still denied access to the franchise, actively "participated in a frenzied cycle of party rallies, processions, committee meetings, conventions, caucuses, and elections."

The new style of politics in Mahone's Virginia also differed drastically from that of Jefferson's and Madison's. Political leaders no longer came from the ranks of the planter aristocracy alone. Middle-class entrepreneurs, large and small, urban and rural began to people the General Assembly on a more regular basis. They were aided in part by the system of internal improvements that led to the higher wages and the creation of jobs that put them there. Despite the fluid nature of the political arena, what is most interesting and compelling is what failed to change: that the majority of the new politicians were as committed to trying to foster a republican character of its people while concomitantly embracing internal improvements and economic growth as had the politicians of Jefferson's day.

By the 1850s, Virginia's Whigs and Democrats, unlike those at the national level, differed little. To be sure, Whigs like Mahone tended to be

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49 Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 173.

more cosmopolitan in their view, but Democrats were equally supportive of banking and internal improvement systems. Further while Democrats were more likely to be slaveholding planters and farmers, large and smallholders, Whigs, too, were equally prepared to protect "rights" to property and political agency from foreigners inside or outside of the larger Union irrespective of their differences of opinion regarding the peculiar institution. It should be remembered that the Whigs and Democrats, however much they sparred rhetorically with one another, were both from the same family, and both from the same side of the Jeffersonian republican coin. In local political matters, therefore, Virginians did contest one another, sometimes viciously, but in national political matters they were very much in accord with one another.51

In 1850 as most Americans looked warily at the debates in Washington over the Congressional plan for slavery in the territories, most Virginians found themselves more focused on constitutional reform. Where westerners had been slighted during the previous convention, they would come to find a ubiquitous spirit of democratic reform in the present one. The western regions, including the Trans-Alleghany, received significant concessions. Property qualifications for voting were abolished and all white males over the age of twenty-one meeting residency requirements gained the franchise. The lower house of the General Assembly was to be apportioned according to the white population based on the 1850 census.

51 The exception that can be made here would be in the Trans-Alleghany region of the Commonwealth. The area's people and leadership, which would eventually become West Virginia in 1863, were much more aligned to the North than they were the rest of Virginia or the South.
Representation in the Senate would also follow the white basis as enacted in the House after 1865. The offices of the governor, the newly created position of lieutenant governor, the Board of Public Works, and even judges and local officials were to be popularly elected thus limiting the appointment power of the governor. While the push to replace voice voting with that of the secret ballot failed, westerners truly could refer to the Constitution of 1851 as the "Reform Constitution."52

If common Virginians' prayers had been answered in the wake of the new constitution by bringing the state closer together, the Old Dominion's preachers also played an important part in its unification. By the 1850s Virginia's pastors, both urban and rural, reflected the secular society as fully one third of them owned slaves. Very few owned more than fifteen, the requisite number to be considered a planter, while most owned from one to five. Nonetheless over sixty percent of Virginia's parsons, again like the rest of society, owned no slaves at all. In fact, prior to the Nat Turner slave revolt, many "Methodist and Baptist pastors openly challenged slavery."53 After the revolt, however, and with the rise of abolitionism, most preachers began to predicate support for the institution within a context of a reform and its attendant social benefits, namely that the Christianization of slaves had an uplifting and civilizing effect on them.

52 Rice, West Virginia, 97-98; Robert Sutton, Revolution to Secession: Constitution Making in the Old Dominion (Charlottesville, 1989), 225-240.

Following the religious denominational schisms of the 1840s with their former Northern brethren—of which Virginians had taken a leading role—the Old Dominion’s leading religious figures, like James Henley Thornwell, created denominational bureaucracies that mirrored the wealth and size of those in much colder climates to the north. While building intrastate and even southern regional denominations, Thornwell and others also believed that they could better Christianize the slaves, as stated previously, and thus transform them into productive beings, even if they lacked equal social rights or recognition.54

Virginia’s churches grew in both people and material wealth throughout the 1850s. Spurred on by denominational fundraising, churches were able to market themselves as “instruments of social consensus rather than as outposts of an alienated community.”55 The growth in size of the Commonwealth’s various congregations matched only its need for larger and deeper collection plates to hold the influx of new contributions.56

Yet, the real increase in church wealth came largely from the rise in the value of the church property which in some cases nearly doubled.57 It


56 Contributions of some groups increased nearly fivefold from 1840 to 1860. See Robert A. Baker, The Southern Baptist Convention and Its People (Nashville, 1974), 200-203.

also suggests that if both church land values increased and their contributions and donations soared, many of Virginia's citizens had greater access to disposable income and were fairing much better than those that have argued, as stated previously, that the market revolution had such a deleterious effect upon the Old Dominion's populous. Further, it suggests that the hundreds of miles of rail and other internal improvements did provide the impetus for the economic development and prosperity of Virginia's citizenry as had been intended by the Board of Public Works and state legislators.

Mahone's desire to enter the field of engineering in 1849 came at a most appropriate time as Virginia's Board of Public Works, supported by recent success, faced a lack of skilled engineers. With the help of men like Cladius Crozet, a former field officer under Napoleon Bonaparte and principal engineer and surveyor for the Board of Public Works, and one of original founders of the Virginia Military Institute, Mahone secured an appointment as surveyor in the engineering corps of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. For the next two years as assistant project engineer Mahone helped plan and implement the best rail route for a connection from the town of Alexandria to the Virginia Central Railroad some eighty miles south and west in Gordonsville.58

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While serving on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad project, Mahone received an offer to join the engineering corps of the Mexican Boundary Commission. He was little successful in negotiating a compensation package that met his approval, however, and remained in Virginia. In a revealing letter he penned to his former V.M.I. superintendent Francis H. Smith he wrote, “Had Mr. Bartlett satisfied me [that] I would be placed in the line of promotion & upon my own merits would [solely] depend my rise or fall, nothing could have held me back. Whenever there is something to be fought for--there I wish to be.”59 Whether the statement can be written off as the hubris of a young man is debatable, but it does reveal the supreme self confidence he would brandish under fire both on the battlefield and campaign trails in the years to come.

There is little debate, nonetheless, that Mahone’s administrative abilities and engineering prowess were quickly being recognized. Early in 1852, the Fredericksburg and Valley Plank Road Company contacted him and tendered him an offer as chief engineer. While Mahone had been less enthralled with the prospects of plank roads in an age of steel and steam, he lacked any other prospects for promotion and accepted the offer. As he oversaw the construction of the plank road into Fredericksburg, he discovered that there were plans to construct the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad through a portion of his home county of Southampton. Mahone

immediately queried for letters of recommendation from his former employers and superintendent and applied for the available position of chief engineer.\textsuperscript{60}

On April 12, 1853, The Norfolk and Petersburg Board of Directors notified Mahone, then twenty-six years old, that he had been chosen as chief engineer. “In all the positions heretofore filled Mr. M. [Mahone] has given the most entire satisfaction,” reported the Fredericksburg \textit{Virginia Herald}, “and for his years, is doubtless without a superior in his line of profession in the State.” If the local papers reported correctly the true sentiment of the people, then Mahone had even more than the board’s approval, he had that of the people’s as well.\textsuperscript{61}

The appointment to the helm of engineering of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad provided Mahone with his first true independent command. It would be his charge to organize an entire engineering corps, build the necessary logistical infrastructure, and move the project from conception to full-scale operational implementation. Little did he realize at the time, but his training as chief engineer and leader would serve him well for the later hail of lead and words that he would face in future military and political contests.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} Blake, \textit{William Mahone}, 26.

\textsuperscript{61} Fredericksburg \textit{Virginia Herald}, April 18, 1853; Harrison W. Burton, \textit{The History of Norfolk, Virginia: A Review of Important Events and Incidents Which Occurred from 1736-1877} (Norfolk, 1877), 15.

\textsuperscript{62} For Mahone’s organizational responsibilities see the \textit{Norfolk Beacon}, May 23, 1853.
Within eight weeks, Mahone and his engineering assistants had surveyed nearly two hundred miles of potential routing for the road. Despite being told to wait for support, Mahone "took the field in person and pushed on with untiring diligence till [sic] his work was completed." So quickly had Mahone moved, that it caused a previous skeptic of both his age and ability from the Norfolk Daily Courier to declare that "opposition ceases to be available when directed against those who have risen superior to its pretexts." "Little Billy" Mahone began to build much more than sound engineering teams and plans, he was building a reputation.

While Mahone received praise for his surveying prowess, planning, and alacrity, his actual implementation of the line would yield him even greater notoriety. By running the line through a portion of the Great Dismal Swamp southwest of Norfolk and bending it back to the northwest near Suffolk, a path few would have tried for its engineering challenges and perceived impossibilities, Mahone was able to affect "an unbroken vista, in mathematical line, for the unprecedented distance of fifty-two miles." For the portion laid through the Dismal Swamp, he first constructed a corduroy road at its base whereby timber would be cut and laid at right angles in a

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63 Norfolk and Portsmouth Herald, October 11, 1853, quoted in Blake, William Mahone, 28.

64 Norfolk Daily Courier, October 15, 1853.

65 Norfolk Southern Argus, April 5, 1855, quoted in Blake, William Mahone, 28.
canal beneath the surface of the swamp for extra support. Yet, Mahone innovatively called for his men to use green timber. Further, he required his men to fully trim the timber so that as it remained submerged in the water it would never rot. So skilled had Mahone been in building the line through the Dismal Swamp that the Norfolk and Southern Railroad, which owns the line unto present day, stills runs “immense tonnages of coal traffic . . . on [Mahone’s] brilliantly engineered 19th century track.”

However solid the planning of the line, as early as a year later, Mahone witnessed what would continue to plague Virginians and thereby hinder their ability to compete for western markets or develop their own interior: a lack of standardization among cities because of the desire of locals to remain in control. Richmond provided the most glaring example as it housed no fewer than “six railroads entering the city [and] because each railroad had its own separate depot, freight had to be transferred from one [railroad] to the other by wagon.”

The growing dissent among city leaders to standardize their operations as evidenced by the Richmond example thus exposed the true dichotomy in the virtue of public works for Mahone and other leading Virginians, especially in relation to republicanism. If Virginia’s political

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66 Quote taken directly from the Norfolk and Southern website under the pull-down tab entitled “About Us” and link to “NS History.” See www.nscorp.com/nscorp/index.jsp.

67 Dozier, A History of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad, 46.

economy favored a system of mixed enterprise and local control in order to better enable all Virginians to gain greater access to markets, economic opportunity, and, therefore, to expand tax rolls to fund social improvements like schools and hospitals, how much more productive and efficient could they be if they standardized their operations, curried national systems and business relationships, and created more competitive environments in which to attract better jobs and wages while concomitantly driving down prices for all consumers? Mahone recognized that as the economy grew around them they would have to look for alternative ways to compete on larger scales or likely be consumed by the conglomerating corporate leviathans that lay beyond their borders or control.

As work finally began on his line after years of delays, Mahone, a chief engineer with little political pull, understood he could do little to address such lofty matters of economic development. Yet, it is more than plausible that a man with his drive, determination, and foresight had undoubtedly made mental notes of the changes needed should the day arise when he could affect them. Nevertheless, even if he had been in a position to try to shift economic paradigms through example or political pressure, his actions would surely have been derailed.

However memorable or forgettable, 1855 proved to be both the best of times and the worst of them for Mahone. In February, he finally married Otelia Butler, "a lady of rare beauty and characterized by a strong and
forceful personality. Yet, it would be in the same year that Otelia would lose her mother and only surviving parent. The couple experienced further loss when William’s friend, mentor, and father, Fielding Mahone also passed away unexpectedly.

After their Richmond marriage and the burial of Otelia’s mother, the young couple made their way to Norfolk, quite naturally, and moved into their new home near William’s place of business. Yet, soon after their arrival they were forced to flee the city because of a yellow fever outbreak. Unlike so many other Norfolk residents who had nowhere else to go late that summer of 1855, the Mahones left for Jerusalem to stay with William’s mother. The “yellow fever ravaged the city during August, September, and October,” wrote the *Southern Argus*, and “out of an average population of 6,000 every man, woman, and child . . . has been stricken . . . and about 2,000 have been buried.” When the plague subsided fully one-third of Norfolk’s population had perished. Included in their number were the treasurer of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad and two of its directors.

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69 Blake, William Mahone, 35; Mahone Biographical Information, Mahone Papers, V.M.I. Archives, 1.

70 Like so much else of Mahone’s personal life, few records exist. To be sure, however, Fielding Mahone and Otelia Voinard did pass on March 15, and August 11, 1855 respectfully. Otelia’s father, Dr. Robert Butler the former Treasurer of the Commonwealth, passed away two years prior on July 21, 1855.


72 Frank Helvestine, “History of the Norfolk and Petersburg,” *Norfolk and Western Magazine*, (September, 1923), 13.
As people and business slowly sprung back to life in Norfolk, as did the work on the railroad, Mahone busied himself with other surveying projects. He helped lay out plans for the city of Ocean View, Virginia, north of Norfolk. Irrespective of the national political events that inflamed sectional rivalries throughout the late 1850s, Mahone continued to build his own rapport with business interests in Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. He laid the groundwork for future partnerships with railroad and steamship lines in advance of the day when the Norfolk and Petersburg line would be open for service. He also made business agreements with Virginia's own Southside Railroad in Petersburg. He hoped that they, in turn, would make connections with the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad at Lynchburg thus opening trade with both the western part of the state and the western part of the country in general.\textsuperscript{73}

In the spring of 1858, Mahone announced the opening of service between Norfolk and Suffolk. By September of the same year “the entire line was completed . . . and opened for operation.”\textsuperscript{74} With the line fully

\textsuperscript{73} Virginia Pamphlets, “The North and South Air-Line Railroad, from New York and Philadelphia to Norfolk, Virginia, 1854” Mahone Collection, Perkins Library Special Collections, 8; In 1857, the United States was in the throw of near-rebellion to be sure. Anti- and Pro-slavery forces battled over the Lecompton Constitution that ultimately split the Democratic party and opened the door for Abraham Lincoln and the Republican party; the Dred-Scott case was decided by Roger B. Taney’s supreme court; the Mormons were in rebellion in Utah; and a financial downturn/panic began as well. For a full explanation of the events in one source see, Kenneth Stampp, \textit{America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink} (New York, 1992).

\textsuperscript{74} Burton, \textit{History of Norfolk}, 30-31.
operational, Mahone capitalized on earlier marketing and began to draw goods from the western regions of the state via the Virginia and Tennessee and Southside Railroads. He then had the goods transferred from rival lines to his Norfolk and Petersburg line where they were off-loaded on to the steam ships bound for northern and other foreign markets, thus effectively creating a carrying trade for his railroad.75

Even before Mahone had been able to fully complete the Norfolk and Petersburg line, he knew his stock—literally and figuratively—had risen to new heights. His reputation grew mightily with the assistance of a friendly press that published glowing reports like one in the Fredericksburg Virginia Herald about his operational effectiveness and ability as leader and manager. "We were delighted to see one of the most perfect labour [sic] systems that have ever come under our observation," the article noted. "[E]very officer had his special duty, and every duty was executed in a manner which showed the most perfect system combined with exactness and neatness [that] was the rule of the department."76 It would be the same organizational and managerial prowess that would catch the eye of the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia some four years later.

75 Board of Public Works, Annual Reports of Rail Road Companies of the State of Virginia, made to the Board of Public Works, for the Year Ending September 30, 1860 (Richmond, 1860), 274-275 quoted in Blake, William Mahone, 32.

76 Fredericksburg Virginia Herald, March 13, 1858.
By April 1860 when it appeared that the bottom half of the country was ready to fall out of the Union, Mahone's career moved in the opposite direction and reached even greater heights. At the Norfolk and Petersburg's seventh annual meeting of shareholders, the offices of president and chief engineer were combined, and at the age of thirty-three "William Mahone was elected to this position by a majority of 923 votes." He would remain president of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad into the second year of the coming conflict between the northern and southern sections of the country. While evidence is clearly limited given the dearth of primary records, it is doubtful that Mahone "was [either] an ardent Democrat" or "an ardent secessionist" as his previous biographer stated. To be sure he would have had to court Democrat city councils and voters, but given his profession, his entrepreneurial vision, and his business activities and associations with the North, he more than likely was a states' rights Whig in the years leading up to the American Civil War. Irrespective of his political stripes, Mahone and all other Virginians, save the Trans-Alleghany region, were prepared to cast their political differences aside should the need arise.

77 Burton, History of Norfolk, 37;
78 Blake, William Mahone, 22, 38.
CHAPTER IV
"DOUBLE 'EM UP': MAHONE AT WAR"

Whatever differences Virginia's Democrats and former Whigs had with one another and however different their visions were of how the Commonwealth should develop, the majority of citizens from the Eastern Shore, Tidewater, Piedmont, Valley, and Southwest all fell lockstep into line with each other after Confederate batteries opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor on April 12, 1861. Following Virginia's official ordinance of secession five days later, William H. Mahone of Southampton County, Virginia, tendered his service to his native state for its defense. Governor John Letcher immediately ordered Mahone to "proceed to Norfolk with the volunteer companies [of soldiers] from Petersburg, Norfolk, and Portsmouth to seize the Gosport Navy Yard."1 Mahone, then still acting president of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad, reported to Colonel William B. Taliaferro the next day and escorted him and his staff to Norfolk where his commanding officer established his headquarters.2

1 Mahone Biographical Information, Mahone Papers, Virginia Military Institute Archives, 1-2.

After he conferred with Taliaferro on how best to pressure and unnerve the Federal forces in and around the navy yard, Mahone ordered his railroad engineers to "blow whistles, ring bells," and engage in every form of conceivable deception throughout the next two days to fool Federal forces. He even detached soldiers dressed in plain homespun to the navy yard to circulate rumors that "large bodies of troops from Georgia and South Carolina were arriving on the road" with the purpose of seizing it.\(^3\)

While Federal forces initially reinforced the Gosport Navy Yard, Mahone's ruse had its desired effect. Believing them to be greatly outnumbered, Commodore Paulding ordered his men to "finish the destruction of the [Federal] ships, to burn and otherwise destroy . . . the property in the yard, and withdraw." On the night of April 20, 1861, Federal forces evacuated the navy yard and sailed to Fort Monroe. Mahone's ruse worked perfectly, and it would be a tactic he utilized again instead of expending blood or lead to gain a position.\(^4\)

Mahone's actions were rewarded with a promotion to lieutenant colonel on April 29, 1861, and by June he found himself in command of the Sixth Regiment of Virginia Volunteers as its colonel. Yet as forces gathered around the rail center in Centerville, Virginia—a rail junction that Mahone undoubtedly knew well from his pre-war occupation as engineer—in advance

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\(^3\) John H. Claiborne, *Seventy-Five Years in the Old Dominion* (New York, 1904), 193.

of the Battle of Manassas, he could do little but reposition his troops south and east of Richmond hundreds of miles from the battlefield. His orders were to defend against any advance the Union army might make from their coastal footholds in Virginia and North Carolina.5

While the news of the Confederate victory at Manassas near the end of July surely lifted Mahone and his men's spirits, they themselves continued to battle with the swarms of mosquitoes and flies that plagued the coastal regions from Norfolk, Virginia, to Portsmouth Island, North Carolina, during the summer months. Drawing from his experience with his father's Southampton militia and that of his fellow cadets at the Virginia Military Institute, Mahone drilled his men daily to hone them into a fighting unit and to mitigate against both desertions and sickness.

As the color of the leaves began to roll over in the fall of 1861 and as inactivity remained the prevailing military sentiment, Mahone found himself in command of an entire brigade. Because his base of operations largely covered the area around Norfolk and "extended southeast of the Dismal Swamp," Mahone made it a point to dedicate time to "many of his . . . business contacts in Norfolk, particularly in connection with the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad."6 While little action preoccupied his time on the battlefield, the inverse held true for him with respect to his railroad. Like the Petersburg and Richmond Railroad that forecast nearly a one hundred


6 Ibid, Ser. 1, Vol. 9, 38, 163; Blake, William Mahone, 42.
percent increase in its dividend payable January 1, 1862, Mahone's Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad also reaped huge benefits as a result of increased traffic surrounding the war effort. The pattern of drilling his men and counting his railroad's profits would continue for Mahone through the winter and into the spring of 1862.\(^7\)

As Mahone viewed the first winter of the war as a relatively happy time, it proved to be much less so for President Jefferson Davis and the Confederate cause. Efforts to gain international de jure recognition as a sovereign, independent nation went unrealized despite diplomatic efforts, especially in London and Paris. Union forces were advancing, however cautiously, in western Virginia, down the Mississippi River, and along the entire southern coast threatening key ports from the Chesapeake to New Orleans. News in February, 1862, from Kentucky, however, proved to be the bluntest of blows to southern morale in the first winter of the war as reports trickled in about the surrender of nearly 15,000 men at Forts Henry and Donelson to Union General Ulysses S. Grant.\(^8\)

\(^7\) Howard D. Dozier, *A History of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad* (Boston, 1920), Appendix, Table I.

\(^8\) While the Confederacy did in fact receive de facto recognition by the international community, it fell short of full or de jure acceptance. This meant that southern representatives could not contract for arms, set up embassies, negotiate treaties, or any of the myriad of other functions that sovereign nations are entitled to do within the realm of international law. Put most simply, it was a way for Britain, France, et al to say that they recognized the conflict but were little prepared to meddle in the affairs of another sovereign nation, in this case the United States. For full description see John Chappo, "Into the Valley of the Shadow: Governmental Policy, Camp Life, and Postbellum Remembrance of the American Civil War Prisoner-of-War"
In the spring of 1862, the military setbacks mounted for the Confederacy and morale waned in Richmond as a result. In March, Mahone prepared his nearly 5,000 man brigade for action. The Federal eastern army, or Army of the Potomac, had been preparing itself for another thrust upon the Confederate capital in Richmond. Following its reverse at Manassas the previous July, the army’s new commander, George Brinton McClellan, displayed incredible skill at reorganization and instruction. His organizational prowess, however, accomplished little to damage or deal with “the Confederate army camped just twenty-five miles from the capital,” in the seven and a half months of his command.9 Further, McClellan had done even less to stop “Confederate [artillery] batteries from closing the Potomac to commercial shipping.”10 Thus, despite his enormous popularity with the men of the Army of the Potomac, the former peace-time army protégé of Jefferson Davis began to cave in to attacks from another more vicious “army of critics:” the press, the Congress, Lincoln’s Cabinet, and even the president himself.

In early March, McClellan called for a council of war to discuss how, when, and where to strike the Confederate army. As he and his officers

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10 Sears, To The Gates of Richmond, 4.
planned for a flanking move on Richmond by transporting his army via sea to
the peninsula of land between the York and James Rivers in Virginia, other
federal forces were also on the move. Fresh from his winter victory at Henry
and Donelson, Grant, along with Don Carlos Buell, moved south through
Tennessee. Their movement forced Confederate forces to evacuate
Nashville on February 17, 1862, which subsequently fell into Union hands six
days later. With Nashville in their pocket, Grant and Buell stood poised to
strike deep into the heart of the Confederacy. Along the Gulf, a combined
land and sea operation led by Admiral David Farragut and Brigadier General
Benjamin Butler also foreshadowed the fall of the key Confederate port city
of New Orleans.

As Joseph E. Johnston, commander of Confederate forces in and
around Richmond, began skirmishing with McClellan’s men then inching their
way west toward Richmond in Virginia, Albert Sidney Johnston—no relation to
the previous and arguably the most capable of Confederate captains—moved
his Army of the Mississippi against Buell’s Army of the Ohio and Grant’s
Army of West Tennessee. On April 6-7, 1862, the ensuing Battle of Shiloh
did little to stem the Federal advance as the Confederates lost both the battle
and their commanding general who was mortally wounded on the first day of
the engagement. The victory thus opened the door for Grant’s invasion of
Mississippi as well as continued Federal river operations from Memphis southward to Vicksburg.\footnote{11}

Across the Mississippi River in northern Arkansas, Confederate troops under Earl Van Dorn made a bid to reclaim Missouri. On March 7-8, 1862, Van Dorn collided with Samuel Curtis’s Army of the Southwest, over half of which were made up of German immigrants, at the Battle of Pea Ridge. With a rare war-time numerical advantage, Van Dorn decided to divide his advancing Army of the West in the hopes of flanking his opponent. Poor weather and delays, however, enabled Curtis to reposition his smaller force. For two days Curtis’s Union army beat back attacks and thus forced Van Dorn to retire from the battlefield with nearly twice as many casualties.\footnote{12}

Upon receiving word of the defeat, Jefferson Davis ordered Van Dorn to move his entire army across the Mississippi River and to report to Braxton Bragg, the new commanding general replacing the deceased Johnston following the Battle of Shiloh. The Confederate defeat at Pea Ridge, coupled with the later loss of New Orleans, virtually left Arkansas and Texas defenseless. Only Vicksburg and Port Hudson, Mississippi, were left to

\footnote{11 For a complete description of the campaign, battle, and consequences, see Larry J. Daniel, \textit{Shiloh: The Battle That Changed the Civil War} (New York, 1997); for information on the Confederacy’s plans in the western theatre, though somewhat dated, see Archer Jones, \textit{Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg} (Baton Rouge, 1961).

\footnote{12 The best account of the battle to date is William L. Shea and Earl J. West, \textit{Pea Ridge: Civil War Campaign in the West} (Chapel Hill, 1992).}
protect the Confederacy from being completely divided into two along the Mississippi River.\textsuperscript{13}

While Mahone's men could little know how grim the situation looked for their cause in early May of 1862 when they were ordered to the Shenandoah Valley to report to General Richard S. Ewell, the Confederate leadership well knew they desperately needed something or someone to reverse the tide of battle in order to restore morale both inside and outside of Virginia.\textsuperscript{14}

As Mahone began logistical preparations for the march, he and the rest of the South received reports of several small Confederate victories under Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson in the very Shenandoah Valley of Virginia that he had been ordered to report. Jackson's well known and documented "Valley Campaign"—arguably one of the greatest in the annals of military history—effectively disrupted McClellan's grand battle plan for the capture of Richmond and set the stage for the full restoration of hope in Confederate morale that had been lost since the autumn of the previous year.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} While the battle for the "Crescent City" actually began on April 25, New Orleans refused to capitulate to Benjamin Butler until May 1, 1862. For an all-encompassing account of the battle, as well as the subsequent fight for control of the Mississippi River, see R. Thomas Campbell, \textit{Confederate Naval Forces on Western Waters: The Defense of the Mississippi River and Its Tributaries} (Jefferson, 2005).


\textsuperscript{15} Jackson's Valley Campaign is contained within nearly a complete volume of its own in the \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 15. For the best
As Mahone and his brigade made their way toward Ewell in the Shenandoah Valley, General Robert E. Lee sent an urgent dispatch to Major General Benjamin Huger ordering "General Mahone, with his brigade, or part of it, to Drewry's Bluff" instead.\textsuperscript{16} According to George W. Randolph, Secretary of War, Mahone was to "assume the command on his arrival there" and "to superintend the engineering operations and to cover the battery with his brigade."\textsuperscript{17}

During the middle days of May, Mahone's brigade were busy erecting batteries at Chaffin's and Drewry's Bluffs, and strengthening obstructions throughout the James River. His orders were to slow or stop any Federal movement toward the capital city by ironclads, gunboats, or troop transports.\textsuperscript{18}

For the next two weeks Mahone, if less so his men, embraced the task of constructing defensive positions while showing an ever apparent willingness and "desire to exercise authority where I am held to account."\textsuperscript{19} His near inflexibility when it came to decision-making and command,

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however, surfaced when Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory called for joint cooperation with respect to the work of “obstructing the [James] river.” Mahone immediately wrote Confederate Secretary of War George Randolph to voice his displeasure. “It is important to harmonize the operations of the Navy and Army I well understand . . . but I cannot be responsible in any co-partnership authority.”

Mahone’s note to Randolph highlighted more than his supreme self confidence, it also revealed his desire to work independently, especially when his name and reputation were at stake based on the results. While Mahone did often seek opinions and counsel on matters, he generally acted according to his own instinct and ideology. Thus, his note to Randolph also intimates as much as it illuminates why Mahone’s later political opponents (and his friends at times too) would refer to as his generally self-centered, hard-headed, and generally inclined to a micro-managerial style.

Few in Richmond, however, cared for Mahone’s rhetorical rant along the James River as they braced for the arrival of George McClellan’s Army of the Potomac. In fact, Mahone’s most recent orders directed him to leave the James River and rejoin his command just east of Richmond to aid in the city’s defense. Moving as expeditiously as practicable eastward along the Charles City and Williamsburg Roads, Mahone’s brigade reached the Seven Pines battlefield at the close of the first day of fighting and just in time to hear

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20 Ibid, 518.
21 Ibid, 544.
that the overall Confederate commander, Joseph E. Johnston, had been severely wounded and taken from the field.\textsuperscript{22}

Early the next morning, June 01, 1862, Mahone’s five regiments of Virginians, all of which had done little more than garrison duty and engineering work, “saw the elephant” for the first time. Looking to capitalize on the lost opportunities of the first day of the battle, Daniel Harvey Hill ordered his division forward as well as two brigades from Huger’s division, Mahone’s and Lewis Armistead’s.\textsuperscript{23}

As the morning dew soaked the wool and jean-cloth trousers of Armistead’s and Mahone’s advancing lines, the terrain, coupled with intensifying Federal firepower, separated Armistead’s flank from that of the rest of Hill’s division. Armistead’s men panicked and streamed rearward leaving their commanding officer, a handful of men, and color guard to keep Hill’s division from being flanked.\textsuperscript{24}

With Armistead’s line melting next to him and his own flanks “in the air,” Mahone ordered his men to fall back to a ditch along a wood-line. Having sent couriers out for orders while reorganizing his own lines into a more defensive posture, D.H. Hill rode up and opened a rhetorical volley on

\textsuperscript{22} One of the better biographies to date on Joe Johnston (and there is much room for improvement) is Craig L. Symonds, \textit{Joseph E. Johnston: A Civil War Biography} (New York, 1992).

\textsuperscript{23} Huger’s other two brigades, Ambrose Wright’s and Robert Ransom’s, joined Longstreet’s division (four brigades) in a sunrise assault along the Federal lines. After some initial success the attack bogged down.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 12, 982-984.
Mahone’s men. Referring to his Virginian’s as cowards, Mahone quickly intervened only to have Hill turn his fury on Mahone himself. Though Mahone was “short in stature, [and] spare almost to emaciation,” his deficiencies in height and bodily frame were more than compensated for in temper. Yet, before he could return superlatives to D. H. Hill—those he surely gleaned from the poker table at his father’s tavern as a boy—Mahone received orders to move his men forward in support of George Pickett’s brigade who were then under severe pressure.

Mahone led his brigade into line on the right of Pickett and “became hotly engaged in a few minutes after getting position.” After a brief and sharp exchange “the enemy retreated to their bushy cover and their fire immediately slackened...[with] no other attempt... by them to advance.”

25 Richmond Dispatch, October 9, 1895.

26 Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 12, 945-946. It should be noted here that Mahone contemplated for some time challenging Hill to a duel over the verbal lashing of both he and his men. It is quite possible that had Mahone been made aware of the language D. H. Hill used in his official report—he reported that “Mahone and his men behaved badly”—that he may well have gone through with the duel. It should also be stated here that while Hill’s frustration with how poorly the attacks were coordinated during the two days of fighting is understandable, his official characterization of Mahone and his Virginia brigade was as unwarranted as it was ill-considered, especially when weighed against the official reports of Hill’s own brigade commanders who fought alongside Mahone’s brigade. See Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 12, 983-984, for George Pickett’s report as an example.

27 Ibid, 983.

28 Ibid, 984.
Later that afternoon Mahone received orders to fall back and await orders from the army's new commander, Robert E. Lee.  

On June 2, 1862, Mahone directed his brigade south and east along the Charles City Road toward Glendale. For the next three weeks Mahone's men gave more blood to mosquitoes than they did Federal bullets as Lee maneuvered his army along both banks of the Chickahominy River in order to force McClellan's army to retreat down the peninsula away from Richmond. Despite several small skirmishes with retreating Union infantry and cavalry, the "only engagement of any significance" Mahone reported had been "at French's field, on Wednesday, June 25."  

"On Sunday, June 29," Mahone wrote, "orders were received to proceed down the Charles City Road for the purpose of . . . pursuing the retreating enemy." While heavy fighting could be heard to the north at Savage's Station, Mahone's brigade skirmished with elements of the Union Sixth Corps until darkness called an end to the sparring match. Because Mahone had been in the vanguard of the Confederate column that was

29 With Joseph E. Johnston wounded and out of action for some unknown amount of time, Jefferson Davis offered command to Lee.

30 Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 11, 796. For all action reported by Mahone between the battles of Seven Pines and Malvern Hill see pp 796-798 of the same volume.

31 Ibid, 797.
Huger's Division, he held his men in battle position through the night where they "slept upon their arms."\textsuperscript{32}

Early the following morning, Mahone was notified that elements of Slocum's division of the Union Sixth Corps were prepared to contest Mahone's advance because the Union army "had changed his route of retreat across the [White Oak] swamp."\textsuperscript{33} The action of the previous day, mostly by Stonewall Jackson's Corps, forced a Union retreat across White Oak Swamp. Because the retreating Union army needed to make use of Brackett's Ford, Slocum's men were more aggressive in applying their rearguard tactics down the Charles City Road. Slocum's men continued to fell trees across the Charles City Road to slow the progress of Mahone's men. Rather than deal with the obstructions, Mahone ordered his men to cut their way through the woods alongside the road, only to have their advance stymied by Union cavalry and dense underbrush.\textsuperscript{34} Mahone's slow advance soon ground to a stop when Union resistance intensified and fighting became more general. All the while, much heavier musket and artillery fire could be

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34} In Mahone's official after-action report he mistakenly reported that he had been engaged with Kearney's Division of the Third Corps, but they had in fact been fighting in the area further down the line against Longstreet's left wing. See both \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 11, 798; Sears, \textit{To the Gates of Richmond}, 284-285, 297.
heard from the south in the direction of Confederate General James
Longstreet's First Corps near the crossroads of Glendale. In the ensuing Battle of Glendale, Mahone, as part of Huger's Division, played but a small part. While ordered by General Lee to attack in concert with Stonewall Jackson early in the morning, neither Huger nor Jackson became engaged until late in the day. The delay enabled much of the Union army to escape isolation and destruction in lieu of Longstreet's successful attack in the direction of Glendale. Because Mahone's very light losses were suffered almost entirely from enemy artillery fire, it does suggest that Lee's orders were anything but adequately pressed to their fullest extent by Huger.

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35 Lee's plan, decidedly too complex given the lack of experience by so many of his subordinates, called for Jackson to attack the five Union divisions from north of White Oak Swamp while Huger attacked to the east from just south of the swamp. Lee's goal was to prevent a speedy retreat across the swamp by the five Union divisions. After the two were engaged, Longstreet was supposed to launch an all-out attack in the direction of the crossroads town of Glendale. Upon driving the Federal army back, and with Jackson and Huger "holding" the five Union divisions in line to check their advance, Lee hoped to drive a wedge between the Federal army and thus isolate and destroy the five divisions opposite Jackson and Huger. While the Confederate attack did in fact push the Federals back, both Jackson and Huger were delayed in their attack which enabled the isolated Federal divisions to retreat with the rest of the Union army to Malvern Hill. See Sears, To the Gates of Richmond, 294-307; For an excellent period map of the Battle of Glendale drawn by an engineer from the then Union Third Corps commander Samuel Heintzelman see Robert Knox Sneden, Plan of the Battle of Glendale and White Oak Swamp, Virginia: Also Known as Frazier's Farm and Charles City Crossroads, Fought June 30, 1862, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (Henrico County, Virginia, 1870-1899?) in the Virginia Historical Society Library or at http:hdl.loc.gov/loc.ndlpcoop/gvhs01.vhs00010.

Lee, refusing to ease pressure on McClellan and his retreating army, ordered a pursuit the following day southward along the Quaker Road from Glendale toward the James River. Little could Lee have known, however, that McClellan's Second, Third, and Sixth Corps had already been in the process of withdrawing behind the fortified lines of the Union Fifth Corps, under Fitz John Porter. Porter's three divisions took up position on Malvern Hill, "an elevated plateau... well cleared of timber, and with several converging roads running over it." McClellan ordered his talented artillery chief, Henry J. Hunt, to support Porter and help fully insure the army could safely carry its wagons and ambulance trains to Harrison's Landing further south and east.\(^{37}\)

As Mahone and his 1200 man brigade were ordered into battle line in support of A.R. Wright's Brigade late in the afternoon of July 1, 1862, heavy cannonade signaled the step-off. At about 5 p.m. Mahone advanced his men "at the double quick." The weight of the Confederate attack forced the Union lines back into their reserves, but the constant "heavy fire of artillery and musketry" forced Mahone's and Wright's "men to waver."\(^{38}\)

As other Confederate infantry advanced to their left, Mahone and Wright steadied their brigades and "rushed forward up the side of the hill... [to]  

\(^{37}\)In his official battle report of the entire Peninsula Campaign, McClellan mentions that orders were given to his Corps commanders to fall back to Malvern Hill while "these troops [were] already en route to Malvern." See \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 11, 67-71.

\(^{38}\)\textit{Ibid}, 814-815.
within a few rods" of the Federal artillery. "With night setting in," Wright later reported, and with difficulty "distinguish[ing] friend from foe," their fire slackened. Only then did they realize the peril of their position as all other Confederate brigades had fallen back.\textsuperscript{39}

Because they were within a hundred yards of the Union lines, then beginning to show signs of orderly retreat and despite Confederate artillery shells crashing about them (mistakenly believing them to be Federals), Mahone and Wright "[u]pon consultation . . . determined to remain . .  . and if any of the foe should be left when morning dawned to give him battle again."\textsuperscript{40} Little further fighting would occur for Wright or Mahone on the morning of July 2, however, as the McClellan's army was again in full, albeit orderly, retreat. As Mahone received orders that he had been relieved, he could take inventory of the wreckage. Reports confirmed the visual toll as he had lost nearly thirty percent of his men on the side of Malvern Hill. Yet, despite what he and his brigade had lost in strength, their "five separate and distinct charges" and resolve to stay on the field had gained them great recognition. "Though he be but little," replied one soldier--presumably in his best Shakespeare--with respect to Mahone's leadership, "he is feared."\textsuperscript{41}

Malvern Hill marked both an end to McClellan's threat to Richmond and to the Peninsula Campaign itself. As McClellan began to transport his army

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 815.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, 815, 800-801.

back to Washington via naval transport ships, Lee began to reorganize his own Army of Northern Virginia. Mahone's, Armistead's, and Wright's Brigades, along with three batteries of artillery, were placed under the divisional command of Robert H. Anderson, within Longstreet's First Corps.\textsuperscript{42}

With McClellan neutralized and his army reorganized and rested after several weeks of reprieve, Lee looked to fully seize the initiative. In an effort to potentially curry favor from foreign powers, spare Virginia's farmers from Yankees ransacking their autumn harvests, and to carry the war to the North, Lee ordered his two Corps commanders, Longstreet and Jackson, with their First and Second Corps respectively, to strike at John Pope's Army of the Virginia then menacingly entrenched along the Rapidan River. Lee, like most all leaders of his time, sought to emulate Napoleonic tactics. He understand well one of Napoleon's greatest lessons, that a smaller force could always defeat a larger force by falling on its exposed elements. Lee moved quickly, therefore, to attack Pope before his army could be re-enforced by the troops returning from McClellan's failed peninsula campaign.

On August 29, 1862, Mahone's brigade moved with the rest of Anderson's division through Thoroughfare Gap toward the plains of Manassas where the first major battle of the war had taken place a year earlier. They could hear the distant rumble of cannon as they received reports that Jackson's Corps was being severely pressed. Longstreet forced the march and was able to relieve pressure on Jackson later in the day as both John B. Hood's and

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 12, 546.
James Kemper's Divisions helped repel Federal attacks against Jackson's right flank.\(^{43}\)

Throughout much of August 30, Anderson's Division awaited orders all the while within sound of the guns. Little could they have known at the time the crushing blow they were about to land on Pope's army as they rested at Brawner's Farm, the very area where the battle had opened two days prior. At around 5 p.m. Anderson received orders to move his division forward to find Pope's left flank. Anderson directed Wright and Mahone to move forward with Armistead in support behind them.\(^{44}\)

After nearly a two mile march amid a shower of Federal artillery shells, Wright and Mahone filed into line on the right flank of D. R. "Grumble" Jones' Division. Because Mahone's line extended well beyond the Union's, he ordered his line to wheel to the left thus forming a near-right angle with which to attack and "roll up" Pope's flank. For the first time of the war Mahone found himself in a position to "double 'em up."\(^{45}\)

Yet just as Mahone and Armistead were poised to press their advantage on the Federal left, a round struck Mahone and the general went down. With Wright's Brigade heavily engaged, Mahone down, his entire division thoroughly fatigued, and darkness fast approaching, Anderson called


\(^{44}\) Ibid, 415.

\(^{45}\) Wise, The End of an Era, 326.
a halt to the attack. If Anderson’s hesitation did little else, it surely provided Mahone an object lesson in the absolute need to remain aggressive, irrespective of losses in the immediate command structure, and to press an advantage to the fullest should the opportunity arise. It was a lesson Mahone would refuse to forget.\textsuperscript{46}

Mahone’s wound, however, like that of nearly 250 others from his brigade at the Battle of Second Manassas, kept him from the field for the remainder of the fall campaign of 1862. As Mahone convalesced in Richmond where his wife served as a nurse, he learned from Governor Letcher and the local papers of Lee’s failed invasion of the North and retreat from Sharpsburg, Maryland, as well as Bragg’s defeat at the Battle of Perryville in Kentucky. As winter approached it appeared that all the hope generated by the summer victories would disappear and that the year would end as it begun, in despair.\textsuperscript{47}

As Mahone made his way toward Fredericksburg to rejoin his brigade in November, he considered the landscape about him. Long had the western-most counties of Virginia seceded to form their own state and taken with them an incalculable number of resources, natural and otherwise.

\textsuperscript{46} Official Records, Ser. 1, Vo. 19, 842. It should also be noted here that while Hennessy’s Return to Bull Run is markedly the best holistic study on the battle, his pejorative treatment of R. H. Anderson (because he called a halt to the flanking attack) is as unfair as it is unwarranted. Nowhere does Hennessy mention that Mahone went down, and only later does he mention that even Armistead cautioned a further advance because of the darkness.

\textsuperscript{47} Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 12, 561; Blake, William Mahone, 45.
Nonetheless, the Old Dominion—the loss of life because of battlefield wounds and sickness aside—appeared healthy. Prices in Richmond, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, and Norfolk for basic goods had increased, largely because of the Federal blockade, but western Virginians from the Piedmont, southern parts of the Shenandoah Valley, and the southwest felt little the price inflation and shortages of "butter, eggs, maple sugar, honey, [or] other household comforts."\(^{48}\) Virginia's Southside rail lines, turnpikes, and corduroy roads were in generally good repair. In fact, so removed were some Virginians in their business and daily lives that "it was if no war had been in progress."\(^{49}\)

Mahone moved with Anderson's Division to the extreme left of the Confederate lines at Fredericksburg and to the left of the sunken road in front of Marye's Heights. Undoubtedly with Mahone's familiarity with the Fredericksburg area because of his time as chief engineer of the Fredericksburg and Valley Plank Road Company, Anderson employed him to direct "the construction of the batter[ies]" as well as rifle pits.\(^{50}\)

From December 11 to 16, 1862, "the brigade was placed . . . immediately in the rear of the line of battle,"\(^{51}\) reported Mahone. While Anderson's Division saw very little action at the Battle of Fredericksburg, Mahone did

\(^{48}\) Wise \textit{End of an Era}, 392.

\(^{49}\) This seemed to be the prevailing sentiment of those residing in portions of the Valley and Southwest largely because of the lack of Federal operations less an occasional cavalry raid. Wise, \textit{End of an Era}, 260.

\(^{50}\) Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 21, 609.

\(^{51}\) \textit{Ibid}, 614.
personally direct the placement of batteries that “enfiladed the slope upon
which the enemy formed his battalions before and after his attacks upon
Marye’s Hill [Heights].” They remained in their battle lines until Ambrose
Burnside’s battered and defeated Union Army of the Potomac retreated on
December 16.  

With the Federal retreat both Union and Confederate armies went into
winter quarters to rest, recruit, and replenish their commands. Virginians also
had to face emancipation as it became effective in January, 1863. While
many slaves had already fled to Union lines as they campaigned throughout
the north and east of Virginia, more became mobile during the winter of
1862-1863. Most, however, chose to remain in their present conditions to
await news from the battlefield and to await the “men in the blue suits” to
legitimize and enforce their freedom.  

On April 27, 1863, Joseph Hooker, the new commander of the Union Army
of the Potomac, ordered his flanking columns to beginning crossing the
Rappahannock River west of Fredericksburg where Lee’s main body, less
most of Longstreet’s Corps, remained in a defensive posture. Mahone, with
Carnot Posey’s Mississippi Brigade, “had been posted at United States Ford
... to check the advance of the enemy.” Mahone and Posey were alarmed

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52 Ibid., 609, 615.

53 William Blair, Virginia’s Private War: Feeding the Body and Soul in
the Confederacy, 1861-1865 (New York, 1998), 55-80; Lynda J. Morgan,
Emancipation in Virginia’s Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870 (Athens, 1993).

when they received word that Hooker’s army had forded the river “at the Germanna and Ely’s Crossings” which effectively “rendered [their] position at the United States Ford no longer tenable.”

Upon consultation, Mahone and Posey determined to leave a small force to slow any attempted Federal crossing of the United States Ford. The surprise of Hooker's flanking move can be seen in Mahone’s commissary reports. Major P. M. Slaughter noted that hundreds of pounds of rice and other supplies were “given to the poor of the neighborhood for want of transportation . . . when on the march.” Mahone and Posey retired “to a position a half mile from Chancellorsville” to await Hooker's flank assault. Curiously, it never materialized.

Whatever initiative Hooker gained in his successful, unexpected, and audacious flanking of Lee's position in Fredericksburg, he lost when he crossed the Rapidan and failed to drive east and give battle to an army he outnumbered two-to-one. Whether he feared another ill-considered charge like that of Burnside’s the previous December or merely waited instead for Lee to either strike him or fall back remains argumentative. What is less debatable, however, was Lee’s equally audacious move to divide his army in

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55 Ibid. 862.

56 Commissary Report, Subject Files, Box 174, Folders 2-3, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections, Duke University.

the face of an already serious numerical disadvantage and to strike Hooker before he could cross the Rapidan with his entire army.

On Friday, May 1, 1863, Mahone received orders from Stonewall Jackson, then in overall command on the field, to lead "a general advance of our [Confederate] forces," with General Lafayette McLaws' Division in support behind him.\(^{58}\) Mahone, with support from McLaws, pushed in the Federal pickets all along the front until nightfall called the engagement. On the following day, Mahone rejoined Anderson's Division in a diversionary attack designed to hold the Union army in place while Jackson performed his much studied flanking march that resulted in the wreckage of Oliver O. Howard's entire Eleventh Union Corps. "[I]t was during this service of the brigade," Mahone wrote of the action on May 2, "that the advance line . . . charged over the enemy's abates . . . [and] captured . . . the colors and color-bearer of the One Hundred and Seventh Ohio," the brigade's first such honor, though hardly its last.\(^{59}\)

Following the successful attack on May 2 and as Hooker pulled his wing of the army back into a circle around the United States Ford, Mahone received orders to follow McLaws' Division back toward Fredericksburg to intercept and engage Union Major General John Sedgwick's Corps. Sedgwick had been opposite Fredericksburg but failed to recognize that Lee had moved his army from the town to strike Hooker. Upon realizing that Lee had slipped

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 862.

\(^{59}\) Ibid, 863.
away he crossed and marched west to relieve Hooker's badly pressed situation.\textsuperscript{60}

Mahone, placed on the extreme left of McLaws' line, "participated in the successful resistance made to the enemy's very determined effort to break our lines."\textsuperscript{61} They remained in line of battle until Hooker's army withdrew completely on May 5. For eight straight days Mahone's men weathered the elements, forced marches, and Federal shot and shell. Their reputation as a fighting force grew as did Mahone's as a leader. Thus, it must have been with mixed emotions that Mahone received the news that he had been recommended for promotion to Major General at the same time he learned that Stonewall Jackson had been mortally wounded.\textsuperscript{62}

As both armies continued to eye one another from across the Rappahannock River following the battle, the city of Norfolk notified Mahone that he had been elected to their vacant Virginia Senate seat. The district's representative, William E. Taylor, had announced that he planned to retire. Given Mahone's ties to the city through his railroad and engineering projects, he seemed a natural choice. Yet because of the obvious exigent

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 801-804, 851.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 863; Mahone's reported losses for the battle were 217. Considering the length and severity of the battle and how heavily engaged Mahone's Brigade had been throughout the fighting, it certainly provides an example of how complete the victory had been for Lee (Jackson's loss notwithstanding), Ibid, 854.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 801.
circumstances, Mahone failed to take his seat until a year later when Ulysses S. Grant would have moved the battle-front much closer to the capital.63

With Grant in mind, Lee determined to invade the North for a second time. Lee believed that a move north would remove the Federal Army of the Potomac from Virginia, and, potentially, force the Lincoln administration to recall Union forces then under Grant's command for defense of the capital in Washington, as Jackson's Valley Campaign had done to McClellan a little over a year previous. The recall of troops could then potentially ease the growing strain on the citizens of Vicksburg by enabling Johnston's army to link up with that of John C. Pemberton's to deal with Grant's and William T. Sherman's forces on more even terms. Moreover, and more important to Lee's Virginia, a drive north would also clear Union forces out of the Old Dominion's farmlands during the peak growing months.

With the loss of Jackson, Lee again reorganized the Army of Northern Virginia. While Mahone remained with the other brigades of R. H. Anderson's Division, they learned that Ambrose P. Hill had been named their new corps commander, and that they had a new Third Corps designation.64 They received marching orders from Hill and made their way to Gettysburg from

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Fredericksburg "by way of Culpeper Court House, Berryville, Hagerstown, and Chambersburg." \(^6^5\)

On July 1, 1863, with the sound of heavy cannon to the south, Mahone's Brigade was making its way toward Gettysburg "passing through the South Mountain at Cashtown Gap." \(^6^6\) As the lead brigade of Anderson's Division, Mahone made it to within "2 ½ or 3 miles [of] Gettysburg where they remained for the night." \(^6^7\)

While Wright's and Posey's Brigades would play an active role in support of Longstreet's attack on the Union left flank on the following afternoon, July 2, Mahone's Brigade "took no special or active part in the actions of the battle beyond that which fell to the lot of its line of skirmishers." \(^6^8\) The previous and decidedly curt statement was taken from Mahone's report dated July 10, 1863. In lieu of the crushing defeat that Lee's retreat signified and owing to Mahone's aggressive nature, there should be little wonder why he and his men would care little for the ignominious ribbing they were given for having suffered the fewest number of casualties of any Confederate brigade during the watershed battle.

Following the Battle of Gettysburg, Mahone helped cover the retreat of Lee's army across the Potomac River and into the relative safety of northern

\(^6^5\) Blake, William Mahone, 47; Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 27, 612-616.

\(^6^6\) Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 27, 622.

\(^6^7\) Ibid, 622.

\(^6^8\) Ibid, 621.
Virginia. For the next several months both armies, badly shattered at Gettysburg, rested and reorganized. Looking to stem the losses at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, Lee dispatched Longstreet's Corps to join Braxton Bragg's Army of the Tennessee to prevent penetration by Union Major General William S. Rosecrans' Army of the Cumberland into the Confederacy's underbelly via Chattanooga, Tennessee and Atlanta, Georgia.69

Upon receiving news that Lee had dispatched Longstreet to the western theatre and rather than attacking Lee in his weakened condition, George Meade sent the Army of the Potomac's Eleventh and Twelfth Corps to reinforce Rosecrans.70 Certain Meade had little interest in taking the offensive initiative and in hoping to stop any further re-enforcement of Rosecrans for the relief of the Confederate siege of Chattanooga, Lee decided to repeat the same flanking movement he had a year earlier during the Second Manassas campaign.

On October 9, 1863, Lee crossed the Rapidan River and drove toward the Union supply base at Centreville near both Manassas battlefields. Unlike...

69 Peter Cozzens, This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga (Urbana and Chicago, 1992), 27-29. It should be noted here that Longstreet had written to Richmond asking to be sent west in hopes of gaining an independent command.

Pope before him, Meade quickly recognized Lee’s intentions and immediately ordered his army to fall back onto its supply base. Lee hastened the Confederate pursuit and caught Meade on October 14 at Bristoe Station (today Bristow), a depot along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad.\(^{71}\)

In the ensuing battle, Hill called for the infantry of Henry Heth’s Division to move forward quickly in pursuit of what he believed to be a retreating Federal column. The lack of reconnaissance, however, nearly destroyed Heth’s division as they had marched into the awaiting Union Second Corps, then fortified in “line of battle behind the [Orange and Alexandria] railroad . . . of whose presence I was unaware.”\(^{72}\) Anderson’s Division moved forward in support late in the afternoon, but could do little else but help Heth’s Division fall back at the loss of thousands of men and several cannon. The disaster later caused A. P. Hill to solemnly report that, “I made the attack too hastily.”\(^{73}\)

Left with little option, Lee determined to begin a retreat. He ordered that the rails of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad be torn to deprive the Union army the use of them. As Lee’s army fell back once again behind the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers and as he made preparations for going into winter quarters, news from the western theatre revealed that Grant had broken the siege at Chattanooga and subsequently pushed Bragg’s army

\(^{71}\) Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 29, 426.

\(^{72}\) Ibid, 427.

\(^{73}\) Ibid, 427-428.
back toward Atlanta. Further reports also indicated that Grant had been
ordered east by President Lincoln, presumably to take command opposite
Lee. 74

The relative quiet along the Rapidan battle line throughout the winter of
1863-64 enabled Mahone to spend time attending to private matters. Long
had the military responsibilities required him to step away from his position
with the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad, but he still maintained close
contact with business associates. Mahone, the consummate planner, also
found time in March, 1864, to take “an active part in the deliberations of the
[state Senate] during the closing days of the session.” While less concerned
about the business then being deliberated, Mahone busied himself laying the
groundwork for a postbellum career irrespective of the outcome on the
battlefield. 75

As Virginia’s General Assembly ended its legislative session in the spring
of 1864, Ulysses S. Grant, recently appointed to the head of all Federal
forces as had been rumored, set the Army of Potomac into motion. On the
opening days of May, Grant’s army moved toward the old Chancellorsville

74 Ibid, 611. One of the best works done on Grant’s Chattanooga
campaign is Peter Cozzens, The Shipwreck of Their Hopes: The Battles for
Chattanooga (Urbana and Chicago), 1998.

75 Blake, William Mahone, 48; General Assembly, Journal of the
Senate, 178-232.
battlefield. Nearly one year to the day and on almost the same ground, Lee and Grant’s armies collided.  

"In obedience to orders," Mahone wrote, "this brigade broke camp on May 4 and . . . [on May 6] proceeded to join the balance of our army then confronting the enemy in the Wilderness." Mahone’s Brigade was ordered into line in support of Longstreet’s Corps along the Orange Plank Road south of the Wilderness Tavern. Being pressed heavily by Union Major General Winfield Hancock’s Second Corps, Longstreet ordered Mahone’s brigade along with two others to attempt to turn Hancock’s left flank.  

Mahone, being the senior ranking brigade commander, directed the movement. Decidedly within his element as an independent commander, he ordered all three brigades into line and wheeled them into Hancock’s exposed left flank with a mind to yet again “double ‘em up.” Because of the quick and determined action of Mahone’s detachment, Hancock’s “lines bent back in much disorder.” Along with the “long lines of dead and wounded” inflicted by his flanking move, Mahone also happily reported the capture of Union Brigadier General James Wadsworth.  

76 The Battle of the Wilderness marked the beginning of the Lee-Grant contest as well as the beginning of the end for the Confederate cause. Lee would soon realize that Grant, unlike previous captains of the army, had no intention of retreating irrespective of battlefield losses and results.  


Along with Mahone's successful flank attack, Longstreet's timely arrival saved potential destruction of Lee's army as it reversed the tide of battle and threw the Federal forces back in much disorder. Shortly after directing Mahone to make his end run, however, Longstreet, like Jackson a year ago before him, fell to friendly fire and was removed from the field.80

With Longstreet out of action, R. H. Anderson was temporarily promoted to command of the corps while Mahone concurrently was appointed to take control of his former commander's division. Mahone's promotion to division command was a direct byproduct of his actions during the battle. Further, when Longstreet was well enough to write his report of the battle a few months later, he recommended Mahone for promotion in rank as well because his flank attack had been "a complete surprise and a perfect success."81

Over the next several weeks Mahone's Division continued to spar with Hancock's Second Corps as Grant continuously moved to Lee's right flank. By June, after the bloody affairs at Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor, and a number of other smaller actions, Grant had crossed the James River and turned his attention to Petersburg.82

80 Ibid, 1062.

81 Ibid, 1055; Ser. 1, Vol. 40, 775.

82 It is quite an oddity how much Mahone and Hancock seemed to square off with one another throughout the remainder of the war. Both commanders remained ever-mindful, respectful, and wary of one another,
For the next nine months Grant would lay siege to Petersburg. Ironically, the same rail lines that Mahone helped to lay in the name of economic growth for his native state prior to the war were now the same rail lines that lay in ruins around Petersburg. Nonetheless, just as Mahone's reputation had grown because of his establishment of the railroad in the pre-war days, so too would it grow further with his defense of them throughout the remainder of the war.

Throughout the summer Mahone's Division moved with a determination, purpose, and measure of success little witnessed since the days of Stonewall Jackson. At the Battle of Jerusalem Plank Road in late June, Mahone routed an entire division (Gibbons) of Hancock's Second Corps. Less than a month later and in support of Heth's Division, Mahone again struck Hancock at the Battle of Ream's Station, effectively shattering what was left of Hancock's much celebrated corps.83 Mahone and his men seemed so tireless that A. P. Hill had to break down and finally order Mahone to rest his division. “Have

with each holding the other in high esteem. See Military Memoir of William Mahone. Virginia Military Institute Archives, Lexington, Virginia, 15.

83 Lee reported that at the Battle of Jerusalem Plank Road "General Mahone, with a part of his division [captured] about 1,600 prisoners, 4 pieces of artillery, 8 stand of colors, and a number of small arms." Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 40, 750. At the Battle of Ream's Station, Heth and Mahone "captur[ed] about 2,700 prisoners, including one brigadier-general." Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 42, 940; also see Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 36, 858-859.
stopped Mahone," wrote Hill, "[his] men have been without sleep now two nights.\footnote{84}

Despite the marked success Mahone witnessed on the battlefield, it was becoming readily apparent to him that his contribution, however great, was too little too late. Mahone, the consummate realist, knew they were losing the war. While the fall of Atlanta and Savannah to Sherman, the destruction of the Shenandoah Valley by Union generals Phil Sheridan and David Hunter, and Lincoln's re-election were yet in the offing, Mahone could see privation on a diurnal basis.\footnote{85}

The rail lines still operated in the Confederate interior where he could see the daily trains pick up and drop off loads of "reserves." The name did little, however, to soften or mask the reality to the naked eye that Virginia had little left to offer but old men and young boys. Union shells daily rained down upon many an unfortunate crown out about trying to locate eggs for less than $6 a dozen, a shot of whiskey for less than $5 a glass, a barrel of flour for under $400, or perhaps even a new frock coat to cover over the coming autumn chill for under $2000.\footnote{86}

Yet for "my own brave Virginia! My own loved, long-suffering Virginia" they continued to fight. Nearly 90 percent of eligible white male Virginians took to

\footnote{84} Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 41, 1028.

\footnote{85} Blair, Virginia's Private War, 150.

the field in defense of something larger than themselves.\textsuperscript{87} It was the same pride for “Old Virginia” that kept Mahone to task despite the wreckage that was the reality strewn about him both inside and outside of the slippery vermilion colored trenches of Petersburg.

Throughout July, 1864, the heat, humidity, short rations, and monotony made life in the trenches as much a psychological struggle as a physical one. Mahone found little time to drill as there was little need. Long, he reasoned correctly, had the sulkers and shirkers deserted or gone home. What remained were the veterans, and it appeared that only Yankee lead would cause them to quit their posts.

Yet if life above ground was nearly unbearable for the Confederate army, life under the ground must well have been equally disturbing for the Federal mining engineers and their men. In an effort to force a breakout, Grant approved a plan to tunnel under the Confederate lines, set off thousands of pounds of gunpowder, and, quite literally, blow open the Confederate lines. Once achieved his infantry would pour through the opening, take Petersburg, and force the evacuation of Richmond.

In the early morning hours of July 30, 1864, after weeks of digging, 8,000 pounds of gun powder sent “more than 100,000 cubic feet of earth . . . five companies of the Twenty-second South Carolina . . . four companies of the Eighteenth South Carolina . . . [and] the two left guns” of Willie Pegrims’

\textsuperscript{87} Sara Strickler Fife Diary, April 3, 1865, quoted in Blair, \textit{Virginia’s Private War}, 149; Reid Mitchell, \textit{Civil War Soldiers: Their Expectations and Experiences} (New York, 1988), 168.
battery skyward. As the debris showered down, it too wreaked havoc on the stunned Confederates. Strangely, the Union assault failed to pour into the breech. Despite orders to proceed directly following the blast, Ambrose Burnsides, leading the assault, seemed paralyzed like “a duck knocked on the head” as Lincoln himself commented.

The crater, of which the ensuing battle took its name and would forever change Mahone’s life, measured “135 feet in length, 97 feet in breadth, and 30 feet deep.” As darkness began to give way to daylight, Burnsides finally began his attack. Yet, rather than rushing through the crater and pushing past in the direction of the Blandsford Cemetery and to Petersburg beyond, the Union assault bogged down inside the crater itself. Successive Union brigades stacked up, became intertwined, and confusion took command.

The delay enabled Confederate General Bushrod Johnson’s men to reform their lines and to begin to train their artillery on “the dense mass of men in the crater and adjacent works.” Mahone also sprang to action and personally led two of his divisional brigades toward the breech. “The enemy

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89 Ibid, 45-163. These pages include the entire proceedings of the Union Court of Inquiry brought about as a result of the disaster and carnage.

90 Ibid, 788.

91 Ibid, 164. Union General George Meade wrote starkly in his report that “no advance . . . was made from the crater to the ridge . . . for more than two hours after [Union forces] had occupied the crater.”

have our works," he is reported to have said, "[and] we must carry his position by immediately assaulting it. If we don't carry it by the first attack we will renew the assault as long as a man of us is left, or until the work is ours." 93

Mahone directed his other two brigades into the fray throughout the morning to thwart all Federal attempts at breaking out of the crater. When his line stabilized, and realizing that the Federals in the crater were fish in a barrel, he concentrated his artillery fire in front of the crater and after three successive assaults, his division forced those inside the crater to capitulate. 94

Mahone's coordinated counterattack had been so swift and decisive that General Lee, who was reported to have witnessed the battle from the nearby

93 Letter of Major Richard Jones to William Mahone, January 3, 1877, quoted in Blake, William Mahone, 56.

94 Official Records, Ser. 1, Vol. 50, 166-167; 789-792. While reports of casualties vary greatly between accounts, it is fairly well documented and accepted that Federal losses were nearly five times those of the Confederates under Johnson and Mahone. It is also worth noting here that Mahone reported that his division captured "19 stand of colors." Mahone's battle reports would draw the ire of other Confederate captains after the war. Men like James Lane and Jubal Early accused Mahone of inflating the numbers captured at Spotsylvania and the Crater for his own political gain. Yet hindsight and evidence shows to the contrary, and the controversy and heated postbellum editorial exchanges, especially between Mahone and Early, were more likely the result of political differences than they were premeditated misrepresentations. See Letter from Jas. A. Englehard to James H. Lane, May 20, 1871, Record Group 501, James H. Lane Papers, Auburn University Special Collections, Auburn University; Also see "A Correspondence Between Generals Early and Mahone in Regard to A Military Memoir of the Latter," Not Dated, Printed Material, Jubal Early Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary.
Jerusalem Plank Road, traveled out to Mahone and promoted him to Major General while yet on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{95}

With the crushing defeat at the Battle of the Crater, the Union high command lost faith in being able to affect an end to the war in 1864. The less aggressive attitude of Grant’s army, however, only served to further empower “the adventurous Mahone.”\textsuperscript{96} Throughout the late summer and autumn of 1864 the newly promoted major general continuously had his division probing the Union lines for weak areas or gaps.

Late in the afternoon of October 27, Mahone took advantage of a break in the Union lines during an advance along Boydton Plank Road. Once again Mahone found himself opposite Hancock and the fresh replacements that reconstituted his corps. As a reporter from the Philadelphia \textit{Inquirer} later wrote, “Mahone’s division . . . [found] General Hancock . . . across the Boydton plank road [and] struck him heavily on his right flank . . . forcing him back.”\textsuperscript{97} Mahone had marched so far around Hancock’s flank, in fact, that units in Hancock’s Corps literally had to change their front facing 180 degrees to meet his attack. Hancock, little known to stray from a fight, returned the favor.

\textsuperscript{95} Jefferson Davis dated the promotion “30\textsuperscript{th} July,...the day of his memorable service.” See Dunbar Rowland, ed., \textit{Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist}, Vol. 6, 303.


\textsuperscript{97} Extracts from the article can be seen in the \textit{Official Records}, Ser. 1, Vol. 42, 485.
on Mahone's left flank and "forced [him] back . . . in the same style in which he had advanced," thus effectively ending the fighting.\textsuperscript{98}

Throughout November, 1864, the Confederate army lost as many men to desertion as they could replace through conscription. Mahone's division busily erected its winter quarters and prepared to enter the Valley Forge of its existence. Yet besides the lack of food, there also would be no French army, or British army, or any other army that would come to their aid. Even the most battle-hardened and devoted sons of Virginia recognized the end was nigh and simply made their way back to their homes. Why starve in a trench hundreds of miles from home, they reasoned, especially in lieu of the fact that the Lincoln administration promised immunity to deserters if they were caught?\textsuperscript{99}

Mahone, too, had reached a winter of discontent, though his men never witnessed it. Throughout the winter Dr. John Claiborne characterized Mahone as a "quiet, uncommunicative" man who seemed "absorbed in his own thoughts [aside] from taking care of his men." Yet as was and would be characteristic of Mahone, Claiborne added, that "nothing interfered with the persistence and pertinacity with which he pursued his ends, viz: to find the Yankees and to drive or capture them."\textsuperscript{100}


\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid}, 609-615.

\textsuperscript{100} Claiborne, \textit{Seventy-Five Years in Old Virginia}, 248; Blake, \textit{William Mahone}, 62.
As March melted into April, 1865, Mahone and his division were ordered to move from the Petersburg line to an area between the Appomattox and James Rivers called the Bermuda Front. There they sparred with Union forces until they received word on April 2 that Lee had ordered a retreat from Petersburg and Richmond. From the Bermuda Front his division fell back in good order along the battered tracks of a railroad he would come to know very well after the war, the South Side Railroad.101

On April 7, 1865, a day after Lee witnessed the loss of over a quarter of his army after their surrender at the Battle of Sailor's Creek, Mahone struck back at the Federal army from his defensive position near Farmville capturing “the colors of the Fifth New Hampshire . . . together with the officers and its men.”102 Mahone’s tenacity, and especially that of his men in the face of utter defeat, is especially telling. While they could hardly have known at the time that the war would end in two days in the front parlor of Wilbur McLean’s home near Appomattox, they well knew the destruction of Confederate army the day previous as it was along their line of battle. Thus fully within forty-eight hours of total surrender Mahone’s division, and its leader, were still looking to “find Yankees” as Mahone’s friend, Dr. Claiborne said, and to “double ‘em up.”103

102 Ibid, 720.
Perhaps it was only fitting that the man some said moved and acted most like the departed Stonewall Jackson should have been alongside Generals Lee and Longstreet in the final conference before the surrender: a reminder of the halcyon days of the summer of 1862 when the triumvirate together filled the Confederacy's emotional coffers with hope. Perhaps, too, there should have been little wonder that Mahone's division numbered nearly half of all those that stacked arms for the last time on Sunday April 9, 1865, especially given the respect that his men had for their captain, their "Hero of the Crater."  

It was a respect that reached the highest levels of command. Lee, like Mahone's men, recognized that he maintained "the best camp, most order over his trains [wagons and provisions] than any brigade in the army . . . [was] brave too & always obey[ed] orders." The letter bears witness to Lee's belief in Mahone's abilities and provides insight into Lee's battlefield promotion of Mahone after successful defense of the Petersburg line at the Battle of the Crater. Yet, there were still uncertainties surrounding Mahone for Lee, as there would be for many Virginians in the months after Appomattox. They knew he was "a man of firmness, courage, ability, and resourcefulness," but "[h]ow he would administer when alone [was] the only

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104 Letter of James Longstreet to William H. Stewart, August, 26, 1877, McGill Papers, quoted in Blake, William Mahone, 64.

question.” It was a question that postbellum Virginians, if less so Lee, were soon to find out.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Letter of Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, August 13, 1864, Lee Papers, Leyburn Library Special Collections; Blake, William Mahone, 66.
Among the several states of the former Confederacy and in the wake of final defeat, Virginia lost most severely in terms of land, resources, and infrastructure. Aside from the obvious loss of nearly a third of the Commonwealth when its counties seceded in 1863 to form the state of West Virginia, the war devastated farmlands and livestock, rail lines and rolling stock, and manufacturing ventures, however limited and unassuming compared to their brethren to the north. Further, with emancipation victoriously affirmed on the battlefield as well as supported by federal law, Virginians also faced an acute labor shortage.1

For Mahone, the end of the war ushered in yet another transitory time in his life. Defeat tasted bitter to be sure, but his unwavering spirit and supreme self-confidence led him back to Norfolk, Virginia with a mind bent toward “regain[ing] the presidency of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad.”2

While Mahone still had several friends and business allies in the Norfolk area, his years away prosecuting a war against the very United States government that held control of the line in the immediate aftermath of

1 While it could be argued that states and regions like Tennessee, Kentucky, and western North Carolina and northern Alabama were witness to bitter rivalries and continued fighting “under the black flag” or that states like Mississippi and South Carolina whose white populations faced newly freed black majorities, it was Virginia that lost most heavily in terms of capital in its varied forms.

2 Blake, William Mahone, 72.
the war enabled opposition to build. Rightfully some questioned the logic of
his return to the helm. "Would it not be going too far," they argued to
Governor Francis Harrison Pierpont, "to again intrust [sic] this man with the
management of the self-same corporation which he so shamefully prostituted
to further the ends of his country's direst enemies?" 3

Yet given his business and personal ties to the line and the city of
Norfolk and because of his vast experience, Mahone found himself elected
president shortly after the United States government restored civil
management. Throughout the late summer and autumn of 1865, Mahone
engineered the restoration— and in some cases re-design—of the roadbeds,
especially in the vicinity of Petersburg that endured a lengthy siege. In
addition to the replacement of roadbeds and rails, Mahone had rolling stock
replaced and new engines built. So complete, in fact, had been Mahone's
restoration of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad that in December of the
same year the shareholders of the adjacent and adjoining South Side
Railroad Company unanimously elected him president of that line as well. 4

Mahone quickly recognized the potential in not only rebuilding the two
railroads, but in their consolidation as well. While the South Side Railroad

3 Scrapbook 3, Box 207, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special
Collections, Duke University. It should be noted that the same trepidation
was given with respect to former Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston's
bid to gain control of Virginia's Richmond and Danville Railroad. With
Governor Pierpont's influence Johnston's bid, unlike Mahone's, fell short.

4 Frank Helvestine, "The Development of a Great Railroad," Norfolk
and Western Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 2 (July, 1923), 73-74; Also see
Helvestine, "History of the Norfolk & Petersburg," Norfolk and Western
Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 4 (September 1923), 77.
was decidedly in a state of disrepair, its service generated “over $1,000 per
day since [it] resumed transportation” in late July, 1865, and thus intimated a
future “as bright as its warmest friends ever anticipated.” Mahone believed,
therefore, that if he could affect a consolidation of the railroads under his
direction, he most assuredly would be able to get shareholders to agree to
institute further repairs or even possibly consolidate the operations.

Mahone, nearly convinced of the move, still queried advice on
consolidation from other railroad magnates like J. Edgar Thomson of the
wrote Thomson to Mahone, “is seen in the reduction of the general expenses
of management but chiefly in the increase in business.”

As president of both the Norfolk and Petersburg and South Side
Railroads, Mahone invited representatives from the Virginia and Tennessee
Railroad “to join their company in a plan to consolidate general management
of the three roads under a common direction.” It must be understood that
beyond the benefit he and other shareholders were to likely derive from the
merger, Mahone had his native homeland of Virginia and its people in mind.


6 Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 37-39, Mahone Papers, Perkyns Library
Special Collections.

7 Letter from J. Edgar Thomson to William H. Mahone, Dec. 30, 1865,
Correspondence, Box 95, 6, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special
Collections.

8 Helvestine, “History of the Norfolk & Petersburg,” 78.
He recognized that foreign capital surely would be required to reconstruct Virginia. Yet for Mahone, foreign capital failed to equate with foreign ownership. Thus, beyond the drive to better his own standing, Mahone also firmly believed that control of the industrial engines that were to restore Virginia’s wrecked homes and businesses had to be those directed by the commonwealth’s native sons for the direct benefit of the Virginia’s people first and foremost.

While Mahone knew the collective mind of the shareholders of the Norfolk and Petersburg and South Side Railroads and that they were on board with his consolidation plan, he could only guess what the reaction might be of the Virginia and Tennessee’s directors and shareholders. He ultimately hoped to link by rail the port of Norfolk with the expansive markets of the western United States via Bristol on the Tennessee and Virginia border. He wanted to re-make postbellum Norfolk over in the image of what antebellum New York had become as a major international commercial artery.

The first blow to Mahone’s grand plan came almost immediately as directors of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad refused to attend his consolidation meeting as it “would lead to ‘discrimination’ against other interests in the state.” They did, nonetheless, include wording that left the door open for the formulation of business agreements with respect to through-freight and passenger travel. Mahone, however, viewed business

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9 Blake, William Mahone, 77.
agreements in the same light of indignation that he had joint commands during the war. If Mahone rebuked joint coordination over the erection of mere shore batteries along the James River as he had early in 1862 near Drewry's Bluff, he surely scoffed at any thought of joint direction of an entire rail line from Bristol to Norfolk through the southern part of his home state.

Hardly one to be undone by the real or imagined strength of an opponent or position, Mahone did what he had done so successfully in the previous two years: He looked to the flanks. In an effort to move beyond the fixed opposition of the Virginia and Tennessee's directors, he began to curry favor with shareholders, citizens, and leading political figures.

On February 19, 1866, in conjunction with the restoration of the railroad service between Norfolk and Petersburg, Mahone asked Governor Pierpont and leading members of the Board of Public Works to attend the event as a way to celebrate the rebirth of internal improvements and business activity at home in Petersburg and throughout the state at large. Beyond the plaudits Mahone received as "the war-horse of railroads as well as the field," he seized the planned media event to declare that "he had no higher aim [with respect to rail consolidation] than the advancement and development of the commercial advantages of Petersburg and Norfolk and the prosperity of the State at large."\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{10} Burton, The History of Norfolk, Virginia, 99. Also see Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 35-37, Mahone Papers, for his thoughts on why his plan for consolidation should be as readily advanced as defended.
Mahone's focus on the economic development surely piqued the interest of Governor Pierpont, himself born near Morganton in West Virginia and a former railroad attorney for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. From the pro-internal improvement western Virginia Whig country of the antebellum period, Pierpont differed slightly with Mahone in that he "advocated a consolidation of the management, but not the interests, of the roads."\textsuperscript{11} For all intents and purposes, Pierpont agreed that combined direction of the roads should fall under one command, but that oversight needed to take place externally to ensure contracts were awarded fairly, if less so equally, throughout the state.

Pierpont's concerns over "interests" were as warranted as they were supported, especially by the city leaders and managers of Richmond, Lynchburg, and Alexandria. They feared outright consolidation on the grounds that their systems of public works and overall development--economic and otherwise--would be left behind that of Norfolk or Petersburgs. Further, they questioned both Mahone's consolidation "scheme" and Pierpont himself "as to whether such authority was vested in the General Assembly, the Board of Public Works, or the stockholders of the railroads which were involved."\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{11} Lynchburg \textit{News and Daily Advance}, October 4, 1866. Also see Charles H. Ambler, Francis H. Pierpont, \textit{Union War Governor of Virginia and Father of West Virginia} (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1937).

\textsuperscript{12} Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 37, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
Mahone's use of the media, not to mention the governor, helped polarize opposition to himself both personally and professionally. His enemies, like the city managers of Richmond and Lynchburg, brandished him a sell-out, "monopolizer," and a carpet-bagger largely because of his northern industrial-minded beliefs. "Consolidation," they firmly believed and simply stated, "is monopoly."\(^{13}\) Even some from his home district, like an editor from the *Petersburg Daily Index* questioned Mahone's motives. To "monopolize the trade of Lynchburg and beyond, for the South Side road," he wrote, "has . . . been the consuming passion of President Mahone."\(^{14}\)

Mahone's allies quickly came to his defense, asserting that "consolidation meant nothing but united management" and, more important, was decidedly necessary to "give the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad a formidable rival."\(^{15}\) Mahone publicly also tried to draw attention to the actions of the directors of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as they had been busily accumulating outstanding shares of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad "with the avowed purpose of getting possession of that road."\(^{16}\)

The polemical exchange across Virginia's several newspaper editors and leading minds highlighted the uncertainties that the postbellum economy's slow, steady transition from a system of mixed enterprise to that

\(^{13}\) *Lynchburg News and Daily Advance*, October 4, 1866.

\(^{14}\) *Petersburg Daily Index*, October 1, 1866.

\(^{15}\) *Lynchburg News and Daily Advance*, October 4, 1866.

\(^{16}\) *Petersburg Daily Express*, October 8, 1866.
of free enterprise unleashed on an unsuspecting and ill-prepared people. In many ways, too, it highlighted the long-standing arguments in the Old Dominion over internal improvements and their attendant differences in opinion over control, local versus global. Mahone's allies subscribed to a more antebellum Whiggish belief in expanding economies of scale and the development of mixed industries to meet the press of a burgeoning market-minded people. Mahone's opponents, conversely, remained suspicious of anything outside the aegis of their local leadership and direction. Put most simply, the debate over consolidation illuminated the hopes or trepidations of Virginia's citizenry, depending on one's political stripe, with respect to what the future postbellum economy might look like, and where, if anywhere, that they might fit into its framework.

Mahone's appeals to the stockholders of the Virginia and Tennessee had been turned aside by the vote held at their annual meeting. On the same day, Mahone showed his continued resolve to the cause of consolidation when he wrote to a friend that "Consolidation was defeated at Lynchburg; not fairly but illegally. The cause, however, will never be abandoned. It is stronger today than ever." Mahone used the word "illegally" in the context that he believed the directors of the Virginia and Tennessee had misled and misrepresented what consolidation would mean.

17 Letter from William Mahone to Colonel John Crockford, October 16, 1866, Letterbooks, Volume 3, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
to their shareholders. The vote also caused Mahone to find it “necessary to turn his attention more definitely in the direction of State Legislative action.”  

Any urgency Mahone may have felt with respect to consolidation in the autumn of 1866 was intensified in the spring of 1867 when the Federal government, under “radical” Republican rule, made Virginia part of Military District Number One and when Governor Pierpont, through former contacts at the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, contacted Mahone with information that the B & O planned to open a new line down the Shenandoah Valley to connect with the Virginia and Tennessee at Salem. “Commerce and money have no conscience,” Governor Pierpont wrote, “when great commercial interests are to be obtained. Richmond, Norfolk, and Petersburg & even Lynchburg are ruined commercially if you don’t succeed. Balto. will buy up the Tennessee and other S.W. roads... You have the best evidences of my sincerity for the interest of Va. You must get your men.”

Mahone, Pierpont, and allies of consolidation engaged in an all out effort to garner the requisite number of votes to pave the way for further mergers and to stave off foreign domination of their rail lines. Like other various business and private concerns, then as now, allies of Mahone found little problem bending ethical and moral principle to meet practicality. “In the strictest confidence,” wrote one supporter of consolidation in Norfolk to

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Mahone, "I ask what could the parties interested afford to pay for the vote of a Senator who has always heretofore voted against consolidation?"\textsuperscript{20}

Whether Mahone responded to such queries is difficult to gauge given the absence of existing documentation. Nonetheless, he is equally as culpable because he well knew that those types of illicit activities took place and he seemed little interested in speaking out against such practices.

Despite questionable methods, friends of consolidation obtained their desired result on April 18, 1867, when Virginia's General Assembly passed legislation in their favor. According to provisions of the bill, "the Norfolk and Petersburg, the Southside, the Virginia and Tennessee, and the Virginia and Kentucky railroad companies [were authorized] to unite by vote of their private stockholders in forming a general company, to be called the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad."\textsuperscript{21} Both friends and enemies of consolidation fully recognized that the die had been cast for unification of the entire rail line under one manager. The question of whether the A. M. & O. could be formed, especially with Mahone at the helm, seemed academic.

While some enemies of consolidation, like Robert L. Owen, president of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, did continue to fight the legislative mandate, allies of consolidation were able to provide the necessary capital for Mahone to procure enough shares of the V. & T. to gain majority control

\textsuperscript{20} Letter of W.W. Wing to William Mahone, March 3, 1867, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{21} "The Southside Consolidation Act," Subject Files, Box 203, 32-36, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
of the line. Whether triumphant through the use of “tactics not laid down in the Books,” as his opponents accused, or merely a text-book example of a hostile take-over, Mahone officially took command in October, 1867, and within a month after that Mahone was elected president.22

The addition of the 204 miles of track from the Virginia and Tennessee that completed the rail link from Bristol to Norfolk gained recognition and notoriety for Mahone both inside and outside of the commonwealth. Former Confederate Brigadier General Roger A. Pryor, then successfully practicing law in New York, wrote Mahone in December of 1867, “You are now the biggest rail road man in American having control of even more miles than [Cornelius] Vanderbilt. Your reputation here is as prevalent as in Va.”23

Pryor’s letter, alongside Mahone’s correspondence with postbellum Pennsylvania Railroad tycoon J. Edgar Thomson, provides merely two of numerous examples of Mahone’s reputation across the country. At home in Virginia both friends and opponents spoke of Mahone’s ability to direct “his railroad with the same enthusiasm and confidence he exhibited as a military

22 Letter of Joseph B. Tree to William Mahone, April 22, 1867, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 6, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Blake, William Mahone, 85; Mahone was elected president on November 12, 1868. For a full description see Helvestine, “The Third Link in the N. & W. Chain,” Norfolk and Western Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 3 (August, 1923), 73.

23 Letter of Roger A. Pryor to William Mahone, December 20, 1867, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 7, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
leader” and that he ran his railroad as if “he were carrying on a campaign.” Mahone also found support in newspapers and publications that lauded him as “our railroad Bismarck” because of his “inventive and executive skill in every department of business.” They also applauded his ability to thwart “rival railroad combinations” in an effort to safeguard Virginia’s rights, interests, and republican nature.

Yet not everyone in Virginia relished Mahone’s consolidation move. Chief among his critics were John W. Garrett and John S. Barbour, presidents of the Baltimore and Ohio and Orange and Alexandria Railroads respectively. They sought to fan the smoldering embers of the enemies of consolidation by pointing past the long-argued polemics of monopoly to Mahone’s newly approved $25,000 a year salary. The salary and self-aggrandizement, they maintained, were his true motive behind consolidation. They also properly provided the print media with headline fodder when they played off the newly-named Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad’s acronym A. M. & O. by referring to it as “All Mine and Otelia’s,” in direct reference to Mahone and his wife, Otelia Butler.

24 Richmond Whig, December 03, 1868; Blake, William Mahone, 87.

25 Richmond Whig, December 19, 1868; Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 32-33, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

26 Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 23, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections. It should be noted here that Mahone’s previous biographer states that in conversations with Mahone’s wife, Otelia Butler Mahone, she said that William and she were actually fond of the sobriquet; that they actually found it quite amusing. See Blake, William Mahone, 89 (footnote number 112) for full description.
Despite Mahone's few critics, his stock—both personal and public—was assuredly on the rise. Yet in the absence of diary entries or an autobiography, it is difficult to know what William Mahone must have thought of himself by the fall of 1868, considering he had been the former "leader of all devilry" from a rural Virginia backwater town of relatively poor economic means; the young white boy from the sticks that began his business career as a newspaper hawk in partnership with none other than a free black boy; and the former engineer turned Civil War general that would become a postbellum economic and political parvenus, both inside and outside his home state.

At first glance, he would appear rather like some character from the mind of a Samuel Clemens. Yet upon closer review, his humble, rough and tumble childhood fits as nicely as it does closely the mold of many other later "Gilded Age" dandies, like Andrew Carnegie, Jay Cooke, Jay Gould, and John Rockefeller.27

Mahone displayed the same drive and determination as the later "Robber Barons" of the colder climates. Yet despite the surface commonalties he shared with the future Robber Barons of the North, Mahone’s optimism toward material progress was founded less in his quest for self-aggrandizement and grounded more in the development of the commonwealth around him. This is not to imply that Mahone failed to

consider his standing in Virginia's society or that of the greater Union in
general, because he did. Rather, the differences between Mahone and the
other burgeoning captains of industry from the North had as much to do with
geography and culture as it did with being on the winning or losing side of the
four years of bloodletting that was the American Civil War. Put simply,
Mahone held his home and its people in much higher regard than the
burgeoning industrial leaders north of the Mason-Dixon line. He did so,
perhaps, because of Virginia's tradition and longer-standing commitment to a
system of mixed versus free enterprise than that of the several northern
states.

Mahone, much more than the Vanderbilts of his day, therefore, always
considered the betterment of his native homeland as much as the
competencies of his own family. The greater good of Virginia and the
restoration of the Old Dominion to a position of political and economic
hegemony guided Mahone more than the thoughts of how many hundreds of
miles of railroad were under his management at any given time or the overall
value of his personal or political net worth.\textsuperscript{28}

Yet, however much Mahone may have differed with his former
enemies from the north in the purpose of business and its relation to the
state, Mahone found himself in agreement with some of them in accepting
Confederate defeat as a positive good. While decidedly a minority view within

\textsuperscript{28} Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 52, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special
Collections.
the Old Dominion, Mahone's logic centered around his epistemological belief in Aristotle's notion of *tabula rasa*, only applied in this case to Virginia as a collective institutional entity rather than an individual person's mind.²⁹ He believed that the war and destruction actually enabled Virginia to start with a clean slate from which to frame and develop social and economic programs bent toward restoring the Old Dominion to prominence. He likened the chains of slavery to that of an economic and social anchor, and now with them forever broken, Virginia could induce business interests from overseas—those in England and elsewhere that had been reluctant to do business in the past because of opposition to slave labor—to help rebuild the state and thereby compete with the business likes Boston, Baltimore, New York, Cleveland, and Chicago.³⁰

Mahone, therefore, cared less for direct self-promotion, as was the case among the other industrial dandies of his day, and more for the re-development and re-vitalization of Virginia's economy and society. He realized, quite correctly and most politically astutely, that any increase Virginia as a state gained in national or foreign stature would naturally be translated and returned to him personally because he led and engineered its

²⁹ For more information on Aristotle's notion of *tabula rasa*, see his "On the Soul" treatise in John Philoponus, *On Aristotle's "On the Soul 1.3-5* (Ithaca, 2006).

³⁰ Mahone's papers contain much correspondence from business interests abroad, especially in England, calling for the "Material reconstruction of the South." See Letter of John Everett (London) to William Mahone, May 23, 1868, Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 7, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections, as one representative example.
recovery. Thus, when rival men like John Garrett and John Barbour tried to attack him personally by saying his motivation was purely driven by self-interest, Mahone could easily return their rhetorical fire by saying he was merely acting in the best interest of his shareholders and the state, as was generally the case with Mahone.31

Mahone used his notoriety outside the state to attract attention to his plan to connect the West with Europe through his Virginia rail lines as a viable alternative to transport down the Mississippi River or across Ohio via the rail and steamship lines of Gould and Vanderbilt. On July 15, 1868, several hundred delegates gathered in Bristol, Virginia, “for the purpose of promoting direct trade from Europe.”32

The delegates, representing the agricultural, mining, and commercial interests from men as far west as Memphis, Tennessee, adopted resolutions at the Bristol Convention that ultimately led to the formation of a new joint stock company whose purpose it was to open a steamship line between Norfolk and Liverpool, England. Decisions regarding the amount of stock subscriptions with which to provide the venture capital necessary for

31 Mahone’s “New South Creed” went beyond the “myth-making” that Paul Gaston ably illuminates in his 1970 study. Mahone did believe Virginia could become a powerful, prosperous, and racially harmonious model for the South and acted in that vein as a business leader and later as political boss. See Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 52, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

32 Blake, William Mahone, 89.
development of the trade were to be left in the hands of an executive committee, with Mahone at its helm.\textsuperscript{33}

Mahone called for the executive committee to reconvene in convention later that year in October. Calls were sent out across the South in support of the idea. On October 14, 1868, the three day convention began and it drew representatives from seven southern states. In a telling speech before the delegates Mahone intimated his vision for a new Virginia and a New South more generally. "If there are any good results from the late struggle it is that we are now standing on a new field and the whole products of the country are seeking new centers of trade." He argued that failure to act quickly would merely allow "old trade lines to be resumed and re-established." He pressed his belief that a resumption of the old lines and ways would simply bring a resumption of economic dependence and thus he called for immediate action. "We have an advantage now which the results of the war have left us," he concluded, "and it ought to be embraced."\textsuperscript{34}

Beyond Mahone's rhetoric for a New South, the convention's composition of delegates was equally as sectional-centric in its orientation

\textsuperscript{33} It is worth noting that Mahone and friends of economic development wanted to link, via business combinations, Europe with the Pacific where Norfolk, Virginia would be the epicenter or hub of trade between the two. The vision suggests that their development was truly national in nature. Further it also highlights the belief among Mahone's contemporaries that real prosperity would come from western trade and alliances.

\textsuperscript{34} Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 51-52, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Burton History of Norfolk, 124-126. Burton says that delegates were in attendance from Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. See also Blake, William Mahone, 89-90.
and vision as witnessed by the lack of any northern state delegates. Considering the antipathy of most southerners in the wake of Appomattox as well as Mahone's disdain for playing economic second fiddle to anything northern in general, it is little wonder that he left the northern states off the invite list. Further, it shows Mahone's willingness to forego northern aid—material or otherwise—by seeking support from European interests directly. As evidenced by the convention's acceptance of the proposal to establish a Steamship and Navigation Company to be funded completely by English and southern financiers, Mahone merely desired to remove the age-old southern dependence on the north for goods and trade. His Whiggish beliefs also caused him to seek ways to link Europe directly to the southern and western United States through Norfolk, Virginia thereby challenging, if not replacing, New York, Baltimore, and Boston's hegemonic control of the import and export trade. Thus while Mahone and other pre-war Whigs had long viewed internal improvements as vital to economic independence and, more important, political liberty and a republican form of governance, the war had taught many other southerners that they had been correct in their views all along. Revenue had to be generated from diversified commercial development rather than the monolithic agricultural infrastructure of single-staple production. Put simply, most Virginians came to realize that cash, not cotton, was king.35

35 Scrapbook 3, Box 207, 9-10, 31, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Larson Internal Improvement, 253-255.
Mahone's attempt to sweep the Old Dominion into a new progressive mindset filled with growth and optimism ever-reminiscent of the halcyon days of Jefferson met with mixed emotions. The Richmond *Whig* heralded the move toward consolidation and commercial development, especially in light of the forces arrayed against the designed plans and in lieu of an absence of Yankee greenbacks. "Our Virginia system under General Mahone," the paper trumpeted, "has once more triumphed signally."\(^{36}\) The Petersburg *Daily Times*, however, took a slightly different position by questioning Mahone's leadership qualities and by attacking him personally. "We think him the most overrated railroad man in Virginia," one editor wrote, "and regret that [Virginians] seem to have adopted the conclusion that he is the only man living who can make a scheme a success."\(^{37}\) That Mahone's vision met with as much support as it did vituperation should come with as little surprise to us as it did for Mahone himself. After all, Mahone's Virginia, as has been pointed out and in a most fundamental sense, had always been not one, but two Virginias—the "Virginia of despair and the Virginia of hope."\(^{38}\)

While Mahone's victories enabled him and his allies to look hopefully to the future, most Virginians found much less to cheer about. Gone were many of the farms and livestock. Mansions, once prominent, were in ill-

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\(^{36}\) Richmond *Whig*, November 19, 1868.

\(^{37}\) *Petersburg Daily Times*, November 19, 1868.

repair. Rural homesteads, too, displayed little more than poverty and decay from their desolate fields and "butchered landscape of scrub oaks and stunted pines." 

Personal property losses, much like land values, were staggering. Internal improvements made in western Virginia before the war, with a mind toward increasing state tax revenue and trade in general, were gone along with a full third of the state that seceded only a handful of years earlier during the war. "Nearly the whole accumulated and available capital of the South was practically annihilated," said a contemporary business chronicle, "by the abolition of slavery and of the Confederate debt." 

Alongside the physical and psychological ruin that most Virginians faced on a diurnal basis in the late 1860s, they were also straddled with the stigma and uncertainty of Federal occupation under the Congressional reconstruction plan. In early April, 1868, General Henry H. Wells replaced Governor Pierpont by order of General Schofield, then in charge of Virginia’s occupation. Mahone, at least initially, cared little about the change in command largely because it had been rumored that Wells “was in sympathy” of his railroad plans. 

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41 James H. Eckenrode, The Political History of Virginia During Reconstruction (Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1904), 117.
Yet with the election of Ulysses S. Grant as President in the fall of 1868 and with large Republican majorities in Congress, Mahone aligned himself with the Conservatives (most of them Democrats) in Virginia to seek an end to Federal military rule and occupation. Virginia's Conservatives knew they had little choice but to accept a new constitution that recognized the political equality of their former slaves if they wanted to escape continued, forced political leadership of "Black Republicans," like Henry Wells.\textsuperscript{42}

Mahone, largely motivated by word that Wells had political ties to his rival Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, sought an expeditious end to both Federal rule and the new governor. He viewed Wells, a New Yorker, as a threat not only to his direction and management of the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad, but to any other public works program in the state. Mahone, therefore, had little problem setting aside his political and economic differences with the Conservatives of the state because he knew that Wells could potentially turn the state over to foreign rule. As evidenced by reports that the governor tried to illegally sell the state's interest in the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad to his friends at the Baltimore and Ohio, Mahone tried to expose Wells as an enemy to Virginia not only because he tried to break up

\textsuperscript{42} The appointment of Wells effectively split the Virginia Republican party into rivaling carpetbagger and scalawag camps with most of the freedmen supporting federal occupation and Wells' carpetbagger government. The disaffected Republicans, which Mahone may have been counted in with their numbers, naturally looked to form a coalition with centrist Conservatives to oust Wells and end Federal occupation.
Mahone’s consolidation plan, but because he did so for his own personal gain.\textsuperscript{43}

In December, 1868, Mahone joined Virginia’s political leadership in Richmond. On the last day of the year he accepted an offer to lend his political support to a “Committee of Nine.” The committee, led by moderate Conservatives, traveled to Washington to persuade Congressional leaders into allowing Virginians to vote separately on the various clauses of their newly proposed “Underwood Constitution.”\textsuperscript{44}

The “Committee of Nine” spent weeks lobbying the Congress even utilizing the support of some leading Republicans owing to Mahone’s connections. On April 7, 1869, President Grant recommended to Congress

\textsuperscript{43} For Mahone’s views of Wells see the Richmond \textit{Enquirer}, March 11, 1869. As for Wells, he allegedly had been approached by agents from the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and was asked to affect the sale of the state’s shares in the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad. In return he would receive compensation personally with newly issued shares of the former line by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Thus in effect Wells stood to gain personally from the sale of Virginia’s state interest. The plan blew up on Wells after he approached George Rye, the State Treasurer, and asked him to sanction the sale. Rather than approve the deal, however, Rye went straight to the press. For full details see Eckenrode, \textit{Political History of Virginia}, 109-118.

\textsuperscript{44} The proposed constitution, known as the Underwood Constitution for John C. Underwood a Federal judge in Virginia, contained several separate clauses. While Virginians were largely prepared to accept a universal suffrage clause legalizing the enfranchisement of freedmen, a state school system clause that called for mandatory funding and attendance, and several other more progressive clauses, they refused to accept the constitution because of a clause that would have continued to disfranchise former Confederates, mostly those that served in the Confederate government. Thus a compromise agreement was sought whereby Virginians would vote separately on the clauses, and thereby effectively accept all parts of the constitution except the Confederate disfranchisement clause.
“that Virginia be authorized to vote separately on the general body of the [Underwood] constitution.”45 In turn, three days later Congress authorized Virginia to hold an election on Grant’s terms. Thus, Virginians were given the unique opportunity to re-enter the Union under the auspices of “white Conservatives and moderate white Republicans.”46

As news reached the Old Dominion that they received Federal approval and clearance to hold a July 6, 1869, referendum on the Underwood Constitution, Mahone and other moderate Republicans realized they were on a political island. While they had been instrumental in helping pave the way toward the apparent end of Federal occupation, their separation from Wells left them without much popular support or a political base. Mahone had traveled the state enough to know that most white Virginians sided with the Conservatives, whereas most newly emancipated and civilly emasculated blacks sided with the Republican Reconstruction government of Wells. As he had done so effectively in the past, Mahone looked to the flanks to reposition himself and his allies.

To coincide with the vote on the Underwood Constitution, President Grant had also called for the election of state officials. Mahone determined to move


46 Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 1. Virginia would approve all of the clauses of the Underwood Constitution except the Confederate disfranchisement clause and thus passed the new constitution for Virginia. It was the commonwealth’s fifth constitution. Thus Virginia re-entered the Union in January 1870 and, unlike many other southern states, avoided a protracted Federal occupation.
immediately to the right in an effort to curry favor with the Conservatives. Though he little cared for their racist, Redeemer policies or rhetoric, he realized that he had to first insure that Wells and his northern railroad backers would be defeated in the upcoming election lest his own railroad or vision for a future Virginia be lost.\textsuperscript{47}

Because of his position as a leading railroad man and his previous willingness to work with the “Committee of Nine,” Mahone secured for himself a voice at the Conservative convention. Mahone and moderate Republicans, or “True Republicans” as they styled themselves, along with moderate Conservatives, called for the nomination of Gilbert C. Walker, himself “a little known but moderate carpetbagger.”\textsuperscript{48} If they were to receive any of the white vote of the Valley and Southwest Virginia necessary to win the election, they reasoned, then they had to nominate a man more aligned with the political center. Ultra Conservatives, however, balked at the Walker nomination. They chose instead Robert E. Withers. Withers had long voiced strong opposition to the Underwood Constitution as being too progressive and permissive and thus he well represented the views of the far right.\textsuperscript{49}

With the Conservative schism, Mahone received more disheartening news. His Valley sources reported that “Barbour [of the Orange and Alexandria] and the Baltimore and Ohio people are getting ready to go it

\textsuperscript{47} Blake, \textit{William Mahone}, 108.


\textsuperscript{49} Richmond \textit{Enquirer}, May 9, 1869.
strong for Wells." Mahone quickly passed the information along to the moderate Conservatives and asked them to again caucus privately with the ultra Conservatives. He also asked them to stress to their constituents that the support that Wells had with the traditionally anti-Eastern Shore and Tidewater folks from the Valley and Southwest was strong but not impenetrable, and if they moved in concert with one another to the center behind Walker all was not lost.51

Accepting reason and in an effort to avoid ultimate defeat, Withers withdrew his nomination and fell in line behind Walker. The move had been applauded by much of the state's press. "The Convention did, in our opinion, the wisest thing it could have done in the circumstances by which it was surrounded," said the Staunton Spectator. "The fact that all classes of Conservatives can now act together for the good of the State," added the Charlottesville Chronicle, "is a matter of congratulation." Even the Fredericksburg Virginia Herald that had opposed fusion of any kind counseled, "Let us then close ranks... and rising to the importance of the occasion, quit ourselves like intelligent men."52

With fusion of the two parties complete, Mahone immediately sent the "True Republicans" with John F. Lewis, Walker's running mate (and by no

50 Letter of R. F. Walker to William Mahone, May 17, 1869, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 1, 7, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

51 Eckenrode, Political History of Virginia, 123-124.

52 All taken from the Richmond Whig, May 5, 1869.
coincidence a Shenandoah Valley man], to stump the western part of the state while concurrently calling upon the Conservatives to rally their eastern base. Mahone himself appealed to older Republican leaders as well as members of the black community in Norfolk and Petersburg in support of Walker.53

As the election drew closer, there were few in Virginia who failed to recognize the driving force behind Walker's campaign. "To those who look beneath the surface of political affairs," wrote a Richmond journal, "it is perfectly apparent that General Mahone is the life and soul of the Walker ticket."54 Yet even beyond Mahone's tireless energy, he also provided Walker with financial support. One Petersburg paper went so far as to report that Mahone had contributed a $1,000 to Walker's campaign. Further, Mahone even jokingly offered Walker his residence while he was away stumping in Lynchburg. "I would say make my House yr. Headquarters—but maybe it might loose [sic] you a vote."55

When the votes were counted after the July election, it appeared that Walker could have afforded to spend several nights at Mahone's as he had

53 Richmond _Whig_, July 6, 1869; Blake, _William Mahone_, 106-108.

54 Richmond _Evening State Journal_, May 5, 1869.

55 Letter of William Mahone to Gilbert C. Walker, May 8, 1869, Letterbooks, Volume 14, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections. Mahone apparently was alluding to the fact that his wife Otelia had little use or love for politics hence Mahone's joke that any stay at their homestead might cost Walker her vote. _Petersburg Daily Express_, June 5, 1869.
won by a rather comfortable vote margin. The Underwood Constitution, too, passed thereby leaving Mahone with the satisfaction of knowing that two potential attacks on his railroad and native homeland had been thwarted. Moreover, because the election was celebrated by Conservatives across the state because of their new supermajorities in both houses, Mahone had successfully positioned himself in the solid political center by proving he could draw support from moderates in the middle as well as from both political flanks.5

Later that year in October, the Conservative dominated General Assembly convened in Richmond and ratified both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution and thus completed the requisite steps for the state's re-admittance to the Union which President Grant, in turn, approved on January 26, 1870. "In the Union at last," wrote a former student of Mahone's, "[now] for the new regime in the Old Dominion. Effete politicians of obsolete ideas must give place to wide-awake men thoroughly imbued with the progressive spirit of the times. My only regret is, that we have so few men in the State of your energetic & enterprising nature, indomitable will and strong, practical sense to urge the machine forward upon its new career."57

56 The election results were 119,535 for Walker to 101,204 for Wells. For results see Richmond Whig, July 17 and 21, 1869.

57 Letter of John Mayo to William Mahone, Correspondence, Box 2, Folder 3, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Richmond Whig, October 6, 1869, October 9, 1869, and January 27, 1870.
The fawning letter sent to Mahone illustrates well his infectious, positive energy and spirit that had been sorely lacking among Virginia's citizens following the war. Whether the people of the Old Dominion applauded or reviled his politics or business decisions as progressive and positive or misguided and poor mattered less than the fact that they could all agree that his leadership and workaday ethic embodied hope at a time when it was most needed. Like the troops that followed him across many bloody fields, Virginians writ large, too, seemed poised to follow Mahone's lead in the wake of the withdrawal of General Edward R. S. Canby's Federal troops and an end to the humiliation that had been occupation and reconstruction.\textsuperscript{58}

With the restoration of the Old Dominion complete, Virginians could resume their embattled discussion over railroad consolidation. While the business interests of the Baltimore and Ohio and Orange and Alexandria Railroads suffered a serious setback with the Walker election, they were little prepared to give up the fight. It should be noted that while Mahone's Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad had been given the legislative backing under the Southside Consolidation Act in April, 1867 as previously stated, it had since "become inoperative" because of "financial technicalities" associated with the Wells administration. Thus began for Mahone what a later editor

\textsuperscript{58} Canby, a Kentuckian known more for his administrative ability than his battlefield prowess, had been in charge of Military District Number One until Grant ordered the withdrawal of Federal forces from Virginia in conjunction with the state's return to the Union.
called "the most terrific legislative railroad fight ever known in the history of Virginia." 59

Parties both for and against consolidation cast verbal and editorial aspersions at one another over the unprecedented and unparalleled lobbying efforts then ongoing in Richmond. "[W]hen men who have failed Virginia in every hour of trial," said the pro-consolidation Richmond Whig with reference to the Baltimore and Ohio and Orange and Alexandria Railroads, "dare now assail her at her vital points, why should the true sons of the old Commonwealth hesitate to summon to her rescue those who have been, who are, and who will be, steadfast to her interests?" 60

As editors and lobbyists sparred rhetorically with one another through the spring of 1870, friends of Mahone and consolidation had more than words on their side; they had statistics. In the nearly three years that the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio were under the former general's direction, the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad reported nearly a 150 percent gain in operating profits, the South Side Railroad nearly a 250 percent gain, and the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad a 100 percent gain. Further, where the individual railroads had transported freight "at an average of three cents per ton per mile" prior to Mahone's direction, they were able to report "an average of between five and eight cents per ton per mile" after he took control. "Results

59 Richmond Dispatch, October 9, 1895. Quoted in Blake, William Mahone, 11.

60 Richmond Whig, March 22, 1870.
will vindicate, and ought to stimulate,” declared the Richmond Whig, “the practical theory of consolidated railroad management.”

While the debate raged, Mahone, decidedly out of character for himself, steered clear of entering the fray personally. Whether content to let his managerial results speak for themselves or whether he enabled others to play the political hack for him is difficult to determine. We can be sure, nonetheless, that correspondence shows he had been in constant contact with his sources in Richmond.

After consideration of the arguments, Virginia’s General Assembly moved quickly in the summer of 1870 to approve of the consolidation. On June 3, the Virginia Senate approved its Bill Number 75, “An Act to authorize the formation of the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad Company.” Four days later the bill moved successfully through Virginia’s House thus formally organizing the A., M., and O. Railroad Company.

The approved consolidation met with great satisfaction in most areas of the state. “We congratulate the people of Virginia on this triumph of Virginia interests,” wrote the Richmond Whig, “gained under the masterly leadership

61 Richmond Whig, March 5, 1870; Blake, William Mahone, 113.

62 Numerous letters to Mahone indicate that he was continuously abreast of the legislative calendar and where the consolidation legislation stood throughout the process. See Correspondence, Box 2, Folders 3-6, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

of that consummate railroad chief, who in peace as in war seems to be invincible. On June 8, 1870, a Petersburg paper headline announced a torchlight procession to be held downtown in celebration of "Virginia Railroads, Run by Virginians in the interest of Virginia." Norfolk, too, called for a celebration that same evening with a planned fireworks display. Before the illuminations began in front of Mahone's railroad office, several speeches were made in his honor. "Heaven and earth . . . were moved to defeat the [opposition], but, [with the] thanks . . . to General Mahone, the king of railroad managers, we have been able to rout the enemy and achieve a victory as great as the celebrated fight of the Crater."

Yet, while the fireworks and plaudits surely must have uplifted and warmed the general's heart and enabled him to look confidently to a new decade and new direction for Virginia in the early 1870s, hardly could he have imagined or known the financial and political difficulties that lay further down the track for him in his attempt to maintain Virginia's republican structure of governance, especially in the face of an unfettered system of free enterprise and racial animosity.

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64 Richmond Whig, June 8, 1870.

65 Scrapbook 3, Box 207, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

66 Burton, History of Norfolk, 135.
In 1870, with Virginia fully restored to the Union and its external problems seemingly settled, the Old Dominion's citizens looked to their newly-elected Conservative Party leaders to address long-standing problems like political party reorganization, race and class relations and definitions in a post-Appomattox world, and ways to revitalize the soils and status of their economic well-being. Because many of the elected officials had been former patricians, "the progressive spirit of the age" failed to assail most men as it had Mahone, and thereby proved to be decidedly wanting for the commonwealth's masses.  

While the war had laid waste to the plantation system to be sure, it did little to dampen the hopes of Virginia's antebellum leaders. After an initial period of psychological and economic adjustment, they began to rebuild. With the Federal troops gone, they were confident in their ability to re-establish the social order as it had been before the war, and, most importantly, they still maintained a monopoly on that most sacred of Virginia's natural rights and gentlemanly political motivations: property and the rights of property owners.

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Adam Smith found as many friends in Mahone’s Virginia as he had in Jefferson’s. Men like George Frederick Holmes, the noted postbellum professor of political economy at the University of Virginia, believed that embedded in nature were certain economic laws that required men to extract their livelihood from an unrelenting wilderness. It required men to be as thrifty as it did them being practical. While Holmes’ beliefs stopped short of those that celebrated greed and luxury like Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees: Private Vices, Publick Benefits* had on Founding men like Hamilton, they did share the belief that the nation prospered—economically, socially, and otherwise—in direct correlation to that of each of its citizens. Therefore, the accumulation of wealth and property was a positive good, especially when government enabled it to develop on its own free market will rather than through the “negative hand” of mixed enterprise or regulation.²

“The individual should be protected at all hazards, and at any cost,” noted the editor of the *Southern Planter and Farmer*, “but when it proceeds to meddle with his business . . . it becomes odious and tyrannical.”³ Opinions like these reigned particularly supreme for Virginians in the immediate post-war period when they faced Radical Republican rule and when they were

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² For insight into Holmes’ political economy and social theory see Faust, *Sacred Circle*, and Neal C. Gillespie, *The Collapse of Orthodoxy: The Intellectual Ordeal of George Frederick Holmes* (Charlottesville, 1972). For a review of Mandeville’s *Fable of the Bees* see chapter one of this dissertation.

³ *Southern Planter and Farmer*, August, 1872, 487.
forced to follow the “tyrannical” dictates of the moneyed elements of the North.

Because most all Virginians believed that the commonwealth should be run (and some would even say owned) by Virginians, it only made sense that they celebrated the previously mentioned parades and illuminations in the wake of “General Mahone’s” railroad consolidation victory over the “Bucktail” interests of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Put differently, most of the Old Dominion’s leaders had such “a keen sense of duty that each strove to perform for his company and his state.” Mahone himself referred to the said keen sense of duty—political and otherwise—subscribed to by political men of his age as “my high mission in the development of Virginia.”

As former planters began to rent much of their holdings or even sell outright their poorer pieces of property, they invested the proceeds in new farming implements. They also devoted time and capital to improved agricultural techniques like those trumpeted and tilled by Edmund Ruffin, Virginia’s long-time agricultural reformer.

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4 “1st Annual Report of the President and Directors of the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad Company,” Subject Files, Box 201, Folder 7, Mahone Papers, Perkijns Library Special Collections; Maury Klein, “Southern Railroad Leaders, 1865-1893: Identities and Ideologies,” Business History Review 42 (Autumn, 1968), 298. It may be also worth noting here that Mahone’s contribution to the defense of the commonwealth during the war must truly have had a profound impact on the Virginians. There is an overwhelming amount of official correspondence in “the Hero of the Crater’s” papers, even into the 1890s after having served as Senator, that utilizes “Genl. Wm. Mahone” as the chosen form of honorifics.

5 W. M. Matthew, Edmund Ruffin and the Crisis of Slavery in the Old South: The Failure of Agricultural Reform (Athens, 1988), 2-11; Edmund
Yet, many former planters left their farms and plantations altogether and entered the new professional world populated by doctors, bankers, factory owners, and mortgage brokers. While there had always been an urban elite, the exodus from farm to firm had a profound impact on Virginia's social structure, even if it were less recognizable in the immediate post-war period.\(^6\)

Following the Federal's retreat from Reconstruction, the Old Dominion's leadership tried to regain control of the state's highest elected office thereby wiping away all remaining vestiges of Radical rule. In the campaign of 1873, with a national economic crisis in the offing, James Lawson Kemper received the nomination of the Democratic (Conservative) party. A former brigadier under Longstreet like Mahone, Kemper held the popular interest of the people. As a moderate and a man that still suffered from wounds that he received at the head of one of Pickett's brigades during the infamous July 3, 1863, Gettysburg charge, the native Virginian had wide cross-over appeal to the moderate Republicans within the scalawag wing of their party, if less so the carpetbagger caucus.\(^7\)

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\(^7\) Letter of W. W. Crump to William Mahone, October 21, 1873, Correspondence, Volume 20, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Also see Harold R. Woodward, *Major General James Lawson*.
While correspondence suggests that Mahone personally favored the Republican candidate Robert W. Hughes, also a native Virginian, he had little with which to dislike about Kemper and his moderate views. Further, Mahone was politically astute enough to recognize and understand that Kemper's campaign "felt not the slightest uneasiness about his election." In November, 1873, despite having to deal directly with a financial meltdown regarding his A, M & O Railroad, Mahone helped a second consecutive Conservative candidate gain the office of the governor. Further, for Virginia's conservatives, the election of Kemper marked the beginning of full redemption.

Earlier in September, 1873, the collapse of Jay Cooke's Banking Firm precipitated a freefall in the economy. Hitting the railroad industry the hardest, then the second largest employer in the country, it caused Wall Street to suspend trading for ten days. Its effects rippled through the country for nearly six years precipitating the failure of some 18,000 businesses as

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8 Letter of W. W. Crump to William Mahone, October 21, 1873, Correspondence, Volume 20, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

9 While the removal of the Federal troops marked the end of Radical Reconstruction, conservatives, known more caustically as Redeemers or Bourbons, had to wait until they regained political power before they could celebrate full redemption and a return to antebellum rule.
well as numerous strikes and armed clashes between government troops and workers.\textsuperscript{10}

While the timing of the panic may simply have been bad luck for governor-elect Kemper, it was devastating for Mahone. In December, he issued a circular to the personnel of the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Railroad that called for the immediate "reduction of expenses . . . [to include] a reduction of not only its force but of the compensation to those who are retained."\textsuperscript{11} Mahone's lay-offs added to the near 14 percent unemployment rate nationally and further alerted bondholders to the potential danger of an interruption to their interest payments from the A, M & O.

Little did Mahone realize at the time, but as he notified the agents for the bondholders in New York and London that the A, M & O would be "unable to meet its interest payments [as early as] January 1, 1874," that they, along with combinations from the Baltimore and Ohio and Orange and Alexandria Railroads, were in talks with one another. They discussed the financial position of Mahone's road as well as the potential acquisition of it should it fall into receivership as so many other railroads had during the period throughout the country.\textsuperscript{12}


\textsuperscript{11} Scrapbooks, Box 207, Vol. 3, 34, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{12} Blake, \textit{William Mahone}, 127-128.
By the end of 1874, the cost-cutting measures decidedly helped the A, M, & O's financials. Yet, prospects continued to remain low for Mahone to resume interest payments because the line was still operating in the red, with little hope of further financial backing. The situation for Virginia's citizens proved little better. In addition to the scarcity of work, the Conservatives under Kemper had begun to roll back some of the democratic gains made with the adoption of the Underwood Constitution. The House of Delegates had their number of elected seats reduced to 100. Moreover, and most damaging given the economic climate, the Conservative dominated General Assembly passed measures that reestablished the payment of poll taxes as a perquisite for voting.  

Throughout much of 1875, Mahone kept John Collinson, the London agent for the English bondholders, well-informed of the financial situation of the railroad. As stated previously, however, Mahone's reports were merely providing fodder for his own ultimate demise as Collinson and the English bondholders had designs of their own. Mahone even went so far as to travel to London in October of 1875 to shore up support and ask for continued forbearance.  

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14 Letter of John Collinson to the Bondholders of the Consolidated Mortgage Loan of the Atlantic, Mississippi and Ohio Rail Road Company,
In early March, however, Mahone's time ran out as he received notification from John Collinson that "the Bondholders . . . cannot endorse the [A, M & O's] present policy . . . and hereby resign such agency."\(^{15}\) While Mahone knew time had always been his biggest enemy, only then, especially after reaching an agreement with Collinson face-to-face several weeks before, did he realize the duplicity of the London agent. "The British went back on us," wrote Mahone, "I made a settlement with them of all our matters, and while we were earnestly at work to carry it out, they broke it up and went secretly to work." Less than three months later, brokers from New York and London placed Mahone's Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad in receivership.\(^{16}\)

While Mahone could hardly have known what combinations actually brought about his demise, he held Collinson personally responsible. He unleashed his invective on Collinson in the form of a 50 page addendum to the London agent’s claim that the road failed to meet its obligations because

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September 28, 1875, Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 7, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\(^{15}\) Letter of John Collinson to William Mahone, March 6, 1876, Correspondence, Box 7, Folder 3, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\(^{16}\) Letter of William Mahone to H. H. Riddleberger, March 26, 1876, Letterbooks, Vol. 22, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; The A, M & O went into receivership on June 13, 1876, and while Mahone tried to maintain control of the road as a receiver, his efforts met with little success.
of “mismanagement on the part of [Mahone].”

"During the fiscal year, terminating in 1875" Mahone wrote, "it is officially ascertained that 41 percent, or over $700,000,000 of bond indebtedness of American railways, failed to pay interest." He continued by correcting what Collinson led some to believe was a southern sectional issue. "One would . . . imagine that this default was principally at the South . . . but statistics do not so show. Nearly fifty of the roads in the hands of Receivers are located in the Northern states . . . Can it be mismanagement that has reduced this number of American roads to such a poor condition?"

Before Mahone's reply turned decidedly personal against the character of Collinson who he said had "deliberately manufactured a libel for the purpose of magnifying his services . . . while attempt[ing] to effect a conspiracy," he attributed the railroad's receivership on the "undue expansion of the railway system." Wall Street's stock-jobbing spurred further wildcat spending on the rail lines and overcapacity led to financial losses and outright financial panic in 1873. Mahone's closing remarks also revealed both his dejection and despair as well as his motivation for the development of the line from the first:

17 "A Reply to John Collinson's Report to the Consolidated Bondholders of the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Rail Road Co," Subject Files, Box 201, Folder 7, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

18 "A Reply to John Collinson's Report to the Consolidated Bondholders of the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Rail Road Co," Subject Files, Box 201, Folder 7, 47-48, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
"Years ago, I foresaw that fortunes, if not the very life, of the three roads... depended upon unification of management... To the accomplishment of that result, and to make it a success, I have devoted the best years of my life, believing that there was no other field of development which promised to even compare with this in the great and lasting benefits which it would confer upon my native state."¹⁹

Aside from the loss of the railroad and the social and economic impact that it would have on him personally, Mahone's greatest frustration, as is apparent from the previous message he sent to the English bondholders, was with the loss of native control of the railroad and the impact that might have on Virginia's citizens. Put another way, Mahone well realized that foreign control of internal improvements almost assuredly translated into higher fares and fees, and, most important, less consideration given for the towns and people where future rail and canal routes may be laid or dug (especially in lieu of eminent domain laws or riparian rights).²⁰

However much Mahone may have disparaged foreign ownership, he must have found little more to be happy about when he turned his attention back toward Virginia's political arena. Just as Mahone found difficulty in saving his railroad from financial ruin, Kemper, too, had trouble trying to balance the state's coffers. While Mahone had remained in contact with

¹⁹ "A Reply to John Collinson's Report to the Consolidated Bondholders of the Atlantic, Mississippi & Ohio Rail Road Co," Subject Files, Box 201, Folder 7, 49-50, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

²⁰ Letter of James G. Holliday to William Mahone, March 16, 1877, Correspondence, Box 9, Folder 6, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Also see Morton Horwitz, The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860 (Cambridge, 1979).
Kemper "who frequently consulted him on various questions" throughout his own railroad ordeal, he failed to fully appreciate how far the Conservatives had pulled back from the Underwood Constitution, or "the Liberal movement of 1869." Moreover, he failed to recognize how great the state's debt issue had become.

Immediately following the war Virginia's debt stood at $38,000,000. The Old Dominion's leadership had various options to pursue relative to the debt: First, it could have suspended any action and waited for the judicial system to determine how best to handle the apportionment of debt relative to West Virginia considering that state's secession. Second, like many other southern states, it simply could have determined itself bankrupt and thus repudiated its obligations. Last, it could honor the debt and see it paid in full in order to maintain its credit-worthiness with outside financial interests.

In March, 1866, the General Assembly determined to pursue the latter course of action and assumed full responsibility for all of the debt hoping to induce a re-unification of West Virginia. Much to their chagrin, West Virginia remained disinterested in returning to its pre-war condition. With the assumption of the full amount of debt, coupled with poor crops and greatly reduced tax receipts, the legislature again had a series of considerations to

21 Blake, William Mahone, 146.

22 Richmond Whig, February 19, 1881; Scrapbooks, Box 209, Vol. 12, 11, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

make: They could repudiate West Virginia’s portion of the debt, scale the debt back relative to what their tax receipts could meet, or simply reduce the percentage of interest payments from six to four. In the end, they chose a simple reduction in the coupon rate as that seemed most in keeping with Virginia’s tradition of “meeting its full financial obligations.”

In 1870, it became quickly obvious to Virginia’s first Reconstruction General Assembly, however, that a new direction was necessary relative to the state’s debt as it had grown to $45,000,000. In trying to keep with the democratic spirit of the new constitution, the legislature passed the Funding Act. The full amount of the debt was to be subsidized in uniform coupon bonds payable from tax payments and other government receipts at the then current 4 percent rate. Further, the state passed the Railroad Act that, for all intents and purposes, wrote internal improvements companies a blank check.

Yet, for unknown reasons, the General Assembly’s plan never received adequate scrutiny. If it had, the Assembly would have realized that the state’s annual tax receipts barely covered the cost of the interest on the debt and commitments to a literary fund for public education alone, and thus failed to take into account normal operating expenses (e.g. wages, etc.. all estimated at $1,000,000 a year alone). Further, the “free railroad” policy little represented the popular will of the electorate. Rather, born out of a new era


of powerful lobbyists like those that favored Mahone's consolidation plan, it effectively led to the demise of the mixed enterprise system and opened the door for unfettered free enterprise in the Old Dominion.26

The effects of Railroad Act were felt almost immediately in the form of Mahone’s railroad consolidation fight with outside venture capital, like that backing the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Thus, whether knowingly, the General Assembly had enabled and unleashed the very free enterprise system that ultimately would cost Mahone his railroad and Virginia its republican form of governance. Put another way, as Virginians waxed hard about retaining a truly republican character and thus sought to limit the government's naturally “tyrannical, negative” hand, they soon came to realize that in the absence of that very governmental oversight—in government's inaction—a greater and more devastating leviathan took its place.

When Kemper took the Old Dominion’s helm in 1874, the state was adrift and in serious need of a new economic mainmast and rudder. The outgoing Walker administration left Kemper with empty state coffers and, in no small thanks to the Funding Act, an additional annual indebtedness to the tune of approximately one million dollars. Kemper starkly summed up Virginia’s current situation when he reported to the legislature that Virginia’s credit worthiness equaled that of “Mexico and San Domingo.” He then called

26 Pearson, Readjuster Movement in Virginia, 30-31; Blake, William Mahone, 159-160.
on the legislature to come up with a permanent plan to rectify the financial morass that Virginia was sinking.27

Despite Kemper's attempts at nullifying the Funding Act and his repeated calls for new financial policy directives, the debt ballooned alongside the state's deficit. By the summer of 1877, Virginia's citizens, black and white, had had quite enough. They began to call for change because they believed their interests were being underserved and ignored.

As early as 1874 on the heels of economic recession, Virginia's farmers began to gather into localized cooperatives called granges. Within three years their membership numbered nearly 20,000 in Virginia and even openly embraced women into their fold. Together the Grangers pressed the legislature for lower freight rates as well as regulation of the railroads via state commissioners. The General Assembly, despite the size of the movement, tended to pay little mind to the rural Grangers. Alongside the seemingly slight impact they were having on government policy and because of financial mismanagement of their own, the movement either melted away in some areas or melded into other later groups, like the Farmers' Alliance or Populists of the Gilded Age.28

Adding to the noise being made by the Grangers were those that clamored for educational funding and programs—programs required by the


Underwood Constitution. By 1873, with the aid of Dr. William Henry Ruffner, the state superintendent of education and public instruction, Virginia’s legislature began funneling cash into the state’s coffers for public instruction per the constitutional guarantees of 1869. Yet almost as quickly as the funds were set aside for education, they were pilfered by the General Assembly in an effort to pay the interest on the state debt.29

Because the Conservative-dominated leadership viewed education as mere luxury and because Virginians were “honor-bound” to pay their debt obligations, the educational fund fell into arrears to nearly $526,000 by the end of Kemper’s watch in 1877. In short, funding had been blocked, teachers went without pay, schools closed, and children were sent home, all despite the taxes for the funding being collected. While the block placed on educational funding for free public schooling bothered whites to be sure, it decidedly upset the black population who, according to their understandably very low literacy rates, stood to benefit the most.30

With the battle lost over his railroad and the political, economic, and social environment for Virginia’s citizenry in an absolute state of flux, Mahone, as he had done so many times before on the battlefield, regrouped. He decided that the best way to avert greater potential losses to foreign interests was to hold political power. He reasoned, too, that his election might

29 Blake, William Mahone, 163.

30 Pearson, Readjuster Movement, 62; Blake, William Mahone, 163-164.
provide a way to flank Collinson's position by persuading local Virginia interests as well as those from New York to allow him the opportunity to return to the controls of the Atlantic, Mississippi and Ohio Railroad.\(^{31}\)

The question for Mahone, naturally, became one of party. Long had he supported the conservative interests of Virginia by assisting in their two previous successful campaigns for governor. Yet, beyond the decided shift to the right that the party had displayed through the middle years of the 1870s, Mahone came to realize that society itself was undergoing a marked shift. While hardly in full swing, Mahone recognized the emergence of a growing middle class that had been aided, in part, by the postbellum move of Virginia's more prosperous antebellum people from their former plantations to the cities and towns. He noticed that these new middle-class professionals—the doctors, lawyers, administrators and managers, and even teachers—were creating a whole new social and political framework. They were casting a new social die for "the men who want money as well as the men who have money," and in the process were making a mirage out of the island communities that once managed their own affairs in the early nineteenth century.\(^{32}\) Thus, "where a shift in party allegiance had once been treason, it became not only possible but in some circles popular," and it

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\(^{31}\) Letter of William Vaughn to William Mahone, May 8, 1877, Correspondence, Box 10, Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\(^{32}\) Richmond Whig, March 24, 1875; See also James Tice Moore, Two Paths to the New South (Lexington, 1974), 91-92.
further opened the door to more and varied forms of interest-group politics, like the lobbyists that pushed for the passage of Mahone's railroad consolidation in the late 1860s.\footnote{Robert H. Wiebe, \textit{The Search for Order, 1877-1920} (New York, 1967), 111, 129.}

Mahone, like Jefferson before him, viewed the cultural landscape about him through a Virginia-first lens. Records of his overall personal correspondence, on balance, reveal a deep commitment to the people of his native state. They also show a desire on the part of the general to seek ways that best preserved the republican character of the small communities of the Commonwealth within the ever-emergent system of free enterprise. Mahone understood that when the railroad came to town that lives and ways of life were forever to be changed. He understood that the very commercial enlargement and development of society that his locomotives and freight cars brought with them precipitated the demise of rural communities and small towns. Yet, for Mahone, that was exactly the intended point.

Unlike Jefferson (and more like Hamilton), Mahone saw the good in advancing fully into the fourth stage of Malthusian theory. Like Frederickson and other leading Virginia intellectuals he welcomed prosperity, and desired for all the commonwealth's citizens to have it just as he had been blessed by it. With increased business activity, budgets could be balanced, and social programs advanced to their fullest measure for the largest amount of
people. No gospel of wealth would need to be written or advanced as everyone would share in the results commensurate to their own personal industry. Thus, like the perspective taken by Hamilton and other Federalists versus that of Jefferson and Madison in an earlier era, Mahone saw progress in the advancement of globalization whereas others, namely Democrats or Funders as they were later called, saw competitive threats to their competencies and therefore saw only personal decay.

It was with this in mind that Mahone contemplated a political career in 1877. His proverbial “glass is half full” mind refused to let tragedies, whether wars or railroads lost, to weigh him down. While anything but a religious man, Mahone believed that in all things there was a reason. He learned, therefore, to take his lumps as they were little more than life’s lessons and opportunities, rather than signs of self-centered and self-serving, niggardly duty and behavior.

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34 Mahone departed from Virginia’s intellectuals here as men like Frederickson fully ascribed to the “mudsill” theory of society as they believed themselves to be the only ones capable of attaining a higher moral ground from which to lead. See Faust, *A Sacred Circle* for a full discussion.

35 See chapter one of this work for greater detail on the Malthusian “four stages” theory as well as differences between Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians.

36 An excellent example of Mahone’s fighting spirit to continue to do what he believed to be true and right, despite of the opposition or odds, can be found in a letter he wrote where he stated, “they [conservatives] would try and complete the destruction [sic] of me . . . [but] I will still hunt until the day of the Convention & then open on them with such a burst as to put them on the defence.” Letter of William Mahone to James B. Hope, February 15, 1887, Letterbooks, Vol 26, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
While Mahone entered the political fray late in the campaign season in 1877 and thus knew his chances for election were slim, he used the governor's race as a way to draw distinction to the direction that he and a small coterie of friends determined would be best for the Commonwealth moving forward. Many former Republicans and a few liberal Democrats understood that many of Virginia's citizens clamored for another choice at the ballot box. They longed for a middle-of-the-road and more moderate choice in candidates or parties that represented their views as opposed to those, then in power, on the fringes of the Radical Republican or Conservative Democrat/Redeemer/Funder society. "But how are you to be Governor," wrote a friend of Mahone's in a telling letter, "that you may control the internal improvement policy and system of the State? . . . By becoming the Leader of a new party in the State to act in accord with the administration of [Presidential hopeful Rutherford B.] Hayes. . . . The South is the Democratic Party, and it is time that the Party that fought to dissolve the Union and the Party that fought to sustain it should cease to exist."37

While records indicate that Mahone considered the idea of an independent movement as evidenced by his later leadership in the Readjuster Party, he rightly reasoned that his ties to the Conservative party afforded him the best possibilities for immediate political success. To be sure he had managed to create more than his share of political liabilities during his

37 Letter of James Holladay to William Mahone, March 16, 1877, Correspondence, Box 9, Folder 5, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Moore, Two Paths to the New South, 90-91.
railroad fight as well as with his willingness to work closely with the Republican Party, but he knew he could little be challenged when it related to his concern or defense of Virginia's rights and honor. He also knew he could hardly be branded a Scalawag because of his previous aid to Conservative candidates, like Walker and Kemper. Mahone's position as a moderate, therefore, was a most comfortable and advantageous position for three important reasons: First, moderates were what Virginians wanted in their leadership. Second, he was a native Virginian and celebrated fighter and defender of the interests of Virginians. Third, and most important, it was really who he was as an individual and thus enabled him to forego any political posturing outside what it was he truly believed as an individual.

Despite Mahone's popular appeal, Democrats passed on the general in his bid for the governor's mansion. Whether Mahone believed that he had been cheated out of a nomination through "bulldozing" and "trickery" as argued by his supporters is doubtful. What is less so, however, is his break from the Conservative party following the election of Governor Frederick W. M. Holliday in 1877.38 Mahone found himself among growing numbers of friends in his ever-mounting apathy and disdain for Funders-Conservative Party men that refused to "sacrifice the honor" of Virginia in their effort to "preserve the credit of the state." Holliday's election and his future policies

38 Both Charles Pearson and Nelson Blake, in their Readjuster Movement in Virginia, 84, and William Mahone, 152-153 respectively for examples, argue that Mahone was (pardon the pun) "rail-roaded" in his efforts to gain the nomination. In the absence of hard evidence against foul play, and in lieu of Mahone's official correspondence, it appears his defeat was precipitated more by dirty politics as it ultimately underwent a fair vote.
would help reveal the cleavage that existed in the Conservative party over the debt issue. Mahone summed up well the sentiment of many Independents when he said, “No man shall cross my path on this [debt] issue, you may depend on it, and I promise to make it hot for the individual who shall so presume.”

While Governor Holliday and the legislature had passed both the McCulloch and Henkel Acts which addressed the debt and public school funding issues respectively in the first two years of his one-time, four-year term, they proved to be little different in thought or result as those during Kemper’s administration. The McCulloch Act did relieve pressure from Virginia’s accumulated interest, but it failed to make provision for disbursement of tax receipts to social programs and organizations like those found in or supported by the schools and hospitals.

“Entrenched in power . . . the Conservatives increasingly lost touch of political reality” by refusing to bend to the prevailing sentiment and emotion

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39 Letter of William Mahone to H. H. Riddleberger, August 31, 1877, Letterbooks, Vol. 27, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Pearson, Readjuster Movement in Virginia, 83-84.

40 In Mahone’s notes, presumably providing data to back up a speech, he shows the history of funding for education from three time periods, 1871, 1879, and 1882. In 1879 under Governor Holliday’s watch, the disbursements to education were lower than in 1871. The number of “school, pupils, and teachers” had all dropped since “the Liberal movement of 1869” guaranteed funding according to the Underwood Constitution. Thus it clearly shows the regressive attitude of the conservatives with respect to educational support and funding. See Subject Files, Box 198, Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
of Virginia’s electorate. Whether the Funders, like the Democrats in Fielding Mahone’s day, tried to cling to the “olde ways” or whether they really believed that their plans to retire the debt were sound, is unclear. What is more transparent, however, is the fact that the new middle-class professionals, like the Whigs of young Mahone’s day, were coming of political age. They decidedly embraced the Independent movement afoot that the “liberal, progressive, realistic, [and] cost-conscious men, unmarried to the past and hoary tradition” like Mahone represented.

Virginia seemed poised to accept a new party, a new direction, and, as one editor put it, an “honest shuffle, and a new deal.”

In an effort to address the internal political, social, and economic ills of Virginia, Mahone and the newer professional leaders of the commonwealth held antithetical views to that of the Funders. Long had the Republican Party in Virginia, largely controlled by freedmen and pre-war Whigs, embraced a more wholly democratic solution. They called for universal male suffrage, graduated taxation, the repudiation of old debts, equal access to the courts and elected bodies without respective to color or class, and state support for public education. The liberal, reform-minded Republican platform mirrored in many ways the political tenets of the party on the national level. Yet, because Virginia’s Republican party had been maintained largely through federal patronage, it garnered little support from the state’s white population, rich or

41 Moore, Two Paths to the New South, 15.
42 Wynes, Race Relations in Virginia, 15.
43 Richmond Whig, October 6, 1882.
poor, property-owner or sharecropper, and thus remained, for all intents and purposes, the party of the freedmen. As Federal (National Republican) support for the party in Virginia dried up in the wake of Virginia being "redeemed" under the Bourbons/Funders, it withered to near extinction and took with it the only real political voice Virginia's black community had ever known. It thus became incumbent upon Mahone and other future Readjuster Party leaders to re-connect to disaffected whites as well as disregarded blacks.44

From the freedmen's point of view, they vehemently opposed any kind of payment on the war debt, especially in light of the fact that most of the debt had been contracted by their former masters while they were then still enslaved. Yet, with the steady decline of the Republican Party after 1873, they remained "ineffective in politics for [nearly] a decade." African-American preachers and community leaders understood that "the only hope for them to play a conspicuous part again lay in the possibility of division in the ranks of the Conservatives."45

As Mahone met with Independent leaders to insure that "no man be sent to the Legislature who does not come up heartily and fully to our purpose--a readjustment of the debt," others began to concurrently canvass and appeal


to blacks and whites, middle-class and poor for support. 46 "The friends and
defenders of bondholders charge that the people are the cause of our
present woes," said Judge John H. Savage in support of the burgeoning
Readjuster Party. "When our ancestors bought a slave for $1000 it was
African sweat and toil that was purchased." He continued by saying that
"when a bondholder gives you $1000 for a bond, it is $1000 worth of free
white labor that he buys. Should a government that would not have black
slavery . . . [be allowed] to buy or sell white men?" 47 Mahone, too, also
canvassed for support across racial lines. "Please send me the names," he
wrote, "of such persons as you would recommend to be appointed as
canvassers, white and colored." 48

As party chairman for the Readjusters, Mahone seemed to be
everywhere. Reminiscent of his tireless nature during the defense of
Petersburg, Mahone truly believed he was engaged in an even larger and

46 Letter of William Mahone to H. H. Riddleberger, August 31, 1877,
Letterbooks, Vol. 27, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

47 Honorable John H. Savage, Speech as Delivered In the Senate and
Before the People, On the So-called Debt Question (McMinnville,
Tennessee, 1879) in Subject Files, Box 198, Folder 1, Mahone Papers,
Perkins Library Special Collections.

48 Letter of William Mahone to L. C. Parsons, September 08, 1879,
Subject Files, Box 189, Folder 6, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special
Collections.
more important fight: One to defend “the sacred principles of a Republican form of government.”

At their first formal meeting on “February 25, 1878, at the People’s Convention assembled in Mozart Hall in Richmond,” Mahone’s afternoon address outlined a plan to readjust the debt because “the State was drifting toward absolute repudiation.” He called on bondholders and taxpayers alike to accede to the policy in an effort “to avoid consequences we would all deeply regret. . . . And because I believe it is a duty we owe to the Commonwealth of Virginia.”

While in opposition to the readjustment of the debt rather than outright repudiation, the African-American community understood the argument and sought to join the Readjuster ranks. William T. Jefferson, a black delegate from New Kent County, stated in a speech given on the second day of the convention that “[w]e are for peace, and we accept the overture made to us as heartily as it is tendered, for we feel that your interests and our interests are identical.”

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49 Letter of William Mahone to H. H. Riddleberger, March 02, 1878, Letterbooks, Vol. 29, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

50 Blake, William Mahone, 174.

51 Scrapbooks, Vol. 9, 31, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

52 Scrapbooks, Vol. 9, 37, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
The Readjuster Party that formed combined blacks and whites, sharecroppers, small farmers, and middle-class professionals and distilled them together in opposition to the "Bourbon Aristocrats." Beyond the class distinctions embedded in the movement, as well as its appeal across racial lines, Mahone and other Readjusters hoped that they could restore the two-party system to the commonwealth. Never did Mahone consider the Readjusters as part of a third party revolt against the existing political structure of the Old Dominion. Rather, they were merely resuscitating and reinventing the existing Republican Party.53

The elections of 1879 were an overwhelming success for the new Readjuster Party and Mahone as they captured both houses of the General Assembly. The larger than average voter turnout and support of the African-American population aided in the victory to be sure, but an analysis of the vote is equally as revealing. The vote had fallen fairly predictably along historical lines, with the Readjusters polling strongest in the Valley, Southwest, and "black belt" counties of Southside Virginia (hence along traditional "east" versus "west" lines). Yet, they were also very strong in the townships of traditionally conservative counties of the western and northern Piedmont. "Of twenty counties selected for the heaviness of realty depreciation, fourteen went Readjuster" with black majorities in only six of them. The results, therefore, suggest that "plain white folk" were more than willing to set aside racial biases when their own economic situation was

wanting. In this case, because their property values had suffered under the Conservative leadership they voted for change.\textsuperscript{54}

Virginia's Readjuster victory also garnished attention at the national level. Congressional Republicans viewed the Readjuster victory as an opportunity to once again reestablish a footing in the Old Dominion. Further, they contemplated the development of a strategy for breaking the political hegemony of the Democratic Party within the "Solid South." In a letter from John Tyler, Jr. to President Hayes, the son of the former Virginia president explained what he believed the real relevance of the vote was for the commonwealth:

"The issue made as to the public debt was not . . . the real issue. Far from it . . . The real issue thus sought to be disguised was between those with General Mahone advocating the policy of placing the State upon the line of progressive advancement in accordance with the spirit of the age and the Nation. . . . The contest has ended in the complete overthrow of the Bourbons."\textsuperscript{55}

Perhaps of more importance with respect to politics at the national level was the fact that Virginia's Constitution still lacked the provision for the popular election of United State's Senators. Instead, Virginia's General Assembly chose their Senate representatives by ballot from the popularly

\textsuperscript{54} Pearson, \textit{Readjuster Movement in Virginia}, 130-131, map p. 129. It is worth noting here as well that the returns from the 1881 election mirrored those of 1879. Because Holliday was a staunch Funder, he spent the last two years of his tenure vetoing Readjuster legislation and thus the economic situation remained static.

\textsuperscript{55} Letter of John Tyler, Jr. to William Mahone, December 6, 1879, Correspondence, Box 17, Folder 8, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Richmond \textit{Dispatch}, November 15, 1879.
elected legislature. Because the Readjusters had won majorities in each of
the houses and because Mahone had been their unofficial party leader,
Mahone received the plurality of votes and the nomination.56

Little did anyone realize it at the time but in the wake of the election of
James Garfield, the Senate became evenly split between thirty-seven
Democrats, thirty-seven Republicans, and two independents, of which one
was Mahone. David Davis of Illinois, the other Independent, had already
pledged to caucus with the Democrats. Davis’s announcement left the
balance and control of the Senate in Mahone’s hands. Few knew for sure,
however, which way he would go considering he had liberal tendencies that
were more Republican in nature, yet he and his Readjusters had also just
backed his old respected war-time nemesis Winfield Hancock, a Democrat,
for president. Mahone, the old poker player, kept his cards close to his vest,
and, like the Union forces arrayed against him during the war, kept his
opponents guessing his next move.57

Mahone’s reluctance to declare which party he desired to caucus
caused the Senate to delay its business because they were unaware of
which party was actually in control. In an attempt to “smoke out” Mahone,
Senator Benjamin Hill from Georgia baited and patronized the freshmen
Senator and former general from the “lower rails” of Virginia society. Mahone

56 General Assembly, “Journal of the Senate,” 1879, 58; General

57 Congressional Record, 47th Cong., Special Sess. of the Senate,
1881, 22, 33, 85, 176; Richmond Whig, August 20, 1880.
responded in kind and set off a lengthy, personally vitriolic, and exceedingly sarcastic exchange between the two men. Mahone did finally reveal that he planned to side with the Republicans, but that:

"he was elected to the Senate . . . to do [Virginia's] will, not to a caucus to do its petty bidding. Virginia earned her title of the Old Dominion by the proud and independent action of her people . . . [thus] I scornfully repel for them and for myself ungracious attempts to instruct a Virginia Senator as to his duty to them and to himself."\(^{58}\)

Whatever Mahone may have been wanting in political diplomacy, he surely made up for in his straight talk and direct action. It was just his way. His language and letters also better enable us to understand why people of his day seemed to either love or hate him: They were merely matching his character in which there were few shades or shadows of gray.

His straight talk with Hill received much print in the northern papers. They praised him for his attack on the Democratic Bourbon leadership and for his commitment "to establish in Virginia 'a free suffrage, a full vote, and an honest count'" of all the people, black and white.\(^{59}\) They also looked to the new party he helped create and supported it liberally with words and dollars. Rhetorical and financial support were omnipresent because, as one fellow Republican Senator said to Mahone, "the Coming Election in Virginia [for governor] is to decide whether the issues of the war are to be considered as

\(^{58}\) Congressional Record, 47th Cong., Special Sess. of the Senate, 1881, 85. For the entire exchange between Hill and Mahone see pages 14-28, 85-97.

settled and if we are to go forward and prepare for the education of the
masses and to give our attention to the better development of the resources
of the Country, North and South. 60

As the wheels of the Federal government ground to halt when President
Garfield became incapacitated from wounds received by an assassin's
bullets and with Vice President Chester Arthur himself incapacitated from
action out of fear that any move toward succession would implicate him in
the plot, Mahone headed home to hunt Funders. 61 Because of his decision at
the Federal level to side with the Republicans, the Republican Party in
Virginia threw its entire support behind Mahone and fused with the
Readjusters in opposition to the Funders. 62

60 Letter of Warner Miller to William Mahone, August 15, 1881,
Correspondence, Box 33, Folder 4, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special
Collections. Miller was a fellow Republican Senator of Mahone's from New
York.

61 Because nearly eighty days passed between Garfield's wounding
by Charles J. Guiteau until the time of his death, this period of time when the
country drifted without a president has been called "The Eighty day Crisis."
While beyond the scope of this study, it should be mentioned that because
Arthur represented the "Stalwart" wing of the Republican Party and Garfield
the "Half-Breed" wing, he refused to step into Garfield's position out of fear
that it would look like the attempted murder had been arranged, as the
assassin Guiteau was a known Stalwart himself. Thus until Garfield passed
on September, 19 1881, the country went without any active chief executive.
While several biographies exist, a good combined work is Justis D.
Doenecke, The Presidencies of James A. Garfield & Chester A. Arthur
(Lawrence, 1981).

62 William L. Royall, The President's Realions With Senator Mahone
and Repudiation. An Attempt to Subvert the Supreme Court of the United
In the November elections the Readjuster candidate for governor, William E. Cameron, won an easy victory and thus replaced the outgoing Funder Governor Holliday. While the well-known Virginian H. H. Riddleberger quickly received the approval of the General Assembly to replace John W. Johnston in the Senate in the wake of the Cameron victory, most Readjusters were anything but well known men. In fact the "party of plain folk" that instituted the "most striking rebuff of the Democratic Party in the South since and after Reconstruction" was reflective of the popular politics of the Readjusters. Theirs was a truly grass roots effort as evidenced by the voter turnout which "nearly doubled in the four years between 1879-1883." With two Readjusters in U. S. Senate seats, Mahone had, quite literally, "doubled 'em up" yet again. In less than one full election cycle the Readjusters had captured every major political office in Virginia and stood poised, without opposition, to enact the very liberal reform promises that had swept them into power.

As promised, the Readjusters first attacked the debt question. With Governor Holliday's veto power out of the way, the Readjusters resuscitated "An Act for the Preservation of the Credit of the State," otherwise known to Virginians as the H. H. "Riddleberger Bill." What to do with West Virginia's

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65 Richmond Whig, February 16, 1882.
portion of the debt had long been a matter for the courts with little action taken or applied. The Readjusters decided that since West Virginia had formally entered the Union on June 20, 1863, that "one third of the principal and accrued interest [would be] set aside." Further, the Riddleberger Bill eliminated all various classes of existing bonds and substituted them with "new eighteen-fifty bonds," or "Riddlebergers" as they were called, "bearing three percent interest payable in lawful money." Thus, beyond the bill's bond uniformity, it provided for the compromise and balance between the taxpayer and bondholders that Mahone had outlined in his first address to the Readjuster Party in Mozart Hall some four years previous.

With the state's debt issue placed on an acceptable and manageable trajectory for all concerned parties, the Readjusters turned next to their political base. In an effort to make affordable the franchise and lend aid to the struggling sharecropper, small farmer, and aspiring middle-class entrepreneur, the Readjusters rolled back property taxes, reassessed realty values, and abolished the poll tax. To insure timely payments of the new "Riddlebergers" and to make up for the lost revenue from the reductions given to the Old Dominion's commoner, Mahone had the Readjusters turn a vengeful eye to the railroads.

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66 Pearson, *The Readjuster Movement*, 142-143.

67 Pearson, *The Readjuster Movement*, 144.
Long had the railroad connections in Virginia, with their ties to the Funders, escaped Richmond’s tax rolls. Longer still, Mahone waxed hot for a way to make the men that “stole his railroad” pay for their slight to his honor and that of his state. Readjusters aggressively pursued unpaid back taxes and cleared the court dockets of “tabled” state claims against the railroads. In less than five years under Mahone and the Readjusters, tax receipts increased from nearly $10,000,000 when Governor Cameron took office to more than $35,000,000 when he left. Thus, while the Readjusters struggled to push through a graduated income tax, they were able to produce sizable budget surpluses from corporate tax receipts.68

With the budget surpluses, the Readjusters turned their attention to long neglected social programs. The public schools were immediately funded to pay all back monies owed to teachers and administrators from the Holliday years. Further, laws were passed that enabled local school boards to also tax rail and telegraph companies so long as they retained at least 90 percent of the receipts for capital improvements and other associated school budget line items.69

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68 Subject Files, Box 205, Folder 2, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Pearson, The Readjuster Movement, 144-145.

69 While the Riddleberger Act caged most of the legal verbiage pertaining to “the Literary Fund,” the Granstaff Act opened the door for local school boards to tax corporations in support of public instruction. See General Assembly, “Acts Passed at the General Assembly,” 1881-1882, 165-167; Subject Files, Box 198, Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
Alongside the cash layouts to pay for arrearages and the empowerment of local communities to establish tax codes, the Cameron administration more than doubled appropriations for the Literary Fund. By 1882, according to Mahone’s owe figures, “$1,157,442 was injected into the public schools [black and white] versus $511,908 in 1879.” Further, the number of “schools increased to 5,587 from 2,491” in the same time-period, and with it, naturally, the number of students and teachers doubled as well.70

Having placed both of their main platform issues—the debt and the public schools—in a more than tolerable state, the Readjusters continued to pass reform legislation. They penalized heavily those that utilized convict labor. They aided veterans of the blue and the gray in their disability claims and care. Immigration was embraced and “lunatic asylums” were erected to take the mentally ill out of the prisons where “many [were] chained to walls like animals.”71 They outlawed the practice of public whippings that had long been employed by the Bourbons as a tool for poor white and black disfranchisement and restored African-American rights to office-holding and the courts.72 Readjusters (Mahone especially) also appointed black men to

70 Subject Files, Box 198, Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections. The figures appear to be part of some general notes of Mahone’s and suggests he may have planned on using them for a speech or for dissemination in general.

71 Degler, “Black and White Together,”429

72 According to Virginia statute, anyone convicted of a crime lost their right to the franchise. Therefore, Bourbons generally pushed for the conviction of crimes, however petty, as a means to regulate the vote of the “mudsills and bottom-railers.”
leading municipal positions and hired them for prevailing wages as party
canvassers and leaders.\textsuperscript{73} Taken together, the sweeping liberal, social
reforms instituted by the Readjusters reflected Mahone's belief in the spirit
and industry of the common Virginian—the same common energy and élan
that his Virginians long displayed on the battlefield. It also reflected his views
that good government insured that its people were granted equal access to
the tools that aided in their own self-improvement, like education, property,
and rights of entrepreneurship.\textsuperscript{74}

While the Funders watched their lease on power run out, they began to
look for ways to outflank Mahone and his "machine." As they toyed with the
idea of instituting the age-old political trick of adopting the opponent's
platform, they received support for their own efforts to re-brand themselves
from a most unlikely source: Mahone himself.

Shortly after the Readjusters had come to power and begun to institute
their changes in economic and social policy, Mahone had drafted a "pledge."
Candidates for elected General Assembly positions were required to sign the

\textsuperscript{73} Pearson, \textit{Readjuster Movement}, 156; Subject Files, Box 189,
Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\textsuperscript{74} Scrapbooks, Box 209, Vol. 12, 8-13, Mahone Papers, Perkins
Library Special Collections; Mahone's scrapbooks, much more so than his
letterbooks or speeches, are as revealing as they are insightful. While
Mahone never invoked the name of Thomas Jefferson, he has clippings of
Jefferson and his policy-decisions (e.g. how Jefferson approached debt
issues). Further the clippings that were pasted in the journals, as opposed to
those that remain loose, are predominantly of newspaper articles highlighting
political fights for the average Virginian (e.g. "God Save the Poor Farmer!).
They reflect in many ways Mahone's upbringing. They seem to reflect the
thoughts of someone who forgot little from where it was he came.
document stating that they would “stand by the Readjuster party and platform, and to go into caucus with Readjuster members of the Legislature.” Naturally, Mahone’s directive met with invective from leaders within his own ranks as the cry of “hypocrite” went up surrounding Mahone.75

Calling attention to the general’s rhetorical melee with Benjamin Hill on the Senate floor where the Virginian decried the pejorative effects of party caucuses and biases, Mahone’s former Readjuster founders and friends, like John E. Massey, vehemently opposed the “party boss” tactics. Moderate Democrats that had joined the “Mahone coalition of Independents,” like Frank G. Ruffin, equally castigated Mahone as a sell-out and puppet to the Republican Party Stalwarts of President Arthur. “No one can be more sensible than I am,” wrote Ruffin, “that the Democratic party, both of the State and the Union, have grievous faults,” but Mahone’s “corrupt bargain with Arthur has ended the coalition.”76

As the election of 1883 approached and the economic climate began to rebound for many Virginians (largely because of the Readjuster policies), Mahone continued to alienate former supporters as he tried desperately to forge a two-party system in Virginia. He made liberal use of the Federal


patronage as approved by President Arthur in support of his efforts to finally "put the Funder under foot." His party boss tactics, while suitable in the military, did little more than alienate and offend leading Readjuster men who "broke camp" and left the party completely.77

In 1883, the Funders re-branded themselves as Democrats both in literature and language on the campaign stump. They knew they had to distance themselves from still being identified as "Funders," "Bourbons," or "Conservatives," especially to the plain white folk of Virginia. They softened their tone and praised the Readjusters for the way they handled the debt situation as it had been a positive good for the Old Dominion. In the wake of the settlement of the debt controversy, they "speechified" their way across the state calling for the dissolution of the Readjusters. Since the party had been created as a mere coalition with a mind toward conquering the debt and in lieu of the fact that the debt issue seemed well in hand, Democrats claimed that former Independents could return home to their former party.

Democrats also began to regularly invoke the language of race as they pointed out that the Readjuster’s continued "effort to promote interracial cooperation was . . . an assault on white racial dominance."78 Democrats, therefore, in an attempt to curry support and favor from the generally politically moderate-minded middle-class professionals, even began to utilize

77 Blake, William Mahone. 218, 221.

a different kind of language they knew the middle-class most wanted to hear: 
the language of money.

As the sun began to rise on a new Gilded Age in America and as all 
vestiges of mixed enterprise disappeared with the Readjuster’s tax, stock, 
and bond reassessments of the railroads, Democrats began to relate free 
access to markets and free enterprise with questions of currency. Harkening 
back to John Locke’s correlation between intrinsic natural rights with that of 
the intrinsic value of specie, Democrats couched arguments about 
competition from market-oriented African-Americans with that of differences 
in specie in general.\textsuperscript{79} They maintained that markets for goods and services, 
like that of stocks, commodities, and bonds, naturally regulated themselves 
around inherent differences in intrinsic values, such as gold and silver over 
greenbacks, or, especially for Democrats, whites over blacks. Thus, while the 
Democrats disparaged the use of previous party labels as has been 
previously mentioned, they embraced and promoted the use of words like 
Redeemer, especially the practice of “redeeming” greenbacks for gold as a 
reflection of the material motivations of the middle and upper-middle class 
whites.\textsuperscript{80}

\textsuperscript{79} Joyce Appleby, “Locke, Liberalism, and the Natural Law of Money,” 
\textit{Past and Present} 71 (May, 1976), 67-68.

\textsuperscript{80} Michael O’Malley, “Specie and Species: Race and the Money 
Question in Nineteenth-Century America,” \textit{The American Historical Review}, 
99 (April, 1994), 386, 389; While the United States \textit{de jure} recognition and 
adoption of the gold standard would not take place until 1900, it did adopt it 
\textit{de facto} as early as 1873.
Democrats utilized the language of money as a way to call attention to African-American competition. Black freedom presented an economic threat to the intrinsic value of whiteness as well as the erosion of social mores through the continued acceptance of “Africanization” by whites and the continued “interracial democracy [that resulted from] Readjuster patronage policies.” Utilizing the race riots in Danville that occurred just days before the 1883 elections as an example, Democrats hammered home their belief that the “mixing of specie,” whether real or perceived concerning the economic ascendancy of the black race, would result in the complete erosion of the white man’s racial identity, and with it continued rioting, tumults, and the very decay of civilization.81

How much the November 3, 1883, Danville Riots impacted the results of the mid-term election is as open to interpretation today as it had been among the several editorialists in the days immediately following the unfortunate event.82 What is more certain, however, is that there was

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82 For editorial comments see the following selected sampling, each known for its own political bent and orientation: Richmond Dispatch, November 2, 4-7; Richmond Whig, November 2, 5-6; Richmond State, November 5-6, 8; Danville Bee, July 31, 2005.
overwhelming support given to the Democrats in the election as they regained clear majorities in both of the houses of the General Assembly.83

The Democrats followed up their mid-term victory two years later with another victory in the governor’s race, thereby turning the political tables on Mahone. The Democratic leadership had spent the previous two years co-opting Readjuster reforms and polishing their new Democratic brand. In the fall of 1885, they skillfully nominated Fitzhugh Lee, a moderate with solid name recognition given his record during the war as well as that of his uncle, Robert E. Lee. To bolster and balance their ticket for broader moderate appeal, the Democrats chose long-time Readjuster party leader John E. Massey, one of Mahone’s former confidantes before he, like others, bolted the party after Mahone’s caucus pledge and patronage tactics. They were further reinforced in their attack on the Readjusters by a rebounding economy, successful race-baiting rhetoric, and, most importantly, Democratic ascendancy at the national level in the form of Grover Cleveland. When the ballots were counted, Lee and the Democrats had completely “doubled up” Mahone by acquiring the governor’s office two years after they had captured the General Assembly. Thus, aside from Mahone’s days being numbered as a Senator, he was left to head an organization that barely resembled a

83 Scrapbooks, Box 216, Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Also see Vol. 31 of Mahone’s scrapbook for clippings on the results and riot.
political party. His party, like his men just prior to and after Appomattox, seemingly had melted away.\textsuperscript{84}

For months and years after the elections of 1883 and 1885, Readjusters accused the Democrats of ballot box stuffing, racial intimidation, and even having instigated the Danville Riot in the hopes of “stealing” elections as well. Democrats, in turn, simply blamed Mahone. It was “Mahoneism,” they argued, that could be blamed for the riot because “he stirred up revolt [and] made the race issue too plain and broad.”\textsuperscript{85}

Yet, for Mahone and the Readjusters, all the editorials, all the public debate, and all the legislative hearings were little going to change the fact that the Readjusters had been dealt a major blow in their rebuff by the citizens of Virginia; that their party’s rapid rise was equaled only by that of its precipitous fall. Mahone and the Readjusters were left little more than the ability to question why. They had been, after all, the party that brought resolution to the debt crisis, repaired and rebuilt the public school system, lowered taxes, abolished the poll tax and opened the franchise, favored immigration and a revenue-only protective tariff, put an end (at least

\textsuperscript{84} Scrapbooks, Box 216, Folder 2, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections; Also see in the same box Vol. 32, 5-42.

\textsuperscript{85} Frank G. Ruffin, \textit{A Reply to Gen. Mahone's Assault on the Democratic Party and the Roanoke Platform} (Richmond, 1887), 36, in the Perkins Library Special Collections at Duke University.
perceptibly) to Bourbonism, and restored Virginia to a place to which others, North and South, looked with hope toward the political future.86

It is difficult to understand in hindsight, especially given Mahone's considerable political skill, how the general could have enabled his "pledge policy" to splinter support from some of his most capable and respected captains, Republican and Democrat alike? Surely he must have known there would be fall-out in the wake of his change in tactics and more authoritarian style. Yet, whether Mahone ever recognized his mistake with regard to his pledge policy and liberal use of the patronage to place "Mahone men" in key positions (hence the "Mahoneism" label), is difficult to attain given the dearth of available records.

Perhaps the general believed that he had succeeded so well and fully by striking the enemy's flanks in the past that he simply planned his political attacks in the same way and in doing so failed to discern that on the political battlefield it was the center—not the flanks—that held the key to victory. His alienation of political moderates, therefore, concomitant with an economic recovery, enabled cracks and breaks to form in his own party lines that ultimately cost him his party, his political future, and, most importantly for Mahone, his ability to continue to defend Virginia's republican character from outside invasion.

86 "Alleged Election Outrages in Virginia and Mississippi: Speeches of Senators Sherman and Mahone Delivered in the United States Senate," July 29, 1884, 8-14, Mahone Papers, Virginia Military Institute Archives.
In the wake of Mahone's alienation of moderate and conservative Readjusters and their subsequent fusion with Funders, the former general, like so many times before in his life, found himself, his party, and his progressive political motives under siege. From the failed Readjuster political offensive in 1883 to the time of his final capitulation and passing in 1895, Mahone and his grassroots political movement, known as "Mahoneism," were repeatedly assaul ted with rhetorical charges of "Africanization." His opponents increasingly used race as a wedge issue to steer white Virginia away from its more recent and socially liberal tendencies and back toward its conservative roots. The return of political conservatives in Virginia fit well the pattern across much of the South with the emergence of Jim Crow.¹

In 1885, with Democrats in a clear majority in the Virginia General Assembly, Mahone failed to garner the necessary support for continued service as United States Senator. By a combined General Assembly vote of ninety-six to thirty-six, Virginia's elected membership chose to replace Mahone (effective March, 1887) with John W. Daniel, a Democrat and long-time political critic and opponent of Mahoneism. For Mahone, as well as

¹ Dailey, Before Jim Crow, 9-11.
Republicans and Readjusters in Virginia in general, the vote sounded the death knell for progressive, socially oriented politics and programs.  

Despite the political setback in 1885, Mahone continued to press for change for the common citizen of Virginia. During his six years in the United States Senate as a Readjuster, he "introduced eighty-six bills, seventy-six of which related to Virginia, and twenty-one of which were passed." Chief among the several appropriations he secured for Virginia were, naturally, those that addressed internal improvements needs in support of business and trade. From capital improvements for public buildings throughout the major cities of the state to river, harbor, and wharf improvements, Mahone exercised his pro-business proclivities in support of his unwavering belief in entrepreneurial advancement. Further (and as evidence of his belief in Clay's American System), he espoused protective tariffs in support of industry, particularly iron ore, while concomitantly lobbying for reductions in Federal excises on tobacco and other exportable goods. All told, his record in the United States Senate, whether via the introduction of bills or his voting record, clearly reflected his commitment to a Whig political economy as the most effective means for restoring Virginia to its once prominent place in the

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Union, and advancing progressive social policy from increased tax revenues from business.⁴

When Mahone returned to his native home in 1887, however, he faced ridicule at every turn from his political opponents. Democrats, and even some disaffected Republicans like John S. Wise, focused on the outright destruction of Mahoneism. Beyond his party boss tactics, enemies of Mahone were incensed with his association with the Republican Party, progressive policy-making, and continued support both for and from Virginia's black population. They portrayed Mahone in print as a bona fide byproduct of a "union of Judas and Cataline," a "Macbeth," and even as an "absolute Devil."⁵

Such had been the political reception and general climate for Mahone as he received the nomination for governor from the Republican Party in Virginia in 1889. Mahone well understood that he, or any Republican for that matter, stood little chance against the Democrat Party machine and their continued race-baiting and recriminatory retaliation. He understood that his opponents were as varied as they were many, from opposition dating back to his fight to consolidate Virginia's South-Side railroads in late antebellum period. Through it all, he remained politically steadfast to the ideas he believed were best for his home state and its people. He tried to educate the

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⁵ Scrap Books, Box 207, Vol. 19, 28-32, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.
“more thoughtless and gullible of [Virginia's] population” about conservative, reactionary political leaders and their attempts to “excite prejudice and fear in the hope of diverting the white working-man from casting [their] ballot for the candidate [they] honestly prefer[ed];” the candidate that best represented their interests.\(^6\) He blamed serfdom, slavery, and the ever-growing economic divide on free trade. He called for the promotion and diversification of industry and home markets as a means to “advance the welfare of the working classes, improve civilization, and promote the happiness of the people--of our [Virginia's] people.”\(^7\)

While Mahone's 1889 campaign speeches provide great insight for us today into his system of belief and the intellectual trappings of his mind, especially in his twilight years, they failed to impact enough Virginians to secure the governor’s position in Richmond. On November 5, 1889, Mahone received nearly a quarter less votes than his opponent Philip W. McKinney, and carried less a quarter of the counties in the state. Beyond marking an end to his own political career, Mahone’s defeat also marked the near collapse of the Republican Party in Virginia, as evidenced by the four score

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\(^6\) "The Vital Virginia Issues: A speech by General William Mahone, Republican Nominee for Governor of Virginia, delivered at Abingdon, Va., Sept. 23\(^{rd}\), 1889," 2-4, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

\(^7\) Ibid, 4-13.
years of Democrat domination of the office that was to follow McKinney's successful campaign.8

Over the next half decade and in ailing health, Mahone soldiered onward. Through his organizational and leadership efforts in support of both Republican and Populist Party movements, he continued push for social reform and the development of business opportunity in Virginia. He traveled frequently between Petersburg, where he performed his duties as chairman of the Republican State Committee in Virginia, and Washington. Yet, with each passing year of the 1890s, Mahone spent more time in Washington watching his health, as well as his few remaining investments, decline in strength and value.9

On October 8, 1895, William Mahone, the "Hero of the Crater" and "most influential political figure Virginia . . . produced since the days of Thomas Jefferson," finally succumbed to the stroke that had suffered a week earlier.10 A funeral procession began at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Petersburg, Virginia, and carried the general's body to nearby Blandford

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8 Richmond Dispatch, November 6, 1889. Virginia would fail to elect any other political party candidate other than a Democrat until A. Linwood Holton Jr., a Republican, was elected in 1969).

9 Records reveal that Mahone's financial interests were many and varied. They seldom approached in value that he once enjoyed as president of the Atlantic, Mississippi, and Ohio Railroad. For one example see Letter of Senator Preston B. Plumb to William Mahone, March 24, 1891, Correspondence, Box 162, Folder 1, Mahone Papers, Perkins Library Special Collections.

10 Washington Post, October 9, 1895.
Cemetery where they laid the body to rest in the Mahone mausoleum. Unlike other former Confederate generals, like James Longstreet, who were disparaged for decades after the war because of their support for the Republican Party, the United Daughters of the Confederacy honored Mahone as they erected a monument "To the memory of William Mahone, Major General, C.S.A." in July 1927. The plain design of the monument, symbolic of the simple man inscribed on its base, stands on the Crater Battlefield in Petersburg, Virginia, very near the site that earned him his lasting and eternal fame.¹¹

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