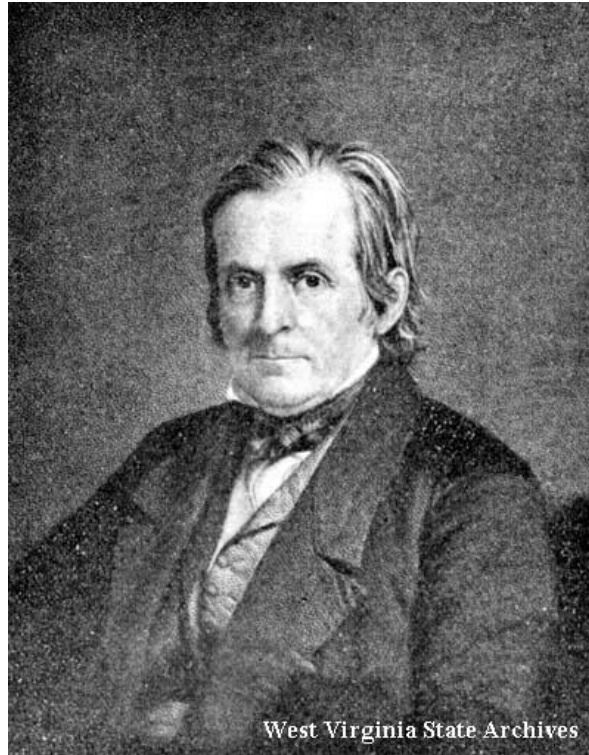


ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY DECEMBER 17



Henry Ruffner, minister, educator and author of the anti-slavery publication *Address to the People of West Virginia*, died in Malden on December 17, 1861.

CSO: SS.8.21, SS.8.22, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (*Address to the People of West Virginia*, 1847, RB 326 R924 PAM)

1. What matter does Henry Ruffner call forth that cites inequalities pertaining to East Virginia and West Virginia?
2. Did the slave-holding powers reside East or West of the Appalachian Mountains?
3. What resolution was introduced to the Legislature in 1832 following the slave insurrection?
4. In Ruffner's Address, he offers a list of suggestions that he trusts will relieve the minds of those feeling apprehension about Western Virginia abolishing slavery. How many years does he state it will take for the anti-slavery legislation to begin its "practical operation?"
5. What fraction of the population does Ruffner cite that slaves accounted for in Western Virginia?

Think Critically: What do you think Henry Ruffner's motivation was for delivering this address? Did he care about the abolishment of slavery or did he want to provide more paying jobs for white workers? Both? Describe the economic and political tensions between the people of western and eastern Virginia.

X FOR GENERAL CIRCULATION.

ADDRESS

TO THE

PEOPLE

OF

WEST VIRGINIA;

SHEWING THAT

SLAVERY IS INJURIOUS TO THE PUBLIC WELFARE, AND
THAT IT MAY BE GRADUALLY ABOLISHED, WITH-
OUT DETRIMENT TO THE RIGHTS AND IN-
TERESTS OF SLAVEHOLDERS.

BY A SLAVEHOLDER OF WEST VIRGINIA.

LEXINGTON:

PRINTED BY R. C. NOEL,

1847.



CORRESPONDENCE.

LEXINGTON, VA., SEPT. 1st, 1847.

Dear Sir :

The undersigned believing that the argument recently delivered by you in the Franklin Society, in favor of the removal of the negro population from Western Virginia, was not only able but unanswerable; and that its publication will tend to bring the public mind to a correct conclusion on that momentous question; request that you will furnish us with a full statement of that argument for the press.

We cannot expect that you will now be able to furnish us with the speech precisely as it was delivered, nor is it our wish that you shall confine yourself strictly to the views then expressed. Our desire is to have the whole argument in favor of the proposition, presented to the public, in a perspicuous and condensed form. And believing that your views were not only forcible but conclusive, and that they were presented in a shape, which cannot give just cause of offence to even those who are most fastidious and excitable on all subjects having any connexion with the subject of slavery, we trust that you will be disposed cheerfully to comply with our request above expressed.

Very Respectfully,

Your ob't serv'ts,

S. McD. MOORE,
JOHN LETCHER,
DAVID P. CURRY,
JAMES G. HAMILTON,
GEORGE A. BAKER,
J. H. LACY,
JOHN ECHOLS,
JAMES R. JORDAN,
JACOB FULLER, Jr.,
D. E. MOORE.
JOHN W. FULLER.

The Rev. HENRY RUFFNER, D. D.

LEXINGTON, VA., September 4th, 1847.

To Messrs. Moore, Letcher, &c.,

GENTLEMEN :

Though long opposed in feeling to the perpetuation of slavery, yet like others I felt no call to immediate action to promote its removal,

until the close of the important debate in the Franklin Society, to which your letter alludes. The arguments delivered by several of yourselves, and the results of my own examination of facts, so impressed my mind with the importance of the subject to the welfare of the country, that I proceeded immediately to write out an argument in favor of a gradual removal of slavery from my native soil, our dear West Virginia; and intended in some way to present it to the consideration of my fellow-citizens. Some months ago you privately signified a desire that it might be printed, and have now formally made the request.

I cheerfully comply, so far as this, in the first instance, that I will prepare for the press an Address to the Citizens of West Virginia, comprising the substance of the argument as delivered by me, enriched and strengthened by some of the impressive views exhibited by several of yourselves. Within the limits of a moderately sized pamphlet, it is impossible to introduce every important consideration bearing on the subject, or to do more than present the substance of the prominent facts and reasons which were more fully exhibited and illustrated by the debaters in the Society.

As we are nearly all slaveholders, and none of us approve of the principles and measures of the sect of abolitionists, we think that no man can be offended with us for offering to the people an argument, whose sole object is to show that the prosperity of our West Virginia—if not of East Virginia also,—would be promoted by removing gradually the institution of slavery, in a manner consistent with the rights and interests of slaveholders.

To the Great Being who rules the destinies of our country, I commit the issue of this important movement.

Yours,

HENRY RUFFNER.

ADDRESS

TO THE

CITIZENS OF WEST VIRGINIA.

FELLOW-CITIZENS,

Now is the time, when we of West Virginia should review our public affairs, and consider what measures are necessary and expedient to promote the welfare of ourselves and our posterity. Three years hence another census of the United States will have been completed. Then it will appear how large a majority we are of the citizens of this commonwealth, and how unjust it is that our fellow citizens of East Virginia, being a minority of the people, should be able, by means of their majority in the Legislature, to govern both East and West for their own advantage. You have striven in vain to get this inequality of representation rectified. The same legislative majority has used the power of which we complain, to make all our complaints fruitless, and to retain the ascendancy now when they represent a minority of the people, which they secured to themselves eighteen years ago, while they yet represented the majority.

You have submitted patiently, heretofore, to the refusal of the East to let West Virginia grow in political power as she has grown in population and wealth. Though you will not cease to urge your claims, you will, if necessary, still exercise this patient forbearance, until the next census shall furnish you with an argument, which cannot be resisted with any show of reason. Then—as it seems to be understood among us—you will make a final and decisive effort to obtain your just weight in the government.

That will be a critical period in your public affairs. A great end will then be gained, or a great failure will be experienced. Are you sure of success? Can you be sure of it, while the question of representation stands alone, and liable to unpropitious influences, even on our side of the Blue Ridge? We propose to strengthen this cause, by connecting with it another of equally momentous consequence—in some respects even more—to our public welfare. United they will stand; divided they may fall.

You claim the white basis of representation, on the republican

principle that *the majority shall rule*. You deny that slaves, who constitute no part of the political body, shall add political weight to their masters, either as individual voters or as a mass of citizens. But the slaveholding interest, which is supreme in the East, is also powerful in some parts of the West. Let this be considered as a *perpetual* and a *growing* interest in our part of the State, and it may throw so much weight on the side of the Eastern principle of representation, when the hour of decision comes, as to produce a compromise, and to secure to the East a part at least of what she claims on the ground of her vast slave property. But let all the West, on due consideration, conclude that slavery is a pernicious institution, and must be gradually removed; then, united in our views on all the great interests of our West Virginia, we shall meet the approaching crisis with inflexible resolution; and West Virginia can and must succeed in her approaching struggle for her rights and her prosperity.

The more you consider the subject, the more you will be convinced that both these questions—the white basis and slavery—are of vital importance, and so intimately connected, that to insure success in either, we must unite them in our discussions both among ourselves and with East Virginia. On both should our views and our policy be firmly settled, when the crisis of 1850 shall arrive.

It is not the object of this address to discuss the question of representation. We leave that subject to the abler management of those who have heretofore conducted the discussion. Yet as the success of the great measure which we shall advocate in this address, will depend much upon our obtaining a just share of representation in the Legislature, we call your attention to some facts, for the purpose of showing, that West Virginia has heretofore suffered incalculably from her weakness in the Legislature. We remind you of these things, not to excite resentful feelings, but to confirm you in your purpose to adhere inflexibly to your just claim of representation on the white basis, *without compromise*. We shall refer to two facts only, out of many that might be mentioned.

Fifty years ago, when the country beyond the Ohio began to be opened for settlement, Virginia had already been for years in full and undisputed possession of her extensive territory on this side. The country between the Alleghany and the Ohio, containing eighteen millions of acres, much of it excellent soil, and abounding in mineral wealth, was an almost unbroken wilderness, and almost inaccessible to emigrants, for want of roads through the mountains. The feeble and detached settlements applied, and for thirty years continued to apply, *almost in vain*, for legislative aid to open wagon roads from the Eastern settlements into their valleys. Let the Acts of Assembly for these thirty years of our infancy in West Virginia, be examined, and they will show how little, how *very little*, our Eastern mother was willing to do to promote the growth of her nurseling in the mountains. A few thousand dollars out of her rich treasury—very few indeed—and now and then some arrearages of taxes due from the poor settlers in the wilderness, was all that the

government could be prevailed on to advance, for the purpose of opening this extensive territory for settlement, and to accommodate its secluded inhabitants.

Now can any man doubt, that if the Legislature had, in the prosperous days of East Virginia, from 1794 to 1824, appropriated only ten or twelve thousand dollars a year to make good wagon roads through the mountain districts, that West Virginia would have increased in population and wealth far more than she did, or could do without roads? May we not affirm, that if East Virginia had pursued that just and enlightened policy, West Virginia would 20 years ago have been more populous than she was by 100,000 souls, and more wealthy in a still greater proportion? No man who has seen the effect of some lately-constructed roads, in promoting population and wealth, can doubt it. And what shows more conclusively the blindness or illiberality of this Eastern policy towards the West, is, that the public treasury would have been remunerated, fourfold at least, by the additional revenue which this early outlay for roads—had it been made—would have produced from the taxpayers of West Virginia. Here we have one notable instance of what West Virginia has suffered from her dependence on an Eastern Legislature. Though her growth in spite of Eastern neglect, has enabled her of late years to get some valuable improvements made, she is still dependent for every boon of this kind, upon the will of those Eastern people who are now a minority of the Commonwealth.

The other instance to which we intended to refer, is of still greater importance than the former. Many of you remember that in 1832, when a negro insurrection in Southampton county had filled nearly all Virginia with alarm, and made every white man think of the evils of slavery, a resolution was introduced into the Legislature, to adopt a system of gradual emancipation, by which the State might, in the course of 50 years, get rid of the evils of slavery.

Whatever may be thought of such a measure in reference to East Virginia, where the slaves are more numerous than the whites; there can be no rational doubt that in West Virginia, the measure, had it been carried 15 years ago, would by this time have wrought a most happy change in the condition and prospects of the country: and so the people of West Virginia then thought, for they were generally and warmly in favor of it, and zealously advocated it through their able and patriotic Delegates. But in spite of their efforts, it was rejected by the all powerful Eastern majority, though several Eastern Delegates joined the West in its support.

We do not censure our Eastern brethren for opposing this measure so far as their part of the State is concerned. But still, we of West Virginia must deem ourselves not only unfortunate, but aggrieved, when an Eastern majority in the Legislature debars us from obtaining measures conducive to our welfare, because these same measures may not suit the policy of East Virginia.

Though defeated for the time, the friends of gradual emancipation

were not in despair. There was a general acknowledgment of the evils of slavery; and strong hopes were entertained that, in a few years, a decided majority of the Legislature would be for ridding the country of this deleterious institution. But these hopes were sadly disappointed. East Virginia became more and more adverse, not only to emancipation in any mode or form, but to any discussion of the subject. Even in our West Virginia, though we believe no material change of sentiment has taken place, little has since been said, and nothing done, to effect an object so important to the welfare of the country.

This long silence and apparent apathy on our part, is also in some degree owing to our conscious inability to do any thing requiring Legislative action, unless East Virginia be pleased to aid us, and this we have felt certain she would not do, at any time since the debate of 1832.

But this unfavorable change of sentiment in Virginia, is due chiefly to the fanatical violence of those Northern anti-slavery men, who have been usually called ABOLITIONISTS.

The excitement in Great Britain on the subject of West Indian slavery, was caught by some enthusiasts in this country, and from that day to this some thousands of these people have been smitten with a sort of moral insanity. A malignant rage against slave-holders—denoted by bitter denunciations and unprincipled calumnies—has characterized their proceedings. Many other anti-slavery men, led on by indiscreet zeal, but actuated by purer motives, contributed to swell the torrent of denunciation, and to alarm the Southern people by incessant attempts to disturb their domestic relations, and to drive them into an immediate abolition of slavery. Southern men of all parties were indignant at this unjustifiable interference with their domestic concerns: they knew also that as the principles of the abolitionists were erroneous, so the measures which they insisted on our adopting, were rash and dangerous.

The friends of gradual emancipation soon saw that of all the ill winds that would blow upon their cause, this storm of abolitionism was the worst. They had to postpone all efforts to effect their object, until this tempest of fanaticism should spend its violence, or become less alarming. It has raged during 15 years: and now the abolitionists may boast, if they will, that they have done more in this time to rivet the chains of the slave, and to fasten the curse of slavery upon the country, than all the pro-slavery men in the world have done, or could do, in half a century. They have not, by honorable means, liberated a single slave: and they never will, by such a course of procedure as they have pursued. On the contrary, they have created new difficulties in the way of all judicious schemes of emancipation, by prejudicing the minds of slave-holders, and by compelling us to combat their false principles and rash schemes, in our rear; whilst we are facing the opposition of men, and the natural difficulties of the case, in our front.

But, fellow-citizens, shall we suffer this meddling sect of abolitionists to blind our eyes to the evils of slavery, and to tie up our hands, when the condition of the country and the welfare of ourselves and our children, summon us to immediate action? We all agree that the abolitionists shall not interfere with any policy that we may choose to adopt, in reference to our domestic relations. We repudiate all connection with themselves, their principles and their measures. All that we ask of them, is that they stand aloof, and let us and our slaves alone. One thing we feel certain of, that we can and do provide better for the welfare of our slaves, than they ever did or ever will. What have they ever done, to better the condition of the slaves whom they have enticed away from their masters? We venture to affirm, that the majority of the poor fellows who have thus been lured away, have regretted the ease and plenty which they left behind them. We are not sure that those even, who have been paraded, as abolition lions, from city to city, to tell horrible stories—the more horrible the better—about the cruelty of slaveholders—have long enjoyed as much comfort in their lying occupation, as many a contented inmate of our Southern negro-quarters has enjoyed in his slavery.

But what of all these abolition manœuvres? They are of such a character, that they disgrace the party which employs them, and disable that party to do as much mischief as they otherwise could.

Having failed in their first mode of action, by denunciatory pamphlets and newspapers and by petitions to Congress, the most violent class of abolitionists have now formed themselves into a political party, aiming to subvert the Federal Constitution, which guaranties the rights of slaveholders, and to destroy the Federal Union, which is the glory and safeguard of us all. Thus they have armed against themselves every American patriot: and what is most remarkable, they have met, from the opposite extreme, those Southern politicians and ultra-proslavery men—called chivalry and nullifiers—who so often predict and threaten a dissolution of the Union. Thus it is that extremes often meet.

Now when the ultraists on both sides have shown their colors, we may leave them to the management of the uncorrupted classes of American citizens, *who will doubtless give a good account of them all*—whilst we of West Virginia steer our course in the safe middle way, and seek to remove the plague of slavery from our limits, without incurring the charge of ultra-abolitionism on the one hand, or of ultra *proslaveryism*—or whatever it may be called—on the other. Against the one party we affirm the right of slaveholding, under present circumstances; against the other party, we affirm the expediency of removing slavery from West Virginia, and from every other State or portion of a State, in which the number of slaves is not too large.

At the same time we avow the principle, that every State, and every great division of a State, ought, in a domestic matter of such

importance to judge and act for itself. We disclaim all intention to interfere with slavery in East Virginia. We leave it to our brethren there, to choose for themselves, whether they will let the institution remain as it is, or whether they will modify it or abolish it, in one way or in another. Their slave population is relatively eight times as large as ours. The same remedy may not be expedient in such different stages of a disease. All that we ask of our Eastern brethren, in regard to this matter, is, that if West Virginia shall call for a law to remove slavery from her side of the Blue Ridge, East Virginia shall not refuse her consent, because the measure may not be palatable to herself.

Heretofore no such scheme for West Virginia only has been proposed among us; and no State has abolished slavery in one part of her territory and retained it in another. For this reason some persons may at first thought consider such a scheme as unfeasible. A State composed partly of free, and partly of slaveholding territory, may seem to present a political incongruity, and to be incapable of conducting its public affairs harmoniously. To relieve the minds of those who may feel apprehensions of this sort, we offer the following suggestions.

1. Free States and slaveholding States have, during 58 years, lived peaceably and prosperously under one Federal government. Sectional jealousies and occasional jars have occurred, but without evil consequence.

2. Nothing in the nature of the case need create difficulty, except the framing of laws that may affect the rights and interests of slaveholders. But an amendment of the constitution could easily provide for the security of slaveholders in East Virginia against all unjust legislation, arising from the power or the anti-slavery principles of the West.

3. After such an emancipation law as we propose, should be passed for West Virginia, no immediate change would take place in the institution of slavery among us; except that masters would probably choose to emancipate or remove from the State, a larger number of slaves than heretofore. As only the next generation of negroes would be entitled to emancipation, the law would not begin its practical operation for 21 years at least, and then it would operate gradually for 30 or 40 years longer, before slavery would be extinguished in West Virginia. So that for many years the actual slave interest among us would not be greatly diminished.

4. There is, and long has been, in different parts of Virginia, every degree of difference, from the least to the greatest, between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding interests of the people. In some parts, the slaves are two or three times as numerous as the whites, and the slaveholding interest overrules and absorbs every thing. In other parts, not one man in a hundred owns a slave, and the slaveholding interest is virtually nothing. In West Virginia at large, the slaves being only one-eighth of the population, and the slaveholding

population less than one-eighth of the whites, the free interest predominates nearly as much as the slave interest predominates in East Virginia: so that we have in practical operation, if not in perfection, that political incongruity of slave interest and free interest, which is feared as a consequence of the measure that we propose.

5. By allowing West Virginia her just share of representation, and, if she call for it, a law for the removal of slavery, East Virginia will do more to harmonize the feelings of the State, than she ever has done, or can do by a continued refusal. West Virginia being then secured in her essential rights and interests, will not desire a separation, nor be disposed to disturb the harmony of the Commonwealth. So far from aiding the designs of the abolitionists, either in Congress or in our Legislature, both her feelings and her interests will make her more than ever hostile to that pernicious sect.

6. If East Virginia apprehend, that the delegates from the free counties would often speak more freely about slavery matters, than she would like to hear in her central city of Richmond; let her agree to remove the seat of government to Staunton, near the centre of our territory and of our white population, and she will be free from all annoyance of this sort. West Virginia would then appear no more like a remote province of East Virginia, and be no longer subject to the disadvantage of having all measures affecting her interest, acted upon by a Legislature deliberating in the heart of East Virginia, and exposed to the powerful influence of a city and a people, whose bland manners and engaging hospitalities, are enough to turn both the hearts and the heads of us rough mountaineers, whether we be legislators or not.

Having thus removed some grounds of misapprehension and prejudice respecting our views, we shall now proceed, fellow-citizens, to lay before you some facts and arguments, which prove the expediency of abolishing slavery in West Virginia, by a gradual process, that shall not cause any inconvenience either to society in general, or to slaveholders in particular.

We use no theoretical or abstract arguments. We ground our conclusions upon facts and experience. Though the history of other ages and countries would furnish us with useful illustrations, we have not room in this address to extend our observations much beyond our own age and country. Nor is it necessary that we should; for within these limits we have abundant materials for argument,—far more than we shall be able to use on the present occasion.

No where, since time began, have the two systems of slave labor and free labor, been subjected to so fair and so decisive a trial of their effects on public prosperity, as in these United States. Here the two systems have worked side by side for ages, under such equal circumstances both political and physical, and with such ample time and opportunity for each to work out its proper effects,—that all must admit the experiment to be now complete, and the result decisive. No man of common sense, who has observed this result, can doubt