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Legislating the Danville Connection, 1847-1862: Railroads and Regionalism
versus Nationalism in the Confederate States of America

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

by

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Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	iv
Abstract.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: North Carolina and the Danville Connection, 1847-1861.....	14
Chapter Two: Virginia and the Danville Connection, 1847-1861.....	46
Chapter Three: The Confederate Congress, North Carolina, Virginia and the Danville Connection, 1861-1862.....	77
Conclusion.....	107
Bibliography.....	111

List of Figures

1. Principal Railroads in Virginia and North Carolina, 1861.....	13
2. Principal Rivers and East/West Regional Division.....	15
3. Greensboro and Vicinity.....	26
4. Virginia Railroads, 1861.....	47
5. Danville and Vicinity.....	51

Abstract

LEGISLATING THE DANVILLE CONNECTION, 1847-1862: RAILROADS AND REGIONALISM VERSUS NATIONALISM IN THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA

By Philip W. Stanley, M.A.

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2014.

Major Director: Dr. Kathryn Meier
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This thesis examines the effect regionalism had upon North Carolina and Virginia during the 1847-1862 legislative battles over the Danville, Virginia, to Greensboro, North Carolina, railroad connection. The first chapter examines the rivalry between eastern and western North Carolina for internal improvement legislation, namely westerners' wish to connect with Virginia and easterners' desire to remain economically relevant. The second chapter investigates the Tidewater region of Virginia and its battle against the Southside to create a rail connection with North Carolina. The third chapter examines the legislation for the Danville Connection during the American Civil War in the Virginia, North Carolina, and Confederate legislatures. Through an examination of voting patterns and public opinion, this thesis finds that, despite Confederate President Jefferson Davis's designation of the Danville connection as a military necessity, regionalism overcame Confederate nationalism during this instance.

Introduction

Travelers zipping along the highway connecting Danville, Virginia, to Greensboro, North Carolina, may hardly notice the railroad tracks that follow closely alongside Route 29. Though only forty miles long, the line between Danville and Greensboro was a hotly contested piece of legislation in its day. The Piedmont Railroad (PRR), now owned by Norfolk Southern Railroad Company, was established in 1862 after numerous legislative battles in Virginia and North Carolina spanning fifteen years, between 1847 and 1862. In order to prevent the isolation of Richmond from the rest of the Confederacy, the Danville Connection, as the PRR was locally known, was proposed as another route to guarantee the city's accessibility.

Richmond, with four railroads terminating within the city limits, was not necessarily isolated. The city's capture was one of the early primary objectives for a Northern victory; this required the consideration by Confederate authorities of every available option for the city's survival. Though there was already one railroad running south into North Carolina, the construction of another connection was paramount for the city's survival. It would seem that legislation for a rail connection of such vital importance to the war would quickly pass, and that North Carolina and Virginia would come together to forge this connection to improve the chances of a Southern victory. In examining the voting patterns of the antebellum legislatures of North Carolina and Virginia, however, and comparing those patterns to the Civil War legislatures of the two states, as well as the Confederate Congressional delegates, it becomes clear that voting patterns remained largely unchanged, despite Confederate President Jefferson

Davis's call for the connection as a "military necessity." Despite war the populations of Virginia and North Carolina remained steadfast in protecting their economic interests. Confederate nationalism was not strong enough to overcome regional jealousies within and between Virginia and North Carolina. Rather, the PRR bill only passed the North Carolina General Assembly because of the impending invasion of the state by Union General Ambrose Burnside. Revealed during an examination of the legislative battles over the PRR, nationalism's failure to trump regionalism is evident.

On the national level Confederate politicians spoke of sustaining the Southern way of life, protecting slavery and states' rights, and possibly dying for the cause. Regionally, local politicians and the populace concerned themselves over more personal matters, anxieties that were ingrained in the regional population's consciousness. Confederate nationalism sought to unite the Southern population in its fight against a common foe. Regionalism, so long a part of the local culture, was a deterrent to the success of nationalism. More tangent and immediate concerns trumped the required sacrifices needed for the survival of the ephemeral idea of the Confederate nation.

The story of the PRR is tied closely to the two states it would connect: North Carolina and Virginia. Both states harbored geographic and financial rivalries that influenced railroad construction. The steam-powered railroad was introduced in the United States during the mid-1820s. By the end of the 1830s, the United States boasted over 5,000 miles of line, with roughly 1,200 miles located south of the Mason-Dixon Line. North Carolina, while bitten by the railroad bug, did not construct as many railroads as did other states of the Union. Although the North Carolina legislature chartered a number of railroads by 1835, only two received funds to begin construction. This dearth of railroads, along with the generally poor state of North Carolina's

commerce, manufacturing, and agriculture, was the reason the state was dubbed the “Rip Van Winkle State” by the rest of the country. Between 1840 and 1855, however, the North Carolina General Assembly initiated a massive program of internal improvement projects. This was in part aided by a state government dominated by Whigs who advocated state sponsored projects, but Democrats, by the 1850s, supported many of the same improvement policies as the Whigs. Marc W. Kruman explained this move in Democratic beliefs, stating, “This dramatic departure reflected no marked shift in popular voting patterns, since they remained stable, but rather represented a response to changed economic circumstances and the dynamics of interparty competition in the late 1840s and early 1850s.” These improvements included the construction of asylums, public schools, canals, plank roads, and railroads. This shift in thinking was not relegated to just North Carolina. Historian Michael F. Holt found that this was a nationwide movement explained by the weakening of party organizations because of constitutional reforms as well as the economic boom following the discovery of gold in California in 1848.¹

By 1850, North Carolina contained roughly 350 miles of railroad. By 1860 the number skyrocketed to over 920 miles. Roughly 140 miles of the 1860 railroads, however, were located in the western portion of the state, with no railroads at all in the mountainous far west region. This lack of railroads in the west was indicative of a larger rivalry between the eastern and western portions of North Carolina, which stemmed from differences in culture, religion, and business. These differences, along with the fact that the west was wholly underrepresented in the General Assembly, contributed to the west’s lack of development. The west’s underrepresentation was addressed during the 1835 state constitutional convention, but by the

¹ Hugh Talmage Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State*, 3rd ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 363, 315-318; Wiley J. Williams, “Rip Van Winkle State,” NCPedia, <http://ncpedia.org/rip-van-winkle-state> (accessed 21 May, 2014); Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 55; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), 3, 13, 102-108, 112.

late 1840s there was little railroad development and the western population clamored for their own railroad access.²

Railroad development in Virginia fared far better than in North Carolina during the decades following the introduction of the steam engine and the railroad. Historian John Majewski posited that “a combination of economic necessity, local rivalry, and incipient southern nationalism fueled state railroad investment” in Virginia. Like the rest of the South, Virginia, because of the state’s plantation and slavery based economy, lacked larger cities. Railroad companies looked to the government to provide funds. Larger towns meant a quicker return on an investment, and therefore railroads were naturally built near highly populated areas, largely ignoring the sparsely populated Southside and western Virginia. Railroad companies promised expanded markets as well as additional income in the form of stock dividends. Local residents pushed politicians to partially fund the proposed railroad ventures. Support of the railroad equated to continued election for local and state officials.³

By 1860 Virginia contained the most railroad mileage of the southern states and was a railroad powerhouse. In 1840, Virginia had only 150 miles of rail. Twenty years later the state boasted over 1,700 miles of rail with most located in the eastern region of the state. Richmond and Petersburg were considered two of the premier rail centers in the country, with eight railroads converging in the cities and seven of those ultimately providing connections to every state in the Union. The rail lines also served the Norfolk region as a way station for cargo travelling to the coast. One particular railroad, the Richmond and Danville Railroad (RDRR), served much of the Southside but terminated a mere ten miles from the North Carolina border.

² Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, 380, 176-177, 354-355.

³ John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 82.

The stockholders of the company, as well as much of the Southside, hoped for an eventual connection with North Carolina via a rail line from Danville to Greensboro. Enthusiasm for this connection, dubbed the Danville Connection, was not shared by the Tidewater region, which saw the connection as competition for already established railroads.⁴

An examination of the history of the Danville Connection, the eventual PRR, reveals that the issue was unusually divisive in nature and aggravated sectional jealousies and tensions in both North Carolina and Virginia. The population of Western North Carolina and Southside Virginia clamored for a railroad to connect the two regions in order to further open up economic markets. Meanwhile, eastern North Carolina and the lower Tidewater area citizens resisted a connection because of a fear that the line would bankrupt regional railroads. Between North Carolina and Virginia there were no less than sixteen bills authorizing a connection presented to the legislatures of the two states. Due to these rivalries, legislation to create a Danville Connection was unable to pass from 1847 up until the Civil War. During the opening months of the Civil War Confederate President Jefferson Davis designated the Danville Connection a military necessity and urged the two states to permit the creation of the railroad. Despite this call from President Davis himself, Confederate nationalism was largely unable to overcome local economic interests.

The PRR has received little attention from historians aside from brief mentions in larger works. The only discussion that solely addressed the PRR in any great detail was C.K. Brown's 1926 article, "A History of the Piedmont Railroad Company." Brown traced the history of the PRR to the late 1840s, with the announcement of the RDRR and the population of western North

⁴ Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy*, 83, 101; Aaron W. Marrs, *Railroads in the Old South: Pursuing Progress in a Slave Society* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 5.

Carolina's subsequent response with a railroad of their own. Brown then jumps to the late 1850s and examines the failed attempts by delegates from western North Carolina to pass a bill for the connection between Danville and Greensboro. Brown, however, failed to investigate the numerous other bills introduced in both state legislatures that showcased the continued support of the connection in the Southside and Piedmont regions. Nor did he notice that a connection between western North Carolina and Southside Virginia did not necessarily have to be built between Danville and Greensboro. Both Brown's article and Scott Nelson's 1995 article, "The Confederacy Serves the Southern: The Construction of the Southern Railway Network, 1861-65," address the final passage of a connection between Danville and Greensboro during the American Civil War. Brown and Nelson, however, fail to notice that Jefferson Davis's call for the connection as a "military necessity" did little to sway eastern North Carolina and lower Tidewater delegates to vote for a connection. Regionalism trumped any sense of Confederate nationalism.⁵

The debate over the effectiveness of Confederate nationalism is tied closely with the idea of states' rights. The idea of states' rights was popularized by historian Frank L. Owsley in his 1925 book, *State Rights in the Confederacy*. It was used as the main impetus for the Civil War by proponents of the Lost Cause, the belief that the states' rights movement hindered rather than promoted Confederate victory in the Civil War and that the war was caused by the argument over the national government's role in state affairs rather than by slavery. Owsley wrote, "If the

⁵ C.K. Brown, "A History of the Piedmont Railroad Company," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (April 1926): 198-222. Other publications to briefly mention the PRR include John E. Clark, Jr., *Railroads in the Civil War: The Impact of Management on Victory and Defeat* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 45; Charles Lewis Price, "Railroads and Construction in North Carolina, 1865-1871" (dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1959), 82-86; and Robert C. Black III, *The Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 148-153; Scott Nelson, "The Confederacy Serves the Southern: The Construction of the Southern Railway Network, 1861-65," *Civil War History* 41, no. 3 (September 1995): 227-243. These publications, however, only examine the PRR during the Civil War. The only publication to trace the PRR's origins in any sort of depth is Brown's article.

[Confederate] leaders had been able to bury their differences as to the theory of government...it would have been almost an impossibility for the South to suffer defeat.” Though Owsley’s representation of the Confederacy as politically unstable angered many Lost Cause advocates his theory did not place any blame on the armies of the Confederacy for their defeats, thereby saving southern pride and honor. Also connected to Owsley’s thesis is the idea that Jefferson Davis was wholly ill-prepared and ill-matched to meet the demands of a war-ravaged nation. Although Owsley’s thesis was largely disproven there are instances where the defense of states’ rights was problematic for the Confederate war effort. During the fight over the Danville Connection a number of Confederate delegates equated the connection to an all-out assault on the role of the state in the Confederacy.⁶

A group of historians, influenced by Owsley’s thesis, wrote *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, which posited that the Confederacy’s loss could be attributed to one reason: the loss of will, and because of this unwillingness the South succumbed to internal influences rather than from military pressure by the Union. Richard E. Beringer and his fellow authors believed that the loss of will was clearly influenced by southern guilt over slavery initiated by clergymen who saw God’s work as evidenced by Confederate defeats on the battlefield, an argument supported by Drew Gilpin Faust. Confederate nationalism would have been able to sustain the population if the war had not dragged on for so long. As the war lengthened and the realities of the war embedded themselves in the minds of the people internal dissonance created ruptures in Confederate society that affected the will of the southern people that Confederate nationalism was wholly unable to overcome.⁷

⁶ Frank Lawrence Owsley, *State Rights in the Confederacy*, 3rd ed. (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1961), 1-2, 4.

⁷ Richard E. Beringer and others, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Georgia; London: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 439.

Drew Gilpin Faust, in her book *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, traced the conflicts in Confederate society to long-held antebellum beliefs and prejudices. Issues, such as expanded government services and higher taxation, pushed by the lower classes threatened and exposed the elitist desire to create “change without change.” According to Faust, Confederate nationalism failed to sustain the populace because of the general unwillingness of the planter elite to welcome expanded government policies that would empower the lower classes. The southern belief that the war was divinely favored on the side of the South provided a powerful impetus for Confederate nationalism. When southern clergymen viewed the defeats and hard times endured by the nation as punishment for past sins religious leaders undermined national support. Faust saw Confederate nationalism’s foundation of republicanism and evangelicalism as flawed, easily disrupted by the exigencies of war.⁸

A rich tapestry of articles and books that support the idea of the failure of Confederate nationalism exists. Historian Emory M. Thomas wrote that the founding of the Confederate nation in Montgomery personified the ideal nation according to Southern beliefs: slavery and the submission of the central government to the states. This ideal nation, however, could not withstand the realities of war, and the central government subsumed the states through slave impressments and the draft, as well as the managing of farmers’ crops. Paul D. Escott believed that as the war continued, the Confederate population increasingly hesitated to sacrifice for the good of the nation. Escott believed that the burden of supporting the war increasingly fell upon the lower classes while the aristocracy fought to protect their own interests. Historians Lawrence N. Powell and Michael S. Wayne found that planters located along the Mississippi River increasingly traded and sided with the Union as the Confederate government was unable to

⁸ Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 21, 81, 84.

protect the river. The unwillingness of the Confederate population to sacrifice for the good of the nation was a powerful force that should not be ignored.⁹

Within the past twenty years scholarship has moved away and attempted to discredit the Owsley thesis and the supposed inability of Confederate nationalism to sustain the Southern people. One of the foremost proponents for the strength of nationalism in the Confederacy is Gary W. Gallagher. In his book *The Confederate War*, Gallagher looked at diaries, letters, military correspondence, and political cartoons to conclude that Confederate nationalism was much stronger than previously thought. The fact that Confederate armies, on multiple occasions, nearly convinced the northern public that the cost of the war was too high should not be ignored, according to Gallagher. But of utmost importance to Gallagher is the question, if the war was going so badly and the Confederate nation unable to cope with its population's needs, why did the Confederate armies fight for so long? According to Gallagher, as disdain for the central government increased the hopes of the Confederate nation rose and fell with Robert E. Lee's victories and defeats. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia became the personification of the Confederacy.¹⁰

George C. Rable, in *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics*, saw Confederate nationalism as a very real and powerful movement. Calling the secession of the southern states a second American Revolution, southern politicians channeled the population's admiration for the founding fathers into enthusiasm for the newly established nation. Despite Rable's support of Confederate nationalism as a reality, the author called for moderation from both sides of the debate. A strident belief in the died-of-states'-rights theory and the failure of

⁹ Gary W. Gallagher, "Home Front and Battlefield: Some Recent Literature Relating to Virginia and the Confederacy," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 2 (April 1990): 137-139.

¹⁰ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3, 7-8, 17.

Confederate nationalism is just as misleading as an unwavering faith in placing the South's loss fully on military defeats. According to Rable, a true understanding of the reasons for the Confederacy's defeat lies in amalgamating both theories.¹¹

In her book *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South*, historian Jaime A. Martinez looked at slave impressment policies in Virginia and North Carolina at the local to the national level. Martinez found that while many upper class slave owners balked at loaning their slaves to the government most did so eventually, proving overwhelming acceptance and cooperation between the public and the government. Though slave impressment policies originated within the states, as the war dragged on local politicians looked to the Confederate government in Richmond to take the reins. Based on her discoveries Martinez does not believe that the fault of Confederate defeat should be laid on uncooperative members of the upper class. The success of the slave impressment policy hints at a higher level of cooperation between the local, state, and national governments than previously believed. The acceptance of Virginia and North Carolina to allow the construction of the Danville Connection using Confederate bonds represents the growing approval of the Confederate population to allow the national government a larger role in the economic development of the states.¹²

This thesis supports Rable's proposal that further study into the American Civil War should combine elements from both sides of the "why did the South lose the Civil War" argument. Ardent supporters of states' rights in the Confederate Congress denounced the PRR bill while regional elements in both state and national legislatures continued to vote for their interests thereby supporting Owsley and argument for the instability of the Confederate

¹¹ George C. Rable, *The Confederate Republic: A Revolution Against Politics* (Chapel Hill; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 2, 301.

¹² Jaime Amanda Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment in the Upper South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 2-3, 5, 9, 163.

government. Conversely, the eventual passage of the PRR bill by North Carolina, Virginia, and the Confederacy illustrates acceptance, grudgingly in the case of North Carolina, of the expanding central government in Richmond as described by Rable and Martinez. This thesis, however, sees the Burnside expedition on the coast of North Carolina as the primary influence on eastern delegates in the state's legislature vote for the PRR rather than any sense of nationalism. By expanding upon the historiography of inter-regional conflict within Virginia and North Carolina and the failure of Confederate nationalism to overcome these differences, the legislative battle over the Danville Connection reveals one of the many challenges facing the Confederacy: how can a newly founded nation overcome past prejudices amongst neighboring internal populations?

Regional concerns over the economy consumed the population's consciousness. Thoughts of war were pre-empted by more immediate concerns. For almost fifteen years the populations of eastern and western North Carolina and Southside and Tidewater Virginia fought over the Danville Connection. Davis's designation of the Danville Connection as a military necessity sought to instill the people of those areas with a nationalistic fervor; the fate of a region's economy should be cast aside in favor of the continuation of the Southern nation. Regionalism, ingrained in the minds of the population long before the creation of the new nation, trumped the idea that the nation was more important than the home.

This thesis will first examine the legislative battles waged over the Danville Connection in the Senate and House of Commons of North Carolina, revealing eastern representatives' reluctance to charter a rail connection with Virginia. Bills chartering a connection with Virginia emerged from both houses of the General Assembly. Influence from the eastern portion of North Carolina, however, continually blocked an actual connection with Virginia. Regionalism inherent

in the eastern and western sections of North Carolina imbued the population of each region with the belief in the righteousness of their cause whether pro- or anti-connectionist. The second chapter investigates the various bills proposed by the Virginia General Assembly and the stalling tactics initiated by delegates mainly from the lower Tidewater region against any legislation proposed by delegates from the Southside for a connection with North Carolina. Though the delaying tactics often failed and a number of bills passed the Virginia General Assembly, the General Assembly of North Carolina failed to take note of Virginia's invitations. The first two chapters illustrate the engrained regionalism inherent in both states that Confederate nationalism sought to overcome. The third and final chapter examines the passage of the PRR bill through the North Carolina and Virginia General Assemblies, as well as the Confederate States Provisional Congress. The voting patterns in two of the three legislative bodies prove that, despite President Davis's call for the railroad as a "military necessity," little changed amongst many of the delegates, and the conflicting regions of North Carolina and Virginia continued their struggle against one another. Confederate nationalism was unable to surmount the regionalism that fifteen years of continual debate between opposing regions of each state had created, and while the connection bill was eventually passed, it was only the threat of Union invasion that swayed some in the North Carolina legislature to approve the bill. This same struggle of national versus state interests would play out in other Confederate states throughout the war and is seen by many historians as contributing to the eventual fall of the Confederacy.



Figure 1: Principal Railroads in Virginia and North Carolina, 1861

Chapter One: North Carolina and the Danville Connection, 1847-1861

The Danville Connection, the forty-mile gap between Danville, Virginia, and Greensboro, North Carolina, embodied the people of western North Carolina's struggle against the east to provide proper infrastructure to improve the lives of the west's population. Most westerners believed the connection could enhance the region's economy and provide them with the means to raise their standard of living. Easterners, afraid of the diversion of goods northward into Virginia, attempted to block every attempt by westerners to create a connection. The fear of a loss of income motivated easterners to oppose the development of the Danville Connection for almost fifteen years. This fear became so ingrained in the minds of easterners that during the first year of the American Civil War, and despite the Confederate president's wish for a connection, delegates from eastern counties continued to fight against the Danville Connection

The geography of North Carolina has long contributed to the lack of development in the west. The mountainous region to the west remained dangerous. The coastal area of the state is bordered by the Outer Banks, a sliver of land that blocks the state from most coastal enterprises. The only entrances into the various sounds of North Carolina are the occasional breaks in the islands such as the Ocracoke Inlet. During the Antebellum Era Wilmington, located at the mouth of the Cape Fear River and thirty miles from the coast, remained the state's main viable port, but the trade to and from Wilmington remained miniscule. The eastern counties, settled first, developed economically into a plantation system growing cotton and tobacco, and rice in the

southern portion of the state. The eastern counties enjoyed naturally navigable rivers such as the Roanoke, the Neuse, and the Cape Fear. Further into the interior, past the Fall Line, most rivers were small with little hope of becoming navigable. Though small farms in the west grew some tobacco and cotton, most of the population of the western counties was employed in subsistence farming.¹

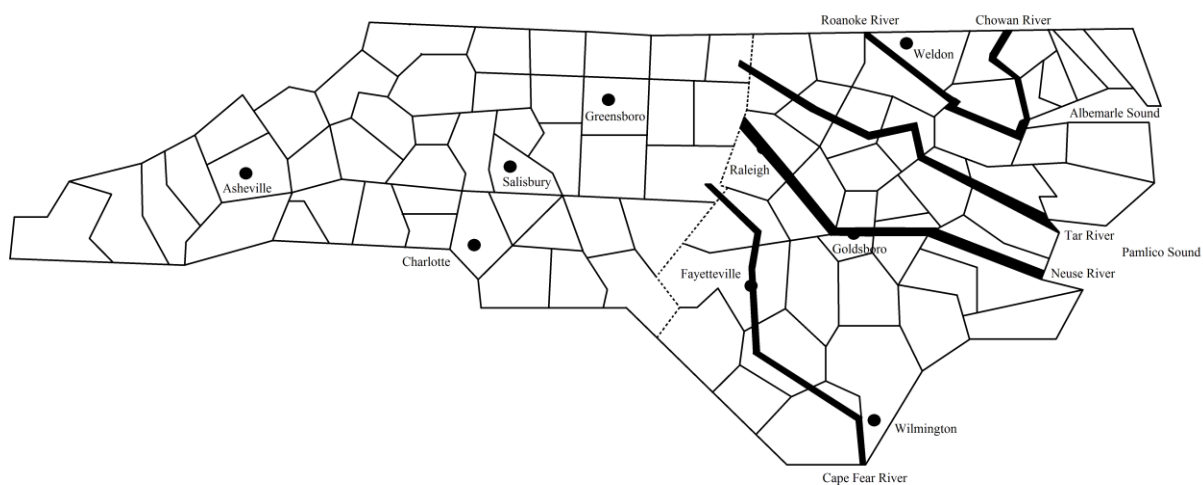


Figure 2: Principal Rivers and East/West Regional Division

The eastern population dominated state politics. While enjoying already established turnpikes, canals, and railroads the people in the east grew richer to the detriment of westerners. Never economically prosperous westerners could not afford the improvements the easterners enjoyed. The male population of the west found their needs answered by the Whig party.

¹ Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, 315; Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 6-7.

Advocating state sponsored internal improvements the Whig party spoke to those in the west that felt ignored by the east.²

The Whig party in North Carolina achieved political success beginning in 1836. Following the North Carolina elections of 1840 the party solidly dominated both Houses of the legislature as well as the governorship. Until 1850 the Whigs enjoyed control of the state government. Democrats, however, were still a viable force in state government, controlling three of the seven legislatures. During the Whig-dominated years, the state government began an unprecedented program of internal improvements in order to bring the “Rip Van Winkle State” into modernity. The Whig experiment in state sponsored internal improvements, however, gave Democrats reason to fear governmental meddling in private companies.³

The Whig state government first looked to the railroad to raise the state from economic torpor. The Wilmington and Weldon Railroad (WWRR) was the first railroad to be completed. The railroad connected eastern North Carolina with the markets of Petersburg. During construction the company continually lacked funds due to the massive amount of money required to construct the road. The only existing entity that could provide the proper influx of funds was the state government. In 1836 North Carolina received almost one and a half million dollars from the federal government due to the Jackson administration’s federal budget surplus. Use of the federal surplus became a partisan issue with Whigs clamoring for the funds to be used for public schools and internal improvements while Democrats favored using the surplus to pay state debts. The legislature ultimately determined to use half a million dollars to refill the WWRR’s coffers. Despite the influx of funds the railroad was completed in 1840 with a 300,000 dollar debt.

² Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 6-7, 10-11.

³ Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, 360-362.

Continued bond measures from the state government only momentarily prevented the failure of the railroad. The WWRR finally made a profit in 1850 but not before the state had invested nearly another half a million dollars in the company. It was no wonder that Democrats balked at state sponsored improvements.⁴

The Raleigh and Gaston Railroad (RGRR) experience only heightened the Democrats' general unwillingness to support state sponsored internal improvements while Whigs became even more strident supporters. The company was chartered in 1835 and built to connect Raleigh with the WWRR at Weldon. Due to the Panic of 1837 the outlook for the company was grim. The state legislature agreed to a 500,000 dollar bond. When the RGRR was completed in 1840 there still remained a quarter of a million dollar debt. The state gave the company a 300,000 dollar bond with the railroad's mortgage as collateral. The railroad never made a profit and the state foreclosed and bought out the company in 1845. Debate over state aid largely died away after 1850 as the state's railroads became financially solvent and began to make a profit. The lesson of the WWRR and the RGRR, however, remained with most Democrats and became a rallying cry for the opposition of more internal improvements in the west.⁵

Following 1850 the Democratic Party in North Carolina largely controlled the state government. The Democrats, despite the lessons of the WWRR and the RGRR, continued the internal improvement program initiated by the Whigs in order to remain politically relevant. The eventual success of the WWRR and the RGRR after 1850 gave Democrats the impetus to approve many internal improvements. The announcement of the Richmond and Danville Railroad (RDRR) and a rail connection between South Carolina and Charlotte in 1847 also

⁴ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 22-23; Lefler and Newsome, *North Carolina*, 363-364.

⁵ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 22-23.

frightened Democrats into supporting improvements. They felt threatened by Virginia and South Carolina as North Carolina could potentially be bled dry by its neighboring states. The announcement of the two railroads caused many in the west to see a connection with these railroads as a means to economic independence. The RDRR bill pushed the population of the western counties of North Carolina into advocating for their own railroad system. Feeling neglected by the eastern establishment, westerners believed a railroad would bring an improvement in their fortunes as well as their lives. Easterners, instead, saw these impending railroads as a threat to their economic prosperity. The connection with Danville and South Carolina was viewed as potentially disastrous to the eastern railroads of North Carolina. It was in this situation that the population of the eastern counties realized that a railroad connecting the east with the west, rather than the west to Virginia and South Carolina, was in the east's best interest.⁶

Reaction to the RDRR and the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad (CSCRR) shows that the population of North Carolina reacted to the news depending upon geographical location. Virginia General Assemblyman and founder of the RDRR W.P. Tunstall of Danville, Virginia, and former governor of North Carolina John Motley Morehead, a strong advocate for internal improvements, spoke to the citizens at a meeting held in Goldsboro, North Carolina, about the necessity of a railroad in order to promote growth. They described the railroad as a means for North Carolinians living in the interior of the state to earn hard money. Following the downfall of the Bank of the United States in 1836 paper money, issued and backed by local banks, flooded the United States economy. The stability of the currency depended upon the liquidity of the issuing banks. Lines of credit and bank speculation were viewed as the engine of large money-

⁶ Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina*, 63-64.

making firms and businesses, mainly located in the east. Hard money was viewed as a more stable form of currency, especially by agrarians, relatively safe from fluctuations in value and counterfeiting. The disagreement between gold-backed specie and bank-regulated currency further split the eastern and western regions of North Carolina.⁷

The eastern portion of North Carolina reacted with shock to the announcement of the RDRR and the CSCRR. Fearing a western railroad connecting Virginia and South Carolina, which would strip the state “of her well-earned laurels,” a call was made for appeasing the population of western North Carolina. One of the first ideas involved improving the RGRR, as well as the canals, and constructing a turnpike into western North Carolina.⁸

The editors of the *Greensboro Patriot*, printed in a town located in the sphere of influence of the proposed RDRR, echoed the feelings of many in the west. The proposed plan came too late to be of any real meaning to the west. Time and time again the eastern establishment promised a number of turnpikes and railroads connecting the west. No progress was made, but now that the threat of a connection to western North Carolina from Virginia appeared on the horizon, the eastern counties scrambled to accommodate the west. The editors proposed a central railroad connecting Danville to Charlotte with branch lines reaching to Raleigh and Fayetteville as a fair accommodation. This connection, however, was exactly what business interests in the east did not want.⁹

There were some in the east, however, sympathetic with the west’s position. A writer for the *Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette* acknowledged the validity of western North Carolina’s desire for a railroad to improve the region’s economic standing. It stated, however,

⁷ *Greensboro Patriot*, 13 and 20 November 1847.

⁸ Reprint of a *Raleigh Star* article in *Greensboro Patriot*, 11 December 1847.

⁹ *Greensboro Patriot*, 11 December 1847.

that the proposed Virginian and South Carolinian railroads threatened to sap the agricultural and industrial production of the west out of the state. Some newspapers reported that, despite the supposed unprofitability of a western railroad, the eastern establishment needed to provide for the transportation of western goods to the markets in the east in order to stem the potential depletion of North Carolina's goods.¹⁰

Westerners, and especially the *Greensboro Patriot*, continued to advocate for a railroad, citing the potential for an increase in the west's economic output. The *Patriot* reported that, despite the town's lack of a substantial industry, the editors believed that Greensboro's location was its greatest asset. Located almost halfway between Danville and Salisbury, Greensboro was a natural thoroughfare for the two towns. There was the potential for Danville and Salisbury to become the leaders of trade in the western portions of both Virginia and North Carolina if a railroad was built. Western North Carolinians believed that the railroad would contribute to the economic stability and the increase of the industrial power of the west. Despite the supposed threat to the east, concern over their region pushed the population of the west to agitate for their own railroad.¹¹

The 1848 session of the North Carolina General Assembly opened with a message from Governor William Alexander Graham calling for legislation to authorize the construction of a central railroad.¹² The bill to charter a central railroad running across the piedmont region of North Carolina was introduced to counter the threat from the RDRR. This bill, introduced also as an attack against House of Commons Representative John Willis Ellis's bill for a connecting

¹⁰ Reprint of a *New Bernian* article in *Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 24 November 1847.

¹¹ *Greensboro Patriot*, 23 February 1848.

¹² North Carolina, General Assembly, *Journals of the Senate and House of Commons of the State of North Carolina, at its Session in 1848-49* (Raleigh: Wesley Whitaker, Jr., 1849), 375-379. Hereafter cited as *1848-49 North Carolina Journal*.

railroad to run between Danville and Charlotte, faced considerable resistance from eastern interests.¹³

The central railroad's route, coming within thirty miles of the Virginia border frightened many in the east that a connection with Danville was inevitable. Critics claimed that this possible Danville Connection would destroy the profitability of the central railroad as North Carolinians travelled and shipped their products northward through Danville rather than to the east. Ellis's bill proved that the citizens in the western counties of North Carolina preferred a connection with Danville rather than a central railroad. One person, however, believed that refusing to grant a charter for a railroad running to Danville "[would] be unheard of in an enlightened age."¹⁴

As debate over the proposed central railroad continued in the North Carolina General Assembly the citizens of the west organized conventions in support of the railroad. Virginia General Assemblyman Tunstall of Danville was a popular orator at many of these conventions. One newspaper described a convention held in Salisbury as "one of the most spirited and intellectual affairs that it has been [the author's] lot to fall in with for many a day." The author stated that the western population of the state deserved to enjoy some of the fruits of the industrial era, especially since westerners continually supported the people of eastern North Carolina in their internal improvement legislation.¹⁵

North Carolina's economic and population hemorrhaging dominated much of the debate over the central road. Speaking during the session of the House of Commons, westerner Andrew H. Shuford of Lincoln County called the railroad "the only plausible plan" to address the

¹³ Allen W. Trelease, *The North Carolina Railroad, 1849-1871, and the Modernization of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill; London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 15-16.

¹⁴ James W. Osborne to William Alexander Graham, 11 October 1848, in *The Papers of William Alexander Graham*, vol. 3, ed. J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton (Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1960), 247-48.

¹⁵ *Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 17 June 1848.

emigration of North Carolinians to other areas of the Union. Shuford eschewed his regionalism for the economic good of the entire state. He called for the awakening of North Carolina to the fact that the state's population was declining. Shuford believed that western North Carolina contained some of the best resources of the entire nation. The unification of the state with a railroad connecting the mountainous west, the central Piedmont, and the coastal east would, according to the Lincoln county representative, surely bring about an increase in land value, growth in local and statewide economies, and halt the draining of the state's population.¹⁶

The fear of a steadily declining population was not a new one. During an 1844 debate over a proposed turnpike to run from Fayetteville to western North Carolina, the Whig newspaper the *Fayetteville Observer* called for the necessity of transportation infrastructure in order to stop North Carolinian "market towns going to decay...the hemorrhag[ing] of her life-blood" and "the grass growing in the principal streets of our towns." The *Raleigh Standard*, taking the Democratic Party stance, called the proposed plan a guarantee for state indebtedness, a claim that state Democrats consistently used during the debates over the central railroad.¹⁷

The North Carolina Railroad bill (NCRB) called for the railroad to run in an arc from Raleigh northwest to Greensboro, and then southwest through Salisbury before terminating in Charlotte. Eastern delegates balked at the idea of a railroad addressing only the needs of the west. They saw little use in this railroad for their constituents, since it did not connect with any railroad running along the coast. Eastern delegates conveniently forgot that western delegates had continually supported eastern improvements. To pacify eastern interests, and to prevent representative Ellis's polarizing Charlotte and Danville Railroad bill from gaining ground in the

¹⁶ *Weekly Raleigh Register and North Carolina Gazette*, 24 January 1849.

¹⁷ *Fayetteville Observer*, 4 September 1844.

legislature, a compromise was made to extend the NCRR to run through Raleigh and connect with the WWRR in Wilmington. The NCRR bill barely passed both the House of Commons and the Senate on 18 and 25 January 1849, respectively. Historian Mark W. Kruman attributed the passage of the NCRR bill to massive logrolling efforts as representatives received support for local pet projects from other members in exchange for support of the railroad bill.¹⁸

Ellis's Charlotte and Danville Railroad bill, now renamed the Yadkin and Danville Railroad, managed to pass the Senate on the day following the passage of the NCRR bill. The Yadkin and Danville Railroad bill, however, never passed the House of Commons. On 15 January the bill was laid on the table in consideration of the NCRR bill. With that bill's passage, Ellis's bill was forgotten. Western North Carolina obtained a railroad while the east gained a suitable connection. As historian Allen Trelease wrote, "The only region to lose obviously by this arrangement would be the region around Danville."¹⁹

After the successful legislation of the NCRR, speculation and talk of a potential connection with Danville continued. *DeBow's Review* printed an update on the progress of the NCRR and speculated that it was only a matter of time before a connection was made between the RDRR and the NCRR. In reality, it was over half a decade, following the completion of the RDRR and the NCRR in 1856, before Greensboro and surrounding environs in North Carolina renewed the fight for a connection with Danville.²⁰

Following the opening of the RDRR and the NCRR in 1856, speculation on the possibilities for a connection with Virginia resumed. Various ideas for a Danville Connection

¹⁸ Trelease, *The North Carolina Railroad*, 16; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 67.

¹⁹ North Carolina, General Assembly, *1848-49 North Carolina Journal*, 298, 672; Trelease, *The North Carolina Railroad*, 15.

²⁰ *DeBow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 9, no. 5 (November 1850): 555.

emerged. In Milton, located near the border of Virginia in Caswell County, an editor for the local newspaper, the *Milton Chronicle*, speculated on how to finance a connection with Virginia. The Yanceyville Bank could increase its capital stock to one and a half-million dollars. In order to buy stock in the expanded Yanceyville Bank, the buyer would be required to purchase stock in a newly chartered railroad, running from Greensboro through Yanceyville to Milton and then Danville. The apparent demise of the State Bank of North Carolina, according to the editor of the *Chronicle*, provided an opportunity for the state to place its investment in both the Yanceyville Bank and the proposed railroad. If this scheme failed because of the reluctance of the Yanceyville Bank to expand its capital stock, a new bank could be created specifically to conduct business with the NCRR.²¹

The editors of the Milton newspaper neglected to mention the near impossibility of passing any legislation that would guarantee a connection with Danville, something easterners had fervently fought against in 1847. A bill for a connecting railroad between Milton and Yanceyville, however, was introduced in the 1858 House of Commons, but it never left the Committee on Internal Improvements and did not pass its second reading in the Senate.²²

Excitement for a Danville Connection permeated western communities with the announcement for holding a general convention in early October 1858. The statement called for a general convention on 18 October of the people in the middle and western counties of North Carolina to address a concentrated push for legislation of the Danville Connection. The article addressed the feelings rampant through much of the population in the west, foremost that easterners had

²¹ Reprint of a *Milton Chronicle* article in the *Greensboro Patriot*, 9 July 1858.

²² North Carolina, General Assembly, House of Commons, *Journal of the House of Commons* (Raleigh: [The Senate], 1859), 99; hereafter cited as *1858-59 North Carolina House of Commons*; North Carolina, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North-Carolina, at its Session of 1858- '9* (Raleigh: Holden & Wilson, Printers to the State, 1859), 91; hereafter cited as *1858-1859 North Carolina Senate*. The connection between Charlotte and South Carolina was completed in 1852.

consistently ignored the wishes of the rest of the state. It called for “those in favor of equal privilege and equal rights, to the importance of securing justice from the next Legislature of North Carolina” to join the convention and make their voices and wishes heard. There was some disagreement, however, over where the convention should be held. The editor of the *Patriot* believed that holding the convention in Greensboro would not be beneficial to the Danville Connection cause as detractors of the issue would see the connection as a purely local matter benefitting Greensboro only. If the organizers of the convention, however, believed it advantageous to the cause to organize in Greensboro, then the editor had no objections. It is unknown whether the Danville Connection convention took place. Perceived abuses by easterners, such as the preference to develop the east economically, and the 1835 reapportionment were still fresh in the minds of the voting population. The organizers couched the reasons for a convention in terms that spoke to the injustices endured by western North Carolinians. Ensuring that the convention would address the unbalanced nature of North Carolina politics guaranteed a sympathetic audience.²³

²³ *Greensboro Patriot*, 1 October 1858. There was no mention of a Danville Connection convention in the weeks after the proposed meeting date.

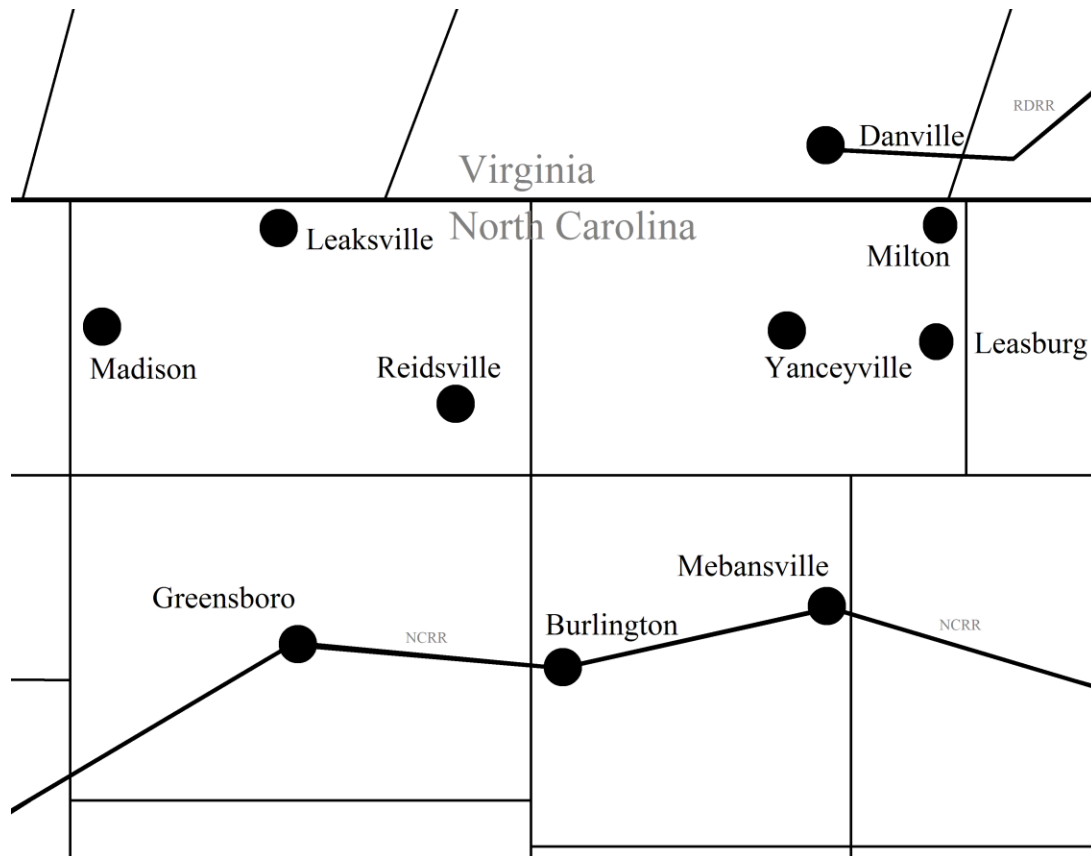


Figure 3: Greensboro and Vicinity

Whether or not the Danville Connection convention occurred, pressure from the west influenced delegates in both houses of the legislature to introduce multiple connection bills. The representatives, one in the Senate and the other in the House of Commons, both hailing from Rockingham County, introduced bills for the incorporation of the Danville and Greensboro Railroad (DGRR) in November 1858. The Senate bill was read a first time, passed the vote, and was ordered to be printed. The House of Commons bill was printed and referred to the committee on internal improvements. The committee was fairly balanced, consisting of eleven representatives, five from eastern counties and six from the west. The committee presented its recommendation to the House of Commons on 14 December. The bill was recommended to not

pass, but three representatives from western counties specifically in the Piedmont region submitted a minority report in an attempt to voice their disagreement with the committee's decision.²⁴

The minority report, whose authors included former North Carolina Governor John Motley Morehead, provided a number of concise arguments in favor of the construction of a connection between Danville and Greensboro. These arguments, the cornerstone of westerners' belief in the connection refuted the Democratic argument against state-sponsored improvements. The authors reminded the House that construction of the DGRR would be funded solely through public subscriptions. Calling the denial of building a railroad through public subscription tyrannical, the representatives called out the House for its hypocritical stance. Why was the NCRR allowed to be built, with the state owning 75 percent of the company's stock, while the Danville Connection was to be relegated to the trash bin?²⁵

The report used the economic reality of Southside Virginia and western North Carolina to show the promise of the monetary increase a connection to Danville would create. Since the completion of the RDRR in 1856, Danville experienced an enormous surge in the amount of tobacco passing through the town, from 68,000 boxes of tobacco in 1856 to over 85,000 in 1857. The Piedmont representatives believed that the amount of tobacco to travel through Danville would exceed 100,000 for the current year. If a connection was made, according to the dissenting

²⁴1858-59 *North Carolina Senate*, 14; 1858-59 *North Carolina House of Commons*, 76, 153. Members of the committee on internal improvements are found on pages 46 and 54.

²⁵North Carolina, "Doc. No. 48. Minority Report of the Committee on Internal Improvements on the Bill to Incorporate the Greensboro' & Danville Railroad Company," in *Documents: Executive and Legislative, Session 1858-'59* (Raleigh: Holden & Wilson, Printers to the State, 1859), 1; hereafter cited as "Minority Report."

members, at least half, if not more, of that tobacco would continue south to the markets of North Carolina.²⁶

In addition to tobacco, the authors referred to the Dan River coalfields, a forty mile long coal deposit located in both North Carolina and Virginia. A connection with Danville would open up the coal fields, an area lacking in transportation access. The connection would also open the western counties to untold goods, culture, and expand the area's markets. The authors of the minority report believed that the DGRR would allow the population of the west to receive "West India and South American supplies of sugar, coffee, molasses, salt, and all tropical products."²⁷

The authors of the minority report also addressed opponents of the DGRR and any bill that advocated a connection with Danville who believed that the connection represented the loss of revenue to Virginia and ultimately the bankruptcy of eastern railroads and businesses. According to the report, detractors believed that all trade from Virginia to North Carolina would suddenly reverse itself and head to Richmond because of the connection. Morehead and the other dissenting representatives believed the South's lack of uniformly-sized rail gauges proved their detractors wrong. Assuming the Danville Connection's gauge was different from both the NCRR and the RDRR, trade heading to Richmond from North Carolina would have to change cars twice: at Greensboro and at Danville. Trade remaining in North Carolina and traveling on the NCRR would only have to change cars once in order to reach any rail line connecting with the seaboard.²⁸

Attacking the state pride of their fellow representatives, the dissenting authors believed that the North Carolina ports of Wilmington, Beaufort Harbor, and Morehead City offered better

²⁶ North Carolina, "Minority Report," 4.

²⁷ North Carolina, "Minority Report," 4-5.

²⁸ North Carolina, "Minority Report," 5.

accommodations for shipping and trade than the port of Richmond, which was seen as “not equal to Wilmington, and greatly inferior to Beaufort.” The authors believed that the merchants of North Carolina should be insulted that lawmakers believed Richmond to be a better market than any town or city in North Carolina. Besides, even if all trade from North Carolina went to Richmond, the revenue from the connection to the Dan River coalfield would outweigh any revenue lost to Richmond.²⁹

Finally, the dissenting representatives looked at both revenue and the geography of the North Carolina rail system. This portion of the minority report sheds much light on the difficulties of traveling by train in the antebellum south. A train ride beginning in Atlanta and terminating in Richmond could take three possible routes: northward to Chattanooga, northeast to Knoxville, and then to Bristol, Lynchburg, westward to Burkeville, and finally the RDRR to Richmond, averaging around 667 miles; the second route consisted of traveling east from Atlanta to Augusta, Kingsville, northeast to Wilmington, north to Weldon and Petersburg, and finally to Richmond, with the mileage totaling 705 miles; the third and final option consisted of the same route as the second until reaching Kingsville, South Carolina. From Kingsville freight could travel on the South Carolina Railroad until reaching Columbia, then north to Charlotte, the NCRR to Raleigh, then the Raleigh and Gaston to Weldon, and completing the rest of the trip traveling northward to Richmond on the same railroads as the second option. This third option totaled an astounding 780 miles. Traveling on southern railroads was an exhausting, confusing, and oftentimes an inconvenient mode of transportation.³⁰

²⁹ North Carolina, “Minority Report,” 5-6.

³⁰ North Carolina, “Minority Report,” 8.

The Danville Connection was viewed as the solution to the circuitous route from Atlanta to Richmond. Taking the NCRR from Atlanta to Greensboro, using the proposed connection to Danville, and then on to Richmond would only be about 570 miles. Morehead and his fellow representatives were relying on the construction of a proposed line from Atlanta to Greenville, South Carolina. From Greenville a passenger could take the train southeast to Columbia, northward to Charlotte, and then onto the NCRR. If the shorter route could be built, merchants in the Deep South would be more likely to ship their wares on North Carolina railroads, raising revenue as well as stock prices. The Danville Connection, besides connecting merchants to other markets, would make the Danville-Greensboro region an important thoroughfare for the South as goods and wares had another, and quicker, route northward.

The minority seemed to have some effect since the recommendation of the committee was ignored and the bill was introduced on 15 December. Consideration on the second reading of the bill was postponed, however, by the author of the DGRR bill, F.L. Simpson of Rockingham, perhaps to use the extra time to bolster support for his bill.³¹

Revival of the Danville Connection caused editors throughout North Carolina to once again take sides on the controversy. The editors of the *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, a decidedly anti-Danville Connection paper, led the attack by criticizing the character of some of the western representatives. The editors accused Morehead, during the fight over Ellis's proposed Charlotte and Danville Railroad bill in 1848, of always intending to support a connection with Danville. The newspaper believed that this support for Danville could be traced back to a love for his birthplace: Pittsylvania County, Virginia. Morehead, along with other supporters of the Charlotte and Danville Railroad bill, correctly realized that the only way to pass

³¹ North Carolina, "Minority Report," 8-9; *1858-59 North Carolina House of Commons*, 163.

any bill for a railroad in western North Carolina was to make the bill as tempting as possible for eastern representatives. With this in mind, a connection with the town of Goldsboro and the WWRR was proposed. The abandonment of the Charlotte and Danville Railroad bill was merely a political maneuver. Once the central railroad was built, the fight for a connection with Danville could begin once again. The editors relegated Morehead and his compatriots to little more than traitors to their state. According to the editorial, now that the central railroad was built and operating, supporters of the Danville Connection were willing to betray North Carolina and see the goods and products of the state shipped to Virginia. Eastern newspapers saw in Morehead's regionalism the betrayal of North Carolina's interests.³²

The paper also published a number of articles from other North Carolina papers that agreed with the *Semi-Weekly's* position. One article, taken from the *Hillsborough Recorder*, was authored by a person named Eno who spoke to the economic interests of the state being in peril because of the connection. He refuted the argument that North Carolina's tobacco would not increasingly find its way to Richmond. According to Eno, if a connection was built with Danville the route would be much more convenient for shipping tobacco to Richmond. The city's authority, wrote Eno, as the central tobacco marketplace in the South was unequalled and it was only logical that even more tobacco would find its way to Richmond. North Carolina wheat was also at risk of being excessively shipped to Richmond because of the city's established mills. The Danville Connection represented economic ruin to Eno and those who agreed with him.³³

Eno echoed the *Semi-Weekly's* argument that the supporters of the Charlotte and Danville railroad in the late 1840s basically lied to the general public. The creation of a central railroad

³² *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 1 January 1859. John Motley Morehead was born a few miles north of the North Carolina/Virginia border in Pittsylvania County.

³³ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 8 January 1859.

was to essentially bind the state together and make the state's economy less reliant on other states, Eno reasoned. The railroad's purpose was "to throw off in some degree our vassal-like dependence on neighboring states." The DGRR bill would essentially nullify the entire purpose of the NCRR, the concentration of North Carolina's economy, by diverting much of North Carolina's products to Virginia. Not only would the NCRR be invalidated by the DGRR bill, but the railroad would financially destroy the NCRR and possibly the state of North Carolina, as well. Eno believed that the NCRR would suffer certain financial ruin due to the Danville Connection and, since the state was so invested in the central railroad, it too would surely fall into massive debt, causing the destruction of the state's autonomy.³⁴

Eno concluded the editorial with his own opinion on how to build a connection with Danville and to ensure that neither the NCRR nor the state would be harmed. Eno proposed that the connection run from Danville to a point on the NCRR halfway between Raleigh and Greensboro, specifically Mebaneville. Locating the terminus of the connection halfway would offer passengers traveling south an equal choice between taking the NCRR towards Charlotte or taking the Wilmington and Weldon railroad south. Placing the connection any further east of Mebaneville would negate the purpose of the connection, as it would be located too close to the Wilmington and Weldon railroad. Locating the connection closer to Greensboro would harm the NCRR and give farmers and merchants in the west a larger amount of influence. Eno's solution, or at least variations of it, was also used by anti-connectionists in the State Convention during the Civil War.³⁵

³⁴ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 8 January 1859.

³⁵ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 8 January 1859.

The debate over the DGRR bill was heated. Following a pro-connection speech by western Representative Thomas Settle, Jr., of Rockingham on 12 January 1859 that the *Semi-Weekly* described as “a very adroit speech...as good a speech, perhaps, as could well be made in favor of a measure having so little merit in it,” a number of eastern delegates attacked Settle over the course of the following two days. Most of the debate, though, was essentially a character attack on Morehead regarding his supposed duplicity over the 1848-49 Charlotte and Danville bill and the NCRR bill. Two eastern representatives, William Dortch of Wayne County and John Norwood of Orange County, were the most prominent speakers against Morehead. The two representatives likely hoped attacking the character of the pro-internal improvement ex-governor would tarnish the DGRR bill’s image as well.³⁶

When the House reconvened for its night session on 13 January eastern representatives continued to delay the bill, making motions to postpone consideration of the bill’s second reading. Finally, on 15 January, the House voted on the bill’s second reading, and the motion was denied, 37-65. Eastern North Carolina overwhelmingly voted against the second reading. Fourteen western counties sided with the east, including the counties of Alamance, Forsyth, and Randolph, which would have directly benefitted from a connection with Danville. The character attack against Morehead was successful. Enough delegates from the west voted against the bill to ensure its defeat. Even if the fourteen western counties voted for the DGRR bill it would not have passed anyway. The imbalance of delegates between the east and west during this vote illustrates the difficulty westerners faced while advocating for economic expansion in their region.³⁷

³⁶ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 12 and 15 January 1859.

³⁷ *1858-59 North Carolina House of Commons*, 266, 274-275, 284, 290.

Easterners “unaffectedly rejoiced” at news of the bill’s demise while local newspapers continued to report on Morehead’s defense against his supposed betrayal of North Carolina’s interests. During the course of another defensive speech made by Morehead before the 15 January vote, numerous references, according to the newspaper, were made in support of the First Families of Virginia, or rather Richmond. Morehead’s speech was effectively muted by Norwood of Orange, according to the *Semi-Weekly*, and there was never any doubt in the outcome of the subsequent vote on the bill’s second reading. Morehead’s speech, at least to easterners, merely affirmed the belief that the Danville Connection would improve the lives of western North Carolinians to the detriment of the eastern economy.³⁸

Representative Outlaw of Bertie County effectively further torpedoed the DGRR bill on 17 January when he introduced an amendment to the bill that negated the purpose of the connection. He proposed that if the DGRR connected with any railroad in Virginia, implying the RDRR, then the DGRR’s charter would be annulled by the North Carolina legislature. Unsurprisingly, this amendment was adopted and the DGRR bill passed its second reading and was referred once again to the committee on internal improvements. On the following day, the bill was presented by eastern Representative Thomas Sparrow of Beaufort County to the House with a recommendation for its passage, and that night the third reading of the bill occurred. David Caldwell of Guilford, realizing that the bill in its present state was essentially worthless, moved for the bill to be laid upon the table. Before a vote on Caldwell’s motion was taken, fellow western representative John Kerr of Caswell successfully moved to adjourn for the day.³⁹

³⁸ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 19 January 1859.

³⁹ *1858-59 North Carolina House of Commons*, 293, 302, 345.

Realizing that the DGRR bill was in trouble, western delegates tried another approach. Before his attempt to lay the DGRR bill on the table, Caldwell of Guilford attempted to attach an amendment to the proposed Chatham Railroad Company bill. Chatham County was located west of Raleigh and southwest of Guilford and Rockingham, making the railroad the closest viable option for a connection with Danville at the time. The amendment would enable the Chatham Railroad to construct a connection between Danville and Greensboro. The proposed amendment was soundly defeated, 25-74. The bill for the Chatham Railroad Company passed its third reading, 67-29, without Caldwell's amendment. A large portion of pro-Danville Connectionists voted against the bill's third reading because the line, running southwesterly from Raleigh, did not benefit most of western North Carolina.⁴⁰

On 22 January consideration of the newly amended DGRR bill's third reading continued. As a further insult to the pro-connection delegates, Outlaw offered another amendment. The new amendment stated that if any company incorporated in Virginia connected with the DGRR, the charter of the DGRR would be annulled. Eastern representative William Ward of Duplin County attempted to amend Outlaw's amendment, offering that any form of transportation, such as stage lines or turnpikes that connected to the railroad, would also annul the DGRR's charter. Ward's amendment was not adopted. In an orchestrated attempt to purposefully torpedo the bill, Caldwell of Guilford offered an amendment to only allow free blacks to travel on the railroad as they immigrated into Virginia. Caldwell's amendment was not adopted. Outlaw's amendment was approved, however, 70-29. The DGRR bill passed its third reading and the title of the bill was changed to "A bill to charter the Rockingham Coalfields Company" (RCRR) and was sent to the Senate for their approval. On 26 January, the North Carolina Senate read, passed, and

⁴⁰ 1858-59 *North Carolina House of Commons*, 344-345.

referred the newly christened RCRR bill to the committee on internal improvements. Eastern North Carolina had effectively neutralized the current threat from the west.⁴¹

Some in eastern North Carolina were not so supportive of the eastern delegates' attempts to stop the Danville Connection. The editor of the *Semi-Weekly* of Raleigh was less than delighted with the proposed railroad even with the amendment that forbade the railroad from connecting with any railroad in Virginia. Though denying that it did not mean the bill was deceitful in nature, the editor of the newspaper believed the RCRR bill to be an underhanded attempt to connect with Danville. A part of the RCRR bill mandated that the company could not construct a rail line within twenty miles of Danville or two miles of the Virginia state line. If the RCRR followed that rule and extended their line to within two miles of the state line, but outside of Danville by twenty miles, the RDRR need only to extend to the state line two miles from the terminus of the RCRR. Though a connection with the RDRR was prohibited by Outlaw's amendment, it was only a matter of time, according to the editor of the *Semi-Weekly*, before a more liberal-minded legislature revoked Outlaw's amendment and allowed the RCRR to connect with the RDRR. The editor claimed that he would have voted for the original RCRR bill, the DGRR, rather than vote for the current bill and be made a fool of in a few years.⁴²

According to the editor of the *Semi-Weekly*, the bill was a threat to North Carolina internal improvements, most notably the already established railroads, and now the threat of a connection with Danville was even more real. Richmond papers carried news of the bill's journey through the North Carolina General Assembly. Calling the gap between Danville and Greensboro "trifling," the editor of the *Richmond Dispatch* believed that, with the passage of the

⁴¹ 1858-59 North Carolina House of Commons, 347-349; 1858-59 North Carolina Senate, 260.

⁴² *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 22 January 1859.

RCRR bill, the connection was all but ensured. Despite the Outlaw amendment attached to the bill, the editor of the *Semi-Weekly* believed that the bill contained only “piddling restrictions,” easily knocked aside by the business interests in Richmond with no concern for the economic harm that would surely assail North Carolina. Richmond full-heartedly supported the idea of the Danville Connection. Reports of Richmond’s approval of the RCRR merely cemented easterners’ belief that the connection would only benefit Richmond to the harm of eastern North Carolina.⁴³

With the RCRR bill now in the Senate, easterners placed all of their hopes in that legislative body. After the committee on internal improvements recommended the passage of the RCRR bill, it was brought to a vote on its second reading on 14 February. J.T. Leach of Johnston County, addressing eastern fears, attempted to add an amendment that called for a nullification of the RCRR’s charter if the company attempted to push for any legislation allowing the company to equip itself. The amendment was rejected. W.S. Ashe of New Hanover County, however, successfully pushed for an amendment denying the RCRR to build within twenty miles of the NCRR, further crippling the railroad from making a connection with either Danville, because of the Outlaw amendment, or Greensboro. The bill passed its second and third reading as amended, and was renamed “A bill to incorporate the Dan River Railroad Company” (DRRR). On the third and final reading, 73 percent of the aye votes were from senators representing western counties. This number is not surprising when taken with the *Semi-Weekly*’s fear that any sort of legislation banning the construction of a railroad even remotely near Danville, and now also the NCRR, could be revoked by a more lenient legislature. As such, the DRRR was still somewhat beneficial

⁴³ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 26 January 1859.

to the west. The railroad would open the coalfields to many in the west, but the railroad was not connected to any other line therefore its uses were definitely muted.⁴⁴

The DRRR bill was approved by the House the following day, 15 February, and the bill was ordered by the Senate to be enrolled. The bill, officially titled “An Act to Incorporate the Dan River Coalfield Railroad Company,” contained the typical bylaws of a railroad company for the era. The Outlaw amendment was not included in the final bill as it was redundant because of Ashe’s amendment. Opponents of the Danville Connection realized that, with the denial of the DRRR to connect with the NCRR, this bill counted as a defeat for pro-connectionists.⁴⁵

The editor of the Richmond *Dispatch* printed what many pro-connectionists believed. He confessed that he was confused by the reason for the existence of the DRRR since it was unable to connect with the NCRR. What purpose would a railroad connected to nothing have? A correspondent of the *Dispatch*, named “All Right,” wrote to the newspaper about a meeting held in Wentworth, the county seat of Rockingham. The meeting showed that, despite the limitations of the DRRR charter, many in the coal field region believed in the railroad, especially if the possibility of a connection with Danville still existed. The purpose of the meeting was to secure the charter of the DRRR. In attendance, and speaking, at the meeting were Representatives Morehead and Caldwell, “the great champions of railroads.” During the course of the evening, their speeches cemented easterners’ belief that the DRRR was only the Danville Connection in disguise, with Morehead and Caldwell, according to All Right, admitting as much. Patience was called for to wait until the next meeting of the legislature to secure an actual connection between Danville and Greensboro. Support for the railroad was shown when a test subscription of stock

⁴⁴ 1858-59 North Carolina Senate, 263, 319, 349, 376, 389-390.

⁴⁵ 1858-59 North Carolina House of Commons, 611; 1858-59 North Carolina Senate, 401; North Carolina, General Assembly, *Private Laws of the State of North-Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly, at its Session of 1858-’9* (Raleigh: Holden & Wilson, Printers to the State, 1859), 184, 187, 189, 190, 192, 195.

took place, with the people of Rockingham County pledging 25,000 dollars in DRRR stock. Pledging an amount of money for stock and actually delivering that money are two different things, though. Western North Carolinians supported the idea of the DRRR even when the railroad did not meet their desire for an actual connection with Danville. Believing that their delegates would eventually triumph in creating the connection, westerners willingly pledged their own money for the advancement of their region.⁴⁶

The fight over the Danville Connection also consisted of a propaganda war with each side using the words of the other as ammunition. A letter written by George Boyd, the senator from Rockingham who introduced the DGRR bill in mid-November 1858, shows how each side used public opinion to further its own goals. The letter was published in the *Greensboro Patriot* and taken at its word. The *Semi-Weekly*, however, republished the letter as part of its continuing campaign to showcase the underhandedness of the DRRR bill. Boyd essentially agreed with Morehead and Caldwell, saying that the DRRR was merely a stop on the way towards creating a real connection with Danville and Greensboro. If a connection with the NCRR could not be authorized by subsequent legislatures, Boyd reasoned that a railroad with a connection with the NCRR could be built to Madison, North Carolina, under the pretense of opening the Dan River coalfields even further. The DRRR could then connect with the proposed railroad, and the connection with Greensboro, while a roundabout one, would be completed. The *Semi-Weekly* printed this letter in the hopes that it would convince the general public and the General Assembly that they were being deceived when it came to the DRRR's true purpose.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 12 March 1859; *Daily Dispatch*, 8 March 1859.

⁴⁷ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 9 April 1859.

Western North Carolinians remained committed to the idea of a connection with Danville. They believed that the west offered just as much commerce and industry as the east and a connection with Virginia would only help the west and North Carolina as a whole. The Danville Connection debate once again resurged during the winter 1860 meeting of the North Carolina General Assembly. Representative Thomas Slade of Rockingham County introduced a bill to incorporate the Greensboro and Danville Railroad Company (GDRR) on 26 November 1860, which was referred to the Committee on Internal Improvements. On 12 January 1861 the bill left committee and was recommended not to pass the House of Commons. The vote on the second reading of the GDRR was denied, 41-47, with eastern representatives casting the largest bloc of negative votes. Any affirmative votes in the east came mostly from those counties located on the coast. Jesse Yeates of Hertford County, who voted against the bill on the second reading, surprisingly called for a reconsideration of the vote. The reconsideration was passed but Slade of Rockingham laid the bill on the table before the vote could take place.⁴⁸

The reconsideration of the GDRR bill's second reading did not occur until 6 February. At the night session, Rawley Galloway of Rockingham County offered an amendment to replace "Danville" with "Leaksville," which was adopted. Leaksville was a small town located roughly twenty miles southwest-west of Danville and roughly three miles from the border of Virginia. Galloway likely offered to change the terminus of the railroad to Leaksville in order to present the railroad as a strictly North Carolinian venture, possibly in an attempt to alleviate fears of a

⁴⁸ North Carolina, General Assembly, House of Commons, *Journal of the House of Commons of North-Carolina, Session of 1860-'61* (Raleigh: John Spelman, State Printer, 1861), 72, 277, 423-525. Hereafter cited as *1860-61 North Carolina House of Commons*. The Caswell Railroad Company bill was passed on 2 February 1860. However, the bill included a section which stated that the company's charter would be forfeited if the railroad connected with any Virginia railroad that connected with Richmond, in *Private Laws of the State of North-Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at its Session of 1860-'61*.

connection with Danville. The location of Leaksville, however, likely left little doubt in anti-connectionists' minds about the true nature of the GDRR.⁴⁹

The GDRR bill passed the second reading, 50-42, on 7 February. Before the vote on the third reading of the bill, now called the Greensboro and Leaksville Railroad (GLRR), Joseph Batchelor of Warren County moved to postpone the consideration of the third reading. The motion failed and the bill passed its third reading, 56-41, on 12 February. There does not seem to be any sort of mass movement of votes to account for the relative ease of the bill's passage. Comparison between the voting patterns of the state's representatives in the House of Commons reveals nothing monumental. Most negative votes continued to originate from eastern counties. All representatives hailing from counties east of Rockingham and Guilford where the NCRR ran, besides Wake County, voted against the GLRR, likely because the GLRR, and the feared connection with Danville, threatened profits along the railroad in those counties.⁵⁰

The bill was read in the Senate for the first time, passed, and referred to the committee on internal improvements on 15 February. Eastern delegates attempted to postpone further consideration of the GLRR bill. Josiah Turner of Orange County moved to lay the bill on the table, which prevailed, 24-15. Simpson of Rockingham was successful later in the day negating Turner's motion and the bill was made the special order for the following day.⁵¹

Debate on the Senate's second reading of the GLRR bill occurred on 16 February. In an attempt to make the bill as unappetizing as possible, Waugh of Stokes and Forsyth Counties moved to amend the bill to include a section that called for the railroad to pay an additional twenty-five cents per ton for any freight transported into Virginia. The amendment, however,

⁴⁹ *1860-61 North Carolina House of Commons*, 529.

⁵⁰ *1860-61 North Carolina House of Commons*, 535, 599-600

⁵¹ *1860-61 North Carolina Senate*, 368-370, 376-377.

was denied. The bill subsequently passed its second and third reading. In an attempt to voice his displeasure over the passage of the bill, Senator Waugh moved to amend the title of the bill to “A bill to diminish the profits and dividends of the North Carolina Railroad, and impose additional taxes on the people of the State.” Unsurprisingly, this amendment was denied. Waugh’s proposal concisely summed up the population of eastern North Carolina’s fears about a connection with Danville.⁵²

The GLRR was authorized with a capital stock of 1,250,000 dollars to construct a route running from Greensboro to either Leaksville or somewhere in the vicinity of the town. The GLRR bill differed from the other bills proposed by the west because the charter of the company did not prevent the railroad from eventually connecting with the RDRR, which was, for all intents and purposes, the reason for the existence of the GLRR. The Dan River Railroad bill specifically denied the railroad the right to connect with any Virginia road lest the charter be revoked. The GLRR bill did not contain any such restriction so the right to connect with the RDRR was implied.⁵³

Despite the introduction of the DGRR bill, the eventual GLRR, in the House of Commons, another bill that threatened to connect Danville with the NCRR was also introduced during the 1860-1861 session of the General Assembly. On 21 December 1860, Senator Brown of Caswell County reintroduced his bill for the incorporation of the MYRR. The bill was read for a first time and referred to the Committee on Internal Improvements on 5 January 1861. The bill emerged from the committee on 26 January with the recommendation that the bill, like its 1858 counterpart, not pass. On 29 January, the MYRR bill was brought to the floor, but Senator

⁵² 1860-61 North Carolina Senate, 384-386.

⁵³ North Carolina, General Assembly, *Private Laws of the State of North-Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly at its Session of 1860-'61* (Raleigh: John Spelman, Printer to the State, 1861), 125-136. Hereafter cited as *1860-1861 Private Laws*.

Outlaw of Bertie County motioned for a roll call of the Senate, a delaying tactic, and the Senate adjourned for the day before a vote on the bill occurred.⁵⁴

The MYRR bill was taken up on 31 January. C.S. Winstead of Person County moved to amend the bill to require the railroad to run through Leasburg, a town on the border of Caswell and Person Counties. The amendment was denied, likely because running the railroad through Leasburg created a circuitous route. Senator V.C. Barringer of Stanly and Cabarrus Counties moved to strike out the bill and to insert a substitute bill to incorporate the GLRR. The senator, however, subsequently withdrew his substitute bill. The bill passed its second reading with most eastern counties voting against the bill. Senator Simpson of Rockingham County abstained, perhaps pinning his hopes on the GDRR bill making its way through the House.⁵⁵

Brown of Caswell continued to present the MYRR bill for its third reading despite being voted down twice in one day; the MYRR bill was not read until 11 February. Waugh of Stokes and Forsyth Counties moved to include an amendment in the MYRR's charter that the railroad could not run within seventy-two miles of the NCRR and that the charter would be dissolved if the MYRR made any connection with Virginia. The amendment was voted down, 7-20, with six of the seven assenting votes coming from representatives of eastern counties. The representatives from these counties, both in the Senate and the House of Commons, consistently voted against any measure that supported a railroad through its western neighbors of Rockingham, Guilford, or Caswell.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ North Carolina, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at its Session of 1860-'61* (Raleigh, N.C.: John Spelman, Printer to the State, 1861), 138, 144-145, 221, 249-250. Hereafter cited as *1860-61 North Carolina Senate*.

⁵⁵ *1860-61 North Carolina Senate*, 254-256.

⁵⁶ *1860-61 North Carolina Senate*, 319.

Following the rejection of Waugh's amendment, the MYRR bill passed its third reading, 20-12, and was ordered to be engrossed and sent to the House for approval. The voting pattern in the Senate coincided with previous votes: most negative votes were cast from the east and affirmative votes generally originated in the west.⁵⁷

The House reviewed and approved the MYRR bill on 18 February, and the Senate approved the final bill on 20 February thus making the MYRR law. The bill authorized the company to a capital stock of 500,000 dollars, with the option of requesting an additional 700,000, and the usual provisions for a railroad: a right of way of one hundred feet on either side of the railroad, the right to post its own rates, and a board of directors. The most surprising aspect of the railroad, however, is contained in the first section of the bill. This section stated, "That for the purpose of constructing a railroad from some point on the North Carolina [border]...to the North Carolina Railroad...with the privilege of connecting the same with the Richmond and Danville Railroad." Thus, the long-argued connection to the RDRR was added seemingly without disagreement.⁵⁸

The debate in North Carolina over the Danville Connection was a turbulent and controversial one, spanning well over a decade. Regionalism infused the populations of the east and the west with the belief that the connection was either a promise of economic growth or disaster depending upon the region. The connection brought the tensions between eastern and western North Carolina to the forefront, showcasing the fight between the eastern and western regions of the state. Westerners, despite continually supporting eastern improvements, found their desire for a connection with Virginia denied because of eastern fears that the connection

⁵⁷ *1860-61 North Carolina Senate*, 320.

⁵⁸ *1860-61 North Carolina House*, 668; *1860-61 North Carolina Senate*, 423; *North Carolina, 1860-1861 Private Laws*, 143, 144, 147.

would harm or destroy established eastern businesses. Despite repeated attempts by western delegates, a railroad running northward from the NCRR to the Virginia border, let alone a connection between Greensboro and Danville, never actually materialized. By the time an actual bill specifically granting the connection was passed by the North Carolina General Assembly, events of a more national character occupied politics. North Carolina, however, was not alone in their debates over legislature that resulted in a connection with their neighbor. Delegates in the Virginia General Assembly, also dating back before the completion of the RDRR and the NCRR, utilized the same arguments for and against the Danville Connection as did their compatriots in the North Carolina General Assembly.

Chapter Two: Virginia and the Danville Connection, 1847-1861

A connection with Danville, Virginia, and Greensboro, North Carolina, was considered a natural evolution of the Richmond and Danville Railroad (RDRR) ever since the bill chartering the company passed the Virginia General Assembly on 9 March 1847. The Virginia legislature experienced hardly any of the full-scale resentment North Carolina suffered in regards to the Danville Connection. Any bills that were perceived to be the Danville Connection in disguise passed both houses of the General Assembly with relative ease. Like North Carolina, the counties that voted largely against any bill that even hinted at a connection between Danville and Greensboro were counties where there were already railroads operating that relied on imports from North Carolina, mainly Petersburg City and much of the Tidewater region. These companies saw the Danville Connection as a legitimate threat against their business interests, believing the connection would take business from western North Carolina along the RDRR rather than eastward and then north through Weldon and Petersburg. Virginia railroads north of Richmond were not affected by the connection as these railroads, such as the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac, received the business regardless if the connection existed or not. Despite the success of the multiple railroad bills in the Virginia General Assembly a connection was never completed. North Carolina, too busy struggling with the western counties, never recognized, nor likely welcomed, the overtures from Virginia. This is evidenced by the complete lack of consideration by the North Carolina General Assembly of the Virginia railroad bills. The

conflict over the economic fate of the two regions caused a schism so strong that, during the Civil War, Confederate nationalism was unable to overcome.¹

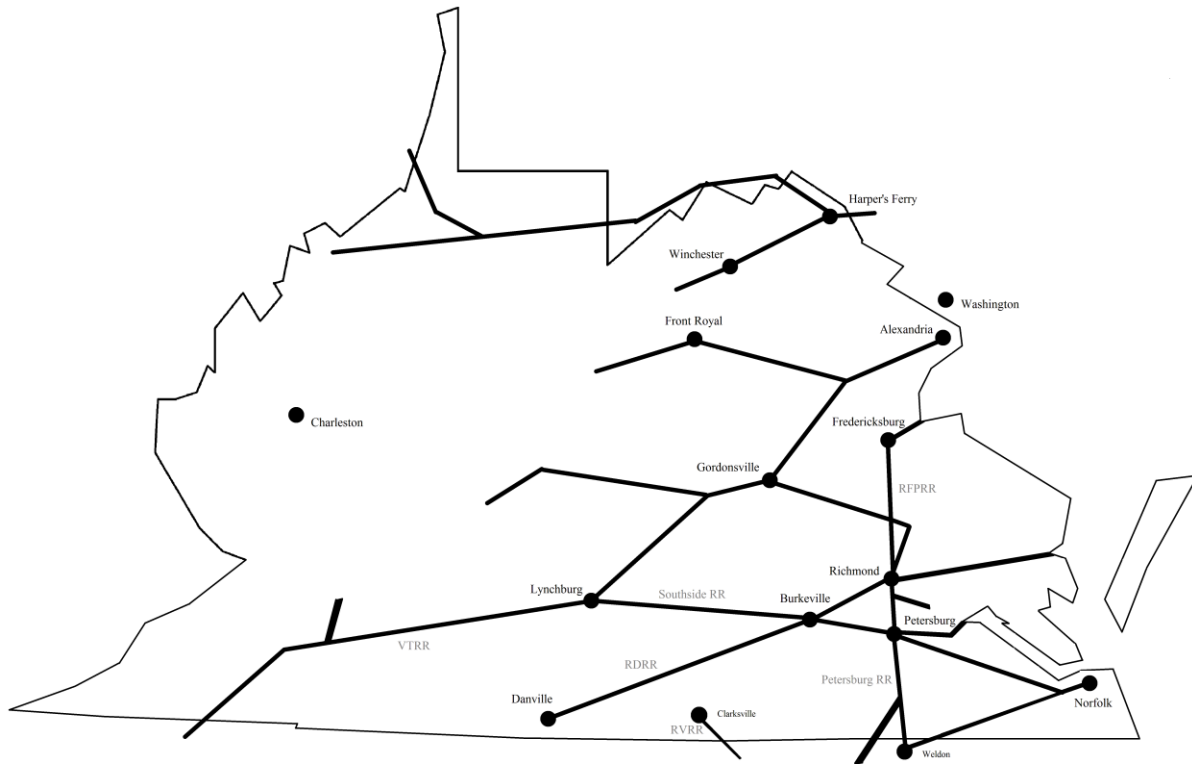


Figure 4: Virginia Railroads, 1861

The lower Tidewater area was at a distinct legislative disadvantage with regard towards a connection with Southside Virginia and North Carolina. The area surrounding Norfolk and Petersburg was decidedly outnumbered when compared with the Southside and the rest of Virginia. Any legislation benefitting southern Virginia, unless there was a sudden outpouring of

¹ Virginia, General Assembly, *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia* (Richmond: Samuel Shepherd, Printer to Commonwealth, 1847), 108-110.

support for the lower Tidewater area, was sure to pass. Representatives from Petersburg and the Norfolk areas, however, still attempted to delay any legislation creating a connection with North Carolina through legislative means. When votes were recorded for those bills that concerned a connection the lower Tidewater area delegates were generally the lone dissenters and the bills passed without complication.

By March 1851 the RDRR line reached the coal mines in Chesterfield County, only about five miles southwest from the center of Richmond. The lack of progress was blamed on the inability of England to deliver the appropriate amount of rails. Though construction was in its early stages, talk of extending the RDRR southward to connect with the North Carolina Railroad (NCRR) was already circulating. These discussions continued throughout the entire construction of the railroad. As the RDRR line reached towards Danville, a number of bills were introduced to authorize the RDRR Company to extend its line. These bills, introduced by delegates from Southside Virginia, served notice to the rest of Virginia that they were unsatisfied with the present state of the railroad in the region.

In December 1853 the senator for Henry, Patrick, and Franklin Counties introduced a motion for the Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation to investigate into the feasibility of authorizing the construction of an extension of the RDRR into Patrick County. The bill left the committee on 30 January 1854. The bill was read a second time on 25 February, engrossed by the Senate, and ordered to be read a third time, but the legislative session ended before the final reading could commence.²

² *DeBow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 10, no. 3 (March 1851): 341; Virginia, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: Printed by John Warrock, Printer to the Senate, 1853), 63, 186, 291-292.

In the House of Delegates, Samuel G. Staples, representative from Patrick County, introduced the same motion as his counterpart in the Senate. Staples called for the committee of roads and internal navigation to investigate authorizing the extension of the RDRR into Patrick County. A bill emerged from the committee on 28 January 1854. The bill was never brought up for debate, however. Though both the Senate and the House of Delegates bills did not specifically mention the NCRR these bills are evidence that Danville was not designated the final terminus of the RDRR.³

Even with the progress of the RDRR towards Danville and its surrounding environs, locals pushed for any connection that would open the countryside to more markets. At a meeting held in Leaksville, North Carolina, citizens from counties in both Virginia and North Carolina passed resolutions calling for a road to run from Lynchburg to somewhere on the state line, most likely Danville. Such a route would open “one of the most extensive tobacco growing regions in the U.S.” to the Lynchburg market, not to mention the interstate Dan River coalfields. Buried within the meeting’s resolutions was inserted a desire that was shared by western North Carolina and most of Southside Virginia: the wish for a connection with the NCRR, a mere forty miles away.⁴

Citizens in the Danville and the surrounding counties sent a number of petitions to the House of Delegates during the 1853-1854 session. Staples of Patrick introduced the first one, which contained over 115 signatures from the citizens of Henry, Franklin, Campbell, and Pittsylvania Counties. The petition listed a number of reasons why Danville and the surrounding area might benefit from a connection with the RDRR and the NCRR. It listed the region’s

³ Virginia, General Assembly, House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Session 1853-4* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1853-4), 87, 231; hereafter cited as *1853-1854 Virginia House of Delegates*.

⁴ *Republican* (Danville, Virginia), 9 December 1853.

abundant and productive soils, large crops of tobacco and wheat, as well as coal and iron deposits. The petitioners reasoned that those items that did not appreciate a high profit rate could not be exported because of the high cost of water navigation. A railroad running from Lynchburg to somewhere near Leaksville, North Carolina, was desired. These reasons are nearly identical to those promoted by the pro-connectionists in North Carolina. The population of Southside Virginia and western North Carolina were a united front in their desire for a connection with one another.⁵

The petitioners believed that a railroad from Lynchburg into North Carolina would allow locals to transport their goods into Richmond to the benefit of the capital's foundries and factories. Also, if the railroad was connected to the NCRR, it would open up another section of Virginia to the southern network of railroads that ran into the Deep South. The authors of the petition also addressed one of the central arguments of western North Carolinians: the western counties of North Carolina were effectively cut off from any sort of transportation because of the distance from the coast and the mountains that bordered the boundary between North Carolina and Tennessee. Building and extending a railroad from Lynchburg to Leaksville and then to the NCRR would provide western North Carolinians access to Richmond markets, precisely the fear of anti-connectionists in the North Carolina General Assembly.⁶

On 10 January a bill was introduced for the incorporation of the Virginia and North Carolina Railroad (VNCRR) Company. It was read a first time and passed on 26 January, passing its third reading on 15 February. It was never introduced in the Senate, however, and the VNCRR bill was left in legislative limbo when the General Assembly session ended on 4 March.

⁵ 1853-54 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 119; Petition from Henry County, 2 January 1854, *Legislative Petitions of the General Assembly, 1776-1865*; hereafter cited as *Legislative Petitions*.

⁶ Petition from Henry County, 2 January 1854, *Legislative Petitions*.

With three derailed bills in one legislative session, the outlook for a connection with North Carolina remained grim.⁷

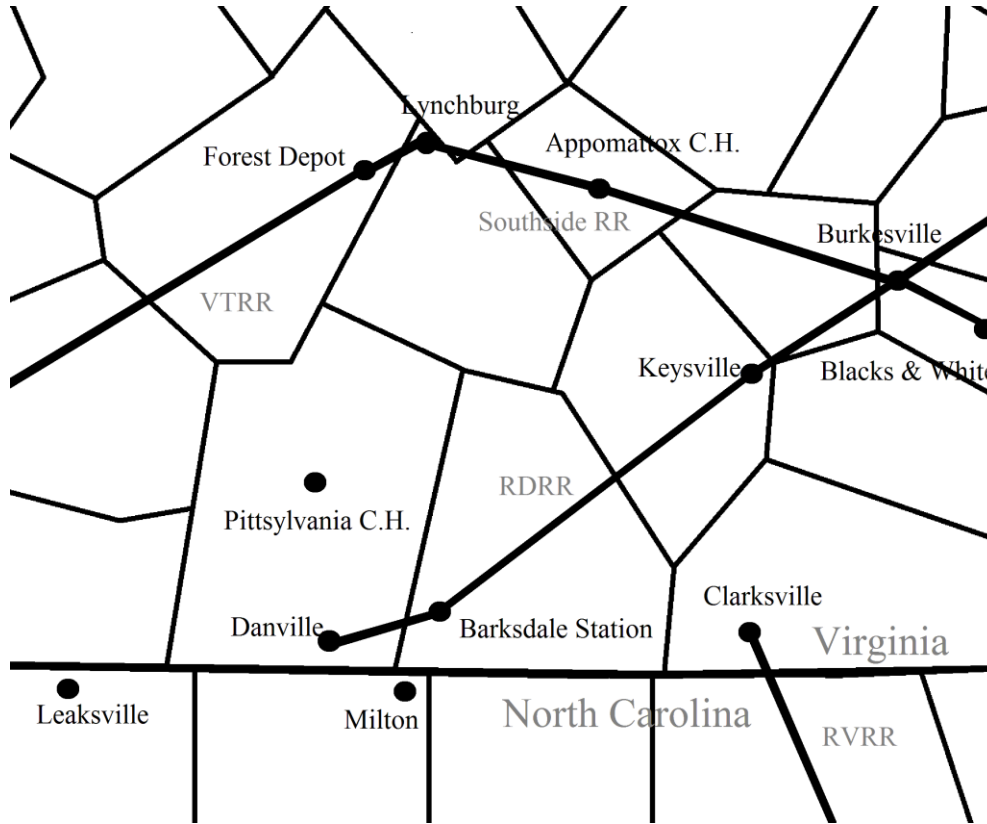


Figure 5: Danville and Vicinity

Active petitioning for some sort of connection with North Carolina continued, however, during the next General Assembly session. On 9 January 1856 a pair of petitions was introduced. The first, composed by the Pittsylvania and Lynchburg Turnpike Company, contained 65 signatures and advocated for a railroad between Lynchburg and Danville. The petition included a very brief history of the company, including the legislature’s approval in June 1852 to improve the turnpike by building a plank road in its place. Before construction could begin, however, the

⁷ 1853-1854 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 147, 153, 175, 224, 324, 329.

company realized that due to the increased commerce and growth of the surrounding counties, a plank road would be inadequate for the area's future needs. Emphasizing the company's profitability so far, the petitioners called for a railroad to run along the current route between Lynchburg and Danville and to extend the railroad into North Carolina, terminating at Leaksville. The company was proposing another VNCRR, this time using the turnpike as a route for the railroad. The petitioners asked for an increase in the capital stock of the turnpike company by one and a half-million dollars. The company saw the proposed railroad as a means to further increase their coffers as well as a way to open the Southside to more markets.⁸

The second petition also called for the creation of a railroad from Lynchburg to the North Carolina state line. This petition was an exact copy of the one introduced in January 1854. It contained over 475 signatures from Pittsylvania, Henry, Patrick, Franklin, and Campbell counties. A collection of local advertisements, including ads for a clothing store, food stuffs, and an import/export company, were included with the petitions. These ads were included to emphasize the diverse business interests that would benefit from a railroad connection with North Carolina. Obviously, the idea of a railroad connecting to North Carolina had gained popularity amongst the citizens of Southside Virginia when compared with the mere 115 signatures on the January 1854 petition.⁹

On 18 December 1855, before the Pittsylvania and Lynchburg Turnpike Company and the Southside counties' petitions were even introduced to the legislature, the Committee of Roads and Internal Navigation in the Virginia Senate presented a bill to repeal the charter of the

⁸ Petition from Campbell County, 9 January 1856, *Legislative Petitions*.

⁹ Virginia, General Assembly, House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Session of 1855-56* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1855-56), 181; hereafter cited as *1855-1856 Virginia House of Delegates*; Petition from Pittsylvania County, 9 January 1856, *Legislative Petitions*.

turnpike company. The Lynchburg and North Carolina Railroad (LNCRR) Company would be incorporated in its stead. The bill was read a first and second time on 9 January 1856.¹⁰

The LNCRR bill was read a third time and engrossed the following day. The bill, however, was again read for the third time, laid on the table, and ordered to be read again on 14 January. The bill was not considered until 7 March when it was laid on the table again. Once more, on 15 March, the bill was ordered to be read a third time, but the legislative session ended before a final vote could be taken on the LNCRR bill.¹¹

The LNCRR bill fared no better in the House of Delegates. On 16 January 1856 the House Committee of Roads and Internal Improvements reported a bill from the Senate to provide for the construction of the LNCRR, though there is no evidence that the bill in the Senate ever passed its third reading. The bill was read a first and second time, and ordered to be read a third time on 10 March. The bill, however, suffered the same fate as in the Senate when the legislative session ended on March 19. The persistence of the Southside delegates speaks to the will of the region's population to obtain a connection with North Carolina.¹²

Despite the inability of the Virginia legislature to pass a bill for a connecting railroad between Virginia and North Carolina, between legislative sessions the Danville Connection never left the public sphere. Former Virginia Governor Henry A. Wise wrote in *DeBow's Review*, a widely read Southern magazine focusing on industrial and agricultural pursuits, that Virginia was a land still untapped and that railroads were a means to ensure Virginia's position as "an empire in herself." Wise saw the future of Virginia connected with the fate of the railroad.

¹⁰ Virginia, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: Printed by John Warrock, Printer to the Senate, 1855), 91, 120; hereafter cited as *1855-1856 Virginia Senate*.

¹¹ *1855-1856 Virginia Senate*, 126, 361, 409.

¹² *1855-1856 Virginia House of Delegates*, 207, 304, 466.

He believed that once Virginia was connected from all points by railroad, including connecting the RDRR and the NCRR, then the state could spread her goods and services throughout the United States. Wise believed the Danville Connection to be an integral part of Virginia's plan for economic dominance.¹³

One day after the official opening of the 1857-1858 Virginia General Assembly, the LNCRR was once again introduced into the political arena. Advocates for a Southside connection with North Carolina were eager to see the project passed and built. On 8 December 1857 Hancock called on the House Committee of Roads and Internal Navigation to investigate the feasibility of proposing a bill to incorporate a company to build a railroad from Lynchburg along "the most practicable route" to the North Carolina state line. The Committee of Roads and Internal Navigation reported the new LNCRR bill on 17 December.¹⁴

Not until 30 March was the LNCRR bill brought up for debate in the House of Delegates when a motion was made for the LNCRR to be laid on the table. This is not surprising when the fact that a bill specifically calling for a connection between the RDRR and the NCRR was making its way through the Senate. This Danville Connection would directly benefit those counties along the RDRR's right of way and surrounding Danville. With the announcement in the House that the Senate passed that bill, chances for the LNCRR bill faded. McKenzie of Alexandria called for a vote to postpone the LNCRR bill indefinitely. The vote was decided in

¹³ Henry Wise, "The Wealth, Resources, and Hopes of Virginia," *DeBow's Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* 23, no. 1 (July 1857): 68.

¹⁴ Virginia, General Assembly, House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Session of 1857-1858* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1857), 19, 54, 68-69, 100-101, 105-106; hereafter cited as *1857-1858 Virginia House of Delegates*.

the affirmative, 44-40. The bill in the Senate never left committee. Debate over the proposed connection between the RDRR and the NCRR took precedence over the LNCRR bill.¹⁵

On 10 February 1858 Senator Richard Logan of Halifax County motioned for the creation of a special committee of five members to inquire into the feasibility of reporting a bill for the connection of the RDRR and the NCRR. Logan was obviously well prepared to speed the Danville Connection bill through the Senate since he presented the bill the same day. The connection bill was read for the first time on 12 February.¹⁶

On 16 February Charles Bruce, senator representing Charlotte and Mecklenburg Counties, interrupted the speedy route of the Danville Connection bill when he railed against Virginia's policy on internal improvements. His speech illustrated the key arguments many legislators held against railroads in general. He noted that the legislature ably represented each region of Virginia with its own railroad legislation: Tidewater received legislation on the Petersburg and Norfolk railroad; the Alexandria railroad soothed the needs of northern Virginia; and the bill for the RDRR connection addressed the Southside. It was, however, the manner in which the legislature continued to provide legislation for the appropriations of lesser roads. Bruce lashed out at the RDRR, the Southside Railroad, the Roanoke Valley Railroad (RVRR), and the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad (VTRR), calling these roads as "the first step towards sinking the credit of the Commonwealth beyond the hope of redemption." Bruce's speech focused on an important point of Virginia's relationship with internal improvements: Virginia, like North Carolina, was heavily invested in internal improvements. Historian John Majewski writes that Virginia was the number one investor in the state's railroads, investing in over 60

¹⁵ 1857-1858 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 517, 518; Virginia, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: John Warrock, Senate Printer, 1857), 155, 160-161; hereafter cited as *1857-1858 Virginia Senate*.

¹⁶ 1857-1858 *Virginia Senate*, 345, 398.

percent of the available stock. Just as in North Carolina the fate of Virginia's coffers depended upon the success of its railroads.¹⁷

According to Bruce, the RDRR was a profitless company having never paid its subscribers any dividends. Why call for additional appropriations for the company to extend its line and improve its rails when the railroad could not produce a profit for its shareholders? Bruce looked to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad as an example of a profitable railroad. He credited the B&O with providing Baltimore the impetus to become a leader in shipping and transportation. What cities had the RDRR and the other three railroads created? Rather, these railroads only increased the wealth of the terminating cities such as Richmond and Petersburg to the detriment of the smaller towns further down the line.¹⁸

Bruce decried the position that railroads would strengthen Virginia's economy. Virginia's economy was weakened by the increasing prices in sugar and cotton, two products that Virginia either could not grow at all or in sufficient quantities to compete with the Deep South. Railroads, rather than bringing a workforce into the state, contributed to the massive emigration of slaves as they were sold south. Bruce's speech may have been a contributing factor to the fact that, during the connection bill's second reading, it was laid on the table and was once again read a first time on 9 March. It was laid on the table a second time ten days later.¹⁹

Finally, on 29 March, debate on the connection bill commenced. Senator William H. Wooding of Pittsylvania County offered an amendment preventing any other railroad from

¹⁷ Charles Bruce, *Speech of Charles Bruce, Esq., in the Senate of Virginia, on the Internal Improvement Policy of the State. Delivered February 16, 1858* (Richmond: Hammersley & Company, Printers, 1858) 4; John Majewski, "The Political Impact of Great Commercial Cities: State Investment in Antebellum Pennsylvania and Virginia," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 28, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 18.

¹⁸ Bruce, *Speech of Charles Bruce*, 5-7.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Speech of Charles Bruce*, 12-15; *1857-1858 Virginia Senate*, 502, 569-570.

connecting Danville and Greensboro, North Carolina, until the connection proposed in the bill was completed. The amendment was soundly defeated, 4-28. The sole senators voting for the amendment hailed from Pittsylvania, Caroline and Spotsylvania, Jefferson and Berkeley, and Clarke, Frederick, and Warren Counties. The bill was subsequently engrossed and read a third time. These senators voted against the bill because it lacked Wooding's amendment, which would have prevented any other railroad companies from connecting with the proposed railroad and siphoning off any profits from the RDRR. As a terminus for the proposed connection it is obvious why Wooding, as a senator from Pittsylvania County, voted against the bill, but why three senators from counties spread across Virginia voted against the bill is a mystery.²⁰

The vote on the passage of the bill in the Senate occurred on 30 March. The bill passed, 26-7. The largest bloc of negative voting senators hailed from southwestern Virginia. These senators likely voted against the bill because of the threat an established railroad connection with Virginia and North Carolina would have on the VTRR, which ran through the Valley from Bristol, Virginia, to Lynchburg. The senators protected their region from any unwanted and possibly harmful competition. Surprisingly, Wooding of Pittsylvania did not cast a vote. It is interesting, however, to note that the senator representing Campbell and Appomattox Counties, Thomas H. Flood, voted against the bill. It was possible that this was an attempt to voice his displeasure for the Senate's failure to consider his LNCRR proposal.²¹

In an article in the *Daily Richmond Enquirer* the editor bemoaned the lackluster performance of the legislature regarding internal improvements. The writer called the RDRR "the most productive" railroad to bring goods and wares from other regions of Virginia and the

²⁰ 1857-1858 *Virginia Senate*, 620-621.

²¹ 1857-1858 *Virginia Senate*, 630.

country to Richmond. The RDRR, as well as the railroads composing the route from Washington, D.C., to Weldon, North Carolina, comprised a system able to “drain...half the productive area of the Union.” This article demonstrated the importance of railroads and their connections to Virginia’s economy and also eloquently illustrated the fears of eastern North Carolinians.²²

The Virginia House of Delegates read the connection bill the required three times and passed the bill on 7 April, 1838. All of the negative votes were cast by representatives from counties where the Petersburg Railroad and the soon-to-be completed Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad ran. Negative votes from these counties are unsurprising considering the economic impact a connection between the RDRR and NCRR would have on the Petersburg and the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroads. Delegates from the Tidewater area attempted to protect their region from the perceived harm the connection would inflict upon local businesses and the region’s economy. The Danville Connection represented economic instability or possible bankruptcy for the railroads in Petersburg and the lower Tidewater area.²³

The actual act for the connection between the RDRR and the NCRR authorized either railroad, or any railroad created solely to build a connection between Danville and Greensboro, to build a railroad whose sole purpose was to connect the two towns. The act contained a number of provisions to be met before a connection could be built, however. It respected state sovereignty by requiring the authorization of the North Carolina General Assembly to construct a line in the state. If the RDRR constructed the connection the company’s stock would be increased by \$1.5 million. Even if North Carolina was willing to allow the construction of the

²² *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, 5 April 1838.

²³ *1857-1858 Virginia House of Delegates*, 569.

connection, the third provision of the act complicated any hope that North Carolina would agree to the act. The connection would be constructed in the same five foot gauge as the RDRR as compared to the NCRR's gauge of four feet and eight inches. Considering that three-fourths of the connection lay within North Carolina, this provision practically guaranteed that a legislature already reluctant with connecting to Southside Virginia would not grant authorization for such a railroad.²⁴

Virginia supporters and dissenters of the Danville Connection closely followed the developments in the North Carolina General Assembly concerning the connection. Following the failure of the DGRR bill's second reading in the North Carolina House of Commons on 15 January 1859, the editors of the Petersburg newspaper, the *Daily Intelligencer*, summed up the feelings of the various factions in Virginia and North Carolina by putting its own spin on the debate. The *Intelligencer* praised the Danville *Register*'s belief that the connection was more important to North Carolina than to Virginia. According to the *Intelligencer*, North Carolina's rejection of the DGRR bill showed that the state was acutely aware of the negative effect the connection would have on the state's debts and its railroads. The *Intelligencer*'s praise for the *Register*'s editorial should be taken with a grain of salt. The railroads in Petersburg faced a possible loss of revenue if a connection between Danville and Greensboro was built, a feeling shared by many in the southern Tidewater area of Virginia. Regional newspapers promoted the region's interests further imbuing the area's populations with a respect and pride for the region.²⁵

The editor of the Danville *Semi-Weekly Transcript* took Petersburg to task, claiming that the city "no longer may fear that the trade and travel from [North Carolina] will be diverted from

²⁴ Virginia, General Assembly, *Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, Passed in 1857-8* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1858), 90.

²⁵ *Daily Intelligencer* (Petersburg), 22 January 1859.

the circuitous route it now follows.” The editor claimed that the citizens of Petersburg rejoiced at the failure of the connection’s passage and were already counting their future earnings. In response the editor of the *Intelligencer* echoed many anti-connectionists when he said that the *Transcript* was mistaken; only Richmond would reap the benefit of a connection between Danville and Greensboro.²⁶

Addressing the article printed by the Danville *Register*, the *Intelligencer* praised the newspaper for its logical views. If a connection was made the *Register* saw no reason why the connection would actually benefit Danville in the short term, but rather North Carolina would reap the benefits, especially since Danville lacked the appropriate number of factories for the sudden influx of raw goods from North Carolina. Also, though most citizens of Danville were in favor of the connection, they would not accept such a connection that was against the will of most North Carolinians. The editor of the *Intelligencer*, however, did not address the accusations made by the editor of the Danville *Register* that the people of Petersburg rejoiced at the failure of the DGRR bill. The *Intelligencer* need not have worried anyhow, as the following days in the North Carolina House of Commons showcased the utter destruction of the DGRR’s purpose.²⁷

Reaction to the 1859 MYRR defeat in the North Carolina General Assembly showcased the argument for and against the connection advocated by Richmond and Petersburg, respectively. The Richmond *Daily Dispatch* kept a close eye on the MYRR bill’s progress in the North Carolina legislature. When the bill was ultimately defeated on 24 January, the editor was not upset by the news. Rather, he remained enthusiastic about the future of the connection, saying, “The ends of the iron rails [of the RDRR and the NCRR] point straight and steadily at

²⁶ *Daily Intelligencer* (Petersburg), 22 January 1859.

²⁷ *Daily Intelligencer* (Petersburg), 22 January 1859.

each other.” The fact that the distance between the NCRR and the RDRR was nearly inconsequential practically guaranteed the completion of the connection sometime in the near future. In the meantime, proponents of the connection could still rely on the old-fashioned way of commerce, the wagon, to bring North Carolinian goods into Danville, with the added bonus of not needing the permission of the legislatures.²⁸

The *Daily Richmond Enquirer* met the defeat of the MYRR bill defiantly. Instead of bemoaning the defeat of the bill, the editor of the *Enquirer* called for support of the Clarksville Connection. If the Clarksville Connection was completed, the citizens of western North Carolina would get a taste of all that Richmond had to offer. Even with the tax on goods shipped along the NCRR to the Clarksville Connection, the farmers and merchants of western North Carolina would realize that the connection meant more money in their coffers and pockets than doing business with the eastern railroads via the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. The editor of the *Enquirer* played upon his readers’ sense of right to make his point. The idea of free trade must overcome North Carolina’s resistance against unfettered access to outside markets. The more markets available to farmers and merchants, the more competition and therefore the better prices for the consumer. If Richmond proved to be a better market for western North Carolina, any law passed to curb the flow of goods to Virginia was unconstitutional and injurious to the people of the west. If, on the other hand, Richmond turned into a terrible market for western North Carolina then no trade would travel along the connection and the route would be injurious only to those who financed the venture.²⁹

²⁸ *Daily Dispatch*, 21 and 26 January 1859.

²⁹ *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, 19 January 1859; *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, 19 January 1859.

According to the *Enquirer*, the tax on goods crossing the proposed connection was an unjust policy placed on those who merely wanted to practice good business. Penalizing the rural areas of the state in favor of the urban counties was “the unwise policy of an ignorant age.” Placing any sort of restriction on trade, as well as the defeat of the MYRR bill, was “the policy of pillaging farmers for the benefit of the owners of city lots.” Though taxes were considered necessary for the operation of the government, any bill designed to incur a tax merely for spite was idiotic. The editor closed his argument with the promise that a connection between the NCRR and the RDRR would increase the profits of farmers and merchants, thereby bringing peace and happiness along the border between Virginia and North Carolina.³⁰

The editor of the Petersburg *Daily Intelligencer* attacked the *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, addressing each point made by the Richmond article and attempting to refute each one in turn. While agreeing with the *Enquirer* that free trade thrived in an open and healthy marketplace, the editor of the *Intelligencer* found the argument that the North Carolina legislature was purposefully trying to harm its western constituents to be ludicrous. Look to the legislative journals, said the *Intelligencer*'s editor. The adoption of any connecting railroad between the NCRR and the RDRR would harm the profits of the NCRR, a company in which North Carolina invested millions of dollars. Despite the relatively cheap cost of a connection, the future expenses of maintaining a failing NCRR would bankrupt the state. The editor called the rejection of the MYRR bill “an act of self-protection.”³¹

Furthermore, the presence of a perfectly good road for wagons between Greensboro and Danville negated the need for a railroad, said the *Intelligencer*'s editor, especially since there was

³⁰ *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, 19 January 1859.

³¹ *Daily Intelligencer*, 20 January 1859.

already a successful network of railroads running to Richmond. The addition of another connecting railroad to Richmond would not be beneficial to either the railroads or North Carolina. It was obvious that the people of North Carolina did not want a connection built or their legislature would have voted differently. The editor of the *Intelligencer* found it reprehensible that the editor of the *Enquirer* was pushing for a connection that was obviously against the wishes of the majority of the population of North Carolina. Now the *Enquirer*, having failed with the MYRR bill, was pushing for the Clarksville Connection in order to force the North Carolina legislature into approving a connection between the NCRR and the RDRR. Let North Carolina maintain its sovereignty as a state, said the editor of the Petersburg paper, and make its own decisions. The editor of the *Intelligencer* failed to mention that a decision against a connection between the NCRR and the RDRR enhanced the coffers of Petersburg and kept North Carolina's goods moving through their city and not into Richmond.³²

Following the passage of the 1861 MYRR bill the editor of the Richmond *Daily Dispatch* met the news with enthusiasm, calling it "a great triumph." Recognizing that the connection of the NCRR and the RDRR was seriously opposed by the eastern establishment in North Carolina, the MYRR bill would open Richmond to the goods and produce of western North Carolina. Richmond manufactories would find an endless supply of raw material to shape and mold into profitable goods. The richness and glory of Richmond would be assured as the entire South opened up to the city. This editorial cemented the fears of anti-connectionists, as the editor hailed the connection as a godsend to Richmond and thus a detriment to eastern North Carolina's interests.³³

³² *Daily Intelligencer*, 20 January 1859.

³³ *Daily Dispatch*, 28 February 1861.

According to the editor, even the route chosen by the North Carolina legislature was evidence of the importance of the railroad. Running from the NCRR company shops near Burlington, the MYRR would run to Milton, and then Yanceyville before terminating at Barksdale's Station on the RDRR, roughly ten miles east of Danville. The route planned was almost a straight line running along a ridge, so there would be no need for fills or bridges to be built. The editor predicted that the railroad could be built for less than 600,000 dollars. The only obstacle that stood in the way of the MYRR was the Virginia legislature. "It remains to be seen whether the enterprise and liberality of Richmond are equal to the achievement of the brilliant fortunes which are now offered to it." The General Assembly of Virginia, however, never authorized or even debated an authorization of the MYRR to construct a railroad into Virginia.³⁴

A connection with North Carolina did not necessarily have to be located between Danville and Greensboro. Citizens in southern Virginia petitioned the General Assembly to authorize a connection with North Carolina from railroads besides the RDRR. In December 1859 the stockholders of the Roanoke Valley Railroad (RVRR) sent a petition to the General Assembly calling for an increase in the company's capital stock in order to fund an extension to the RDRR at the town of Keysville. The petitioners called for an increase of 550,000 dollars with the state investing at least three-fifths, an amount consistent with Majewski's research.³⁵

According to the petition, the proposed extension would cost much less than a connection between Danville and Greensboro, nearly a difference of a million dollars. The proposed extension would provide a line of communication with North Carolina and states further south. Despite the smaller magnitude of the railroad, especially when compared with the RDRR, the

³⁴ *Daily Dispatch*, 28 February 1861.

³⁵ Miscellaneous Petition, 13 December 1859, *Legislative Petitions*; Majewski, "The Political Impact of Great Commercial Cities," 18.

extension promised to also open the tobacco and wheat fields of Southside Virginia and North Carolina. This increase in trade along the RVRR would, according to the petitioners, make profitable Virginia's expected \$310,000 investment. The inference that the RVRR was not a profitable railroad until then was brought up by state Senator Charles Bruce during his speech against Virginia's internal improvements in February 1858. They believed that the extension could be built for only half a million dollars with the remaining \$50,000 going towards construction of depots, bridges, and grading. The authors also addressed the financial impact the RVRR extension would have on the RDRR. The petitioners believed that the connection could net a potential \$149,000 a year in business for the RVRR, but also an astounding \$125,000 for the RDRR from the increase of goods transported along the railroad. The extension would be a financial boon to both companies. The petitioners knew that introducing a rival connection with North Carolina would anger the stockholders of the RDRR therefore the introduction of a promised monetary increase was necessary.³⁶

The supplicants did not need to worry that their petition would go unheard. A week earlier in the House of Delegates, on December 6 1859, William Baskerville, representative from Mecklenburg County, moved that the Committee of Roads and Internal Navigation investigate the feasibility of passing a bill calling for an increase in the RVRR's capital stock and the state's investment of three-fifths of the stock. The bill was introduced, read for the first time, and ordered to be read a second time on 12 December. The following day, 13 December, Baskerville

³⁶ Miscellaneous Petition, 13 December 1859, *Legislative Petitions*; Bruce, *Speech of Charles Bruce*, 6.

introduced the petition from the stockholders of the RVRR as means of reinforcing the idea that the RVRR extension was a project desired by the public.³⁷

The bill was not considered until 4 February 1860 when, as an engrossed bill, it was denied passage, 37-69. Half of those counties located in Southside Virginia that voted did so in the affirmative. Charlotte and Mecklenburg voted for the extension, which is not surprising considering the RVRR's extension would run through those counties. Oddly, Pittsylvania voted in favor of the extension even though the proposed railroad would invariably take away some income from the town of Danville despite the promises of the RVRR petition. All the counties that the Southside Railroad ran through voted against the connection. The Southside Railroad connected with the VTRR in Lynchburg. A connection into North Carolina along the RVRR could possibly divert goods from the Deep South that would otherwise travel along the VTRR and then the Southside Railroad to Richmond. Regionalism caused the delegates from those counties to protect their constituents. Surprisingly, James Seddon, representative for King George and Stafford Counties, who voted against the extension, called for a reconsideration of the vote. The bill, however, was laid on the table before the vote could take place.³⁸

The final vote occurred on 9 March. The bill did not gain the required two-thirds and was rejected, 67-51. The largest bloc of counties with representatives who voted against the extension bill hailed from those areas fed by the James, Rappahannock, and York Rivers as well as the Petersburg and the Southside Railroads. Obviously business interests were a major motivating factor for these legislators to vote against a bill that would threaten the profits of transportation businesses located in those counties. Keen of Pittsylvania moved for a reconsideration of the

³⁷ Virginia, General Assembly, House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Session of 1859-60* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1859), 17, 62, 73; hereafter cited as *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*.

³⁸ *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 291-292.

vote but the bill was laid on the table and it was never brought up for debate again in the House of Delegates.³⁹

Pro-connectionists simultaneously pushed for an RVRR extension in the Senate, creating a two-pronged attack. On 5 December 1859, Bruce of Charlotte and Mecklenburg introduced a resolution calling for the Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation to draft a bill calling for the state to invest into three-fifths of the stock to be raised for the RVRR extension. This bill coincided with the actual RVRR extension bill in the House; if the state was willing to invest in the proposed extension, this would strengthen the extension bill in the House. In order to solidify the position that this investment was the will of locals, on 14 December Bruce introduced a petition written and signed by the citizens of Mecklenburg County.⁴⁰

The petition, signed by over 250 individuals, called for an extension of the RVRR from the Roanoke River specifically to the town of Blacks and White, present day Blackstone, to connect with the Southside Railroad. The petitioners believed that such an extension would benefit the citizens of Lunenburg County where not a single rail of track existed. Interestingly, the petition originally also suggested the Southside Railroad, the RDRR, or the location of the junction of these two roads at Burkeville as an appropriate place to connect the extension. This was crossed out, however, so that the Southside Railroad at Blacks and White was the only option for the terminus of the extension. The line was likely edited in order to increase the importance of the RVRR. Goods travelling the longer proposed route of the RVRR extension

³⁹ *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 427-428.

⁴⁰ Virginia, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: James E. Goode, Senate Printer, 1859), 44, 75; hereafter cited as *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*.

increased the income of the railroad. The petition, however, could still be perceived as threatening to siphon potential North Carolina business away from the RDRR.⁴¹

On 11 January 1860 a bill to authorize the increase in the capital stock of the RVRR was introduced, read for the first time, and order to be read a second time. The bill was read a second time, ordered to be engrossed and read a third time on 24 January. On 13 February, in an attempt to mollify opponents of the bill, Bruce amended the bill and motioned for the amended bill to be read a third time. It is unknown what amendments were made to the bill. It, however, was laid on the table on 23 February and not entered into debate for the rest of the legislative session.

Whatever amendments Bruce made to the bill were not enough to satisfy opponents of the bill.⁴²

Judging from the unwillingness of the House of Delegates and the voting pattern of the legislators for the 9 March vote, it is unlikely that the Senate bill would have survived a final vote. Both RVRR extension bills in the House and the Senate were too localized to entice the rest of the state to vote for the bills. The RVRR extension posed a threat, despite the urgings of the RVRR Company petition of December 1859, to all three of the major southern Virginia railroads: the Petersburg Railroad network, the RDRR, and the Southside Railroad.

Citizens in southern Virginia continued to push the General Assembly, this time to authorize the creation of an entirely new railroad in order to connect with North Carolina. On 5 December 1859 Franklin County representative W.H. Edwards introduced a petition written and signed by a number of Franklin County residents. The petitioners asked for the authorization to construct an entirely new railroad from somewhere on the VTRR to run southward and connect with the NCRR. Over one hundred petitioners specifically asked for a charter to be created that

⁴¹ Petition from Mecklenburg County, 3 January 1860, *Legislative Petitions*.

⁴² *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*, 133, 179, 184, 265, 297.

would allow the construction of a railroad from Lynchburg to the state line. The petitioners were well informed of the recent legislation being passed by the North Carolina General Assembly. They reminded the Virginia legislature that North Carolina had recently passed legislation for a railroad, the Dan River Coalfield Railroad, to connect with the NCRR and to terminate at the state line. The activists pushed the same argument used by previous petitioners: the counties the railroad passed through would benefit economically from the line; the railroad would penetrate into counties where no railroad passed, opening vast swaths of untapped land to Virginian markets; and the proposed road would form a link in a great southern railway reaching into Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, thereby opening Virginia markets even further into the interior of the United States. Pro-connectionists on both sides of the state line agreed on the positive aspects of the Danville Connection.⁴³

On 21 December a bill authorizing the creation of the Virginia and North Carolina Railroad (VNCRR) was introduced. The bill called for the railroad to run from the VTRR in Bedford County south through Franklin and Henry Counties to the state line. Inter-county bickering seriously hampered the progress of the bill. Asa Dickinson of Prince Edward County, on 9 February 1860, introduced a rider stating that the VNCRR could not connect with the VTRR east of the Forest Depot, located roughly ten miles southwest of Lynchburg thereby removing Appomattox Court House as a potential junction for the VNCRR and the Southside Railroad. Crawford Jones of neighboring Appomattox County immediately moved to amend Dickinson's rider stating that the VNCRR could not connect with the VTRR at any point west of the Forest Depot. Dickinson's amendment complicated matters with the VTRR and the Southside Railroad since Lynchburg was the terminus for both railroads. If the VNCRR was

⁴³ 1859-1860 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 13; Petition from Franklin County, 10 December 1859, *Legislative Petitions*.

built in Lynchburg, permission to connect with the Southside Railroad would also be required. Jones's amendment would require the VNCRR to be connected in Appomattox County, likely near the depot by the courthouse, thereby making Appomattox a railroad junction that could rival Lynchburg.⁴⁴

Jones's amendment to the rider was rejected. Dickinson's rider was approved and the VNCRR bill passed the house, 98-25. Most of the dissenting votes originated from the Tidewater and Petersburg areas, though Petersburg City itself voted for the VNCRR. The Tidewater delegates realized that the VNCRR could potentially harm the economy of the region. Prince Edward, Appomattox, and Charlotte Counties voted against the bill likely because the VNCRR would encroach upon the RDRR's business and sphere of influence in North Carolina.⁴⁵

The following day, 10 February, the Senate debated on the VNCRR bill. Wickham of Henrico and Hanover Counties offered an amendment that would prevent the proposed road from running through Franklin County. If the road was denied passage through the county, the closest route would be through Pittsylvania County where a connection between the VNCRR and the RDRR would be easy to build. This connection would strengthen the RDRR and, though in a roundabout way, connect Danville with North Carolina. Wickham's amendment, however, failed and the bill passed the Senate, 25-14. Once again, most of the dissenting votes originated from the Petersburg and Tidewater areas. Much of Southside Virginia also voted against the bill, fearing a loss in business to the RDRR from a railroad reaching towards North Carolina not directly connected to the RDRR.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 119, 311.

⁴⁵ *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 311.

⁴⁶ *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*, 248.

Legislators in the Virginia General Assembly of 1859-1860 attempted to pass two bills that, even though they did not specify a connection with North Carolina, the proximity to the state line was likely viewed as a threat to business interests in Petersburg and the Tidewater area. Representatives' votes from both houses of the legislature reflected the unwillingness of those areas to accept another route of competition and to protect their region's interests.

On 6 December 1859 William Martin of Henry County introduced a resolution for the Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation to investigate drafting a bill for the extension of the RDRR from the town of Danville westward into Henry County. This bill would further open the Dan River Valley and both Virginia and North Carolina to commerce. The bill left committee on 12 December where it was read for the first time and ordered to be read a second time. The bill, however, was never again brought up for debate.⁴⁷

The same day Martin of Henry County introduced his resolution, Representative Keen of Pittsylvania introduced his own resolution calling for the incorporation of the Pittsylvania Railroad Company. The same day that Martin's RDRR extension bill was read for the first time, the Pittsylvania Railroad bill was introduced, also read for the first time, and ordered to be read a second time.⁴⁸

The bill moved quickly, but the engrossed bill was rejected, 57-64, on 7 January 1860 since the bill represented an attack upon the economies of parts of the Southside and the Tidewater regions. The only county where the RDRR ran through to vote yes on the Pittsylvania Railroad Company bill was Pittsylvania. Every other county where the RDRR travelled either voted in the negative or abstained. Every county where the Southside Railroad was located voted

⁴⁷ 1859-1860 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 18, 63.

⁴⁸ 1859-1860 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 17, 63.

against the bill as did most of Tidewater Virginia and the area surrounding Petersburg. The legislators from Richmond City and Henrico County voted in favor of the bill, which is unsurprising considering anything travelling along the Pittsylvania Railroad would ultimately find its way to Richmond on the RDRR.⁴⁹

The Pittsylvania Railroad Company Bill, however, was not dead. Senator George Townes of Pittsylvania, on 6 December 1859, called for the Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation to draft a bill creating the Pittsylvania Railroad Company. The bill was introduced and read for the first time on 11 January 1860. The vote on the engrossed bill ultimately occurred on 28 February; the bill passed the Senate, 27-8. Senators from those counties where the Petersburg network of railroads ran voted in the negative while a large portion of counties in the James, York, and Rappahannock River area did not vote at all. Those counties where the Southside Railroad travelled through generally did not vote in favor of the Pittsylvania Railroad bill. Delegates from both the House and the Senate generally agreed with each other over the impact the Pittsylvania Railroad could have upon their respective regions and voted accordingly.⁵⁰

The House voted on the Senate's Pittsylvania Railroad bill the following day, 29 February. The bill failed to pass, 56-57. The voting pattern of this vote and the 7 January vote are almost exact images of each other. Those counties where the Petersburg network and the Southside Railroad ran generally voted against the Senate's bill. Tidewater Virginia voted almost completely against the bill. Oddly, Franklin County voted against the bill though the county would directly benefit from the proposed railroad.⁵¹

⁴⁹ *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 300.

⁵⁰ *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*, 46, 133, 178, 184, 316.

⁵¹ *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 389-390.

Philip W. McKinney of Buckingham County, who had voted against the House's Pittsylvania Railroad bill on 7 January, called for a reconsideration of the final vote. Following the removal of a key provision that required the state to invest in sixty percent of the company's stock, the bill passed the House. The Senate voted on and approved the amended bill and the Pittsylvania Railroad bill became law on 29 February 1860.⁵²

The final bill for the Pittsylvania Railroad allowed the company a capital stock of \$300,000. The route for the railroad would run north from Danville to the Pittsylvania Courthouse located in present day Chatham, and continue northwest to terminate at or around the border of Pittsylvania and Franklin Counties. The company was authorized to negotiate with the RDRR for use of the company's railcars so long as the Pittsylvania Railroad Company remained competitive in its rates. The company was also required to begin construction of the railroad within five years and to be completed within ten years of the passage of the bill. The railroad, however, was never built, likely because the Virginia General Assembly continued to pass legislation that authorized an actual connection with the NCRR which would prove more profitable to potential investors.⁵³

In February 1859 the North Carolina General Assembly passed the act to incorporate the Dan River Coalfields Railroad (DRRR). The railroad planned to run from the vicinity of Danville, but still within North Carolina borders, to the Dan River coalfield located in Stokes and Rockingham Counties, North Carolina. Though the company's charter specifically denied the company to connect with the NCRR, there was no restriction on the company's right to connect with the RDRR and delegates in both houses of Virginia's legislature leaped at the opportunity to

⁵² *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*, 323.

⁵³ Virginia, General Assembly, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1859-60* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1860), 398-400.

connect Virginia with the DRRR. On 9 December 1859 Wyndham Robertson, House of Delegates representative from Richmond City, moved that the Committee of Roads and Internal Navigation enquire into drafting a bill providing for the connection of the RDRR and the DRRR. The committee never responded with a bill for a connection.⁵⁴

In the Senate, however, Thomas P. August, senator from Richmond City, motioned for the Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation to draft its own bill for a connection between the RDRR and the DRRR on 9 January 1860. In order to solidify his resolution, August introduced a petition drafted and signed by Lewis E. Harvie, president of the RDRR, T.T. Giles, and J.R. Anderson, also of the RDRR company, asking for permission to extend the RDRR to the Virginia and North Carolina state line in order to connect with the DRRR.⁵⁵

No mention of a bill for the connection appeared until, suddenly, it was attached to a bill making its way through the Senate on 9 February. The bill called for an increase in the capital stock of the RDRR. The increase in stock was likely to fund the proposed connection between the RDRR and the DRRR. The bill, officially titled “An act to increase the capital stock of the Richmond and Danville railroad company, and authorize a connection with the Dan River Coalfield railroad of North Carolina,” unanimously passed the Senate the same day, 43-0.⁵⁶

The following day the House of Delegates read the engrossed Senate bill for the first and second time and then sent the bill to committee. On 9 March the bill left committee and William A. Burwell of Patrick County called for the final vote. The bill passed, 118-4. The four legislators who voted against the bill hailed from Petersburg, Southampton, Prince George and

⁵⁴ North Carolina, General Assembly, *Private Laws of the State of North-Carolina, Passed by the General Assembly, at its Session of 1858- '9* (Raleigh: Holden & Wilson, Printers to the State, 1859), 184, 195; *1859-1860 Virginia House of Delegates*, 45.

⁵⁵ *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*, 123-124.

⁵⁶ *1859-1860 Virginia Senate*, 244-245.

Surry, and Norfolk Counties. The railroad companies in these areas were opposed to the competition a connection with North Carolina would naturally bring and the region's delegates attempted to protect their constituents.⁵⁷

The bill authorized the RDRR to increase its capital stock by 300,000 dollars, the same amount promised to the Pittsylvania Railroad. The bill allowed the company to extend its rail to the state line. It also addressed state autonomy, giving the DRRR permission to connect with the RDRR if the DRRR chose to extend its rail to the state line. The *Daily Dispatch* summed up the benefits of the connection saying, "Richmond, particularly, will have reason to be thankful for an improvement so important and which is made so cheaply to her, ensuring so much to her future increased prosperity."⁵⁸

Despite continued petitioning and legislation initiated by the people and representatives of the Southside counties of Virginia no railroad was built connecting Virginia to North Carolina. Though Virginia was more successful at passing legislation that allowed a connection with North Carolina, the bills entered into debate in the General Assembly clearly show the tensions between Petersburg and much of the Tidewater area and the southern counties of Virginia. Such tension is also mirrored in North Carolina between the eastern and the western counties of that state. Interests in both the eastern portions of Virginia and North Carolina viewed a connection with the other as a potential rival and therefore a threat to the established railroads. Southside Virginia and western North Carolina viewed a connection as a means for economic autonomy. Rather than being a unifying force on the population, the proposed railroad connection between Virginia and North Carolina exposed the tension between the two regions of

⁵⁷ 1859-1860 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 312, 429.

⁵⁸ Virginia, General Assembly, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1859-60* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1860), 263-264; *Daily Dispatch*, 14 March 1860.

Virginia. As the Civil War began the tension in both states would need to be overcome if the newly formed Confederate nation was to triumph over the Union army.

Chapter Three: The Confederate Congress, North Carolina, Virginia and the Danville Connection, 1861-1862

At the beginning of the Civil War the Confederate States of America contained anywhere from seven to nine thousand miles of track, compared to the Union's nearly 22,000 miles. The fact that most of these roads were poorly built, poorly maintained, and fragmented merely compounded the Confederacy's predicament. The railroads of the South lacked a consistent gauge between the lines, although this difference in gauge also existed in the northern states. The nascent Confederacy also boasted far fewer locomotives and rolling stock as the Union. In one instance the Pennsylvania Railroad alone operated over 220 locomotives while all the railroad companies in Virginia combined could barely muster two hundred locomotives. There was no question that the Confederacy sorely needed more rail infrastructure.¹

Confederate President Jefferson Davis, in a message written in honor of the opening of the fifth session of the Provisional Confederate Congress, realized that the war would not be over by Christmas. Though the Confederacy was able, for the most part, to stave off invading Union forces, Davis knew that planning for a prolonged war was of the utmost importance. Richmond, a mere ninety miles from Washington, D.C., was a prime target for Union General George B.

¹ William G. Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2011), 215; Robert C. Black III, *The Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 2, 5, 20; *American Railroad Journal*, 9 August 1862. Both Black and Thomas believed that the South contained roughly 7,000 miles of track while other historians, such as George Edgar Turner in *Victory Rode the Rails: The Strategic Place of the Railroads in the Civil War* (Indianapolis: New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953) contend that the South possessed over 9,000 miles of track.

McClellan and the protection and provision of Richmond was vital to sustaining and winning the war. In his 19 November 1861 message Davis took stock of the avenues of Richmond's sustenance. The two available routes, west along the Southside Railroad and south along the Petersburg Railroad, both offered excellent means of transportation into the Deep South. There was a third potential route, however, which only required the construction of forty miles of rail. Davis's description of the Danville Connection as a "military necessity" designated this route of paramount importance to the survival of the nation.

Although Davis's 19 November speech to the Provisional Congress does not evoke the same patriotic fervor as some of his other speeches, labeling the Danville Connection as necessary for the proper execution of the war harkens back to his 18 February 1861 inaugural speech as the provisional president. Davis said, "It is joyous, in the midst of perilous times, to look around upon a people united in heart, where one purpose of high resolve animates and actuates the whole – where the sacrifices to be made are not weighed in the balance against honor and right and liberty and equality." The Confederate people, namely those in Virginia and North Carolina, needed to band together, put aside political and economic differences, and sacrifice for the nation in order to win the war.²

Despite Davis's call for unity against a common foe the factions in North Carolina continued to fight each other in the legislature as evidenced by voting patterns in the General Assembly of the state and the Provisional Confederate Congress. Virginia swiftly passed legislation for the connection. Legislative infighting did not hamper the progress of the bill through the Virginia General Assembly. The only evidence that the Danville Connection was

² U.S. Congress, Senate, *Journal of the Congress of the Confederate States of America, 1861-1865*, 58th Cong., 2nd sess., 1904. S. Doc. 234, 1: 66; hereafter cited as *CSA Congressional Journal*.

still a contentious subject for the Petersburg and Tidewater areas came from that area's Congressman. It was not the call for unity but rather the threat from invading Union forces on the coast of North Carolina led by General Ambrose Burnside that provided the impetus to tip the balance towards pro-connectionists in the North Carolina General Assembly.³

Davis's focus on the Danville Connection as another route for supplies to Richmond was brought to his attention by the general of the Virginia forces Robert E. Lee. He, in turn, was influenced by a number of the Southside population. B.M. Jones of Danville urged Lee to build a connection between the Richmond and Danville Railroad (RDRR) and the Roanoke Valley Railroad (RVRR), running from Keysville to Clarksville. Legislation for just such a connection was introduced and passed in the 1859-1860 Virginia General Assembly. The reason why Jones, a Danville resident, suggested a connection between the RDRR and the RVRR is unknown. Perhaps, knowing the difficulties caused by regional antagonism over the past ten years, passing legislation to authorize a connection between two Virginia railroads would be much simpler rather than the other option: a connection between the RDRR and the North Carolina Railroad (NCRR). Also, construction on the RVRR extension had already begun when it was interrupted by the Civil War. A partially finished railroad would be easier to build than creating and building an entirely new road. Despite Jones's urging, Lee politely declined the suggestion. Lee acknowledged that an additional road leading to Richmond from the Deep South would greatly improve the city's ability to survive a siege. The current finances of the state, however, made the construction of the connection nearly impossible.⁴

³ *CSA Congressional Journal*, 1: 470.

⁴ United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880), Ser. I, Vol. II, 830-831.

Davis's announcement of the need for a connection between Danville, Virginia, and Greensboro, North Carolina, caused a flurry of activity in both states. On 28 November a meeting occurred in Rockingham County, North Carolina. This meeting, like many before it over the past decade, called for a connection between Danville and Greensboro, but now the reason for the connection was couched in terms of military necessity, echoing Davis's recent speech to the Confederate Congress. Davis's couching of the Danville Connection as a "military necessity" spoke to the citizens of the Piedmont counties. Not only was Davis's acknowledgment of the connection a boon for public exposure, not supporting the connection could be seen as anti-Confederate. The meeting passed a number of resolutions that reflected a belief in the Confederate cause: stout support of any connection authorized regardless of which route the railroad ultimately took, approval of Davis's message, and the "vital importance" of the connection in order to fully and successfully prosecute the war.⁵

Printed alongside the announcement of the Rockingham County meeting was an editorial written by "Rockingham." The author praised Davis's willingness to put aside the pressing matters of state in order to address the needs of a small contingent of people. Mentioning the numerous meetings held throughout the area, "Rockingham" called on all administrators in both the state and national governments to pass the appropriate bills. The author believed the most advantageous route to be the one travelled between Danville and Greensboro via Reidsville rather than the potential route through Leaksville, which was proposed to the North Carolina General Assembly in December 1860 and passed in February 1861. The route through Reidsville would benefit from being roughly ten miles shorter than the Leaksville route. "Rockingham" also described the potential route of the connection as "remarkable for its beautiful scenery, purity of

⁵ *Richmond Whig*, 9 December 1861; *Daily Dispatch*, 6 December 1861; Virginia, Public Works, *Biennial Report of the Board of Public Works to the General Assembly of Virginia, 1859-60 & 1861-62* (n.p.: n.d.), 151.

water, and fertility of its soil.” The Reidsville route already boasted a road where the mail and goods travelled between the two cities. This route was generally known as the “Piedmont line.”⁶

The author only mentioned military necessity once, saying, “The intelligent passenger will be astonished that this connection had been delayed until forced upon us as a ‘military necessity.’” No mention is made of using the connection for actual wartime or even commercial uses, but “Rockingham’s” use of the word “passenger” betrays his thoughts on the uses of the proposed connection. Rather than seeing the proposed military necessity of the road, “Rockingham” saw the commercial and industrial uses of the road long sought by the population of the Danville and Greensboro areas. The idea that the connection would be used not only for military supplies was not an uncommon belief. Lewis E. Harvie, president of the RDRR, wrote of the Danville Connection, “The opening of this new and central through line will furnish uninterrupted and adequate transportation, not only for military stores and men, but for agricultural productions and commercial supplies.” Nationalism was enhanced by the promise of profits.⁷

Davis’s message convinced others in the new nation that the central government was willing to foot the bill for other state projects. “A Citizen of Stokes County,” focused on the still unbuilt Dan River Coalfield Railroad (DRRR), chartered during the 1858-1859 North Carolina legislative sessions. The author believed that since the central government was willing to fund an interstate connection, why not also build a railroad that promised immense raw materials? “Citizen” focused on what the DRRR could give to the Confederacy in terms of mineral wealth

⁶ *Daily Dispatch*, 6 December 1861.

⁷ *Daily Dispatch*, 6 December 1861; Virginia, Public Works, 1859-60 & 1861-62 *Biennial Report*, 151.

naming coal, iron, clay, marble, and salt as a number of the many geological resources that could be found in the vicinity. These resources were tremendously important to the war effort, especially salt which was used to cure meat to be used as rations for the army, so the construction of the DRRR would also fall under President Davis's view of being a military necessity.⁸

Focusing on a more national level, the *Daily Dispatch* printed an editorial that couched the need for the Danville Connection in less local and more national and military necessary terms. In April 1861 United States President Abraham Lincoln declared a blockade of all southern ports. The Confederacy had to rely on materials smuggled through the Union blockade or the use of railroads to distribute and divert needed foods and materials throughout the Confederacy. The connection would open up new markets to the nation as well as provide another direct link between Richmond and the South. The proposed route also boasted a number of geographic and war-related advantages. The route, located on the gently rolling landscape of the Piedmont region, was not subject to the harsh winters of the mountainous regions of Virginia and North Carolina or to the Union Navy or the tides that a water route would entail. The Danville Connection was also a route not bound to the political proclivities of eastern Tennessee. The Virginia and Tennessee Railroad (VTRR) was a major carrier of goods and matériel. The railroad, however, travelled through eastern Tennessee, an area of pro-Union sentiment. Therefore the railroad could not be relied upon to provide prompt and continual service to the Confederacy. This turn of events solidified Davis's belief that the Danville Connection was a military necessity while threats from the east further proved the wisdom in Davis's belief.⁹

⁸ *Daily Dispatch*, 2 January 1862.

⁹ *Daily Dispatch*, 7 December 1861.

Reaction to Davis's message concerning the Danville Connection was not all positive. The editors of the *Raleigh Standard*, long opponents of the connection, were generally in agreement that a railroad to speedily transport goods and troops was sorely needed. They, however, did not believe that the Confederate government should be determining how states should spend their money on internal improvements. This opinion became one of the reasons behind any resistance against the Danville Connection's passage through the Confederate Congress. The editors reminded readers that there already existed a charter for a line from Greensboro to Leaksville (the GLRR), passed during the 1860-1861 North Carolina legislative session, and also a charter for a line from the Company Shops at Burlington to Yanceyville passed during the same session as the GLRR. Reminding readers of these current charters served as notice to the public that the state did not need the potentially unconstitutional money from the Confederate government, and also that North Carolina was certainly more than capable to see to the nation and the state's interests.¹⁰

Responding to Davis's message, a citizen near Wilmington, North Carolina, addressed the local paper with outright defiance to the connection. The author believed that other roads merited more attention. Pre-existing roads should be considered for improvement of their infrastructure before the building of new roads, especially roads that would favor Wilmington and the eastern counties. The author believed that a bridge over the Cape Fear River would better serve the needs of the Confederacy. The bridge would hurry traffic along the railroads that travelled from Georgia along the eastern coast towards Richmond. According to the author, if the Danville Connection was built, goods and materiel would still need to travel along the shore. As to the concern of Union advances upon coastal railroads, there was no need to worry, said the

¹⁰ *Raleigh Standard*, 27 November 1861.

author. The author's belief in the Confederacy clearly influenced his opinion of the military necessity of the Danville Connection.¹¹

As to the ever present problem of gauge changes between railroads, the eastern route along the coast, at Wilmington, required one change. The NCRR was set at four feet eight inches while all other roads were at five feet. There could be any number of car changes if the Danville Connection was used instead of the eastern route. A difference of gauges between railroads was not a problem experienced solely by the South, however. In 1860, there were at least nine different gauges in both the North and the South. The gauge differences only posed a problem for the Confederacy because the nation, as a whole, was on the defensive. Lastly, the author brought up the usual tirade against the Danville Connection and its potential to bankrupt the state's eastern railroads. Despite Davis's call for the connection as a military necessity, many Confederates refused to reach down and look to their sense of nationalism to support their president and sacrifice for the good of the nation.¹²

The editors of the *Greensboro Patriot*, vocal proponents of the Danville Connection, responded to the editors of the *Wilmington Journal* and attempted to refute each of the editor's reasons against the connection. The editors of the *Patriot* supported the president, believing that President Davis was better informed of the current state of the burgeoning nation's position in the war than any of the population of the Confederacy. Reports of delays and lack of proper infrastructure on the nation's railroads were widely reported. Clothes, ammunition, and rations waited hours, even days, for transport. The construction of another railroad would address those concerns by alleviating some of the pressure on the railroad system. As to the possible

¹¹ *Wilmington Journal* (North Carolina), 26 November 1861.

¹² *Wilmington Journal* (North Carolina), 26 November 1861; Thomas, *The Iron Way*, 27.

unconstitutionality of Davis's proposal, the editors of the *Patriot* viewed Davis as the epitome of the states' rights advocate. If Davis believed that the government was able to direct influence and money towards internal improvements then this was reason enough for the editors of the Greensboro paper to support their president.¹³

While calling the Wilmington paper to task, the editors of the *Patriot* addressed the *Journal's* apparent concern towards the liquidity of the assets of North Carolina's railroads. Though the Danville Connection may possibly lessen revenue on the NCRR and the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad, the loss in revenue would be temporary. What the editors of the *Journal* were truly worried about was the effect the Danville Connection would have on the coastal railroads, which included the Wilmington and Weldon (WWRR) and the Wilmington and Manchester railroads. According to the western editors, the Wilmington railroads had consistently earned higher and higher profits. The editors of the *Patriot* believed what the editors and the readers of the *Journal* were truly afraid of was the possibility of less profit than previous years. The editors closed with the long held belief that North Carolina's railroads were built only where the money was and not where the desires of the population called for. The west knew exactly why the east did not want this connection: the potential loss of money and profits.¹⁴

The Provisional Confederate Congress moved first to pass a bill providing for the Danville Connection. The bill was introduced and read for the first time on 9 December 1861. The bill was not taken up for debate until 30 January 1862. Davis, worried that the Confederate legislature and the nation would see the passage of a bill that created a commercial venture as unconstitutional, attempted to soothe any public fears by once again stating that the proposed

¹³ *Greensboro Patriot*, 16 January 1862.

¹⁴ *Greensboro Patriot*, 16 January 1862.

connection would be used solely for military purposes. On 17 December Davis, knowing full well the controversy such legislation would incur, addressed his vision for a centralized government, at least for during the war. He wrote, “That certain appropriations which otherwise could not be constitutionally made by the Confederate Government come within the range of its powers when absolutely necessary for the prosecution of a war there is no doubt. It is equally clear that when this military necessity ceases the right to make such appropriations no longer exists.” This position, as will be seen, did little to mollify Davis’s critics in the Confederate Congress and created even further controversy surrounding the Danville Connection.¹⁵

Debate over the bill’s third reading consumed much of 30 January with delegates arguing over the wording of the proposed bill. The bill failed to pass its third reading, 6-3, with both Virginia and North Carolina voting in favor of the bill. Every Virginian delegate who voted did so in the affirmative. North Carolina’s delegation, however, was divided, 5-3. All three of the delegates who voted negatively hailed from eastern counties. The two delegates who did not vote were from counties that would vote in the negative during the bill’s final passage on 7 February.¹⁶

By 30 January many in the Confederacy were nervous at the apparent lack of progress made by the Confederate Congress concerning the Danville Connection. Though Burnside’s expedition off of the coast of North Carolina had yet to prove to be a serious threat to the Confederacy, the *Richmond Dispatch* calling it “unwieldy, inefficient, and frightfully costly to the Federal exchequer,” the editors of the newspaper warned against underestimating the Union forces. If even one soldier failed in his duty to protect the nation, the enemy could gain a

¹⁵ CSA *Congressional Journal* 1: 548, 731, 586.

¹⁶ CSA *Congressional Journal* 1: 731-734, 737, 762-764

foothold that would threaten the important coastal railroads and spell the beginning of the end for the fledgling nation. Though the editors of the paper had every confidence in the abilities of the Confederate armies, they were not willing to tempt fate and allow the destruction of the nation because of overconfidence.¹⁷

The vote on the bill's passage occurred on 7 February. The bill passed, 9-3, with North Carolina delegates divided, 5-5. Virginia delegates voted 7-1 in favor of the bill. The delegates in both states voted just as their fellow legislators in the Virginia and North Carolina General Assemblies had for the past decade. Every single delegate from North Carolina who had voted in favor of the bill hailed from a district situated in western counties while every delegate hailing from the east voted against the bill. The sole dissenting vote in the Virginia delegation represented the Petersburg and Tidewater area, a part of the state that had long been against any sort of connection with North Carolina. Clearly, Davis's call for the connection as a military necessity failed to convince some in the Virginia and North Carolina delegations to put aside regional differences and vote for a bill that would improve the Confederacy's ability to win the war. Regional interests trumped support of the Danville Connection despite the war-related promises of the link.¹⁸

The final bill, officially entitled "An Act to Provide for Connecting the Richmond and Danville and the North Carolina Railroads for Military Purposes," can be seen as an example of President Jefferson Davis's expanding executive powers. During the course of the Civil War the Confederate government centralized its power and regulated many aspects of people's lives. This included the introduction of the draft; mandated slave impressments as described by historian

¹⁷ *Daily Dispatch*, 30 January 1862.

¹⁸ *CSA Congressional Journal*, 1: 770.

Jaime A. Martinez; and dictating to planters and farmers what to plant, as well as the suspension of habeas corpus. Though Davis promised in his 17 December 1861 speech that many policies pursued by Congress were only necessary because of the war and would cease with the ending of hostilities, many in the South harbored resentment towards Davis and his expanding power. Fervent states' righters, including Robert Augustus Toombs, Robert Barnwell Rhett, and Louis T. Wigfall, were consistently vocal against Davis's expanding executive power even going so far as to suggest a coup d'état.¹⁹

The act granted Davis the power to enter into a contract on behalf of the Confederate government with any railroad company authorized to build the connection. It also gave Davis sole discretion to decide upon the route of the connection as well as the use of one million dollars in Confederate bonds to fund the project. The provisions of the act raised the ire of many fervent anti-Davis Congressmen in Congress.²⁰

These fire eaters, led by Toombs of Georgia, filed a protest against the passage of the connection bill. The opponents of the act believed the legislation to be unconstitutional. The Confederate constitution expressly allowed the Confederate government to acquire land but only with the consent of the states even if the confiscation of land was deemed to be of the utmost importance. The authors of the protest summed up their views of the president's expanded powers saying, "The wishes of States, the vested interests of States in other roads, corporate rights, rights of private property, all, by this act, are made to fall before the fiat of the Executive." The authors believed that, since the president now had the authority to construct and build a railroad, Davis also possessed the power to protect it and enforce punishments upon those

¹⁹ Martinez, *Confederate Slave Impressment*, 10; Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 138, 143-144, 148-149, 192-193.

²⁰ Confederate States of America, *The Statutes at Large of the Provisional Government of the Confederate States of America*, ed. James M. Matthews (Richmond: R.M. Smith, Printer to Congress, 1864), 258-259.

who harmed the railroad both physically and economically. According to Toombs and company these were the powers of a dictator created under the guise of military necessity.²¹

Aside from the perceived illegality of the act, the authors of the protest also disagreed with the theoretical necessity of the connection. The proximity of the areas served by the RDRR and the NCRR never exceeded 25 miles. The connection's benefits would be purely local and therefore the necessity of such a connection was unfounded. The authors admitted that the connection would be convenient to those it served, but such convenience was enjoyed by anyone with access to either railroad. Such arguments, the localized benefits of the connection, had long been used for the past decade by opponents of the connection in both Virginia and North Carolina.²²

Toombs and his fellow authors also questioned the financial ability of the Confederacy to actually pay for one million dollars in bonds. The amount allowed worked out to roughly 20,000 dollars per mile, a number the authors were quick to point out equaled the amount paid for some of the best railroads in the former United States. Toombs and company wondered where the newly founded nation would acquire the money to pay for the bonds. Also the relocation of materials to the cause of war, namely iron, would amount to higher costs for materials as well as prolonging the construction of the road due to the lack of availability of iron and wood. The war would likely be over by the time the railroad was completed thereby depriving the reason of military necessity put forth by Davis.²³

²¹ *CSA Congressional Journal*, 1: 781-782. The dissenters are interpreting Art. III, sec. 3, cl. 1 of the Confederate Constitution, which states, "...no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State...without the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress."

²² *CSA Congressional Journal*, 1: 782.

²³ *CSA Congressional Journal*, 1: 782.

Toombs, a fervent opponent of Davis's supposed abuses of power, and the other authors of the protest closed their message with a list of cruelties perpetrated by the United States government. The abuses included the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus as well as the declaration of martial law in some areas of the Union. The power to confiscate lands without the consent of states was merely a step in the direction that would lead to a mirroring of the enemy, according to Toombs. The authors of the protest, however, would find their argument of the unconstitutionality of the act invalidated as the legislative bodies of both Virginia and North Carolina approved legislation to allow the creation and construction of the Danville Connection in the following weeks.²⁴

The North Carolina State Convention began debate on the Piedmont Railroad (PRR) Company ordinance on 12 December 1861, roughly three weeks after Davis's opening message to the Provisional Confederate Congress. Progress of the ordinance almost immediately met the same delaying tactics that previous Danville Connection bills over the past decade encountered. A motion to postpone debate until the following January was narrowly defeated, 42-48. The pattern of two solid voting blocs consisting of either solely eastern or western counties continued. The dividing line of the counties voting for or against the postponement coincided directly with the established demarcation between eastern and western North Carolina.²⁵

Delaying tactics continued with a motion to adjourn for the day. The motion passed, 41-37, with eastern counties successfully gaining enough support from a group of three western counties and three other scattered counties to gain a majority. Debate on the PRR did not resume until 23 January 1862. An eastern representative, however, moved to postpone debate on the bill.

²⁴ *CSA Congressional Journal*, 1: 782. Toombs' fears of a suspension of the writ of habeas corpus and the establishment of martial law were confirmed in the spring of 1862.

²⁵ North Carolina, State Convention, *Journal of the Convention of the People of North Carolina. Second Session* (Jno. W. Syme, Printer to the Convention, 1862), 79; hereafter cited as *North Carolina Convention 2nd Session*.

The motion passed, 46-33. Only one representative from the east voted against the motion to postpone.²⁶

Much of 1 February was spent in debate over where the terminus of the PRR should be located in North Carolina. The convention split into two factions: those who believed that the state should determine the terminus and those who believed that the decision should be left to the stockholders of the PRR. The pro-state faction was led by John A. Gilmer of Guilford and the pro-stockholder faction was headed by Bedford Brown of Caswell County. Gilmer's argument rested on the idea that the state, not the central government, should be allowed to determine where the PRR terminated. Anything other than that would be an intrusion on states' rights by the Confederate government. As the financial backer of the PRR the Confederate government could become a majority stockholder in the company and thereby subvert the will of the people, or in this case, other stockholders. Brown's pro-stockholder stance was likely weakened by the fact that if the terminus was located at the Company Shops in Burlington, which was the delegate's wish, the PRR would run directly through Caswell County. David S. Reid of Rockingham County called Brown out on his desired location, saying, he "was glad States Rights was at last located" so conveniently in Caswell County.²⁷

The debate continued on 3 February with the pro-state and the pro-stockholder argument disintegrating into the usual east versus west debate concerning the Danville Connection: what sort of harm would the PRR do upon established eastern railroads. Ralph Gorrell of Guilford County naturally approved of the connection saying that the PRR would be beneficial to the NCRR rather than a detriment. George Howard, Jr., of Edgecombe County vehemently argued

²⁶ *North Carolina Convention 2nd Session*, 80-81; North Carolina, State Convention, *Journal of the Convention of the People of North Carolina. Third Session* (Raleigh: Jno. W. Syme, Printer to the Convention, 1862), 9-10; hereafter cited as *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*.

²⁷ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 30; *Raleigh State Journal*, 5 February 1862.

against the connection no matter where the terminus was located. Howard believed that too much emphasis and concern was placed on the central government in Richmond. Where was the love and ardor for North Carolina? If, however, the PRR was chartered then he believed that the terminus should be located at the Company Shops. Howard, despite his protestations against the central government, was still willing to hope for a terminus of the PRR that would benefit the east.²⁸

Reid of Rockingham struck back at Howard, calling out the east for its ill-treatment of the western counties of the state. It seemed hypocritical to Reid that the legislator representing Edgecombe lived alongside the WWRR, which travelled out of state to both Virginia and South Carolina. Why was Howard not voicing his displeasure at a railroad that took goods out of North Carolina just as the PRR would if built? Reid accused Howard of favoritism of the east over the west, voting in favor of any internal improvement that raised the stature of the east to the detriment of the western counties.²⁹

Kenneth Rayner of Hertford County took the floor saying that he would vote in favor of Brown's amendment that favored a terminus chosen by the stockholders, but would vote against the bill in general. Rayner saw the bill to charter the PRR not as a war-related necessity vital to the survival of the Confederacy, but rather as merely a local interest that did not concern the Convention. Instead, the legislative body should be attending to the approaching attack by Burnside's expedition off the coast of North Carolina. Rayner betrayed his eastern-held belief that the west should be almost subservient to the east when he stated, if a connection should be built, then let the connection be placed as far east as possible so that coastal interests did not feel

²⁸ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 33-34; *Raleigh State Journal*, 5 February 1862.

²⁹ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 33-34; *Raleigh State Journal*, 5 February 1862.

neglected. Rayner seemed to have forgotten that the most recent railroad built in the west was the NCRR, chartered in 1849, solely because eastern interests were mollified by the railroad extending to Goldsboro, a railroad hub in the east.³⁰

The following day, 4 February, Robert Strange of New Hanover County spoke to the Convention against the PRR. His speech, however, was notable for invective against the assembled body as a whole. He wondered at the constitutionality of the Convention to pass laws in the first place since the assembled body merely represented the North Carolina House of Commons and not the Senate as well. As historian May Spencer Ringold wrote, “For varying periods of time and to varying degrees secession conventions complicated the lawmaking process by sharing with governors and state legislatures the legislative activities concerning the new order.” Unfortunately, historians have remained mute about the perceived illegality of the State Convention. It is known that the State Convention was organized to address war-related measures concerning the state, but its relationship with the General Assembly has never been explored.³¹

Following Strange’s speech, the vote on Brown’s amendment, which required the terminus of the PRR to be located at the Company Shops at Burlington, was finally called to a vote. Brown’s amendment was rejected, 24-58. Delegates from the western counties continued to vote against any legislation detrimental to the west’s interests. Many delegates in the east, however, supported the west. These delegates hailed from counties largely located along the coast where Burnside was currently threatening. The coastal delegates, tired of the posturing by many of the eastern delegates against the connection, voted against Brown’s amendment as a

³⁰ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 33-34; *Raleigh State Journal*, 5 February 1862.

³¹ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 35; *Raleigh State Journal*, 5 February 1862; Mary Spencer Ringold, “The Role of the State Legislatures in the Confederacy,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (September 1964): 258-259.

message to the eastern delegates. While much of the east was distracted arguing over the Danville Connection, the coast was threatened with invasion, and any legislation that would improve the Confederacy's ability to repel the invaders was welcomed. This vote reflects Ringold's belief that "partisan conflicts in general assemblies were naturally distasteful to a citizenry so desperately in need of judicious legislation."³²

Following the fall of Forts Hatteras and Clark to Union forces in late August 1861 the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds were essentially defenseless. Small garrisons of Confederate soldiers remained but were essentially ineffective against a larger Union invasion of the North Carolina coast. The largest garrison of troops was stationed on Roanoke Island guarding the entrance to the Albemarle Sound. After convincing President Abraham Lincoln of the importance of controlling the coastal waterways of North Carolina, in early January 1862 Union General George McClellan ordered General Ambrose Burnside to capture the garrison on Roanoke Island. By February 1862 Burnside was ready to begin his invasion of the North Carolina waterways. Calls for an increased army presence in many coastal counties inundated the office of North Carolina Governor Henry T. Clarke. Unbeknownst to the population of North Carolina Burnside's orders called for him to continue down the coast of the state to capture the ports of New Bern and Beaufort before heading inland to capture the town of Goldsboro. As the actual threat of war reached North Carolina war became less an abstract concept to many inhabitants on the coast and more a reality. Delegates in threatened coastal counties voted, and

³² *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 35-36; Ringold, "The Role of the State Legislatures in the Confederacy," 257.

continued to vote, in favor of the PRR in order to stave off military invasion and possible defeat.³³

On 5 February the Convention resumed debate over the PRR bill. Much of the debate that day occurred between George V. Strong of Wayne County and B.A. Kittrell of Davidson County. Their debate, namely Strong's response to Kittrell, shows the regional tensions that existed between the eastern and the western counties of North Carolina. Kittrell claimed that Wayne County representatives had continuously voted against internal improvements for the west because Strong's county, whose seat was Goldsboro, enjoyed the economic advantages of the railroad and was not willing to sacrifice its position as an economic powerhouse. Not so, said Strong. The population of Strong's county believed it to be folly to send the county's money to another portion of the state. Strong followed with an attack against Davidson County's patriotism, and thereby Kittrell's. In terms of the current war Wayne County willingly sent much of its male population and money to the war effort. How many native sons and how much money had Davidson County contributed to the war effort? Strong closed saying, the PRR was not a military necessity because there were already two charters in existence that could accomplish what the PRR sought to do: the Milton and Yanceyville Railroad Company and the GLRR.³⁴

As an extension on the debate between pro-state and pro-stockholders in the Convention, and thereby the right of the Confederate government to own stock in a local company, William Foy of Jones County offered an amendment to the PRR bill. He suggested that following the war North Carolina be allowed to purchase all of the road, engines, and rolling stock situated within the state as a means of wresting control of the PRR from the national government. The

³³ John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill; The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 42-45, 60; United States, Naval War Records Office, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1897), Ser. I, Vol. VI, 507-508.

³⁴ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 38-39; *Raleigh State Journal*, 8 February 1862.

amendment was rejected by more than two to one. Bedford Brown of Caswell County next offered an amendment that, following the present war, any “rights, franchises and authority” claimed by the Confederate government would cease to exist and be given to the state. The amendment was also not approved. The Convention’s rejection of Foy’s and Brown’s amendments can be seen as tacit approval of the Confederate government’s expanding powers.³⁵

Debate continued the following day, but not without a number of further delaying tactics by representatives from eastern counties. Walter F. Leak of Richmond County, who had consistently voted for every postponement of the PRR bill, moved to postpone debate further on the bill. His motion, however, was denied nearly two to one. Howard of Edgecombe attempted also to postpone debate in order to introduce a bill to raise additional regiments of troops. This motion barely failed with western counties generally voting against the postponement and eastern counties voting for the motion, 47-50. Clearly delegates from the western counties overwhelmingly continued to be against any motion that delayed the PRR bill.³⁶

The bill passed its second reading, but debate continued before the bill was read a third time. William H. Thomas of Jackson County offered an amendment that would protect North Carolinian interests by denying the PRR the ability to discriminate against any North Carolina railroad in terms of prices concerning freight or passengers. The amendment was approved. Thomas likely feared that the PRR, as the sole route from western North Carolina into Virginia, would attempt to enhance its profits on a road that had been so long hoped for and was immensely popular in the western counties.³⁷

³⁵ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 39-40; *Raleigh State Journal*, 8 February 1862.

³⁶ *North Carolina Conventin 3rd Session*, 42-43.

³⁷ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 44.

Thomas presented another amendment, which required the PRR's gauge to match that of the NCRR. If the PRR matched with the NCRR's four foot eight inch gauge freight, passengers, and cars would quickly and easily transition from one railroad to the next. The RDRR, with a gauge of five feet, would experience the delays caused by the transfer of matériel travelling north from North Carolina. The second part of Thomas's amendment would allow the NCRR to construct a branch road to Danville or to the VTRR. This part of the amendment, if the NCRR built its own branch line to Danville, would negate the PRR. A connection with the VTRR, while not necessarily causing a negation of the PRR, could harm the company's profits. Thomas's attempt to allow the NCRR to connect with the VTRR does some have merit considering that Thomas represented a county with no railroad access. The nearest railroad was actually the VTRR, roughly twenty miles away from Jackson's northern border, and not the NCRR. Gorrell of Guilford County, whose seat was Greensboro, moved to strike out the second part of Thomas's amendment with a clause that would allow any railroad in North Carolina to connect with the PRR allowing the isolated Dan River Railroad to connect with the PRR. On advice from his fellow representatives Gorrell withdrew his clause and Thomas agreed to strike out any mention of allowing the NCRR to connect with the VTRR.³⁸

Following the debate over Gorrell and Thomas's amendments the Convention voted on the third and final reading of the PRR bill. The bill passed, 61-35. Every delegate hailing from the western counties voted for the bill except for the delegates representing Orange County and one delegate from Chatham County. Both Orange and Chatham Counties had long been split over any Danville Connection bill. It is not surprising that these two counties would continue to vote against the connection. Both counties would be negatively affected by a connection as the

³⁸ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session, 44-45.*

NCCR continued west from Greensboro through Orange, just north of Chatham. Seven eastern counties voted for the bill. All of these counties were threatened by the encroaching Union armies. Only the threat of Union invasion, not a sense of pride or love for their country, influenced the delegates of these seven counties to vote in favor of the PRR.³⁹

The eastern counties located inland that voted against the connection, who had voted against any connection bill for the past decade, were served by the eastern portion of the NCCR and the WWRR. A connection with Danville threatened profits and the political influence these counties enjoyed. Despite Davis's call for the Danville Connection as a "military necessity," these eastern counties still fought against the connection and refused to make the necessary sacrifices and put aside thoughts of monetary gain for the survival of the new nation.⁴⁰

The ratified PRR bill granted the company with a capital stock of one and a half million dollars "for the purpose of constructing a railroad on the best, cheapest, most direct and practicable route from the [RDRR] to the [NCCR]." The charter decreed that the first stockholder meeting would occur in Greensboro, giving the town an important role in the construction of the PRR and also hinting that the railroad would begin in that town. There was no doubt that Greensboro would be the terminus of the railroad.⁴¹

Concerned with constructing a North Carolina railroad in Virginia the charter addressed Virginia's sovereignty. Upon passage of the charter it would be transmitted to the Virginia General Assembly for their approval and the permission to build within Virginian territory. There was a caveat, however, that the PRR must be built to conform to the gauge of the NCCR,

³⁹ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 46.

⁴⁰ *North Carolina Convention 3rd Session*, 46.

⁴¹ North Carolina, State Convention, *Ordinances and Resolutions Passed by the State Convention of North Carolina* (Raleigh: John W. Syme, Printer to the Convention, 1862), 86, 89; hereafter cited as *North Carolina Convention Ordinances and Resolutions*.

four feet eight inches, and not the gauge of the RDRR, five feet. This caveat could cause problems in the Virginian legislature as Virginia interests would naturally push for a gauge matching that of the RDRR even though the PRR would run a mere ten miles inside Virginia. The company was also authorized to construct a branch road to the Dan River Coalfields to take advantage of the coal industry and the water transportation established there.⁴²

The thirtieth ordinance of the PRR charter exempted a number of company employees from jury and militia duty. These employees included the president of the company, board members, accountants, and engineers, naturally. Managers of the railroad's depositories, station or railroad security guards, and conductors were also included. These employees were considered invaluable to the railroad and its continued operation, especially in war time as worries over the end of twelve-month enlistments in April 1862 intensified, was a prime concern for Confederate officials. The company did not need to worry as the First Conscription Act of April 1862 exempted a number of jobs deemed necessary for the war effort, including those involved in transportation.⁴³

Gorrell's amendment authorizing other companies to connect with the PRR was also included. The amendment was reintroduced by Howard of Edgecombe and adopted. This amendment, along with permission for the NCRR to build a branch road from Hillsboro to Danville, was likely included to mollify eastern fears that the PRR would destroy railroad companies located in the east. These additions to the PRR's charter mirror the compromise the west made with the east in 1849, the extension of the proposed NCRR to Goldsboro where it

⁴² *North Carolina Convention Ordinances and Resolutions*, 91-92, 98.

⁴³ *North Carolina Convention Ordinances and Resolutions*, 97-98; Rable, *The Confederate Republic*, 155.

would connect with eastern railroads. Once again western counties needed to pander to eastern interests in order to improve their economic and financial standing.⁴⁴

Reaction to the passage of the PRR ranged from hesitancy over the future of the state's internal improvements to joy. The editors of the *Semi- Weekly Raleigh Register* reported the passage in a matter-of-fact tone. The editors freely admitted that the debate over the Danville Connection was long argued dating back over ten years. The editors likely voiced the same opinion as many in the east saying, "It has now found a settlement, but with what results of good or evil to North Carolina, time alone can tell. Let us hope that those who have contended that, so far from injuring the best interests of the State, the connection will contribute greatly to their promotion, may, in the sequel, prove to have been true prophets." Opponents of the PRR, and the Danville Connection in general, had lost and now pro-connectionists were challenged by the east to prove that the connection would not be harmful to eastern railroads.⁴⁵

Greensboro was jubilant over the PRR's passage. The editors of the *Greensboro Patriot* praised the delegates from the western counties for their solidarity during the long debates over the bill. Praise was laid upon those delegates from the east who "[laid] aside old prejudices" and "[resisted] the factious opposition exhibited by some Eastern friends to defeat the Road." The "factious opposition," however, did not deserve universal condemnation. The anti-connectionists used legal and parliamentary means to delay and defeat the bill. The number of ill-conceived amendments passed by a number of opponents to the bill, however, could "not fail to receive the condemnation of a high-minded and magnanimous people." The PRR was of national importance and would have no ill-effects towards eastern railroads. The editors of the *Patriot*

⁴⁴ *North Carolina Convention Ordinances and Resolutions*, 98, 100.

⁴⁵ *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Register*, 8 February 1862.

were willing to take the anti-connectionists' challenge and declared that "in less than five years from its completion, [it will] be universally admitted by all sections of our State and Confederacy" as an important and necessary railroad in the nation.⁴⁶

One contributor to the *Richmond Dispatch*, while believing the PRR to be a sound idea, believed that the Confederacy's railroad problems could be solved if the Virginia and Confederate legislatures looked to the RVRR. Like B.M. Jones of Danville, the contributor believed the extension of the RVRR to be paramount to the Confederacy's success in the war. The 21-mile route from the terminus of the RVRR at Clarksville to Keysville on the RDRR was already surveyed, graded, and in some places, track was already laid. Why should a longer route be constructed and a new company chartered when there was already a company ready to build an extension that would be cheaper and quicker, the writer wondered. The RVRR extension also benefitted geographically, located inland away from the coast and Burnside's expedition. By the printing of this letter Burnside had established a foothold on Roanoke Island and threatened the inner coastal ways of North Carolina, and General Ulysses S. Grant had captured Fort Henry on the Tennessee River and was well on his way to capturing Fort Donelson. It was obvious now that the Union intended to inflict damage upon the Confederacy's transportation routes and railroads were the next step in crippling the Confederacy's ability to make war. Speed was of the essence now, and time should not be wasted on the creation of an entirely new railroad company when a perfectly suitable company, the RVRR, already existed. This was essentially the same argument supported by Strong of Wayne County, why create a new railroad company when there already existed the means to create a connection, namely the MYRR and the GLRR.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Greensboro Patriot*, 13 February 1862.

⁴⁷ *Daily Dispatch*, 13 February 1862.

Following Davis's speech to the Confederate Congressional Congress, in Virginia, Lewis E. Harvie, president of the RDRR, was in contact with members of the Confederate government concerning how the various railroad companies in the nation could cooperate with one another to better facilitate the transportation of goods and war matériel. Harvie communicated to Davis his belief that a connection between Danville and Greensboro would "afford the safest route at all times for the transportation of troops and munitions of war" because of its interior location. Internally, the stockholders of the RDRR saw, in addition to the military importance of the connection, the commercial benefits of the railroad. Military necessity was the perfect reason to build the connection, especially if the RDRR's coffers benefitted.⁴⁸

The stockholders of the RDRR held their annual meeting on 12 December in Richmond. Naturally news of Davis's recommendation for the Danville Connection consumed much of the meeting. The *Daily Dispatch* reported that the stockholders were largely in favor of the connection. The meeting passed a number of resolutions: the stockholders approved of Davis's recommendation for a connection and the company would cooperate with the Confederate government in relation to furthering the railroad; if, for whatever reason, it was deemed more expedient to place the connection elsewhere, the RDRR would not hesitate to assist the government in whatever capacity it deemed fit; and, if the General Assembly passed a law expanding the RDRR's corporate power, then the company would accept these expanded powers, even without the majority of stockholder consent. Davis's recommendation for the connection was not unwelcome to the RDRR Company. For ten years the company desired a connection with North Carolina and now the president of the new nation had personally blessed

⁴⁸ "Resources of the Confederacy: Report of General I.M. St. John, Commissary General," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 3, no. 3 (March 1877): 109; Richmond and Danville Railroad Company, *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company* (Richmond: G.W. Gary, Printer, 21 Pearl Street, 1862), 214-215.

the connection as necessary for the proper execution of the war. Naturally, the company could not appear overly gleeful at the turn of events in the company's favor. The appearance of being magnanimous, and also patriotic, if a new route was chosen and still offering the company's services announced to the general public that the company was willing to support and make sacrifices for the Confederate war effort.⁴⁹

Pro-connectionists in the Virginia House of Delegates were quick to take advantage of the situation created by President Davis. On 3 December, one day following the opening of the winter 1861 Virginia legislative session, A.S. Buford of Pittsylvania County proposed the creation of a five-person committee to correspond with Confederate and North Carolina authorities on whether legislation would be required to construct the Danville Connection. The committee created two days later consisted of thirteen members with a decidedly pro-connectionist slant. Only one of the members represented a county, Nansemond, which had consistently voted against any sort of connection between Danville and Greensboro in the previous ten years. Both representatives from Pittsylvania County were members of the committee.⁵⁰

Little occurred until the special committee received a communication from Virginia Governor John Letcher on 14 February 1862. The communication consisted of a letter from W.N. Edwards, the president of the North Carolina State Convention, announcing the passage of the PRR bill. This communication was the sign that the special committee was waiting for. The special committee reported back on 21 February with a bill to authorize the Piedmont Railroad company (PRR) to build the ten miles from the North Carolina state line to the RDRR terminus

⁴⁹ *Daily Dispatch*, 13 December 1861; *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, 18 December 1861.

⁵⁰ Virginia, General Assembly, House of Delegates, *Journal of the House of Delegates of the State of Virginia, for the Session of 1861-1862* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1861), 12-13, 17; hereafter cited as *1861-1862 Virginia House of Delegates*.

in Danville. The committee did not report back to the House until both the North Carolina and the Confederate legislatures had passed bills authorizing the creation of the PRR, likely to ensure the success of the bill in the Virginia legislature. The bill was read a first time and ordered to be read a second time but the bill did not reappear for debate until the end of March when the Senate's version of the PRR bill entered the House.⁵¹

The Senate received Letcher's communication on 15 February and the ordinance was submitted to the Committee on Roads and Internal Navigation. The committee responded on the 24th with a bill giving the state's consent for the construction of a railroad from North Carolina to connect with the RDRR. The bill travelled quickly through the Senate and was passed on 3 March and entitled "An Act to Sanction an Ordinance of the State of North Carolina Entitled 'An Ordinance to Incorporate the Piedmont Railroad Company.'" The House passed the bill on 26 March.⁵²

The bill contained a number of provisos to be followed before a connection could be authorized. The PRR Company was not allowed to discriminate against the RDRR or any other Virginian railroad company in terms of higher freight rates or the postponement of shipments. The connection with the RDRR must be located at or near Danville and, if for any reason, the location of the PRR's terminus was to be changed, only the president of the Confederacy held the power to authorize such a change. This proviso, likely because of the controversial nature of the section, was the only time that a roll call appeared during the course of the bill's journey in Virginia. The proviso granted powers to the presidency that could be construed as outside of

⁵¹ 1861-1862 *Virginia House of Delegates*, 165, 193.

⁵² Virginia, General Assembly, Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (Richmond: James E. Goode, Senate Printer, 1861), 143, 158, 172, 177; hereafter cited as *1861-1862 Virginia Senate; 1861-1862 Virginia House of Delegates*, 316.

executive authority. However, as an examination of the Confederate Congress' PRR bill shows, granting the president powers outside of his constitutional authority was nothing new.⁵³

The obvious lack of debate over the Danville Connection, as shown by the absence of roll calls during the readings of the PRR bill in both houses of the General Assembly, can be attributed to a number of reasons. During the years between the announcement of the RDRR in 1847 and Davis's November 1861 message no less than thirteen bills and amendments were introduced in the Virginia General Assembly authorizing an extension for or a connection with the RDRR. Six separate times delegates from Petersburg and the Tidewater counties consistently voted against the Danville Connection bills and amendments. Four of the thirteen attempts ultimately passed both houses despite the objections of Petersburg and much of the Tidewater. Where North Carolina is divided in eastern and western factions, Virginia consists of a greater number of regions that have their own interests at heart. Petersburg and the Tidewater area were decidedly outnumbered by the rest of Virginia.

After the passage of the PRR bills in the Confederate Congress and the North Carolina General Assembly passage of Virginia's PRR bill was practically guaranteed. The sole dissenting vote in Virginia's Confederate Congressional delegation represented Petersburg and the Tidewater area. It is only logical to believe that during Virginia's PRR debate many, if not most, of the counties located in southeast Virginia continued to vote against the Danville Connection.

The battle over and the passage of the PRR bill reveals the inability of anti-connectionists to support a war measure that would allow the Confederacy to more successfully prosecute the

⁵³ Virginia, General Assembly, *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Virginia, Passed in 1861-2* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, Public Printer, 1862), 72.

war, though it would negatively affect the eastern region. Eastern delegates in both the State Convention and the Provisional Confederate Congress continued to vote against the connection due to a long held prejudice against western North Carolina. Though there were a few instances in which delegates from the east in the State Convention voted for the connection, the overwhelming majority did not appeal to their better nature and vote for the connection. Western delegates continued to support the connection just as they had since 1847. In the Provisional Congress eastern delegates in the North Carolina delegation continued to vote against the connection despite its military importance. Avid states' righters saw in Davis's proposed connection the death of the autonomy of the states. A sense of nationalism for the newborn Confederate nation was unable to overcome the prejudices of inter-regional rivalries. Rather, it was the threat of Burnside's Expedition against the coast of North Carolina that convinced enough delegates in the east to vote for the Danville Connection. Virginia continued largely to support the connection. Unfortunately no roll calls were recorded so PRR votes in both the House and the Senate do not exist. The quick passage of the PRR bill in the Virginia legislature was likely due to the geographic imbalance of Virginia's regions as well as the passage of sister bills in the North Carolina and the Confederate legislatures. Despite resistance the PRR bill passed and the railroad, albeit with difficulties, was built in time to be of considerable use to the Confederacy, especially during the 1864-1865 Siege of Petersburg.

Conclusion

Following the March 1862 passage of Virginia's ordinance allowing the PRR to be built within the state's territory the company's books opened to investors. Within a week the RDRR purchased 14,900 shares of the PRR's 15,000 shares, which is unsurprising considering the pressure placed upon Jefferson Davis by Lewis E. Harvie, president of the RDRR. The company had pushed for a connection with North Carolina since the railroad's creation in the late 1840s. The company's purchase of a majority of the PRR's stock allowed the Confederate government a way out of the politically sticky situation funding the PRR with government bonds had created. The Confederate government loaned one million dollars in bonds to the RDRR, which had agreed to construct the PRR. The RDRR paid contractors in government bonds, which were backed by RDRR funds. The RDRR eventually paid the Confederate bond back to the central government, while replacing the government bonds paid to contractors with company bonds, thereby granting the RDRR with near sole ownership of the railroad.¹

Due to the wartime lack of labor and materials the PRR was not completed until May 1864, though trains ran on the track as early as October 1863. Rails were taken from surrounding, less necessary, railroads, including the RVRR, which some had believed to be a better and cheaper connection with North Carolina than the PRR. The completion of the line

¹ Brown, "A History of the Piedmont Railroad Company," 207, 209; Nelson, "The Confederacy Serves the Southern," 236; Price, "North Carolina Railroads During the Civil War," 305.

came none too soon. In June of 1864 General Lee and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia dug in around Petersburg, protecting the city from Union General Ulysses S. Grant and the Army of the Potomac. Lee's sole lifelines were the RDRR to North Carolina via the PRR, the Southside Railroad, and the Petersburg Railroad and the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad running south into eastern North Carolina. A significant portion of the Petersburg Railroad was captured by Union forces in August 1864. Lee and his army survived solely on what little provisions came to them via the RDRR and the Southside Railroad. The PRR and the RDRR operated as well as any company could during the closing months of the war. Shoddily built in the first place, the PRR struggled to keep up with the demand put upon it as a part of the surviving lines into Richmond and Petersburg. When Richmond fell in early April 1865 the PRR was part of the route taken by President Davis and the fleeing Confederate government.²

Beginning in 1866 the RDRR leased and operated the PRR, improved and replaced the rails, and altered the gauge of the road to conform to that of the RDRR. In 1874 the lease was amended to extend for another eighty-four years. In the early 1890s the RDRR, including the still-leased PRR, was bought by the Southern Railway System, which, in turn, was bought by the Norfolk Southern in 1982. The route of the Norfolk Southern between Danville and Greensboro still closely follows the route of the PRR.³

The legislative history of the PRR reveals inter-regional rivalries within Virginia and North Carolina as well as the failure of Confederate nationalism. The eastern and western counties of North Carolina were divided over the distribution of internal improvement projects for their respective portion of the state. The west, jealous of the east's developed region, longed

² *Greensboro Patriot*, 26 May 1864; Brown, "A History of the Piedmont Railroad Company," 210; House Select Committee on Southern Railroads, *Southern Railroads*, 40th Cong., 2nd sess., 1867, H. Rep. 3, 2; Angus J. Johnston II, "Lee's Last Lifeline: The Richmond & Danville," *Civil War History* 7, no. 3 (September 1961): 295.

³ Brown, "A History of the Piedmont Railroad Company," 216-218, 221

for a railroad of its own to expand into other markets. The creation of the NCRR helped stem the west's jealousy, but an actual connection with Virginia, through Danville, would further the west's economic independence. The Danville Connection represented the west's efforts to be on par with the eastern section of the state. The east attempted to block the west's efforts to secure the connection. To the population of the eastern counties the Danville Connection represented the potential of lower profits for the area's established railroads.

Virginia echoed North Carolina's inter-regional rivalries. Southside Virginia was only able to trade with Richmond and Petersburg using the RDRR. Any trade that went south to North Carolina travelled along poorly maintained dirt roads. Many in the Southside wished for an easier way to trade with North Carolina. A railroad connection with Danville and the NCRR, preferably at Greensboro, was the population of the Southside's wish. Opposition by the delegates of Petersburg and the lower Tidewater area emerged through the initiation of a number of delaying tactics and voting against the interests of Southside Virginia. The lower Tidewater area, however, did not possess a large enough bloc of delegates to prevent the passage of a number of connection bills. Only the North Carolina General Assembly's unwillingness to connect with Virginia saved the Petersburg and lower Tidewater area's railroads. The Danville Connection represented further economic independence from the Tidewater area for the Southside and potential bankruptcy for business and railroad interests in Petersburg and the lower Tidewater area.

The commencement of the Civil War in April 1861 ushered in a new chance for the creation of the Danville Connection. Confederate President Jefferson Davis brought national attention to the connection, citing it as a "military necessity" for the successful conclusion of the war. In the Confederate Provisional Congress the PRR represented a blatant attack against state

autonomy and was seen as a likely candidate for an abuse of power by the central government. Within the North Carolina's congressional delegation eastern and western rivalries continued and the state's delegation split evenly along geographical lines. Despite legislative delays initiated by delegates who saw in the PRR the destruction of state autonomy, the PRR bill passed. When the bill entered into debate in the North Carolina State Convention during the Civil War, eastern fears of the collapse of established railroads overcame their sense of Confederate nationalism inherent in Davis's call for the connection as a "military necessity." Only the threat of invasion by Union forces led by General Ambrose Burnside convinced enough delegates from counties on the coast to vote for the PRR and to tip the balance in favor of the pro-connectionists. In Virginia the legislature easily passed its support of the PRR though the lower Tidewater area likely still struggled against much of the rest of Virginia.

The Danville Connection represented different ideas depending upon geographical location. Both western North Carolina and Southside Virginia saw the Danville Connection as a means to open up larger markets for their goods and to become more economically independent from the eastern portion of their state. Eastern North Carolina and the lower Tidewater area of Virginia perceived the Danville Connection as a threat to established railroads and business interests. Many in the Confederate Provisional Congress saw the PRR as an attack against states' rights while others saw the railroad as a means to bring about the successful conclusion of the Civil War. In light of the legislative controversy spanning over a decade and the ingrained regional jealousies and bickering, the Danville Connection and the PRR represent the hurdles Confederate nationalism needed to overcome in order to be a reliable means of support during the Civil War.

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