

This Day in History... December 20, 1860

South Carolina Secedes from the Union

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

Well before the start of the American Civil War, South Carolina came into conflict with the federal government. South Carolina depended heavily on foreign trade and federal tariffs discouraged foreign trade.

In 1828, soon after an economic depression struck the US, Congress raised tariffs. This law became known as the "tariff of abominations." Anti-federal sentiment spread throughout the state. Vice President John C. Calhoun, a South Carolinian, wrote the "South Carolina Exposition," which claimed that no state could be bound by a law it deemed unconstitutional.



Confederate stamp picturing John C. Calhoun

When tariffs were raised again in 1832, the state passed the Ordinance of Nullification. This ordinance declared the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832 void. This action prompted President Andrew Jackson to threaten sending troops to enforce federal law. In 1833, Congress passed a compromise tariff bill, and the Ordinance of Nullification was repealed.

By the 1860s, South Carolina had the largest percentage of enslaved people in the US – 57% of the state's population was enslaved with 46% of white families owning at least one black person. The issue of slavery in America was a major point of contention in the mid-1800s. Violent clashes, such as those at Harpers Ferry, brought national attention to the debate. By the election of 1860, the nation was split on the issue.

According to one South Carolina politician, "If the Republican Party with its platform of principles, the main feature of which is the abolition of slavery and, therefore, the destruction of the South, carries the country at the next Presidential election, shall we remain in the Union, or form a separate Confederacy? This is the great, grave issue. It is not who shall be President, it is not which party shall rule – it is a question of political and social existence."

Abraham Lincoln faced Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas and two pro-slavery candidates in the 1860 presidential race. When the results were tallied, Lincoln easily won the November 6 election. Despite receiving only 39.8% of the popular vote, Lincoln won a majority in 15 states totaling 169 electoral votes, and a plurality in three earning him 11 more. Any hope Southern states had of preserving the institution of slavery appeared to be dashed.

Days later, the South Carolina General Assembly passed the "Resolution to Call the Election of Abraham Lincoln as US President a Hostile Act" and announced the state intended to secede from the United States. The general assembly then called for a state convention to consider secession and selected delegates. The secession convention met on December 17 in Columbia and voted unanimously 169-0 to secede from the United States.

The ordinance was officially adopted on December 20, 1860. That day South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union. President James Buchanan proclaimed the secession illegal, but did nothing to stop it. Days later, on December 24, the committee drafted a *Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina*, which explained why they had seceded. This declaration claimed it was because of "increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the Institution of Slavery."

The declaration also criticized the free states for refusing to enforce the Fugitive Slave Acts. They claimed it went against the 4th article of the Constitution: "No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up, on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due."

The declaration went on to say that the non-slaveholding states had broken this agreement, releasing South Carolina from its obligation to be part of the Union.

In the coming months, South Carolina prepared for an expected attack from the US military and also worked to convince other states to secede. They succeeded and between January and May 1861, ten more states joined them, creating the Confederate States of America that February. The first battle of the war would be fought in South Carolina that April.



Stamp issued for South Carolina's 200th anniversary in 1987.

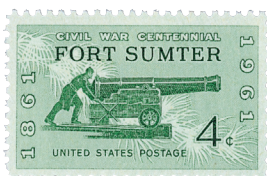


America's first mourning stamp



The South Carolina flag was first created in 1775 using the blue from soldiers' uniforms and the crescent emblem on their caps. South Carolina troops successfully defended a fort made from palmetto logs, inspiring the palmetto tree in the state flag.

of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina, which explained why they had seceded. This declaration claimed it was because of "increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the Institution of Slavery."



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Fort Sumter in South Carolina.



Issued for the 150th anniversary of the Constitution.

This Day in History... December 20, 1860

South Carolina Secedes from the Union

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

Well before the start of the American Civil War, South Carolina came into conflict with the federal government. South Carolina depended heavily on foreign trade and federal tariffs discouraged foreign trade.

In 1828, soon after an economic depression struck the US, Congress raised tariffs. This law became known as the "tariff of abominations." Anti-federal sentiment spread throughout the state. Vice President John C. Calhoun, a South Carolinian, wrote the "South Carolina Exposition," which claimed that no state could be bound by a law it deemed unconstitutional.



Confederate stamp picturing John C. Calhoun

When tariffs were raised again in 1832, the state passed the Ordinance of Nullification. This ordinance declared the tariff acts of 1828 and 1832 void. This action prompted President Andrew Jackson to threaten sending troops to enforce federal law. In 1833, Congress passed a compromise tariff bill, and the Ordinance of Nullification was repealed.

By the 1860s, South Carolina had the largest percentage of enslaved people in the US – 57% of the state's population was enslaved with 46% of white families owning at least one black person. The issue of slavery in America was a major point of contention in the mid-1800s. Violent clashes, such as those at Harpers Ferry, brought national attention to the debate. By the election of 1860, the nation was split on the issue.

According to one South Carolina politician, "If the Republican Party with its platform of principles, the main feature of which is the abolition of slavery and, therefore, the destruction of the South, carries the country at the next Presidential election, shall we remain in the Union, or form a separate Confederacy? This is the great, grave issue. It is not who shall be President, it is not which party shall rule – it is a question of political and social existence."

Abraham Lincoln faced Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas and two pro-slavery candidates in the 1860 presidential race. When the results were tallied, Lincoln easily won the November 6 election. Despite receiving only 39.8% of the popular vote, Lincoln won a majority in 15 states totaling 169 electoral votes, and a plurality in three earning him 11 more. Any hope Southern states had of preserving the institution of slavery appeared to be dashed.

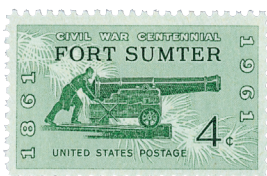
Days later, the South Carolina General Assembly passed the "Resolution to Call the Election of Abraham Lincoln as US President a Hostile Act" and announced the state intended to secede from the United States. The general assembly then called for a state convention to consider secession and selected delegates. The secession convention met on December 17 in Columbia and voted unanimously 169-0 to secede from the United States.

The ordinance was officially adopted on December 20, 1860. That day South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union.

President James Buchanan proclaimed the secession illegal, but did nothing to stop it. Days later, on December 24, the committee drafted a *Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina*, which explained why they had seceded. This declaration claimed it was because of "increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the Institution of Slavery."

The declaration also criticized the free states for refusing to enforce the Fugitive Slave Acts. They claimed it went against the 4th article of the Constitution: "No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up, on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due." The declaration went on to say that the non-slaveholding states had broken this agreement, releasing South Carolina from its obligation to be part of the Union.

In the coming months, South Carolina prepared for an expected attack from the US military and also worked to convince other states to secede. They succeeded and between January and May 1861, ten more states joined them, creating the Confederate States of America that February. The first battle of the war would be fought in South Carolina that April.



Stamp issued for the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Fort Sumter in South Carolina.



Stamp issued for South Carolina's 200th anniversary in 1987.



America's first mourning stamp



Issued for the 150th anniversary of the Constitution.