

"Treason and Insurrection"

Introduction

In December 1860, following the November election of Abraham Lincoln to the office of President of the United States, South Carolina became to first slave-holding state that seceded from the Union. By February 1, 1861, six more Southern slave-holding states seceded. On February 8, 1861, the seven rebel states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas) formed the Confederate States of America, known also as the Confederacy. After the first shots at Fort Sumter were fired on April 12, 1861, four other states joined Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia. The eleven states were determined to preserve their slave-holding privileges.

That does not mean, however, that all white Southerners supported the Confederacy and its cause. While some did not agree with the official stand of the Confederacy but remained passive, others engaged in secret activities to fight against the Confederacy in the seceded South. One such initiative was the Arkansas Peace Society, a loose affiliation of anti-Confederate groups established shortly after Arkansas seceded from the Union. Those groups were usually secret because Confederates, who represented the majority of white Southerners, believed their members were traitors. The secret anti-Confederate groups in Arkansas were particularly popular in northern counties, where slavery was not as crucial to the economy as in other parts of the state. They did not last long, however. Most were disbanded already at the end of 1861 when the persecution of their members resulted in large-scale arrests.

In this activity, you will examine a letter that John Rice Homer Scott wrote to one of his fellow Confederate officers. In it, Scott discusses how the Arkansas Peace Society operated and what men like Scott – loyal to the Confederate cause – thought of anti-Confederate organizations. Although Scott was the great enemy of anti-Confederates, his letter allows us to reconstruct how these secret societies functioned in the South, where their activities were considered, in Scott's words, "treason and insurrection."



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Letter by John Rice Homer Scott, December 3, 1861 (John Rice Homer Scott Collection, 1836-1895)



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Is then letting their hand fall down to the side, The
2 rd Lign was to pull with the two forefrigers of the right
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Letter by John Rice Homer Scott, December 3, 1861, p. 2 (John Rice Homer Scott Collection, 1836-1895)



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Letter by John Rice Homer Scott, December 3, 1861, p. 3 (John Rice Homer Scott Collection, 1836-1895)



their plans be were decided that they would "give me a fight be think is would be advisable to Station Some of the Companies of my command in Wiley's Cove Leancy County, there is a Camp meeting ground with Love good buildings a Very large Harbor and near on in midse of this seeses - so city &c. I think Caps; Boon is in the becoming of county of the same Kind of men but fear her able to procuse minter Luartins Convenient, I am in fass hopes I may be permited to Station the Companies, if found necessory separately in the most assaffected and unloyal licalities br adjoining Counties within reach or days ricu from my head dry It will be better in geting the use of buildings in hast now essected at estain points by religious Societies & in neighbor hoods where protection would be needed ye store I shall take the What's of acting as I have tougasted hoping it may meet your approval, Should I necen no answer in time to the application and concumitances Shall organis A in son, preguments. Lambin Very Ruspie Vpuly your Obt Servent Brig Sen B. McCulcock Ino RA omers cott Caph Condy Trester Division Comide Battallion A. C.S. American was and control C. S. A. Marytalla Man I work will want to of all made on thempton in May a produce Cotal Harologe to Shell comment

Letter by John Rice Homer Scott, December 3, 1861, p. 4 (John Rice Homer Scott Collection, 1836-1895)



Questions:

- 1. Who wrote the letter and when?
- 2. What type of "secret society" does the letter's author discuss? See "Introduction" for more information.
- 3. Secret anti-Confederate organizations were distinctly created in the Southern Confederate states. That was because, in other states, individuals did not have to hide their anti-Confederate views. Why do you think Scott writes that the organization that he discusses was "of Northern origin," which is not accurate?
- 4. Why do you think Scott believes that the organization that he discusses "breaths Treason and insurrection of the most conclusive and positive nature"?
- 5. How did the secret organization discussed in this letter operate? What kind of signs and secret signals did its members use to convey various messages?
- 6. What does Scott mean when he writes that some members of the secret organization "were to volunteer & go into the army of the South and there work our destruction"?
- 7. Where did the secret organization concentrate in Arkansas? Locate these counties on a map. If possible, use a map from 1861.
- 8. What else do we learn about the secret society from Scott's letter?
- 9. How could Scott's point of view (i.e., his views and beliefs) shape his description of the secret organization that he discusses in this letter?
- 10. How did Scott obtain all the information about the secret organization that he discusses? See the first lines of the letter for important information.
- 11. Although Scott opposed anti-Confederate groups and considered them treasonous, his letter allows us to study their history. Why do you think we can learn so much about those secret organizations from the letter of an enemy of such organizations?