

## Secession in Abbeville

155 Years Ago  
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On November 22, 1860, a meeting was held to launch South Carolina's secession movement.  
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Four and a half years later on May 2, 1865, Jefferson Davis officially dissolved the Confederate government.

### ***Both events happened in the same town: Abbeville, South Carolina.***

As the 1860 presidential election loomed, tensions rose high throughout the United States. And cockades blossomed along with political fervor.

As early as October 22, 1860, a newspaper observed: "South Carolina is Arming.—We are glad to see the people of our State everywhere preparing for the crisis which is at hand. As an offset to the "Wide-Awakes" of the North, "Minute Men" are organizing in all the principal districts of South Carolina. Their object is to form an armed body of men, and to join in with our fellow citizens, now forming in this and our sister States as "Minute Men," whose duty is to arm, equip and drill, and be ready for any emergency that may arise in the present perilous position of the Southern States.

"In Kershaw, Abbeville and Richland Districts the organization is already complete and powerful, embracing the flower of the youth, and led on by the most influential citizens. The badge adopted is a blue rosette, two and a half inches in diameter, with a military button in the centre, to be worn upon the side of the hat. Let the important work go bravely on, and let every son of Carolina prepare to mount the blue cockade."

### **Blue Silk and Brown Paper**

"Secession fever" continued to grow, as did the cockades. As the year moved into November, the Charleston Mercury reported, Sturdy Patriots.—A number of charcoal dealers, from the interior of this district, were yesterday here on business, wearing—not the blue silk cockade—but plain strips of brown paper, bearing such mottoes as "Resistance," "Remember Harper's Ferry," etc. We could not but admire the stern simplicity of this unpretending badge of devotion to South Carolina.

### **Election Rejoicings**

Finally the election results rolled in. Lincoln's private secretary tells the story of what happened the morning after voting day. "The morning of November 7th brought the certain news of the election of Lincoln and Hamlin on the previous day, and the rejoicings which would have been uttered over their defeat became jublations that their success offered the long-coveted pretext for disunion.

From this time forth everything was managed to swell the revolutionary furor. The Legislature immediately ordered a convention, made appropriations, passed military bills. The federal office-holders, with much public flourish of their patriotic sacrifice, resigned their offices. Military

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Companies enrolled themselves in the city organizations of minutemen sprang up in the rural neighborhoods. Drills, parades, meetings, bonfires, secession harangues, secession cockades, palmetto flags, purchase of fire-arms and powder, singing of the Marseillaise - there is not room to enumerate the follies to which the general populace, especially of Charleston, devoted their days and nights."

### Which brings us to November 22.

Over 3000 Abbeville townspeople gathered on that southern fall day to listen to secession speeches and to elect delegates for the upcoming Secession Convention. The site where they assembled is now called Secession Hill. In early December 2010, just a few days past the 150th anniversary of this event, I enjoyed a visit to Secession Hill with my family (and can't resist sharing a picture of us!).

The delegates went on to the Secession Convention in Columbia, which was later moved to Charleston when smallpox broke out in the capitol city. When South Carolina finally did become the first state to secede on December 20, the reverberations - and cockades - were felt all the way to Washington, D.C. We are told, "It was the late dinner hour, and dining-rooms and corridors were shaken with excitement, as men with the blue cockades of the secessionists brushed jubilantly past those who wore the colors of the Union."

No one could have known at that point that America's bloodiest war was about to begin.

**Epilogue:** Fast forward four and half years. His armies surrendered, his government in exile, President Jefferson Davis fled Richmond and headed south.

He spent a night in Abbeville at the home of his friend Armistead Burt. On May 2, 1865, in the front parlor of what is now known as the Burt-Stark Mansion, Jefferson Davis held his last cabinet meeting and officially dissolved the Confederate government. Abbeville saw the beginning... and the end.

Of course, nobody knew then that history buffs 155 years later would wearing those cockades all over again!

### History Commemorated

On November 10, 2018 thousands will gather once again in Abbeville, SC to dedicate a monument commemorating that far-reaching historical event 155 years ago. If you need a cockade for the event, check out the South Carolina cockades in my shop: <https://creativecockades.ecwid.com>.