

Educator Resource

Secession!

Dates & Eras 1861

Themes Leaders,
Secession,
Slavery,
Soldiers

Grades 5–7

Standards VS.1,
VS.7,
VS.8,
USI.1,
USI.8,
USI.9;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.
RH.9-10.4,
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.
RH.11-12.3,
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.
RH.11-12.5

History Overview

Abraham Lincoln won the hotly contested 1860 presidential election. Throughout the campaign, the sectional division within the country was on full display. Lincoln did not carry a single southern state, and he failed to capture a majority of the popular vote. However, his victory in the electoral college was clear.

Although he promised to leave slavery alone where it existed, many Southerners insisted that Lincoln and the Republicans would work to end slavery. A little over a month later, South Carolina seceded from the United States, claiming an “increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery.” They were followed by six other states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas.

Virginians had to decide what to do. Should they follow the states in the Deep South and secede, or should they stay in the Union?

On February 13, 1861, one hundred fifty-two delegates met in Richmond for the Virginia Convention of 1861. On April 4, the convention voted 90 to 45 against secession. However, the Convention continued to meet. When Fort Sumter fell and Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers on April 15, feelings changed. A day later, the Virginia Convention went into secret session. On April 17, the Virginia Convention voted again, this time 88 to 55 in favor of secession.

James Thomas Petty was a young Virginian living in Washington, D.C. He recorded his thoughts as the secession crisis unfolded.



Suggested Questions

1. What are Petty's feelings concerning Virginia's secession?
2. Explain why or why not you think these feelings were typical of most Virginians.
3. How does Petty convey his message through his word choice in his diary?
4. Explain why the language used reflects the atmosphere of the time period. Give examples.
5. Throughout the diary, why do you think Petty's entries involving succession were so vague?

Resources

[James Thomas Petty
Diary Entries](#)

[Transcription of Petty Entries](#)

Additional Links

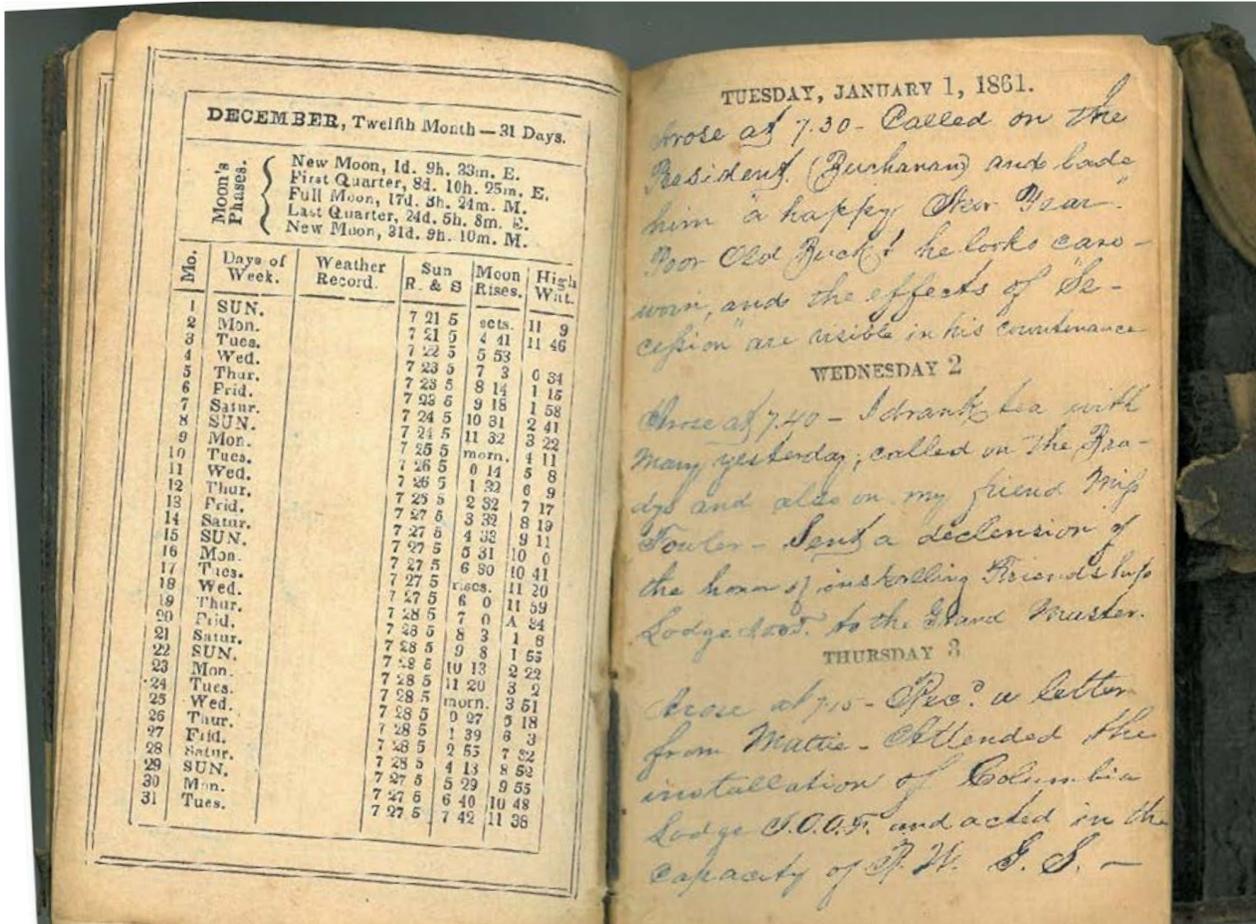
[Library of Congress Manuscript
United States Senate
Historical Office](#)

Suggested Activities

1. Have students write a descriptive paragraph about Thomas Petty based upon what they learned from his diary.
2. Have students read excerpts from the diary of Horatio Nelson Taft in the Library of Congress. Then, have them compare and contrast Taft's observations with Petty's.
3. Have students read Lincoln's Call for 75,000 Troops. After, have the students evaluate the key words in Lincoln's speech describing his political stance and how this affected the secession of Virginia.
4. Distribute to students the page of "Opinions on Virginia's secession." Have students view these letters online. Depending upon the level of your students and the time available, you may wish to have students view a limited number of letters from the sheet. Have students record the following information about each letter: Who wrote the letter? Where did the person who wrote the letter live? When was the letter written? Is the writer for or against secession? Why? Record two statements of interest. Reassemble the class and discuss the various opinions of people concerning secession. Did Lincoln's call for volunteers seem to influence people? Do opinions seem to vary based on where people lived? Are there letters from places that are no longer in Virginia?

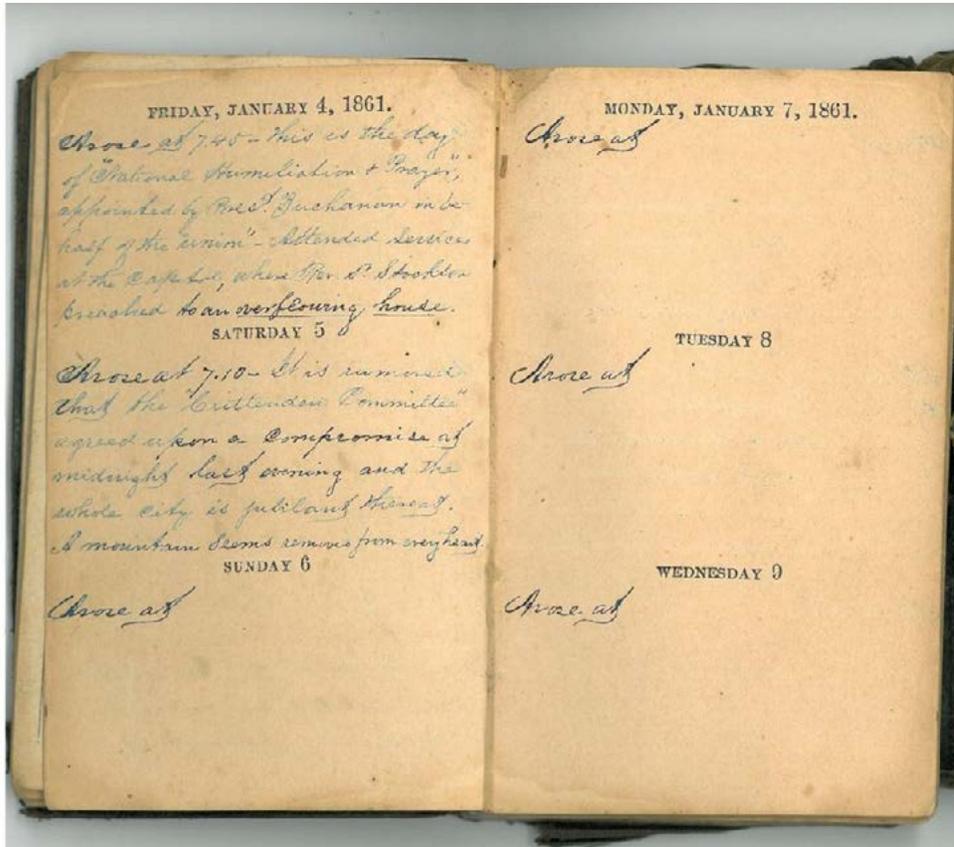
James Thomas Petty

Diary Entries



Entries of James Thomas Petty of Virginia from January-April, 1861

American Civil War Museum



FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 1861.

Arose at 7.40 - This is the day of National Humiliation & Prayer, appointed by Pres. Buchanan on behalf of the Union. - Attended Services at the Capitol, where Mr. S. Stockton preached to an overflowing house.

SATURDAY 5

Arose at 7.10 - It is rumored that the Crittenden Committee agreed upon a compromise at midnight last evening and the whole city is jubilant thereat. A mountain seems removed from my heart.

SUNDAY 6

Arose at

MONDAY, JANUARY 7, 1861.

Arose at

TUESDAY 8

Arose at

WEDNESDAY 9

Arose at

THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 1861.

FRIDAY 5
Arose at 4.30. - Attended Lodge - Called at Bradley's. Had a tragic scene with ~~William~~ in which ~~thunder~~ participated. Walked home with Fannie H. - Things are getting worse in the political world fast.

SATURDAY 6

Arose @ 6.30 - Poor Violet Hinton died at 1 a.m. - Met the Milburns, and the Lees and the Stanleys. Mary Lee introduced me to Mr. C. & F. to Miss Jennie Green of Baltimore. Amelia Stanley introduced me near same place to Frank Carlin of this city.

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 1861.

Spent night with Violet's remains - in gaze the full bears last evening. - Met Mr. Harkins, C. Stanley, Mr. Thompson, J. S. Thompson & myself. Funeral at 3 to day. - Spent day with Jennie Green at her's. Her father & myself had dinner till 11.20 p.m.

MONDAY 8

Arose @ 7.30 - Got to breakfast. Didn't attend Sunday school yesterday but slept from 7 to 10.30 a.m. - Spent the evening with Miss Jennie G. at her's. - Spent till 10.30 and whiled the time away in chat & yarn spinning.

TUESDAY 9

Arose @ 6.30 - Examined Lodge Book & Cleaned to night. - Went to call on Miss Jennie and lost courage as my hand knocked the door bell. - The "Coercive" preparations of the Lincoln government create intense excitement. The South is in a blaze.



Transcript of Petty Diary Entries

Diary of J. Thomas Petty 1861
406 D St. bet. 6th & 7th
Washington, D. C.

Warren Rifles Co B.
17th Regt. Va. Vol. C. S. A.

Notes: Brackets indicate changes to text. All underlining and parentheses appear in the original.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 1861

Arose at 7.30 – Called on the President (Buchanan) and bade him “a happy New Year.” Poor Old Buck! He looks careworn, and the effects of “Secession” are visible in his countenance.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, 1861

Arose at 7.40 – I drank tea with Mary yesterday – called on the Bradys and also on my friend Miss Fowler – Sent a declension of the honor of installing Friendship Lodge I.O.O.F. to the Grand Master.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 3

Arose at 7.15 – Rec a letter from Mattie. Attended the installation of Columbia Lodge I.O.O.F. and acted in the capacity of R.W.G.S.

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FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 1861

Arose at 7.45 – This is the day of “National Humiliation & Prayer,” appointed by Pres Buchanan in behalf of the “union” – Attended Services at the Capitol, when Rev. D Stockton preached to an overflowing house.

SATURDAY 5

Arose at 7.10 – It is rumored that the “Crittenden Committee” agreed upon a compromise at midnight last evening and the whole city is jubilant thereat. A mountain seems removed from every heart.

SUNDAY 6 – WEDNESDAY 9—all entries read:

Arose at

THURSDAY, JANUARY 10, 1861 – SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 1861 – no entries

MONDAY, MARCH 11, 1861

Billy Gray died at 3 this afternoon I closed his eyes.

TUESDAY 12

Sat up with Billy’s remains last night. With W.H. West, W.A. Thompson & Benton Linton.

WEDNESDAY 13

Sat up again with Billy last evening – I never saw a corpse that so nearly preserved the appearance of life as his – We buried him in Glenwood (vault) today. I promised to write his obituary for the Star.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14, 1861 – no entry**FRIDAY 15**

Arose @ 7 – Inserted Billy Gray's obituary in the Star – paid \$1.75 for it. Attended meeting of the lodge and then called at Mrs. Brady's.

SATURDAY 16 – THURSDAY, APRIL 4, 1861 – no entries**FRIDAY 5**

Arose at 6.30 – Attended Lodge – Called at Brady's – Had a tragic scene with [name erased] in which "thunder" participated – Walked home with Bettie H. – Things are getting worse in the political world fast.

SATURDAY 6

Arose @ 6.30 – Poor Violet Hinton died at 1 a.m. – Met the Milburns, and the Lees and the Stanleys – Mary Lee introduced me on cor. 6th & Fth Sts. to Miss Jennie Green of Baltimore. Amelia Stanley introduced me near same place to Frank Larkin of this city.

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 1861

Sat up last night with Violet's remains. Engaged the pall-bearers last evening – D F.W. Mead, F. Larkin, C. Stanley, W.A. Thompson, J. G. Thompson, & myself. Funeral at 3 to-day. Drank tea with Jennie Green at Lee's – Her father & myself told "stories" til 11.30 p.m.!

MONDAY 8

Arose at 7.30 – Late to breakfast – Didn't attend Sunday school yesterday but slept from 7 to 10.30 a.m. – Spent the evening with Miss Jennie G. at the Lee's. Staid til 10.30 and wiled the time away in chit-chat and yarn-spinning.

TUESDAY 9

Arose at 6.30 – Examined Lodge Books at Elvan's tonight – Went to call on Miss Jennie and lost courage as I touched the door-bell-knob. The "coercive" preparations of the Lincoln government create intense excitement – The South is in a blaze.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10, 1861

Arose at 6.30 – Exciting telegrams, &c from Charleston – D.C. Militia Volunteers called out to the number of Seven Companies and mustered into Service of U.S. to guard pub. buildgs. (Called at Mrs. Milburn's this afternoon. Spent evening with Jennie Green at Lee's & got "salted").

THURSDAY 11

Arose at 6.30 – City is rife with warlike rumors from Confederate States. (Spent last evening with Jennie Green at the Lees. Had a pleasant time). Called on Mrs. Fowler, Mary & the Brady's this evening – Heard "photographic" news!

FRIDAY 12

Arose at 6.45 Late to breakfast – Called at Lee's & escorted Miss Jennie & the girls to Milburn's where we spent the evening – startling telegrams from Charleston! War begun! Sumter attacked & defended! 2 Guns silenced & breach made in Sumter's walls! Glory enough for one day.



SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 1861

Arose at 6 – Thrilling news from the South! Major Anderson surrendered Sumter unconditionally at 1 p.m.! The city is ablaze with excitement! – Called on Jennie and staid till 11 p.m. Enjoyed myself notwithstanding many of the company were antipodes to me in politics.

SUNDAY 14

Arose at 7 – To S. S. & church in morning. News from Sumter is doubted by the Black Republicans – I believe it – Have resolved not to discuss politics – Drank tea with Jennie at Lee's – Escorted her to D Sunderland's 4 ½ St. Presbt Church – Much company & I staid at Lee's till 11 p.m.

MONDAY 15

Arose at 6 – News from Sumter is true – Lincoln has issued a proclamation calling out 75,000 men! Wrote a joint letter to father and mother defining my position on the "crisis" - [writing scribbled out] Spent the evening at Lee's [writing scribbled out] (We played "consequences" to-night).

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 1861

Arose at 6 – All my friends nearly condemn me but believing I'm right I still cry hurrah for Old Virginia! Wither she goes I'll follow. Jennie & Mollie called at store & got weighed – [erasure] Jennie got a letter telling her to come home immediately – Spent evening with her, got her address and bade her good-bye with a kiss-

WEDNESDAY 17

Arose at 6 – Oh! that God might save us yet from civil war! My country! O my country! I could weep tears of blood if it would avail to restore the old, the true "Union" in peace! War will never, never do it – Have had the "Green" fever terribly to-day – Spent the evening with Mollie Lee and all we said was deeply tinged with green.

THURSDAY 18

Arose at 6.10 – My best friends are unable to discuss politics with me without getting angry, so I keep cool & still but determined Called on Mary & the Bradys – Met Mollie Lee & her mother on the street & went home with them. Went to the Long Bridge to see the U.S. Artillery there – Had a talk with Char. Hancock.

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 1861

Sat up all last night with the corpse of old Mr. Taylor. The Mass. Troops were assaulted in Balto. today & there was a bloody time – This is the first blood spilt and today is the anniversary of the first battle of the Revolution! Have resolved to respond to Gov. Letcher's call & go to Virginia to volunteer. Saw Mrs. A. Lincoln. Drank tea with Mollie Lee & remarked sitting in her front door: "Where will I be three months from this time?"

SUNDAY 20

Arose @ 5.30 – Have been packing & getting ready to leave – Walter Frankland & I will go to Va. To-morrow. Bade Mrs. Harrover & the family "good-bye" to-night. Spent the night with Walter – Was presented to Mrs. Tamar at Mrs. Holmead's. Was presented also to Walter's mother.

SUNDAY 21

Arose at 4.50 – Walter & I & three others chartered Brown's Hotel Omnibus & rode to O. & A. R.R. depot in Alex. We gave three cheers when we got across the Long Bridge from old Va. Got acquainted with Almira Lake's husband & stopped at Recertown all day & night. Saw Smith Harding there also.