

Chapter 1

The Hinsons of Bubbling Springs

“They were, in a very real sense, mountaineers without mountains.”

In the western reaches of Kentucky and Tennessee, there is a long slice of land, in effect an inland peninsula, known as the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area. It runs approximately north-south, with Kentucky Lake on the west side, and Lake Barkley on the east side. Since 1969, it has been uninhabited except for USDA Forest Service personnel and the hunters, fishermen, boaters, tourists, field trippers, and researchers who constantly come and go. It occupies much of what was once an isolated land surrounded on three sides by great rivers.

Prior to the radical changes brought by the Tennessee Valley Authority, before the flanking rivers became lakes and the people were uprooted and forced to leave their homes, that forested inland peninsula was locally known simply as Between the Rivers. The inhabitants usually pronounced it 'Tween the Rivers.

This land between the rivers consisted of the western portions of four counties and one entire county. In Kentucky, there were the western ends of Livingston, Lyon, and Trigg Counties; in the Tennessee portion, there was most of Stewart County and all of Humphreys County. At Cumberland City the Cumberland River turns off to the southeast toward Nashville, the land between the rivers widens increasingly, and the effects of being bound closely between the flanking rivers diminish imperceptibly. For this reason, it isn't possible to say, precisely, where Between the Rivers ended southward, but it was at some ill-defined point south of a line between Johnsonville and Waverly in Tennessee.

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, Kentucky Lake was the Tennessee River and Lake Barkley was the Cumberland River, unimpeded in their ancient flows, keeping their natural channels. As the two mighty

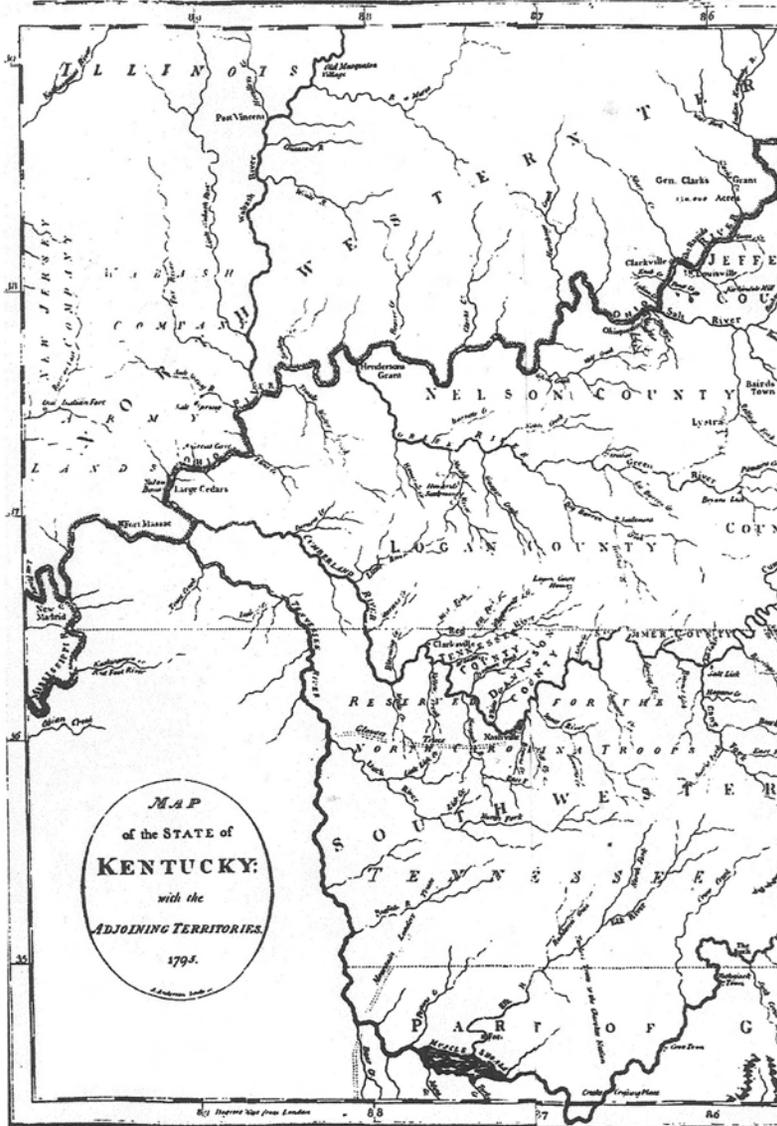
streams neared their mouths, they turned almost due north and ran parallel for sixty miles before emptying into the Lower Ohio River. Paducah, Kentucky, was (and is) at the mouth of the Tennessee, and Smithland, Kentucky, was (and is) at the mouth of the Cumberland. At this point, the Ohio River is a mile wide in its final run to its mouth at the Mississippi River, just thirty-five miles downstream.

This inland peninsula was river country. The lives of the people were woven inextricably into the turns, currents, channels, and the rising and falling of the mighty streams that enclosed their land. The rivers and the associated cane breaks, cypress swamps, and marshes provided abundant fish and waterfowl. It was the rivers that brought what few manufactured goods they had, and it was the rivers that carried away their hides, cotton, tobacco, crossties, barrel staves, and whiskey to markets in Clarksville, Smithland, and Paducah, thence from these markets on to Nashville, Louisville, Memphis, and New Orleans.

As they flow toward the Ohio River, the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers run from south to north; therefore, the people called south “up” and north “down,” so wedded were their lives and thinking to the flow of the streams. Although Paducah and Smithland were at the northern end of the land between the rivers, the people spoke of going “down” to Paducah and Smithland, not “up.” Their descendants living in the area still do. This inland peninsula has a geographic crest running north and south, more or less up its center, a “continental divide” in miniature. Rain that falls on its western slopes drains into the Tennessee River, and that which falls on its eastern slopes drains into the Cumberland. Locals called it “the Dividing Ridge;” their descendents living in the area still do.

The People

The typical original settler between the rivers had come from the Carolinas where many had fought at Kings Mountain and in other battles with Brig. Gen. Francis Marion, the “Swamp Fox” of the American Revolution. Many, if not most, of the settlers had come to the Carolinas from Scotland, some by way of Ireland, fleeing persecution (thus the classification, applied to them by some as “Scotch-Irish”). By ancestral nature, these people were fiercely independent, self-reliant, clannish, and suspicious of outsiders.



Kentucky and surrounding territories. Note the Land Reserved for the North Carolina Troops. (Courtesy Austin Peay State University, Felix G. Woodward Library)

They were tough, accustomed to hard work, and comfortable with hardship. The raw nature of the frontier and the isolation in which they lived served to intensify these inherent traits. They were, in a very real sense, “mountaineers without mountains,” for it is isolation that makes mountaineers what they are—not the mountains. When great political conflicts concerning the area were being debated and resolved, such as the location of the uncertain border between Kentucky and Tennessee, county boundaries, the choices of towns for county seats, and law enforcement jurisdictions, Between the Rivers residents were relatively indifferent. They had little interest in matters of law and government beyond their rivers, including those that could affect them. They were interested primarily in their own very local affairs and wanted most of all to be left alone. And, incidentally, they definitely did consider them to be *their* rivers.

Their attitudes, customs, and bits of the language of many were Scottish Highlands. Like the settlers in the southern Appalachian Mountains, from whence they had come, the people Between the Rivers had brought and retained into the second and third generations some of the customs, values, and traditions of the Scottish clans. Among these was the law of vengeance, a pivotal factor in this story. Such a man was John W. Hinson, whose story this is. Also known, from the Civil War years on, as “Old Jack” and “Captain Jack” Hinson, he settled between the rivers during the first half of the nineteenth century. There is no known record of his middle name. Middle initials were seldom used in the records of the time. Only one known document lists his middle initial, “W.” One can only speculate, but since he had a son named William, perhaps that was his own middle name. He married Elisabeth James, established a farm home, and settled down to rear a family. Like the rest of the settlers between the rivers, all he wanted was a chance to work, conduct his business enterprises, support his family, and to be left alone.

The descendants of the original settlers continued to exist in relative isolation, and they lived and thought much like their eighteenth-century ancestors well into the mid-twentieth century, when those proud, independent people “tween the rivers” were summarily uprooted and driven from their homeland by the federal government. The calamity that had invaded their lives during the War Between the States and the harsh Reconstruction that followed was

capped by the depopulation of the area, the final tragedy that forever ended life as it had been known Between the Rivers. The Highland Clearances in Scotland, which had forced Scottish ancestors of Between the Rivers citizens to leave their highland homes and lands to come to the New World in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, would be repeated for their descendants of the third and fourth generations in the mid-twentieth century.¹

The Economy

From the beginning, the economy between the rivers was basically one of subsistence farming, augmented by hunting, fishing, and barter. Except for staples, such as sugar and salt, virtually everything consumed on the farm was produced on the farm. Even these items could sometimes be produced locally. Salt of a sort could be had from natural “salt licks,” and a form of sugar could be rendered from sorghum cane or honey. Wild honey was abundant, and hives for captured swarms could readily be made from hollow sections of the logs of black gum. Such hives were called “bee gums.” Cash crops were cotton and tobacco. Corn could also be sold although most was produced for feeding stock and for grinding into corn meal. Some of the corn was used for making whiskey, a skill the settlers brought with them from the North of Britain, and they took great pride in the quality of their product. Most settlers made whiskey only for home use, but any surplus could be sold or bartered. As commercial contact increased with the markets beyond their rivers, the people produced whiskey in increasing amounts for export and sale. By the turn of the twentieth century, the land between the rivers had become an exporter of whiskey, with Golden Pond in Trigg County, Kentucky, as the industry’s center. The best whiskey was made between the rivers; the best of the best came from or through Golden Pond.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, cotton was a major cash crop for the area, but it quickly depleted the soil. When fields were depleted, farmers either cleared and planted new ground or turned to other cash crops. Less and less cotton was planted for sale. Still, most farms had at least a small cotton patch for home use (spinning, weaving, and quilting). Hemp and flax were also grown for the fibers used in spinning yarn and weaving linen and

course cloth. Most homes had a loom for weaving and two spinning wheels, a large one for spinning cotton and wool and a smaller one, usually called a flax wheel, for spinning the flax and hemp fibers. Hemp fibers were also used in making rope, a valuable substitute between the rivers for metal chain, which, even when available, was expensive. When cash was in short supply, as it usually was, surplus home products were used for bartering.

Saw mills and gristmills operated throughout the area, with each serving the area immediately around it. As the people Between the Rivers slowly came under the regulation of county governments, mill permits were issued and prices were regulated by the county courts. Inns, where they existed, were likewise regulated by the county courts, including establishment of prices. The people resented all such governmental intrusion into their lives and evaded it when they could. The only heavy industry in the area was the iron industry, utilizing the high-quality native ore. Old stone smelting furnaces, in various states of ruin, still dot the area, bearing silent witness to the once-thriving industry, which reached its peak in the 1850s, but continued through, and after, the War Between the States. On, and in, the ground surrounding the iron furnaces pieces of "blue rock," a glassy biproduct of the iron smelting process, can still be found. Cpl. Eugene Marshall of the occupying Fifth Iowa Cavalry was fascinated with these blue rocks: "The road, and ground, [are] covered with a curious cinder from the iron works. It has every appearance of glass, and [is] a beautiful blue color, many pieces being finely veined and variegated."²

The furnaces operated throughout the region between the rivers, both in Kentucky and in Tennessee; however, the majority of the area's furnaces were in Stewart County, Tennessee, where they were concentrated in the Dover area, with most of them on the Cumberland River side of the dividing ridge. During the years from 1815 to 1860, of the three iron-producing counties with portions between the rivers, there were eighteen furnaces operating at various times in Stewart County, Tennessee, compared with only two each in Lyon and Trigg Counties on the Kentucky side of the border.³ Investors in the iron industry between the rivers were attracted to the deposits of high-quality ore, both brown hematite and limonite, and the limestone, which was used as a flux in the smelting process. In addition, the ore deposits tended to be easily

accessed, frequently located just below the surface or exposed in bluffs. The limestone was never far beneath the surface, and much of it was likewise exposed in river bluffs and stream banks. The availability of seemingly inexhaustible supplies of hardwood trees for making charcoal and the great rivers for transportation completed the assets necessary to the industry. In addition to all this, adjacent rich farmland provided ample food for the hard-working crews, many of which were made up of immigrants brought in for that purpose or locally owned slaves. The iron industry, with its furnaces, mills, and cleared “coaling fields,” would play a significant role in the coming war, and in the Hinson family’s role in it.

“Between the Rivers” was both a geographical entity and a sociological refugium, with their way of life held tenaciously in times past. Because of the isolation between the rivers, it was an area in every way behind the times. In there, by comparison with the surrounding area and its cosmopolitan centers of Paducah, Kentucky, and Clarksville, Tennessee, it was still yesterday. There were no bridges. Except for the boats that came and went and a few ferries, the people were isolated, and few traveled beyond their river boundaries. Like most of the surrounding region, many of the original inhabitants had come in the late eighteenth century to settle on land grants awarded for service in the Revolutionary War. Unlike the surrounding region, however, things “tween the rivers” hadn’t changed much, nearly a century later. And that was not an altogether bad thing.

The Hinson Family

John W. “Jack” Hinson was born in North Carolina in July 1807 and, as a young man, came with his family to Tennessee about 1830. Birth state determinations in Tennessee can be difficult due to the fact that Tennessee was western North Carolina prior to June 1796. In Jack’s case, however, his post-1796 birth date establishes his birth state as North Carolina. The year of his birth in some census records can appear to be 1808, depending on the month in which the census was taken.

Like most Hinsons, he was not a tall man. He was about five feet, five inches tall, lean and strong, with unusually long and muscular arms. One local lady, who lived to be 102, vividly remembered descriptions of his long, muscular arms. When asked what he looked like, she replied, “He looked like Popeye.”⁴

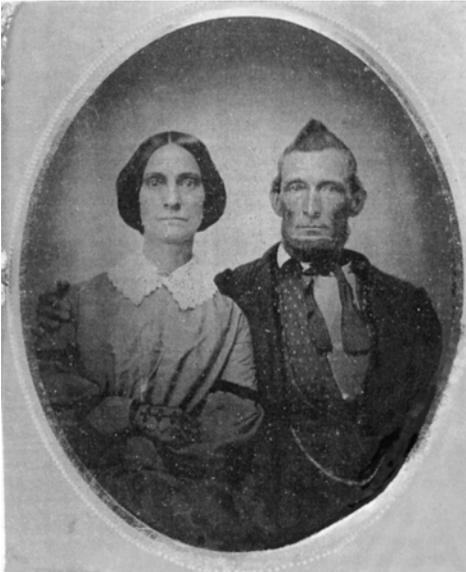
He was serious and strong-willed. His posture was erect, and his gaze steady. His manners were courtly and genteel for that raw frontier, and his strength of character was apparent. He was a quiet man who spoke sparingly; yet in his manner and countenance there was a suggestion that his relatively small size concealed a combination of great strength and cool courage, if not outright menace. Confederate major Charles W. Anderson, wartime adjutant general to Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, knew Jack Hinson and served with him on at least three occasions during the war. He has given us the only known surviving, complete physical description of Jack Hinson. Major Anderson described Hinson's "clear, gray eyes, compressed lips, and massive jaws" and offered his opinion that Hinson's natural appearance "clearly indicated that under no circumstances was he a man to be trifled with, or aroused." His eyes were narrow, above high cheekbones, almost suggesting the oriental, but inclining slightly upward toward the center of his forehead. Known in the family as "Hinson eyes," they are a strong genetic characteristic, which continues to appear in his descendants today.⁵



Jack Hinson before the war. (Painting by Joe McCormick)

Within this quiet, courteous man there lay a depth of character and great inner strength—like a coiled spring of tempered steel, ready at all times for instantaneous action. In a metaphor often used in the rural South to describe such a man, he was “small, but wound up tight.” Never boastful, nor even conspicuous, but demonstrably without fear, he was, as Major Anderson put it, indeed a man not to be trifled with or aroused. The same thing, incidentally, could be said of his sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons. These traits seem to have been strong hereditary dominants and carried with them the potential for tragedy.

John Hinson, who came to be called “Jack,” first appears as head of a household in the 1840 census in Stewart County, Tennessee. Its county seat was the little village of Dover, on the banks of the Cumberland River. Stewart County, formerly a part of Montgomery County, was named for Duncan Stewart, who in 1793 had come from Scotland by way of North Carolina as one of the first settlers. He had been instrumental in the establishment of Stewart as a separate county in 1803 and was, justifiably, looked upon as the father of the county.



Thomas Hinson, Jack's brother, and wife Eliza (Stanfill), circa 1860.

The identification of Jack Hinson's father is uncertain, but the evidence points strongly to Jacob Hinson of Little Richland Creek in Humphreys County, also born in North Carolina. Humphreys County was the county immediately south of Stewart, and many Hinsons lived in the border area where Stewart, Humphreys, Montgomery, and Dickson Counties met. Jack had a younger brother, Thomas, who lived in the Ellis Mills community, southeast of Dover. Assuming that Jacob was his father, Jack had two

other, younger, brothers and a younger sister, whose names are unknown.⁶

Jack's wife, Elisabeth James Hinson was born in 1817. Although her name in later records is spelled with a "z," in the earliest records it is spelled with the British "s," and this spelling will be used here exclusively. Elisabeth was the daughter of John James (1791-1852) and Agnes James (1800-1851), both of whom are buried in the old cemetery in Dover. Wives and children were not named in the 1840 census but were only numbered in categories according to age. Thus, in the 1840 census, she appears only as "female, 20-30." Elisabeth first appears, by name, in the 1850 census, as Jack's wife, with her birth state listed as North Carolina; however, later records consistently state her place of birth as Tennessee. Judging from the age of their oldest child, she and Jack were married about 1835, although the records have not been found.

Jack Hinson today would be called an achiever. He was serious, goal-oriented, and a hard worker. A man of means, he was not only a prosperous farmer, but also bought and sold farm land, timber land, and other properties in the area, sometimes alone and sometimes in partnership with others. His holdings at times included not just rural properties, but also building lots in Dover, and his business dealings were not confined to Stewart County. He bought and sold land and other things across the Tennessee River in Henry County, where he also had relatives. In the 1840 census, he was recorded as owning ten slaves, a number fairly typical of a substantial landowner in that area but fewer than the one hundred or more found on the great plantations of the very rich. In 1840, Jack was thirty-three and Elisabeth was twenty-three; their first-born child, Robert A., was three, and their baby, George, was one.

Jack's holdings became even greater when, in 1847, he acquired four hundred acres on the upper waters of Lick Creek, by a Tennessee land grant. This grant was the beginning of what would become the Hinsons' permanent home, three miles southwest of Dover, which they called "Bubbling Springs." That farm would be enlarged until it eventually included more than 1,200 acres, operated with a growing number of slaves.⁷

By October 1850, Jack and Elisabeth were established at Bubbling Springs and had four more children: William, age eight;

John, age six; Albert F., age four; and Joseph S., age two. Elisabeth had borne at least six sons in fifteen years. There is no way of knowing how many other children may have been born and died in the ten-year periods between censuses. She could have had fifteen babies during those fifteen years. The family Bible, letters, photographs, and other such family records that might have recorded the number have not survived, apparently having been destroyed when Union soldiers burned the house during the war.

In 1853, Jack was issued a tavern-keeper's license. At that time, such licenses were issued to those who had homes large enough to have extra bedrooms and the capacity to serve meals to overnight guests. Such large homes had to be located on or near the existing roads on the stagecoach routes, for there were few hotels in that time, and travelers depended on such places to stay overnight while traveling. Of course, by the unwritten protocols of the rural South, all farm families were expected to take in individual travelers overnight and feed them but not in the numbers of stagecoach loads of passengers.⁸

Jack also found time to build the first toll road in Stewart County, the road passing, of course, through his own land, and he kept a trusted slave at either end to collect the tolls.⁹

By 1860, John and Elisabeth, still at Bubbling Springs, had eight of their ten children at home; the two oldest sons, Robert, twenty-five, and George, twenty, had moved out to make homes of their own. The Hinson sons at home in 1860 were William, eighteen; John, fifteen; Albert F., fourteen; Joseph S., twelve; Charles S., ten; and Thomas W., eight. And, after having borne at least eight sons, Elisabeth had been blessed with two little girls: Mary, three, and (Sarah) Margaret, two. Also living with them in the home was Amanda Nelson, twenty-four. She was probably a live-in teacher for the children, sometimes the only means of formal education for the children of prosperous farm families.

Bubbling Springs, the Hinson home place, sat in a beautiful grassy valley between gently rolling hills, three miles southwest of Dover. The home was one-half mile south of the Dover road that connected Dover, on the Cumberland River, with Paris Landing, on the Tennessee River. That road roughly followed the general line of what is today U.S. Highway 79. What was then the Hinsons' lane to the Dover road is now called Keel Hollow Road.

The Hinson home was characteristic of the homes of prosperous men of that time and place. There was ample room for the large Hinson family and extra room for houseguests and stagecoach travelers. In the front was a nicely furnished parlor used only for entertaining guests and for special family occasions such as Christmas. Guests were a frequent and welcome addition to the family, and visits from relatives and friends were pleasant times, much more important than they are today. There was always room and food for visitors at Bubbling Springs. A large, separate, back kitchen spared the rest of the house the heat of cooking in summer, and in winter, it was a pleasant, warm, good-smelling place to sit. The kitchen was presided over by a slave named Sarah, who also supervised the other house servants. In the peculiar protocols of the old South, a matter largely incomprehensible in the North today, Sarah, although a slave, enjoyed in many ways the status of an elder member of the family and mentor of the children. Although she addressed the children with courtesy ("Mr. Thomas," "Miss Mary," etc.), she spoke with unquestioned authority. The children dared not treat her with disrespect or misbehave in her presence. And, in that kitchen, she was virtually sovereign.

Free-flowing springs, bubbling out of the ground behind the great house, provided a constant supply of cold drinking water. Flowing through the springhouse, they also provided a means of



Bubbling Springs today.

keeping milk, cream, butter, and other perishables cool, and gave the farm its name. The springs were also a major tributary to Hinson Creek, which flowed through the valley, providing water for stock and holes for swimming and fishing. The house sat in a grove of maple trees and faced northward, toward the Dover Road. Clear, cool Hinson Creek ran through the meadow along the west side of the lane, flowing northward.

The Hinson farm was typical of its time and place, except that it was larger than most, and by no means could all the farmers in the area afford to own slaves. Such large farms produced corn, wheat, tobacco, hogs, cattle, plus oxen, mules, and horses for draft and riding stock. Although by 1860 cotton was no longer a significant cash crop in Stewart County, there was usually a patch of cotton for home use. Flax and hemp were also grown to provide fibers for weaving, and hemp fibers were used for rope, made on the place. Sheep were kept for wool and meat, in addition to the usual chickens, guinea fowl, geese, ducks, and turkeys kept for eggs, food, and for mattress and pillow down. Hogs were the primary source of meat. A large "kitchen garden" provided vegetables for family, hired hands, and slaves. Apples, peaches, pears, and plums grew in abundance in an orchard while wild plums, peaches, crabapples, and muscadines grew naturally in the woods. Grapevines on overhead arbors supplied fresh fruit, preserves, and wine. They also provided a shady place to sit in the summer, snap or shell beans, shuck sweet corn, or just rest. Beehives, in the edge of the orchard, produced honey and provided pollination for the fruit tree blossoms. Corn and wheat were carried to gristmills to make corn meal and flour. Unlike at the smaller farms in the county, whiskey was not made at Bubbling Springs. The Hinsons could afford to buy it.

Like most such substantial farm homes in the South, Bubbling Springs was essentially a self-contained little community. There were barns for livestock and hay and for curing tobacco; a smokehouse for preserving and storing hams, bacon, and other meat; stables; a woodshed; and other outbuildings. A root cellar kept such "root" foods as potatoes, sweet potatoes, and turnips through the winter weather. It also stored "keeper" apple varieties and the large, hard Kieffer pears, which softened during the cool fall weather. In its blacksmith shop, horseshoes, mule shoes,

hinges, and other hardware were made, and tools were repaired. The blacksmith was either a skilled farm hand or a slave trained to do the work; such a skilled slave took great pride in his work, enjoyed elevated social status, and was worth considerably more, if sold, than a field hand or house servant was.

To the right front of the great house at Bubbling Springs, about three hundred feet to the northeast, there was a row of slave cabins, with their garden plots, chickens, and dogs arranged along a wagon road running eastward off the lane.

The Hinsons were a prominent, respected family. Not merely prosperous, they were also genteel, educated people by the standards of that rough-hewn time and place. They were examples of what Thomas Jefferson called “the natural aristocracy”—those who, regardless of ancestry, were gracious, responsible, productive, and given to learning and self-improvement. These admirable Hinson qualities and values were passed down to future generations. Remembering them, one who knew the family well said that the Hinsons were “different—as if they weren’t from here.” She also stated that the Hinson men treated ladies with deference, stood in their presence, assisted them in being seated, offered an arm when appropriate, and habitually offered refreshments to all visitors. Such attitudes and customs were a natural part of the family heritage.

In 1851, Elisabeth Hinson’s mother, Agnes James, died at age fifty-one and was buried in the old Dover cemetery, next to the Christian Church. Five months later, in January 1852, Elisabeth’s father, John James, died at age sixty and was buried beside his wife. His son-in-law, Jack Hinson, was appointed executor of Mr. James’s estate. On January 4, 1853, the court allowed him the interesting sum of \$3.30 for expenses as executor. Death had begun to arrive in the Hinson family, as it does in every family, but, at that time, they had not yet been visited by tragedy. That kind of magnified pain was still locked in their unknown future.¹⁰

Life was good at Bubbling Springs in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was an idyllic place for the Hinson children to grow up, fishing, swimming, hunting, and learning to work. In that pleasant, pastoral setting, Jack and Elisabeth passed happily through middle age and into the years beyond, with fulfillment,

prosperity, and peace. The future stretched pleasantly before them, seemingly endless and filled with promise.

Elsewhere, however, beyond their rivers, political conflicts were escalating and the winds of war were blowing. In faraway places, pivotal matters were being debated and acted upon. Henry Clay's Whig Party was dying, and the new Republican Party was rising up to take its place. The sovereignty of the individual states was being debated, and secession was discussed. In the background, slavery was becoming a simmering, volatile issue. There were "peace abolitionists," like William Lloyd Garrison, appealing to reason and conscience. There were also radical abolitionists, like John Brown, arming themselves and their followers and calling for the spilling of Southern white blood.

Between the rivers, most of the people knew little of these events and cared about them even less. They asked only to be left alone, to go on with their lives as they had before, but their isolation could not be sustained for long. War, with its multiplied tragedies, would soon arrive, uninvited and unwelcome, between the rivers. And, when it came, it would end life as the Hinsons of Bubbling Springs had known it. Forever.

Regional Conflict Invades the Hinsons' Tranquility

The tranquil, relatively isolated life of the Hinsons, and of their neighbors between the rivers, would soon end in a tragic, bloody conflict, one they did not want. That conflict would change the lives of all the people between the rivers, and it would cost Jack and Elisabeth Hinson their home, the death of at least seven of their children, and their freedom to live out their twilight years in peace. It would be an internecine war of unprecedented savagery, the bloodiest in all of American history. The peaceful isolation there between the rivers would end, shattered and crushed under the tread of massive, outside forces, and, still worse, neighbor would soon be killing neighbor.

How could such horror invade and end the peace and prosperity the Hinsons enjoyed? By the middle of the nineteenth century compelling issues, largely unknown to those living between the rivers, were severely straining the bonds between the states of the North and those of the South. Divisive issues, principally political and economic, accumulated without resolution. Conflicting values and goals, both

economic and cultural, produced growing stresses on the nation's political unity. More and more, the citizens of the North and South saw themselves as two distinct and incompatible regions.

Increasingly, politicians demagogued the issues, newspaper editors and pamphleteers editorialized, exhorted, and fanned the flames of controversy. Preachers, in both the North and South, found scriptural basis for their mutually exclusive pronouncements and gave them passionate voice. Among the politicians, there were a few statesmen, such as John J. Crittenden, who strove mightily to find solutions and maintain the peace. When war did come, his two sons were generals, one Union and one Confederate. At the other end of the spectrum, a few radicals, such as the Kansas incendiary, John Brown, took up the sword, figuratively and literally, and actually sought to bring about the war. In Kansas in 1856, he, four of his sons, and two others murdered five unarmed men and boys considered to be proslavery, hacking them to death with broad swords, in what came to be known as the Pottawatomie Massacre. The majority, as always, pragmatically occupied the middle ground.

As the Hinson Family Grew, So Did the Conflict

Between the rivers, however, most people went on with life, largely unaware of the trouble brewing beyond their borders, or essentially disinterested in them. They, as always, just wanted to be left alone. This was the attitude of Jack Hinson. Although he was better informed than most of the citizens between the rivers, he went on with his life and hoped for a peaceful, political resolution.

While trouble was brewing and blood was being shed elsewhere, the Hinsons lived in tranquil isolation and peaceful prosperity. Jack's family continued to grow and flourish, as did his farm and other business ventures. As the Hinson family steadily grew, so did ominous developments outside their rivers, with darkening political skies, growing thunderclouds, and the swirling, sweeping winds of war.

These two growing phenomena, Jack's family and prosperity and the trouble building beyond their rivers, developed in parallel and, in a sense, in mutual isolation. Yet, in time, the parallels would break the rule and intersect with tragic consequences.

South . . . More a Matter of Attitude than of Latitude

Although compelling, hardly anything about the regional conflict in the mid-nineteenth century was simple. For one thing, “North” and “South” were not then, nor are they today, geographic absolutes. “South” was then, and still is, more a matter of attitude than of latitude, more a matter of culture and values than of position on the map. For those seeking a political resolution of North-South conflicts, this was a significant complication.

In 1861, Kentucky was strongly “Southern” and, except for much of the eastern mountains, intensely Confederate. The same was true of Tennessee. There were portions of Missouri and Maryland that were intensely Confederate and identified in every way with the Deep South. The counties in extreme southern Illinois, with its flat, alluvial land, cotton culture, and rivers connecting them with the Gulf, provided many soldiers for the Confederate army. They would probably have seceded had not Cairo, at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, been quickly occupied by Union forces. At the same time, there were areas of western North Carolina, and of northern Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, that leaned toward the Union or, at least, toward neutrality. Even after secession, a faction in one county of Mississippi seceded from the state and organized a fighting company for the Union. Most of the mountainous, western counties of Virginia did secede from Virginia and the Confederacy, with the help of the Lincoln government and Gen. George McClellan’s army, and became the Union’s new state of West Virginia. No, lines between “North” and “South” were not at all easy to draw in 1861—at least, not on maps.

A Clash of Cultures

Most who considered themselves “Southern,” regardless of geographic location, shared a common culture. They might not all have been able to define that culture, but they immediately recognized it, regardless of social class, and they would fight to defend it. That culture was basically agrarian, somewhat feudal, and strongly committed to the values of chivalry, honor, tradition, social graces, consistent (if not always sincere) courtesy, and their strongly held Christian faith. Their commitment to honor, although not always reasonable, was, nevertheless, something

for which many were ready to die. Their romantic and cavalier, if somewhat unrealistic, attitudes were sincere; a man without honor, they generally believed, was not fit to live among them.

That distinctive cultural reality bound Southern people together like an adhesive matrix, caused them to see outside intrusion as a threat to their way of life, and made them willing to fight like tigers against whatever threatened it, whether real or perceived. Stephen Vincent Benét, in his epic poem *John Brown's Body*, expressed the complexity of what it was that Southerners were willing to fight for. In the poem, Wingate, an upper-class Southerner on his way to a war to which he was already committed, was still pondering the question: "Why? What is it we are fighting for?"

*He brooded a moment. It wasn't slavery,
That stale, red herring of Yankee knavery,
Not even states' rights, at least not solely,
But something so dim that it must be holy.¹¹*

Because the Union, at the outset, made the first invasive moves, seizing large portions of Kentucky and other border areas of the South, most Southerners saw the issue as defending their homes from invasion. A story is told of one young rebel prisoner who was asked, "Why are you fighting against your country?" The unsophisticated boy, in his ragged, butternut uniform, replied simply and sincerely, "Because you're here."

It is true that many people of the North shared with the South the same Victorian values and attitudes toward matters of honor and chivalry, and yet, as a culture, the differences were significant. Northern culture was more heterogeneous and comparatively multicultural. There was lacking, across the North, a common cultural matrix to bind people in a fundamental similarity. It is oversimplified, but perhaps illustrative, to say that while Southern boys were working in the corn, cotton, and tobacco fields as they always had, or (if sons of the wealthy) were sitting on the veranda, dreaming of glory and writing cavalier poetry, many in the North were desperately trying to learn a new language and find work to feed their wives and children in a strange and ungenerous setting.

In the South, the field hand and the privileged aristocrat, although not mixing much socially, knew one another by name

and recognized one another as belonging to the same cultural phenomenon. Each recognized the other as part of his world, both were comfortably “at home” in the South, and would not have felt that way anywhere else. In the North, however, the poor farmer or the working immigrant tended to cling to others of his own situation, and often saw the rest of the culture around him as foreign and threatening. Moreover, in the North, the poor and the privileged sensed little or nothing in common. They lived in separate and very different worlds. This diversity and lack of cultural cohesion was illustrated tragically in the New York City Draft Riots of 1863, in which white immigrant laborers viewed the entire black population as a threat to their jobs and the cause of their being forced into the war.

Race relations were likewise very different. In the South, although definitely subjugated, slaves belonging to the better classes, or more affluent, of whites often enjoyed a mutual affection with their owners, who considered them part of the extended family. Children of the master often had, as best friends, slave children of the same age on the farm and grew up playing, hunting, and working with them. Many slave owners, of course, especially those of the lower class, treated their slaves with cruel abuse, but this was not true of the Hinsons. Family tradition plus the fact that his freed slaves called their new community “Hinson Town” indicate that Jack Hinson’s treatment of his slaves was kind and protective. In the Northern states, slavery had existed since colonial times but had been largely abolished by 1861. Although very few of them were slaves, blacks in the North were still generally excluded from white society, lived for the most part in alien separation, and were viewed as an inferior, servant class seldom with any sense of belonging, let alone of familial connection.

State Sovereignty: The Kentucky Resolutions

Although the issue of state sovereignty, and particularly the right of individual states to secede from the Union, can be traced to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the secession crisis of 1860 and 1861 can be traced significantly to the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798 and 1799. These resolutions of the Kentucky legislature, in reaction to the Federalists’ Alien and Sedition Acts,

were secretly written by Thomas Jefferson, who was at the time Washington's vice president. They declared that individual states could not only secede, but could also nullify any federal law of which they did not approve.

Concentration of financial and industrial power in the North, what the South saw as unfair import taxes, and the vexing question of slavery were certainly issues contributing to regional ill-feeling, but the fundamental issue, still unresolved, was the right of a state to secede. This issue's resolution would be found in four bloody years of war.

When the Kentucky Resolutions were adopted in the late eighteenth century, strengthening the foundation for state sovereignty and secession, Jack Hinson and Elisabeth James were not yet born. Their families were living in North Carolina where most of the people were of Jeffersonian Republican persuasion. Both families would soon be migrating westward, however, into the free "lands reserved for the North Carolina Troops." After the revolution, the North Carolina legislature could not afford to pay its veterans in cash, so many were paid with land grants in the largely unsettled western reaches of the state. This payment accomplished two things: it fulfilled the state's obligation to its veterans of the revolution, and it accelerated the settlement of its wild and sparsely populated western area, soon to become the sixteenth state as Tennessee.¹²

In 1807, when little Jack Hinson was born in North Carolina, Thomas Jefferson was president and his Kentucky Resolutions were still being discussed as the rapid expansion of national borders created many more potential states.

Slavery Was Not the Issue

Jack Hinson and his friend John Bell were perhaps the most politically aware men in Stewart County, and they followed developments carefully. They both realized that if a war should be inevitable, it would be fought to settle the issue of state sovereignty and secession. It never occurred to either of them that such a war would be fought over slavery. Although this was the rallying cry for ardent abolitionists, the war was not entered into for the purpose of ending slavery. In fact, Lincoln, during the

campaign before the election of 1860 and in his first inaugural speech, went to great lengths to make it clear that he opposed the abolition of slavery in states where it already existed. Like Thomas Jefferson, Lincoln believed that slavery would soon die a natural death.¹³

Actually, African slaves were first imported into New England, not the South, and slavery was fairly common in the Northeast in Colonial times and the early years of the Republic. In 1760, slaves constituted approximately ten percent of the population of Philadelphia. Although he became an abolitionist late in life, for most of his life Benjamin Franklin himself kept one or two slaves who traveled with him as personal servants. In 1804, Vice President Aaron Burr was one of many New Yorkers who owned black slaves.¹⁴

Providence, Rhode Island, had been the very center of slave importation, dominating the trade from the latter eighteenth century until such importation was ended by Congress in 1808. An illustration of this fact is the life of a slave named Venture Smith. As an African boy, he was captured by other Africans in his coastal homeland and sold into slavery. The African slavers sold him to a white New England slaver who took him to America. Venture grew up in America as a slave. He was abused, sold three times, married, and eventually bought freedom for himself, his wife, and several others. As a free man, he engaged in businesses, bought and sold other black slaves, and left a journal of his long and eventful life. This remarkable man was never in all his life south of Long Island, New York.¹⁵

Two years into the war, for political reasons, slavery was made the emotional rallying cry in the North. However, despite revisionist contentions to the contrary and the stirring, noble lyrics of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," the war was not fought primarily over slavery, not in its beginnings or even in its final days. The issue was never that simple. During the war, slavery was legal and common in the nation's capital. As far into the war as 1863, in spite of the Compromise of 1850, which forbade it, a weekly slave auction was conducted one block from the White House in a sale lot behind the Decatur Hotel. Even after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, slavery legally continued in Washington City (the District of Columbia), for the proclamation applied only to states that had seceded.¹⁶

And There Were Many Black Slave Owners/Dealers

Also complicating the picture was the fact that there were many blacks who owned, bought, and sold slaves. In New Orleans in 1830, there were 10,689 free blacks, and more than 3,000 of them, nearly one third, owned, bought, rented, and sold black slaves. In 1840 in the city of Charleston, South Carolina, there were 402 black slave owners, with 2,357 black slaves. It appears that these black slave owners were neither more nor less benevolent than the white ones, but were “by and large . . . just darker versions of their white counterparts.”¹⁷

Secession in the North?

In 1860, secession was neither a new nor a bizarre idea. The right to withdraw from the Union had been assumed by the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787, and they jealously guarded the sovereignty of their individual states. In its vague and pliable form, and with the added safeguard of the Tenth Amendment, the Constitution had long been assumed by many political leaders to allow for secession. Had the delegates from the thirteen founding states not been convinced of this right, it is probable that the Constitution would never have been ratified.

Actually, secession was first seriously considered in the North, not the South. The ink had hardly dried on the Constitution before talk of secession by the New England states and New York began. Northern Federalists distrusted Jefferson's populism and were especially threatened by his authorizing the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. By this time, there was serious talk among such prominent leaders as Vice President Aaron Burr and Massachusetts senator Timothy Pickering, who had been secretary of state under both Washington and Adams, of the secession of New York and the New England states. The plan was to form an independent Northern Confederation, of which Burr would be the likely president. Interestingly, the idea was not without its racial component. In 1803, Pickering's vision for the Northern Confederation was of one with no blacks: “There will be . . . a separation, and the white and black population will be the boundary.” Each time the issue rose to a boil, cooler heads prevailed and the idea was eventually abandoned.¹⁸

Questions of state sovereignty and secession continued to resonate, however, as problems with an increasingly aggressive England led to the War of 1812. There was even serious consideration of another secession, that of the southwestern states and territories, such as Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi, as part of a western empire with Aaron Burr as its emperor. The death of Alexander Hamilton in a duel with Burr, the reelection of Jefferson in a landslide victory in 1804, and the War of 1812, brought an end to these discussions of secession as a serious possibility.¹⁹

But the idea was not yet buried.

The Hartford Convention

British raids along the New England coast actually created heightened resentment, not of the British, but of the government in Washington, which many blamed for the raids and resulting loss of trading revenue. As a result, in 1814, delegates from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island met in the Hartford (Connecticut) Convention to consider seceding from the Union. Again, cooler heads prevailed, and no fundamental political changes occurred; yet the issue of the constitutionality of secession remained unresolved, a bomb waiting for the right spark to detonate it. That explosion would occur in 1861, but the fuse had been smoldering at least as far back as 1790.²⁰

In 1814, when secession was being debated at the Hartford Convention, young Jack Hinson was seven years old, receiving his first schooling on his father's North Carolina farm, learning to ride, fish, and hunt. He dreamed of the day when he could go into the forest by himself with a rifle and knife, like the men and the older boys. He had no idea that he would someday make history with the way he would go into the forest, alone, with rifle and knife, half a century later in Tennessee.

Efforts to Resolve the Slavery Issue (Not to Abolish It, but to Live With It)

In November of 1820, James Monroe was reelected president. Nicknamed "the Last Coked Hat," he was the last president from the ranks of the founding fathers with their three-cornered hats, excluding John Quincy Adams, who had been a teenage

diplomat during the American Revolution. He was also a staunch Jeffersonian Republican and a defender of state's rights. Jack Hinson was thirteen years old that November and beginning to do the work of a man. He was also beginning to enjoy the freedom of a man who could go into the forest alone with rifle and knife. Far away over the mountains to the west, in the twenty-four-year-old state of Tennessee, Elisabeth James, his future wife, was three years old, walking, climbing, and learning to say, "No!"

The unresolved problem of states' rights versus federal sovereignty, including the right of states to withdraw from the Union, was succinctly expressed in an exchange of toasts in Washington, D.C. at a dinner celebrating Jefferson's birthday on April 13, 1830. With meaning as clear as the crystal wine glass he held aloft, Pres. Andrew Jackson stated, "Our Federal Union—it must be preserved." Those present replied, "Hear, hear." Then, with equal clarity, South Carolina's John C. Calhoun countered, "The Union, next to our liberty, most dear!" The eyes of both men must have sparkled like the glasses they lifted to one another, for each knew exactly what the other meant. The problem was that both were right, and, at the same time, both were wrong.

As Jackson and Calhoun crossed philosophical swords over their wine glasses that April, Jack Hinson was approaching his twenty-third birthday, a fully grown man. Elisabeth James was twelve and rapidly approaching womanhood. In five years, they would meet in Jackson's Tennessee and marry.

On March 1, 1845, three days before leaving office, Pres. John Tyler signed a resolution providing for the annexation of the Republic of Texas as a slave state under the provisions of the Missouri Compromise; on December 29, Texas statehood became official.

By that time, Jack Hinson had migrated westward to Stewart County, Tennessee, and married young Elisabeth James. He was then thirty-eight; Elisabeth was twenty-eight, and they already had four sons: Robert, ten; George, six; William, three; and their baby, John, was celebrating his first birthday. Elisabeth was carrying their fifth son, Albert, who would be born the following summer.

As their family grew and prospered, their farm also grew and prospered, and Jack was the owner of about fifteen slaves, a large number by the standards of the day in Stewart County. In May of 1847, he acquired a grant of four hundred acres on the upper

waters of Lick Creek and began to build what would be their permanent home.

The following year a sixth son, Joseph, was born to the Hinsons, followed by Charles, two years later.²¹ Jack and Elisabeth had now been married fifteen years, had six sons, and their extended family at Bubbling Springs included an ever-growing number of slaves.

State Sovereignty Could Not Be Separated from the Slavery Issue

The year that Charles Hinson was born, Congress in far-off Washington struggled to effect a compromise that would keep the Union from splitting. The principal issue at that time was the vexing matter of the extension of slavery into the new territories of the West, recently acquired as a result of the war with Mexico. The Compromise of 1850, adopted after extended political debate, failed to stop the relentless drift toward division and war. It had postponed the inevitable clash by applying the concept of “popular sovereignty” to the issue of slavery in the southwestern territories ceded by Mexico. Rather than resolving the fundamental issue of states’ rights, it seemed to have made it more divisive. The vexing, emotional issue, which continued to cast sparks into an already volatile situation, was slavery.

Making bad matters worse, the Compromise of 1850 strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act. This was a law in which abolitionists in the North already took particular pleasure in violating, and its strengthening only resulted in increasingly strong feelings on both sides of the issue.

During this volatile period, Harriet Beecher Stowe, of the prominent abolitionist Beecher family, was living in Cincinnati, where her husband was a seminary professor. She had seven preacher brothers, the most famous of whom was abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher. His support for arming antislavery forces in Kansas with state-of-the-art Sharpe’s rifles and saying that the rifles might be “a greater moral agency” in Kansas than Bibles caused the Sharpe’s rifles to be called “Beecher’s Bibles.” Already a dedicated abolitionist, Mrs. Stowe crossed the Ohio River into Northern Kentucky, and witnessed a small slave sale at the courthouse in the village of Washington in Mason County. She also made at least one visit to the plantation home of friends in Central

Kentucky, the Thomas Kennedys of Garrard County. On the basis of this brief experience with slavery, she wrote the imaginative and highly emotional book *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Published in 1852, the book was an instant sensation. It did little to clarify thinking, but it mightily fueled antislavery emotions in the North, where the popular perception was that every slaveholder in the South was a cruel Simon Legree. In the South, her book was just as vehemently hated as it was lionized in the North, and it was viewed as abolitionist propaganda (a position not without basis in fact). The book was an immediate success, more and more people read it, and sectional divisions grew yet wider.²²

Also in 1852, at Bubbling Springs, the eighth son, Thomas, was born to Jack and Elisabeth Hinson.

The new law not only fanned the flames of regional tension, but also led to an undeclared border war between proslavery men in Missouri and antislavery men in Kansas Territory. Raids and counterraids, atrocities and counteratrocities drenched the border area in blood and created new animosities that would not only hasten the war, but would long outlive it.

In March 1857, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney handed down the *Dred Scott v Sanford* decision, which declared that any person of African ancestry was simply property and runaway slaves could be pursued and recovered from a free state or territory. Taney went even farther, stating that blacks could not sue or be sued in court because they were not, and could never be, citizens. Further, he said that Congress had no power to forbid slavery in new territories, once and for all nullifying the Missouri Compromise. There was fury in the North and general rejoicing in the South.

In Stewart County, most people were not aware of the Dred Scott decision, let alone what it would mean. That year, after having eight sons, Elisabeth Hinson gave birth to a girl and named her Mary.

In October 1859, John Brown, the fanatical, unbalanced abolitionist who was a fugitive from Kansas for multiple murders, attacked the U. S. Arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. With eighteen followers, he seized the virtually undefended arsenal, and the next day fought an all-day battle with local militia, killing several local blacks who declined to join his "slave revolt." United States Army colonel Robert E. Lee, on leave at his Arlington, Virginia, home, was

sent with a detachment of twenty Marines, led by Lt. Israel Green, to retake the arsenal and capture Brown, who was fortified in a brick firehouse. Lee was assisted by a young officer, Lt. J. E. B. "Jeb" Stuart, whose negotiation for a surrender failed. Leading his twenty Marines in a bayonet assault through a hail of rifle fire, Lieutenant Green brought his sword down on Brown's head, stunning him, and his Marines seized the building. Green's sword, identical to the one worn by Marine officers today, was a ceremonial sword, not a saber; otherwise, it would have split Brown's head in two. The blow brought Brown down but ended the career of the sword; still bent in the general shape of John Brown's head, it is today in the collection of the National Museum of the Marine Corps. One Marine was killed, ten of Brown's men lay dead, and four escaped. Brown, stunned and bleeding but intact, was captured with four of his men. They were all subsequently hanged for treason.

By the time of the John Brown insurrection, a second daughter had been born to Jack and Elisabeth Hinson, and little Sarah Margaret was one year old.

The Catalytic Election of 1860

In the profoundly pivotal election of 1860, the Democratic Party split along sectional lines. The southern Democrats nominated John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, who was at the time Buchanan's sitting vice president. The northern Democrats nominated the "little giant," Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas.

The Democratic Party had been the only national institution still holding the North and South together, and with the party thus divided, that uniting cord was severed.

The new Republican Party, concentrated in the North, nominated Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. A third party (actually, with the Democrats split into north and south, it was a fourth party) met in May and nominated Jack Hinson's friend, John Bell of Stewart County, Tennessee. Calling itself the Constitutional Union Party, it attracted those in the South, largely the remnants of the Whig Party, who wanted to preserve the Union and their way of life, but without war. Bell carried three states: Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee. Douglas carried only Illinois and part of New Jersey. The result was to elect Lincoln with only forty percent of the vote.

Lincoln did dismally in Kentucky, the state of his birth and early childhood, where the vote was divided between Breckinridge and Bell. In fact, in strongly “old South” Fayette County, Kentucky, where he had been married and where his wife’s family, the Todds, was still one of the most prominent, Lincoln received only five votes! One is tempted to believe that all five of the voters were named Todd.²³

In that pivotal year of 1860, the Hinsons were living peacefully and prosperously at Bubbling Springs. They had ten children, ages two to eighteen, and a young lady named Amanda Nelson in the household, probably a tutor for the younger children. In addition, to operate the large and expanding farm, there was a growing number of slaves.

It is unknown how Jack Hinson cast his vote that fateful November, but it would be difficult to believe that he did not vote for John Bell, whose political position he shared. Bell, a wealthy émigré from Nashville, was at the time the leading citizen of Stewart County, and one of the most prominent men in the entire South. After Bell, who occupied a category of prominence all his own, Jack Hinson was perhaps the second most prosperous and prominent man in the county. However Hinson cast his vote in the election of 1860, he could not have imagined how the election of Lincoln would eventually change his life.

Secession Becomes Reality

With Lincoln’s election, mechanisms for secession, already in place, were immediately set in motion in South Carolina. On December 20, the South Carolina legislature met in Columbia and voted unanimously to secede. The entire student body of the University of South Carolina enlisted in the army of a Confederacy that did not yet exist.

President Buchanan called upon the nation to pray for peace and proclaimed Friday, January 5, 1861, to be a national day of fasting and prayer for a peaceful solution to the growing conflict.

During January 1861, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana followed South Carolina out of the Union. On February 1, Texas seceded, and eight days later Virginia followed. In March, the Crittenden Compromise, the frail, last political hope for holding the Union together, failed in Congress.

Meanwhile, Between the Rivers . . .

The winds of war were blowing with gathering force, and peaceful isolation between the rivers could not continue. As historian B. F. Cooling observed, “the tranquil days of packet whistles sounding around the bend, and waters gently lapping against the soft clay banks” were numbered. War was coming. Some visionary leaders saw its awful potential and went on struggling against it. Perhaps only God knew just how terrible it would actually be.²⁴

At Bubbling Springs, Jack Hinson followed these events and was deeply troubled. Like his friend, John Bell, he favored life in the South as he had always known it. He viewed the ardent abolitionists as radical meddlers who understood nothing of life in the South, but he did not want the Union divided, and he was strongly opposed to the war. Like John Bell, Jack thought that war, if it did come, would be fought over the right of states to secede. He believed that once the issue had been settled, his life could go on as he had known it before. He was right about the former point; about the latter, however, he could not have been more wrong.