

UNION AND CONFEDERATE PERSPECTIVES

PHILLIP A. SMITH DIARY ENTRY

Phillip A. Smith was a German immigrant living in Peoria, Illinois, who enlisted in the 8th Missouri Infantry in 1861. He wrote this diary entry shortly after joining the Union army.

Jefferson City, Mo., July 22, 1861.

As I lay in my bed this morning, I got to thinking that as I had enlisted in the Army for the period of Three years. Through which time many an incident would occur and many an event take place that would be a pleasure and likely much interest not only to myself if God so wills that I pass safely through this war, but to my friends in the future, I have concluded to Keep a Diary, and shall endeavor to keep it as accurate as can be done under circumstances and conditions under which for what little experience I have already had, I will have to contend with.

I have left home and a good situation thrown all peaceful avocations aside and have grasped the weapon of death for the purpose of doing my part in defending and upholding the Integrity Laws and the preservation of my adopted County from a horde of Contemptible traitors, who would if they can accomplish their Hellish designs destroy the best and Noblest Government on Earth. Merely for the purpose of benefiting themselves on the slave question. They want to have a Government of their own whose chief Cornerstone shall be Human Slavery. They say that the reason they have seceded was that the North having elected a man to the Presidential chair who is opposed to slavery, will use his Power to oppose and even crush it. That they stand No show of security, That the future will or would be an aggression of the People of the North on their state Institutions and to secure themselves from all this, they would Withdraw from the Union.

As someone deeply devoted to his new country and its principles, Smith used his diary to reflect on his enlistment and the deeper meaning of his cause. Even at the beginning of the war, he believed in the cause of abolishing slavery and preventing the South from perpetuating the institution while breaking up the country to do so. He knew he was not built to be a soldier, but he would fight and die for his new home.

I am a young man. Am not of soldierly propensity, but one thing is sure I shall not lay down my musket until this Wicked Rebellion is subdued and the Seceded States brought back to allegiance. I also hope and pray that as the South is fighting for nothing in the World to perpetuate slavery, that not a single state shall be permitted to resume her place in the Union until she has rid herself of this damnable institution hanging to her skirts.

Trout, K. M. (2020, February 10). A member of the 8th Missouri Infantry reflects on why he enlisted. *Emerging Civil War*. <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2020/02/10/a-member-of-the-8th-missouri-infantry-reflects-on-why-he-enlisted/>

JOHN H. COCHRAN TO HIS MOTHER, OCTOBER 8, 1860

John H. Cochran was a 22-year-old Virginian from Augusta County who wrote letters supporting Southern secession. After Virginia seceded, he enlisted in the 46th Virginia Infantry.

Dear Mother,

Your letter was received this evening, and I take this opportunity of answering it. We hold to the principle among others that this government is not solely the government of a majority but that the minority have rights that must be respected. To preserve these rights the constitution was framed which puts such checks and restraints upon the dominant power as the framers in their far-seeing wisdom thought necessary...

...But it is said that at this late day we have suddenly waked up to the idea that we were not getting our rights in the Union and that the leaders of the party were disposed to ruin the country for the sake of reopening the slave trade. The last of these charges is a ridiculous absurdity and could only been hatched in the brain of some unscrupulous opponent of the true States Rights Democracy...We have been battling against abolitionism in some form or other for many years. The abolition of slavery has been agitated in congress ever since 1790 first came petitions in that year for the abolition of the slave trade. Then petitions in 1805 for the exclusion of slave property from the territories. Then in 1817 petitions against the slave trade between the middle and southern states. Then in 1831 petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia.

...We have procured a decision of the Supreme Court in our favour [Dred Scott case]. Speaking of the power of Congress in the territories Chief Justice Taney uses these very words. "The only power conferred is the power coupled with the duty of guarding and protecting the owner in his rights." And yet when we incorporate this in our creed and demand that Congress shall exercise this protecting power we are branded as traitors by the very party who were loudest in their professions of loyalty to the South a few short months ago.

...Holding up the Constitution we have asked to have the rights it secures us given to us in the Union. If we have them we are the last people who would wish to dissolve the Union. On the other hand we have determined that if it is necessary that we should go out of the Union for the purpose of maintaining these rights that we will do it. It is an alternative which we do not seek but as a free people we will not submit to having our rights taken from us by that greatest of all tyrants a numerical majority.

J.H. Cochran

Valley of the Shadow. (1860, October 8). John H. Cochran to his mother. <https://valley.newamericanhistory.org/letters/A1136>