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SLAVERY AND THE COMING OF THE CIVIL WAR, AS SEEN IN *THE BEAUMONT BANNER*

by Robert J. Robertson

Texas newspaperman A.N. Vaughan was very much a Southern man. He advocated the cause of Southern rights, defended the institution of slavery, demanded the protection of state's rights, opposed the election of Abraham Lincoln, and favored the secession of Texas. He was also a man of conviction and action. When the Civil War came, he was true to his politics. He gave up his newspaper business and joined the army of the Confederacy.

Editor and publisher of *The Beaumont Banner*, Vaughan produced his paper for just over one year, from the spring of 1860 until the beginning of the war, and published some sixty issues. Of this number, eleven are available for study, scattered from September 1860 to May 1861. These issues, filled with news, editorials, advertisements, and public notices, tell much about slavery and politics in Beaumont, about secession and the coming of the war. And, because the newspaper was the primary source of news and information and reflected public opinion, these issues provide valuable insights about Beaumonters and their political attitudes. Also, these issues, which demonstrate how Vaughan molded the political opinions of his readers, are important for understanding the secession of Texas.¹

In addition, the paper provides a picture of Vaughan, the newspaperman. Born in Mecklenberg County, Virginia, in 1829, his complete name was Archibald Nicholas Vaughan. His given names must have seemed awkward to him because as an adult he consistently identified himself simply as A.N. Vaughan. Little is known about his early years but records show that he had arrived in Beaumont by 1858, when he was employed as teacher and principal of the Beaumont Male and Female Academy. By 1860, when he was only thirty years old, Vaughan was well-known in the town, serving as mayor of the Board of Alderman and publisher of the newspaper. A political and business leader, he boosted the town and worked to promote its commercial development, especially the railroads.²

Vaughan's career in Beaumont was similar to those of fellow editors in nearby Galveston and Houston. Willard Richardson, editor and publisher of the *Galveston News*, after migrating from Massachusetts to Texas by way of South Carolina, enjoyed an early career in Texas as a school teacher. Hamilton Stuart, proprietor of the *Galveston Civilian*, served as mayor of his city from 1849 to 1852. The editor and publisher of the *Houston Telegraph*, Edward H. Cushing, used his paper to encourage the development of railroads and other economic improvements for his city. Like Richardson, Stuart, and Cushing, Vaughan was prominent and influential in his town. And like these men, Vaughan was "sound" on the slavery question; he favored the institution.³

Vaughan's newspaper was one sign among many that Beaumont had become a real town. Well-situated on the Neches River in the farming and ranching country of Southeast Texas, the town in 1860 boasted more than 1100 people, with farmers, stock raisers, doctors, lawyers, and craftsmen. Its streets,

which hugged the high, wooded banks of the river, were lined with hotels, saloons, dry goods stores, sawmills, and woodworking shops. Nourished by a growing population, Beaumont was fast becoming an important transportation center; steamboats came and went and two railroads were under construction.

Vaughan's market area, the town of Beaumont and the three counties of Jefferson, Orange, and Hardin, possessed a definite Southern character, but the region was not typical of most of East Texas; in terms of cotton and slaves, it was not homogeneous with the Lower South of the United States. The three counties did not have a plantation economy; they were considered "poor" in cotton production and were not characterized by extensive cultivation of the popular staple. Instead, the economic base was diverse; agriculture and animal husbandry were mixed with goodly portions of business. In Jefferson County no more than thirty-five percent of the heads of households claimed occupations engaged directly in any kind of farming or stock raising; a large majority reported jobs in urban, commercial, and transportation activities. No one described himself as a planter.⁴

In Vaughan's corner of Southeast Texas, the system of slavery was firmly established but the actual number of slaves was modest. Over the entire state, slaves represented thirty percent of the total population while in some East Texas counties the bondsmen accounted for more than fifty percent of the whole. In contrast, the counties of Jefferson, Orange, and Hardin had a slave population of only seventeen percent, with 892 black and 4400 white. These were not unlike the numbers for Galveston County, a truly urban area, which counted a slave population of eighteen percent, 1520 slaves and 6709 free.⁵

Locally the percentage of citizens who owned slaves was not great: of the 269 households in Jefferson County, only about sixty-five, or approximately twenty-four percent, had residents who held bondsmen. In Beaumont itself about fourteen percent of the households listed occupants who owned slaves.⁶

Despite living and working in such a non-typical Southern region, with its diverse economy and relatively small slave population, Vaughan was completely orthodox in his political attitudes and activities. He was similar to the partisans of the Lower South on the important questions of the day, and was strongly committed to slavery and the Southern cause.

In every issue of *The Beaumont Banner*, Vaughan reiterated the original two-fold political mission of his paper: maintain the United States Constitution, with all its restrictions, and advocate the cause of the South and Southern rights. However, in the fall of 1860, with the presidential campaign and the election of Lincoln, his two missions became one: defend the cause of Southern rights against Northern interference, even at the cost of breaking up the Union.⁷

Among all the issues of Southern rights, the most important was slavery, its protection in the South and its extension into the territories of the United States. As previously noted, the institution was solidly in place in Beaumont and Southeast Texas. In Jefferson County, of which Beaumont was the governmental seat, there were seventy slaveowners and 309 slaves. As the economy of the county was diverse, agriculture combined with business and

transportation, so was the ownership of slaves. This diversity of ownership was in marked contrast to the rest of Texas where ninety-four percent of the slaves were held by masters who reported agricultural occupations and only six percent were owned by non-farmers.⁸

In Jefferson County the ownership patterns were very different; agricultural owners held only sixty percent of the slaves while non-farmers owned forty percent. Among the farmers and stock raisers were William McFaddin, who had eight slaves, Joseph Hebert, who owned fourteen, and Alex C. Blanchat, who also held fourteen. On the other hand, non-farmers or "town people" held at least 120 blacks and employed them in urban and commercial activities, such as domestic service, sawmill operations, and railroad construction.⁹

The variety of town people who held bondsmen showed the manner in which slavery was embedded in the business and society of the county. Surveyor James Ingalls owned three slaves; carpenter George Wilkinson, one; tanner David French, one; steamboat pilot Charles Burch, one; merchant Otis McGaffy, two; physician Sylvester Mansfield, two; and lawyer William Lewis, one. The slaveholder with the greatest number of bondsmen was John Stamps, a Tennessee railroad contractor, who owned twenty-six. Another significant owner was David Wingate, the operator of a sawmill at Sabine Pass, who owned thirteen. Vaughan was not a slaveholder.¹⁰

About one-fourth of the slaveowners were women. Among them were Eliza Lewis, wife of a lawyer; Nancy Hutchinson, an innkeeper; Lucinda Ruff, wife of a sawmill operator; Sarah Herring, wife of a merchant; Mary Coffin, wife of a ship carpenter; and Elizabeth Junker, wife of a county official.¹¹

In Beaumont, the largest town in the county, slaveownership was common but not a requirement for holding public office. The municipal government, which was reorganized in October 1860, was comprised of Vaughan, the mayor, and five aldermen: George W. O'Brien, clerk of Jefferson County; Thomas Fletcher, farmer; John J. Herring, merchant; John W. Patridge, saloon keeper; and Nathan Wheeler, machinist. Among these city officials, only Fletcher and Herring were slaveholders. Early appointments by the Board of Aldermen confirmed that slaveownership was not a condition for participation in government. Henry E. Simpson, cabinetmaker, was appointed town clerk; Robert Ruff, merchant, was named treasurer; and Wilson A. Junker, blacksmith, was selected to be constable. None of these men were slaveholders, although Junker came from a family which owned bondsmen.¹²

On the other hand, advertisements in the *Banner* demonstrated how important slave labor was to the region. A farm for sale in Hardin County had particular features: one well, two springs, comfortable dwellings with kitchen, overseer's house, and Negro cabins. W.H. Dunbar, a general auctioneer at nearby Sabine Pass, offered his services to sell real estate, furniture, and slaves. Cave Johnson, a Beaumont saloon keeper and land agent, had a slave for sale in May 1861; describing him as "a likely Negro boy," Johnson touted the twenty-two-year-old slave as a good blacksmith.¹³

In a notice of an administrator's sale, Dr. P.H. Glaze and Sarah Pattillo

announced the disposition of all the assets of the estate of W.C. Moseley. Included was "a certain Negro girl, of dark complexion, aged about seventeen years." The girl would be sold for cash to the highest bidder.¹⁴

Other advertisements in the paper revealed that slaves were employed in sawmill operations and railroad construction. Such practices apparently were not common in Texas, as shown in a recent study which discussed various employments of slaves but did not deal with their use in sawmills or railroads. At Beaumont such procedures were routine. In September 1860 the sawmill operator J.M. Long took out a notice "Negroes Wanted;" he needed five or six able-bodied blacks to work at his mill.¹⁵

On the railroad projects of Southeast Texas, the use of slave workers was extensive. Editor Vaughan often reported about the use of slave labor in the construction of the Eastern Texas Railroad. In September 1860, he told of "another gang of 50 slaves" from Rusk County which had passed through Beaumont on their way to Sabine Pass to labor on the road. Later, the editor mentioned a similar occurrence - 105 slaves passing through town on their way north to work on the same line. In December, while praising the progress of the Eastern Texas project, Vaughan noted an ample supply of labor - "more than 500 hands, mostly Negroes owned by the stockholders."¹⁶

The use of slaves on the Texas & New Orleans Railroad project was also covered in the banner. In September, contractor W.J. Williams & Co. advertised for 200 Negro laborers. The company wanted to hire slaves and offered good wages to the owner, by the month or by contract. The next month Vaughan complimented the yeoman service being performed by Negro gangs under the contractor Minter and Gilder, saying the slaves were doing "excellent work."¹⁷

Another contractor working on the Texas & New Orleans project and hiring slaves was Marsh, Campbell & Co. Their advertisement, "Two Hundred Negroes Wanted," offered liberal wages, good frame houses, and attention paid to the slaves' comfort. The company also promised to care for the sick, provide a well-ventilated building, and a physician who would give constant attention. These conditions of hire showed evidence of at least some humanitarian feelings for the bondsmen.¹⁸

Humanitarian sentiments towards blacks also were expressed in "The Latest Slave Murder Case," a lengthy story which the Banner borrowed from the Petersburg Express. In Mecklenberg County, Virginia, which was Vaughan's birthplace, a white man had been convicted and imprisoned for the stripping, whipping, and murdering of his slave woman. The paper applauded the punishment of the white man, saying it vindicated Southern character against aspersions cast by enemies in the North. Southerners "utterly detest and abhor cruelty and barbarity," the paper declared, "whether to whites or blacks."¹⁹

Printed by Vaughan, these protestations against cruelty and barbarity were ironic. They were contradicted by other articles which he published and by his performance as mayor of Beaumont. In these activities he demonstrated his loyalty to the slavery system and his sympathies with racist ideas which

justified the enslavement and exploitation of African Americans. Like many Southerners and Texans, he apparently believed in the basic inferiority of the Negro, the extraordinary capacity of the slave to withstand heat and hard physical labor, and the inability of the black to govern and improve himself.²⁰

Vaughan borrowed materials from other publications to promote these racial concepts and to justify the institution of slavery. For example, he ran a long article about slave management which he took from *The Southern Cultivator*, a popular agricultural journal published in Augusta, Georgia; the anonymous writer supported the concept of Negro inferiority and suggested that slaves should be firmly disciplined, preferably with a cow hide whip. And in apparent support for expansion of slavery, and perhaps for the reopening of the slave trade, Vaughan printed a *Harper's Weekly* essay which argued that only "the dark races" were suitable for laboring in the Southern climates. Because it was illegal to import slaves by force, the article asked, how were they to be had?²¹

With the system of slavery came risks of slave escape and slave rebellion. Incidents of such were reported in September 1860, when the *Banner* carried stories about the "Texas Troubles," a wave of hysteria and violence which spread across the state during the summer of that year. Destructive fires in North Texas, rumored to be the work of arsonists, produced tales of abolitionist plots and slave insurrections, of arson, murder, and rapine. Fear and panic in white communities prompted the organization of vigilante committees and the enrollment of patrol companies that regulated slave behavior. Numerous suspects were rounded up and subjected to whipping and lynching.²²

Perhaps as many as fifty men, black and white, died in the "Troubles." The *Waco Democrat* reported the hanging of two men named Boatwright; one, Richard Boatwright, was described as notorious for stealing horses and tampering with slaves. The *Colorado Citizen* told of a Fayette County plot in which 200 Negroes had banded together and planned to escape to Mexico; the plot was discovered and the leader arrested. The affairs of the Athens Vigilance Committee were recorded by the *Trinity Advocate*. The committee had uncovered a Negro plot to poison water wells; one well was poisoned and slaves were discovered in possession of bottles of strychnine. The plot had been suppressed and the Vigilance Committee subsequently disbanded.²³

Details of the slavery system in Beaumont were revealed in November 1860 when the *Banner* published various town ordinances. Here editor Vaughan printed the laws which he had drafted and signed as mayor. And here, in a section entitled "Offenses related to Slaves and Slave Property," he demonstrated his loyalty to slavery, his willingness to enforce the system, and his approval of whipping as a punishment. Also seen in these city regulations was the manner in which the institution of slavery was entwined with the city government. The citizens owned the slaves but the municipality claimed the right to regulate slave behavior and to control relations between the races.²⁴

The slave regulations for Beaumont were similar to urban slave codes adopted in other Texas towns such as Austin and Galveston. The Beaumont

statutes prescribed crimes and penalties. For white citizens, there were fines of \$10 to \$50 for various violations: allowing a slave unauthorized possession of guns, ammunition or intoxicating liquors; associating on terms of equality with any slave or slaves; or resisting the orders of any slave patrol company. For Beaumont slaves the ordinances set forth penalties for possessing firearms or alcoholic spirits, lounging in public, engaging in any insolent or boisterous behavior, or being found away from home at night. The punishments for the blacks were specific and brutal – fifteen to thirty lashes, “well laid-on by the town constable.”²⁵

As slavery was seen and discussed in the *Banner*, so the coming of the Civil War was reported in the paper. From September 1860 through May 1861, Vaughan covered a chain of critical national events: the presidential campaign, the victory of Lincoln, the secession of the Southern states, the separation of Texas from the Union, the formation of the Confederacy, and the mobilization of troops. The editor recorded the political attitudes of the voters of Beaumont and Southeast Texas, their opposition to Lincoln, and their support for secession of the Lone Star state. Here also, working to influence public opinion, Vaughan used his paper for advancing the Southern cause, opposing Republicans, and advocating the movement for secession.

In the presidential campaign, two matters were clear for Southerners, according to Vaughan. The Southern Democratic ticket of John C. Breckinridge and Joseph Lane was the preferred choice; Lincoln and the Republicans were completely unacceptable. Editorials taken from other Texas papers made the case. Fellow newspaperman Hamilton Stuart of the *Galveston Civilian* listed his choices for president: first Breckinridge, next Douglas, then Bell, last Lincoln. Also favoring the Southern Democrats, the *Redland Express* claimed Breckinridge was the only man who could “drive back the tide of fanaticism and silence the waves of frenzy that lashed at the proud columns of the Union.” Taking a slightly different angle, an article borrowed from *Edward Cushing’s Houston Telegraph* attacked Stephen A. Douglas, the nominee of the regular Democrats. Describing the candidate as “bold, talented and unscrupulous,” the writer predicted Douglas would cause a catastrophe – the defeat of Breckinridge and the election of Lincoln.²⁶

In September, while writing about the presidential campaign, Vaughan lashed out at Texas Governor Sam Houston, castigating him for his attitudes of moderation and for his failure to provide strong leadership in the cause of Southern rights. Once hailed as the hero of San Jacinto and “the infallible man of Texas,” now Houston was condemned for “his specious dogmas ... and electioneering cant,” for his “blubber about the Constitution and the Union.” For failure to face the hard issues, Houston should be ignored, along with moderates such as John Bell and Edward Everett, the candidates of the Constitutional Union Party. What was needed, Vaughan argued, was vigorous opposition to the Black Republicans. He recommended Breckinridge and Lane.²⁷

The next month Vaughan stirred up the sectional controversy and tried to build opposition to the Republican Party. He published articles showing the fanaticism of radical Republicans and their hostility to the Southern way of

life. "Helper's Creed" was a distillation of the anti-slavery diatribe contained in *The Impending Crisis of the South: How to Meet It*. Written by Hinton R. Helper, the extremist book was denounced in the article as a Republican manual. Advocating immediate termination of slavery, the "Creed" recommended the unqualified condemnation and the total ostracism of all slaveholders.²⁸

Equally obnoxious to readers of the *Banner* were the "irrepressible conflict" speeches of New York Senator William H. Seward, a prominent and provocative Republican spokesman. The collision between North and South was not accidental, Seward declared, it was an irrepressible conflict: "The United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation or a free labor nation."²⁹

Also in October, the *Banner* reported a campaign rally in Beaumont. A Mr. Gammage had spoken in favor of Breckinridge and Lane but Vaughan thought it a poor effort, redeemed only by its cause. Gammage was followed by Judge E.A.M. Gray, a popular local lawyer, whose remarks the editor described as a brief but eloquent appeal to the Southern patriotism of the audience.³⁰

In the paper of November 6, Vaughan included a brief notice: "Election Today." He predicted Jefferson County, the whole of Eastern Texas, the entire state would give an overwhelming majority to Breckinridge and Lane.³¹

Two weeks later the *Banner* furnished details of the Republican victory. Northern states, with large popular votes and great electoral power, had gone for Abraham Lincoln and Hannibal Hamlin. The South, including Texas, had voted for Breckinridge and Lane; that ticket had carried every Texas county by large majorities. As forecast by Vaughan, Jefferson and Orange County voters had given most of their ballots to the Southern Democrats – 283 votes for Breckinridge and Lane against ninety-one for a fusion ticket composed of anti-Lincoln electors.³²

The same edition of the paper carried news of reactions to Lincoln's election: business distress in the North and political unrest in the South. In New York a financial panic was reported; trade was restricted and the bills and stocks of Southern companies were scarcely negotiable. Hoping to restore public confidence, three New York papers – the *Herald*, the *Tribune*, and the *Times* – called on Lincoln to issue a manifesto promising he would protect Southern interests and institutions.³³

From Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida came reports of movements for secession and organization of armed militia. In South Carolina, where political excitement was intense, the legislature set the date for a secession convention. At Augusta, Georgia, thousands joined in a disunion parade, a hussar company was raised, guns were fired, and the "Marseillaise" was sung.³⁴

Adding to the tensions between North and South was Lincoln's plain-spoken vow to maintain Federal authority in the Southern states. In a New York article appearing in the *Banner*, the President-elect insisted that he would maintain Federal laws at all hazard. He declared that his duty forbade his permitting the secessionists to take possession of Federal forts.³⁵

Resistance to Lincoln and the coming Republican administration mounted in Texas. From Willard Richardson's Galveston News came a long article by C.G. Forshey, Commandant of the Texas Military Institute. Forshey demanded that Lincoln and Hamlin resign their offices; failing that, Southerners should refuse to live under a sectional president. He wanted all citizens to decline service under Lincoln and all judges and postmasters to refuse to function. Suggesting that Texas send delegates to a general Southern convention, he recommended secession within a strong confederacy. If that was not possible, Forshey wanted Texas to go it alone under the Lone Star banner that floated from the flagstaff at the Institute.³⁶

Borrowing additional items from Texas papers, Vaughan printed more reactions to Lincoln's election, reactions which promoted secession and which he no doubt wanted to encourage. Richardson of the Galveston News argued that the "election of a Black Republican president" meant the "hour of waiting was past" and the time for "a bold and decided Stand" had arrived. Waiting for an overt act from the new president was folly, the Rusk Enquirer declared; his election was an overt act. The Anderson Texian reported a company of cavalry had been organized while the Waco South-West told of Lone Star flags flying in the city. Recommending immediate secession, the Huntsville Item claimed it never saw the necessity of joining the Union in the first place.³⁷

At Orange, Texas, meetings were held in December to consider issues raised by Lincoln's election. The crowds there were large and enthusiastic, the Banner said, much in favor of protecting the rights of Texas. A beautiful Lone Star flag was presented by the young ladies of the town to the young gentlemen.³⁸

Across the state of Texas, support for secession was widespread, but not unanimous. There were voices of moderation, but these were not heard in the Banner. Governor Houston and others urged caution, delay, careful consideration of the issues. Also recommending caution was Hamilton Stuart, editor of the Galveston Civilian. While not absolutely condemning secession, Stuart suggested "it will be hard to institute better governments or a happier order of things than we have hitherto enjoyed."³⁹

For Vaughan, the need for protecting Southern rights was clear already. In early January, he invited his readers' earnest and thoughtful attention to "The Address of the People of South Carolina ... to the People of the Slaveholding States... ." Here he offered Beaumonters a lengthy rationalization for secession.⁴⁰

Covering more than five columns, the open letter from the South Carolinians was an impassioned statement of the Southern position, including its historical development. Southerners had loved the Union and fought on her behalf. But all fraternity between North and South had been lost. The sections were driven apart by stern destinies. The North preferred a system of industry in which capital and labor were in perpetual conflict while the South had a system in which labor and capital were held in common, and capital therefore protected labor. Benefits of the Southern program were numerous; many fertile regions, where Caucasians could not labor, were brought into usefulness

by the work of the Africans. The South Carolinians demanded to be left alone and invited Southerners to join them in forming a confederacy of slaveholding states.⁴¹

Vaughan was convinced of the necessity for Texas to secede. Echoing the impatience expressed earlier by Richardson of the Galveston News, Vaughan declared on January 8, 1861, that all argument had been exhausted and all appeals to the North were unheeded, that Southern rights would not be guaranteed if Texas remained in the Union. Urging decisive steps, he thought cooperation with sister Southern states was desirable but not essential. It was high time for action, he proclaimed, but what action? "Shall we remain silent? ... Shall we enter into resolve? ... No! ... Texas should take immediate action ... Let us ... disunite ourselves from a government, under which our most sacred rights are disregarded."⁴²

Some even believed that secession was not only necessary but also desirable, that separation would bring many benefits to the South. Probably embracing this view and wanting to persuade his readers, Vaughan ran an article from the London Times which suggested that if all the Southern states combined to form a confederacy, they would be the real United States, so far as prosperity was concerned. Every advantage was with the slaveholding states, the writer claimed. Mexico would be conquered and the Southerners would be the lords of the most magnificent domain in the world, controlling the passage between two oceans.⁴³

By February the secession movement among the Southern states had made significant progress. On February 19, Vaughan published a status report: five states had seceded – South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, and Georgia; three – Louisiana, Virginia, and Texas – had called secession conventions; Arkansas, North Carolina, Missouri, Kentucky, and Tennessee had not acted.⁴⁴

In Texas the secession question was considered in a special convention in Austin. Commencing on January 28, the conclave was covered in the Banner. A "Proceedings" report dated February 4 advised readers about various bills and resolutions. One demanded that General David Twiggs, commander of Federal forces in Texas, surrender all government arms in his possession. Another provided for the purchase of military weapons for the state. A third prescribed a referendum, the submission of the secession act to the voters for ratification.⁴⁵

Feelings of Southern patriotism ran high. A reprint from the Austin State Gazette called on all Texans to stand by the state and the South in the struggle that was pending between the two great sections of the country. Late events had proved the validity of the Southern position. "Every man must raise his voice on behalf of the honor and safety of his state," the article declared. "He who is not with us, is against us."⁴⁶

Locally, Colonel Henry C. Hicks, a lawyer from nearby Sabine Pass, addressed citizens of Beaumont about the questions then shaking the pillars of the nation. In a speech described by Vaughan as "cogent, beautiful and loudly applauded," Hicks recommended the immediate secession of Texas. "Long live the Colonel," the editor proclaimed, "and all such patriotic men."⁴⁷

The secession of Texas, approved by the Austin convention, was referred to the voters for ratification in an election set for February 23. Writing a few days before the vote, Vaughan counseled with his readers and argued in favor of separation from the Union.⁴⁸

The issue of secession had been forced upon the South, the editor wrote. Earlier, Southerners had submitted patiently to injustice, but continued submission would be the part of a people degraded, ignorant of their rights, too cowardly to defend them. Texas did not fear the coming election or its results. The honor, the tranquility, the future independence, and prosperity of Texas were safe in the hands of Texans. Threats of coercion had no effect on them, except to confirm them in their opposition to the oppression planned by a fanatical sectional majority.⁴⁹

Vaughan claimed that the Constitution had been violated by the North. Also, he vowed Texas would not bear allegiance to a national government inaugurated upon sectional issues. "We, as freemen, absolve the ties which bind us to it," he declared, "protesting solemnly but peacefully, against the usurpations which impelled us to act." He hoped "that the people of the North may yet concede that we are right" and that "they will learn to construe our national pact as we do."⁵⁰

Closing his argument, Vaughan threw down the gauntlet; unless the people of the North fully corrected their ways, the editor warned, the people of Texas would regard them as enemies in war.⁵¹

Even before the ratification of Texas secession, the *Banner* announced the mobilization of troops in Beaumont. A notice printed on February 19 ordered members of the Jefferson Light Dragoons to assemble for drill at the courthouse on the following Saturday afternoon. The orders were signed by Captain Frank P. Powers and Orderly Sergeant Ben Gammon.⁵²

The separation of Texas from the United States was approved by the voters on February 23. Across the state the vote was nearly four to one in favor of secession; in Jefferson County the numbers were even more decisive, with 256 in favor and only sixteen against.⁵³

With Texas officially separated from the Union, the next step involved realignment of the state with the new Confederate government. Covering this process, Vaughan told of a meeting in Beaumont on May 17 to select delegates to a convention in Jasper that would nominate a candidate for the Congress of the Southern Confederacy. George W. O'Brien, County Clerk, served as chairman of the meeting, and Felix O. Yates, principal of the Beaumont Male and Female Academy, served as secretary. O'Brien appointed six delegates: Joseph Hebert of Taylor's Bayou, Messrs. Alexander, Hotchkiss, and Eddy of Sabine Pass, and John J. Herring and Cave Johnson of Beaumont. Hebert was a farmer; Hotchkiss, a county official; Johnson, a saloon keeper; Alexander and Herring, merchants. The delegates were instructed to support, insofar as it was possible, the nomination of Colonel Henry C. Hicks, the Sabine Pass lawyer who had campaigned earlier for secession.⁵⁴

In these early political activities of the new Confederacy, slaveownership was not a requirement for participation. Neither O'Brien or Yates were

slaveholders. Among the delegates, three – Hebert, Herring and Johnson – were slaveowners, while the other three – Alexander, Hotchkiss and Eddy – were not. Colonel Hicks, the proposed nominee, owned six slaves.⁵⁵

The separation of Southern states from the Union continued. On May 21 Vaughan happily reported the secession of Arkansas and Tennessee. He welcomed the Southern sister states with “open arms” and greeted them with “demonstrations of affectionate regard.”⁵⁶

While secession proceeded, preparations for war already had begun. The Banner provided numerous reports from the North and South; Federal troops were maneuvering and Confederate forces were taking up positions. At nearby Galveston the construction of breastworks and fortifications was almost complete. Fifteen hundred citizens were drilling, getting primed for the enemy. Houston and other area towns were preparing to send additional troops to assist in the defense of the island city.⁵⁷

Vaughan also printed stories intended to hearten the Confederates and belittle the enemy. Two articles ridiculed President Lincoln and a third made fun of Pennsylvania troops. Lincoln was depicted as a drunkard and at odds with his generals. The Pennsylvanians were described as unarmed, undisciplined, uncouth; woe to them, the article warned, when they met the mighty South Carolinian regiments.⁵⁸

In other attempts to encourage his fellow Southerners, Vaughan published articles showing a lack of resolve among some Northern leaders and their efforts to head-off a military collision. In late May he printed a long statement from Ohio Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham detailing his opposition to Republican policy and to the possibility of war. Presenting a similar view was a story about Indiana Congressman Daniel W. Voorhies, who asserted that Indiana had no quarrel with the South and that he would vote no funds to make war against fathers, brothers, and friends. And from the Baltimore Exchange came “The Position of Maryland.” Denouncing the tyrannical Republican government and its repression of the South, the paper pleaded for patience and peace.⁵⁹

At the same time Vaughan published “The St. Louis Massacre,” a bloody story which no doubt was intended to inflame his readers. An eyewitness account written by a Dr. Ed Crescent told of a violent incident in which Union soldiers had opened fire without warning on a crowd of Southern militia and civilians. Between twenty and 100 persons had been killed, including a fourteen-year-old girl and two young brothers. In anger, Dr. Crescent cried out, “We are now overrun by a horde of barbarians from Illinois and blood thirsty Abolitionists from Iowa and Wisconsin and jayhawkers and freebooters from everywhere. But God is just,” he declared, “and by his help we will maintain the right.”⁶⁰

On May 30, Vaughan was not happy. The nonarrival of steamboats from New Orleans had prevented him from getting newsprint. Also, he had received no mail or newspapers and found it impossible to offer his readers any late news. In those critical times, when the need for news was so great, he was compelled to print only a half sheet – two pages instead of four. But even with

this last available, abbreviated issue of the Banner, he gave vivid glimpses of the days just as the war was beginning. Emotions were running high. Troops were being mobilized.

Being deprived of supplies and mail from New Orleans, Vaughan complained bitterly about the interruption of shipping in the Gulf of Mexico. He lambasted the steamship company of Harris and Morgan for taking their ships out of the Southern trade and sending them North. "Good riddance!" the editor declared; the company held "one of the most damnable monopolies ever practiced on a people . . . , they have amassed millions of dollars, and in return - what have they done? Flown to Abraham's bosom for safety, of course!"⁶¹

In Beaumont a vigilance committee was organized. According to a notice in the paper, the Beaumont Vigilance Committee ordered the expulsion of Peter B. Ennis, a twenty-eight year old carpenter and railroad worker from Pennsylvania. A unanimously adopted resolution required Ennis to leave Jefferson County by midnight, Sunday, May 26. Reasons for this action against the man were not given, but perhaps it was to suppress slave insurrections or root out Union sympathizers.⁶²

The paper reported continuing mobilization of troops in Southeast Texas. Orange County citizens met at Duncan's Woods to organize a fighting company. Dr. S. Gill, chairman of the meeting, spoke eloquently, declaring that the new company would defend the rights and liberties of a free and independent Confederacy, that they would meet any foe who might attempt to invade Texas soil, which had been bought most dearly by pioneer fathers. Officers were elected: David E. Lawhon, captain; William Gill, 1st lieutenant; George Haynes, 2nd Lieutenant; and Josh Harmon, 1st sergeant. Dubbing themselves the "Duncan's Woods Independent Rifle Company," the men spent several hours in good-order drilling.⁶³

Other East Texas troops were already on their way to various points. The Banner reported that the Woodville Volunteer Company had passed through Beaumont before dawn on Tuesday, May 28; the company of sixty men were going downriver on board the steamboat "Belle Sulphur." Having been accepted by President Jefferson Davis, the group first had to travel to New Orleans where it would await further orders. Vaughan applauded "these first class citizens of Tyler County," declaring they had no other object than to fight. "Three cheers for the Woodville volunteers!" he cried.⁶⁴

Men from the Beaumont area were also under arms near Brownsville, Texas. A letter "From the Rio Grande" provided a lively report from the Jefferson Mounted Rifles who were on duty at Fort Brown. Located opposite Matamoros, Mexico, the fort had been used previously to protect Brownsville and the United States border against Indian raiders and Mexican freebooters such as Juan Cortina. Now the fort was a point of contention between North and South.⁶⁵

Beginning "Dear Vaughan" and signed with the *nom de guerre* "Dragon," the letter told of exciting times at Fort Brown. Union vessels cruised the coast and there was danger in trying to ship anything, even a bale of cotton or a pack of wool, out of Texas ports. The Confederates had seven

companies, about 600 men working day and night on the trenches. Soon they would complete the fortifications. If Northern troops took fort Brown, the writer vowed, "they will have to kill every mother's son of us."⁶⁶

Elated that the military spirit had taken hold of the good citizens of Jefferson County, "Dragoon" believed the Jefferson Mounted Rifles would prove themselves under fire. He hoped they would not allow any man to join them except those "prepared to go to Washington or the devil." Having a high opinion of the men from Jefferson County, he called them "gallant fellows." Truly, he said, the county was well-represented in the defense of her state.⁶⁷

Biding "*au revoir*" to Vaughan and readers of the Banner, the writer unleashed a round of Texas bravado: "After making a meal of the Yankees," "Dragoon" declared, we will "take Cortina for dessert, Matamoros for dinner and the whole world for supper."⁶⁸

The military spirit which had inspired the words of the Soldier "Dragoon" soon gripped the newspaperman Vaughan. In a short time, perhaps only one or two weeks after publishing the May 31 issue of the Banner, he abandoned his paper and joined the Confederate Army. Vaughan served with Company F, 5th Texas Regiment, Hood's Brigade. He campaigned with the Southern forces, suffered episodes of debilitating illness, and was wounded severely in May 1864 in the Battle of the Wilderness. Staying with the army for the duration, he witnessed the defeat of the Confederate armies, the failure of the Southern cause, and the destruction of slavery.⁶⁹

After the war Vaughan returned to Southeast Texas but did not re-enter the newspaper business. He lived in Beaumont, taught school, and served for a while as tax assessor and collector of Jefferson County. He married Alabama E. Keith and later moved with her to Sabine Pass, engaging there in the shipping business. Then he and his wife relocated to Cairo, Jasper County, where he had an ownership interest in the Texas Tram & Lumber Company. Vaughan died at his residence in Jasper County in 1882 at the age of fifty-three. He was survived by his wife, a son Nicholas, and three daughters, Florence, Anna, and Addie.⁷⁰

In the period just before the Civil War, Beaumont and Jefferson County was different from East Texas and the Lower South. The area did not have a plantation economy and its business was varied; farming and ranching were balanced with operations of sawmills, steamboats, and railroads. Also, the number of slaves was modest, as were the quantity and influence of slaveholders. This section of the country was not dominated by planters or a slaveholding aristocracy. There were no planters and many of the city and county leaders, such as Vaughan and O'Brien, were non-slaveowners.

But the institution of slavery was completely ingrained in the society of Beaumont and Southeast Texas. And while the number of slaveholders was not large, their variety was great. Their chattels were found throughout the community, not only on farms and ranches, but also in sawmills, on railroads, and around the town of Beaumont, in hotels and stores, and in the homes of doctors, lawyers, and craftsmen. In short, slavery pervaded Beaumont culture.

Editor Vaughan was not a slaveholder, but he strongly supported the

institution with his actions as newspaperman and mayor. He published articles expounding racist theories which justified slavery and wrote approvingly about the employment of blacks on the railroad projects. And as mayor, he drafted and signed town ordinances which perpetuated the slavery system and regulated slave behavior.

With slavery deeply rooted in his community, Vaughan aligned himself and his paper with the politics of the Lower South, with the diehard defense of the institution. When slavery was threatened by national events, Vaughan used the *Banner* to promote the Southern cause. Writing editorials and borrowing like-minded articles from other papers, he worked to mold the opinions of his readers on the critical issues of the day. He opposed Lincoln and the Republicans, favored the secession of Texas, and endorsed the mobilization of troops.

Vaughan's readers agreed with his editorial and political policies. When given opportunities, the people of Beaumont and Jefferson County consistently supported the Southern cause. Even though their ownership of slaves was not great, they steadfastly demonstrated their loyalty to the institution and the Southern way of life. In the presidential campaign, they voted decisively for Breckinridge and Lane; during the secession crisis, they voted conclusively in favor of separation; and in a final test of their political convictions, the men of Southeast Texas took up arms and risked their lives to defend the South.

NOTES

¹Issues of *The Beaumont Banner* are located as follows: September 11, 25, October 23, November 6, 20, 1860, February 19, 1861, in Tyrrell Historical Library, Beaumont, Texas; October 16, 1860, in the New York Historical Society, New York, New York; December 11, 1860, January 8, May 21, 1861, in the Newspaper Collection, Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin, Texas; May 30, 1861, in the San Jacinto Museum of History, LaPorte, Texas. For a discussion of the importance of newspapers, see Donald E. Reynolds, *Editors Make War: Southern Newspapers in the Secession Crisis* (Nashville, 1966), pp. vii-ix, 5.

²Beaumont Enterprise, February 3, 1883; March 21, 1955. W.T. Block, *A History of Jefferson County, Texas. From Wilderness to Reconstruction* (Nederland, 1976), p. 51. *United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Texas, Schedule 1, Inhabitants, City of Beaumont. "Record of Board of Alderman" (Beaumont, Texas, Official Minutes), October 2, 1860, Sam Houston Regional Library and Research Center, Liberty, Texas.

³For a discussion of Galveston and Houston editors, see Earl Wesley Fornell, *The Galveston Era: The Texas Crescent on the Eve of Secession* (Austin, 1961), pp. 142-150, 151-154.

⁴The homogeneity of East Texas with the Lower South is described by Walter F. Buenger, *Secession and the Union in Texas* (Austin, 1984), pp. 10, 13-14. The lack of cotton production in Jefferson, Orange, and Hardin counties is shown by Allan C. Ashcraft, "East Texas in the Election of 1860 and the Secession Crisis," *East Texas Historical Journal*, I (July, 1963), pp. 7-16. *United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Texas, Schedule 1, Inhabitants, City of Beaumont.

⁵Slavery in Texas and its eastern regions is discussed by Randolph B. Campbell, *An Empire for Slavery: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1821-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1989), pp. 55-60. See also Barbara J. Rozek, "Slavery in Galveston, Texas, on the Eve of the Civil War" (unpublished ms., Houston), p. 2. *United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Slave Schedules.

⁶*United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Slave Schedules.

⁷The *Beaumont Banner*, May 30, 1861.

- ⁸Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*, pp. 118-125. *United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Slave Schedules.
- ⁹*United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Texas, Slave Schedules.
- ¹⁰*United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Texas, Slave Schedules.
- ¹¹*United States Eighth Census* (1860). Jefferson County, Texas, Slave Schedules.
- ¹²*United States Eighth Census* (1860), Jefferson County, Texas, Slave Schedules. See also "Record of the Board of Alderman" (Official Minutes), October 2, 1860 through April 9, 1861. Among leading county officials, non-slaveowners were prominent. George W. O'Brien, county clerk, did not own slaves, and neither did A.J. Tevis, sheriff. Josiah Junker, chief county magistrate, was counted as an owner by virtue of bondsmen held by his wife and children.
- ¹³The Beaumont Banner, September 25, December 11, 1860.
- ¹⁴The Beaumont Banner, September 25, 1860.
- ¹⁵Campbell, *Empire for Slavery*, discusses the employment of slaves, including their hiring and rental, but does not write about the use of slave labor in sawmill or railroad work. The Beaumont Banner, September 11, 1860.
- ¹⁶The Beaumont Banner, September 11, November 20, December 11, 1860.
- ¹⁷The Beaumont Banner, September 11, October 23, 1860.
- ¹⁸The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.
- ¹⁹The Beaumont Banner, December 11, 1860.
- ²⁰Billy Don Ledbetter, "White over Black in Texas: Racial Attitudes in the Ante-Bellum Period," *Phylon*, 34 (December 1973), pp. 406-411.
- ²¹The Beaumont Banner, September 11, 1860.
- ²²For a discussion of the role of newspapers in the Texas Troubles, see Reynolds, *Editors Make War*, pp. 99-116.
- ²³The Beaumont Banner, September 11, 1860.
- ²⁴The Beaumont Banner, November 6, 1860.
- ²⁵The Beaumont Banner, November 6, 1860. Urban slave codes are discussed by Paul E. Lack, "Urban Slavery in the Southwest," *Red River Valley Historical Review*, VI (Spring, 1989), p. 9.
- ²⁶The Beaumont Banner, September 11, October 23, 1860.
- ²⁷The Beaumont Banner, September 11, 1860.
- ²⁸The Beaumont Banner, October 16, 1860.
- ²⁹The Beaumont Banner, October 16, 1860.
- ³⁰The Beaumont Banner, October 23, 1860.
- ³¹The Beaumont Banner, November 6, 1860.
- ³²The Beaumont Banner, November 20, 1860. For a discussion of the 1860 election results, including the role of the Fusion ticket, see Buenger, *Secession and the Union in Texas*, pp. 53, 58.
- ³³The Beaumont Banner, November 20, 1860.
- ³⁴The Beaumont Banner, November 20, December 11, 1860.
- ³⁵The Beaumont Banner, December 11, 1860.
- ³⁶The Beaumont Banner, December 11, 1860.
- ³⁷The Beaumont Banner, December 11, 1860. See also Fornell, *The Galveston Era*, p. 278.
- ³⁸The Beaumont Banner, December 1860.
- ³⁹Fornell, *The Galveston Era*, p. 281.
- ⁴⁰The Beaumont Banner, January 8, 1861.
- ⁴¹The Beaumont Banner, January 8, 1861.
- ⁴²The Beaumont Banner, January 8, 1861.
- ⁴³The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁴⁴The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁴⁵The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁴⁶The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁴⁷The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁴⁸The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁴⁹The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁵⁰The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁵¹The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁵²The Beaumont Banner, February 19, 1861.

⁵³The Beaumont Banner, May 21, 1861. For results of the secession ratification vote, see Ralph A. Wooster, *The Secession Conventions of the South* (Princeton, 1962), pp. 132-133. Also see Block, *A History of Jefferson County*, p. 98.

⁵⁴The Beaumont Banner, May 21, 1861. *United States Eighth Census (1860)*, Jefferson County, Texas, Schedule 1, Inhabitants.

⁵⁵*United States Eighth Census (1860)*, Jefferson County, Slave Schedules.

⁵⁶The Beaumont Banner, May 21, 1861.

⁵⁷The Beaumont Banner, May 21, 1861.

⁵⁸The Beaumont Banner, May 21, 1861.

⁵⁹The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁰The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶¹The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶²The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861. *United States Eighth Census (1860)*, Jefferson County, Texas, Schedule 1, Inhabitants.

⁶³The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁴The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁵The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁶The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁷The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁸The Beaumont Banner, May 30, 1861.

⁶⁹Copies of Vaughan's military records, including Company Muster Rolls, are located at the Confederate Research Center, Hillsboro, Texas.

⁷⁰Beaumont Enterprise, February 3, 1883. Vaughan family papers, including photographs, were made available to the writer by Vaughan's great granddaughter, Vallie Fletcher Taylor, Hico, Texas.