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### Arkansas Secession Ordinance, 1861 May 6

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# **Arkansas Secession Ordinance MS.000542**

**Finding aid prepared by the Arkansas State  
Archives**

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository</b>	Arkansas State Archives
<b>Title</b>	Arkansas Secession Ordinance
<b>Date</b>	1861 May 6
<b>Extent</b>	1.0 Cubic feet 1 box, 1 reel microfilm
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Language of Materials</b>	Materials entirely in English.
<b>Text [Box]</b>	1
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### Preferred Citation

Arkansas Secession Ordinance, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas.

## Biographical/Historical Note

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In 1860 Arkansas was enjoying a period of progress and prosperity. In the last ten years the population had doubled and now was about 435,000. The future seemed bright, but in the background were bitter disputes between the Northern and Southern states which threatened to reach a climax. If war should come, Arkansas would be involved.

With slavery, the most outstanding of the issues between North and South, the majority of people in Arkansas were not greatly concerned. Four-fifths of the white families in the state owned no slaves. Few of those who did own slaves believed that the system was in danger. For many years the slavery question had caused trouble, but somehow compromises had always been reached.

The presidential election of 1860 brought on a crisis. Arkansas was caught up in the rush of events. The new Republican party with its candidate Abraham Lincoln was making its second bid for the presidency. The Democrats, long in control of national affairs, were unable to agree on a candidate. The party split into Northern and Southern wings and each division nominated a candidate. This practically insured the election of Lincoln. Since the Republican party opposed the extension of slavery, some Southern leaders declared that if Lincoln were elected the South should secede and become an independent nation.

The presidential campaign of 1860 caused no great excitement in Arkansas, but many people eagerly awaited the outcome of the election. Lincoln's name did not appear on the Arkansas ballot, and the Southern Democratic candidate received a majority of the votes cast in the state. As soon as it was certain that Lincoln had been elected, South Carolina called a convention and passed an ordinance of secession declaring that the state was no longer a part of the United States. She sent delegates to the other Southern states urging them to follow the same course. The Arkansas General Assembly, which was in session at the time, listened to the South Carolina delegates but took no action.

While Arkansas hesitated, other Southern states were busy passing ordinances of secession. South Carolina was soon joined by Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. In February 1861 representatives of the seceding states met in Montgomery, Alabama, and organized the Confederate States of America. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was elected president. Other Southern states, including Arkansas, watched and waited.

As the secession movement grew, people in Arkansas became greatly concerned. In January 1861 Governor Henry M. Rector, at the direction of the General Assembly, called an election for the people to vote on whether Arkansas should hold a convention to consider secession. At the same time the voters were to elect delegates to the convention in case the vote should be favorable. At the election on February 18 the vote was favorable and delegates were chosen.

Companies of troops were already being organized in different parts of Arkansas, and demands were raised that the United States arsenal in Little Rock be surrendered to the state government. Early in February troops from Helena and several other places moved into Little Rock and declared that they would take the arsenal by force if necessary. Alarmed by the possibility of bloodshed, Governor Rector

persuaded the Federal commander to surrender the arsenal and evacuate his troops. The governor then took charge in the name of the state.

The secession convention met in the Old State House in Little Rock on March 4, 1861. David Walker, who opposed secession, was elected president. The convention continued in session for two and a half weeks. Feeling ran high and many fiery speeches were made, but it soon became evident that a majority of the members did not think that the situation at that time called for secession. The convention voted down a resolution condemning Lincoln's inaugural address, and defeated a conditional ordinance of secession.

The opinion seemed to prevail that Arkansas should secede if the Federal government made war on the Confederate States. Still hoping for a compromise settlement that would avoid war, the delegates agreed to go home until after the people had voted on the secession question at a special election to be held in August.

The Civil War began on April 12, 1861, when Confederate guns opened fire on Fort Sumter, in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina. When President Lincoln asked Arkansas to provide a regiment of troops to force the seceded states back into the Union Governor Rector refused. The governor sent a force to take the Fort Smith arsenal, and Arkansas regiments began organizing to fight for the South.

The secession convention, recalled in special session, met again in the Old State House in Little Rock on May 6. Before a packed house, a secession ordinance was introduced and passed by vote of sixty-five to five. When the chairman asked that the decision be made unanimous, Isaac Murphy of Huntsville was the only delegate who refused to change his vote. On May 20 Arkansas was admitted to the Confederacy. Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina also seceded after the war had actually begun.

---John L. Ferguson and J.H. Atkinson, "Historic Arkansas"

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## Scope and Contents

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This document authorized Arkansas's secession from the Union.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

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## **Controlled Access Headings**

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### **Subject(s)**

- Secession