

Eventually the Know-Nothing phenomenon ran its course. The Democrats recaptured control of the General Assembly in 1859 and cut the heart out of the Know-Nothing party's political base by taking control of the city police department, dividing the city into election precincts, and declaring the election of the Know-Nothing delegates from the city void.<sup>46</sup>

The decline of the Know-Nothings coincided with dramatic national events. Abraham Lincoln was inaugurated president in March 1861, and a few weeks later the long-smoldering debate over slavery, secession, and the nature of the federal union erupted into violence. Charles Branch Clark describes the impact on the Maryland political scene:

The political organization of Maryland was drastically changed by the appeal to arms. The Know-Nothing party ceased to function as did the short lived Constitutional Union party. The new Republican party was unable to gain many adherents and for some time was an unimportant faction within the State. The Democratic party ceased to exist openly. Its members were divided in allegiance to the Union, and one faction, sympathetic to the Confederacy, became known as the Secessionist, Peace, or State Rights party. The others, supporting the Lincoln administration and the Federal Government, organized as the Union party and gained control of the State in the special election held in June, 1861, to elect representatives to the United States Congress. Nor was it likely to be ousted from control so long as it was supported and protected by the Federal military force.<sup>47</sup>

Maryland was truly a state caught in the middle in many different ways. In terms of sentiment, the Eastern Shore and the southern counties maintained an affinity with the Confederate cause, whereas the northern and western counties were more Unionist in sympathy. Geography alone made the state's position precarious. Maryland shared a long common border with Virginia, with whom she had cordial relations. But a break in those relations left the state open to invasion, which indeed occurred, as well as to disruption of her major internal improvement works—the C & O Canal and the B & O Railroad. On the other hand, it was clear that Lincoln could not suffer Maryland to be disloyal. The safety of Washington, D.C., and a major transportation route to the West were at stake. The state was already being used as a conduit for Union troops on their way to Washington, and the threat of Union occupation in the event of disension was real.

These uncertainties produced repeated demands for a special session of the General Assembly, which Governor Hicks, unsure of what the Democratic majority in that body might do, resisted. With the commencement of actual hostilities in April 1861, however, and the intrusion of Union troops into Maryland, Hicks finally relented. He originally called the session to meet in Annapolis, but when Union troops occupied that city he switched the meeting place to Frederick. There, with periodic interruption, the General Assembly met from April to August.

The legislature that met in special session was the one elected in 1859. It was not given to extreme views but, recognizing the realities, walked a narrow line and chose its words carefully. Through a number of resolutions the General Assembly explicitly confirmed Maryland's loyalty to the Union and recognized her obligation "to submit in good faith to the exercise of all the legal and constitutional powers of the General Government." But at the same time it declared that "the war now waged by the Government of the United States upon the people of the Confederate States" was "unconstitutional in its origin, purposes and conduct, repugnant to civilization and sound policy; subversive of the free principles upon which the Federal Union was founded, and certain to result in the hopeless and bloody overthrow of our existing institutions."<sup>48</sup>

46. Acts of 1860, chs. 7 (putting the city police under state control), 9 and 10 (regulating elections in the city); res. 6, 7, and 8 in effect voided the election results in the city.

47. Charles Branch Clark, "Politics in Maryland during the Civil War: The State Elections of 1861," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 37 (1942): 378. See also Duncan, "Era of the Civil War," pp. 353-56.

48. Acts of 1861 (Spec. Sess.), res. 4.