

Confederate Party ^[1]

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Confederate Party

by Gordon B. McKinney, 2006

The Confederate Party was active in political battles in North Carolina during the Civil War. In a real sense, the party was created by its opponents, who eventually called themselves "Conservatives." At the beginning of the war, a façade of unity existed in the state, with all prominent political leaders supporting secession from the Union. This surface unity could not hide the fact that virtually all of the state's political leaders still aligned themselves with organizations similar to the antebellum political parties.

The first indications of the survival of partisanship came with the appointment of officers in the North Carolina regiments of the Confederate army. Former [Whig](#) ^[2] congressman [Zebulon B. Vance](#) ^[3] of [Buncombe County](#) ^[4] estimated that 90 percent of the generals from North Carolina were former [Democrats](#) ^[5]. During the election for president of the Confederacy, dissatisfied former Whigs ran an opposition Jefferson Davis ticket that won approximately 40 percent of the vote against the regular slate. In an effort to head off the dissatisfied opposition, the incumbent group nominated former Whig [William Johnston](#) ^[6] of [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[7] for governor in the early spring of 1862. The leaders of the opposition group, now calling it the "[Conservative Party](#) ^[8]," met later in 1862 and chose Vance as their candidate. Led by [William W. Holden](#) ^[9] and [William A. Graham](#) ^[10], the Conservatives attacked their opposition, which they labeled the "Confederate Party." It is unclear whether the name was selected in an attempt to associate the party with the unpopular Jefferson Davis administration or because an anti-Conservative newspaper in Raleigh called itself the *Confederate*.

The Confederates failed to organize effectively for the 1862 gubernatorial election, and Vance overwhelmed Johnston in the popular vote for governor. From then on, the party rarely offered candidates. It is uncertain whether the party ever existed as a formal organization or whether the title was simply a convenience adopted for the vestige of the Democratic Party that survived into the Civil War.

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Additional Resources:

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