

## "Secession Spilled Over to County"

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By Mary Ann Ashcraft

Little is remembered today about Dr. Bernard Mills and the role he played when Maryland was caught between allegiance to the North or South as the Civil War began in 1861.

Mills was a native of Calvert County, but he married a Carroll County girl, Mary C. Gore, and settled in Uniontown in the 1850s where he established a medical practice. A notice for his joint practice with J. Cambell Shorb ran in Westminster's American Sentinel early in 1860. Why he chose to advertise in the Sentinel, a decidedly Republican newspaper, when he was a staunch Democrat, is unknown.

Mary's father, Jabez Gore, had been a political figure in Carroll County and was serving as a clerk in the U. S. House of Representatives when he died. Something lured 29 year-old Dr. Mills into politics as well because he successfully ran as a Democrat for a seat in the Maryland House of Delegates during the November 1859 election. Two other men also served from Carroll, but their political affiliation is unrecorded.

In the spring of 1861, Bernard Mills was still a delegate and the Maryland legislature was dealing with the toughest issue it had ever faced: whether to join Virginia, which had seceded on April 17 and joined the Confederacy, or remain part of the Union.

Could Maryland successfully straddle secession as Governor Thomas Hicks once suggested?

"The only safety of Maryland lies in preserving a neutral position between our brethren of the North and of the South," Hicks said to the Maryland General Assembly during its meeting April 25, 1861. Mills was known to favor secession. This isn't surprising given his birth in Calvert County which contributed many of its sons to the Confederate cause; that tobacco-growing part of Maryland had much more in common with the South than with the North.

The Maryland legislature met in Frederick, not Annapolis, in late April 1861 to discuss the matter of secession, but made no commitment to either side, and the session adjourned with the state still sitting on the fence. Another meeting was scheduled for mid-September in Frederick, but this time the Federal government was taking no chances on how the legislators might vote. Under orders from President Lincoln and Secretary of War Simon Cameron, Major General Banks arrested seven openly pro-South legislators plus four officers and clerks, including Bernard Mills.

Mills was seized September 17th and sent to Annapolis. Many of Maryland's Southern sympathizers were imprisoned at Fort McHenry, but Mills was sent to Fort Lafayette in New York harbor on September 24th and later held at Fort Warren in Boston harbor. He had plenty of political company in the latter prison.

By early 1862, several men were petitioning for his release. "The state of his domestic affairs, the entirely dependent and helpless condition of his family, his wife's delicate health [she was pregnant],

make his presence at home for a time very desirable and urgent," wrote his brother Leonard to the Secretary of State on February 12th.

He was released in April 1862, the same month his wife gave birth to a daughter, but his brief obituary in May 1869 makes no mention of the tumultuous events of 1861-62. They do appear, however, in his wife's longer obituary in 1901.

No image ran with this column

Mary Ann Ashcraft is a library volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.  
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