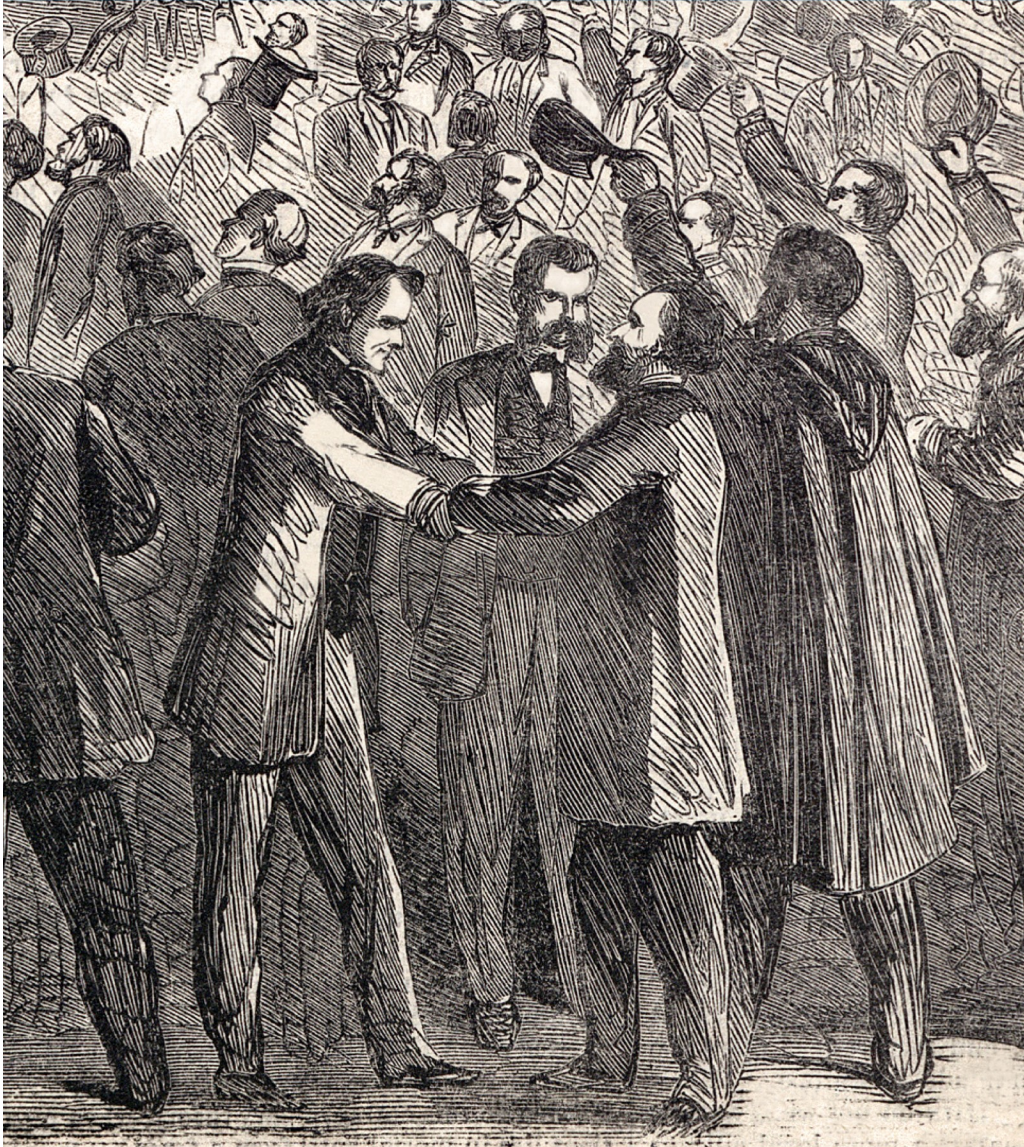


Forgotten Abolitionist

JOHN A. J. CRESWELL OF MARYLAND

By John M. Osborne & Christine Bombaro



HOUSE DIVIDED PROJECT AT DICKINSON COLLEGE

**Forgotten Abolitionist:
John A.J. Creswell of Maryland**

John M. Osborne and Christine Bombaro

Carlisle, PA
House Divided Project at Dickinson College
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The cover illustration features detail from the cover of *Harper's Weekly Magazine* published on February 18, 1865, depicting final passage of Thirteenth Amendment on January 31, 1865, with (left to right), Congressmen Thaddeus Stevens, William D. Kelley, and John A.J. Creswell shaking hands in celebration.

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John Andrew Jackson Creswell, circa 1870
(National Archives)

FOREWORD

It used to be considered a grave insult in American culture to call someone an abolitionist. Even among antislavery politicians in the antebellum North, there was a deep reluctance about acknowledging any sympathy with abolitionism. Right through the election of 1860, the northern Republican press tended to portray abolitionists as dangerous extremists almost fatally bent on destroying the union. All of that began to change, however, during the Civil War. Northern Democrats and Southerners remained hostile to the term, but to many Republicans-turned-Unionists, abolition began to seem as a reasonable, even necessary, alternative to the terrible crisis wrought by secession. John Hay, who served President Abraham Lincoln as a top White House aide, memorably captured this transformation in one of his more notable diary entries. Following the public announcement of the president's emancipation policy in September 1862, the young staffer wrote that certain members of the cabinet had gathered afterward at Treasury secretary Salmon P. Chase's residence, where they "drank wine" and "gleefully and merrily called each other and themselves abolitionists." According to Hay's private account from September 24, the "old fogies" as he called them, had really "seemed to enjoy the novel sensation of appropriating that horrible name."

With this provocative and insightful biography of John A.J. Creswell, we have another even deeper depiction of that remarkable political revolution. John Osborne and Christine Bombaro have managed to deliver a stunning portrait of a Southerner who became an abolitionist during the crucible of civil war. That he is now a "Forgotten Abolitionist," as the authors suggest, is perhaps even more surprising, because unlike Lincoln and his cabinet, Creswell entered the conflict with no discernible antislavery history at all. His story was unexpected, and thus an eminently teachable one for the modern American classroom. Creswell was a son of the slaveholding South, a native of Maryland who had been a Democrat and conservative businessman before the war. He did not speak out against the peculiar institution until deep into the secession conflict and under the pressure of wartime necessity. Yet he became one of the most pivotal abolitionists in the country. In 1864, Creswell helped secure passage of an antislavery constitution in Maryland, the first (and only) popular vote for abolition in any U.S. state. He also led off the final congressional debates for the Thirteenth Amendment in January 1865, with an eloquent address that showcased the changing times. Nor did Creswell stop with this newfound embrace of freedom. After the war, the Marylander also became an unlikely advocate for equality of opportunity. While serving as a Postmaster General during the Grant Administration, Creswell helped to integrate and modernize the federal post office system. He had truly become a man of the future.

None of this could have been predicted when Creswell attended Dickinson College in the late 1840s. Yet as Osborne and Bombaro so vividly

demonstrate throughout their exhaustively researched study, this promising young man simply changed with his turbulent times. In doing so, Creswell became a great figure, an important ally of even greater men like Abraham Lincoln, Thaddeus Stevens, and Ulysses S. Grant. Anyone who cares about or teaches nineteenth-century American history should want to understand his evolution and use it to help explain what the Civil War meant to American society. That is why we are grateful for special funding from the Digital Humanities Advisory Committee (DHAC) and proud to publish this gripping biography as the first in a series from the House Divided Project at Dickinson College. This year, we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of our project and its wide-ranging effort to bring nineteenth century American history to life with twenty-first century tools. There is no more fitting way to do so than with the powerful but largely forgotten story of John A.J. Creswell.

Matthew Pinsker
Carlisle, Pennsylvania
July 1, 2015

INTRODUCTION

On January 5, 1865, John Andrew Jackson Creswell of Maryland stood in the House of Representatives and said quite simply that "So long as we hesitate and delay this work we can have no peace."¹ The "work" he referred to was the abolition of slavery. Representative Creswell delivered his speech on the day that Congress was expected to begin debate on the proposed Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States. As the first congressman called to the floor, and representing a state that had just abolished slavery on its own by popular vote, Creswell set the tone for this historic decision, condemning slavery as an "unmitigated evil."² It was an especially striking statement from an experienced politician who had migrated across the political spectrum over a long career in a hotly contested Border State.

Creswell's speech was thunderous and vivid in its imagery as he used legal, moral, economic, logical, and religious arguments to persuade many of his still-wavering colleagues to ratify the amendment. There was a clear majority in favor of abolition, but still uncertainty over exactly how it should be accomplished and whether there were enough votes in the Congress to secure the two-thirds threshold required to submit a constitutional amendment to the states. There was also some doubt that morning as to whether this unlikely abolitionist's words would even be heard. Two heavy snowfalls had blanketed the capital. Few observers expected that enough members of Congress would attend to make up a quorum, at least not until much later in the afternoon. Yet Republican leaders pushed ahead anyway. By noon, the House of Representatives assembled to carry out the business of the Republic, and the final session of the Thirty-eighth Congress of the United States began. Creswell was among them, despite having lost his re-election bid eight weeks before. He would not be sitting in the new body that would assemble after March, but Congress had one momentous task to carry out before then, and John A.J. Creswell of Cecil County had a vital role to play in the events about to unfold.

They bore straight into their tasks on January 5. For example, the House made enquiries into randomly bursting guns that were plaguing Union artillery, introduced measures to give preference in the hiring of government clerks to disabled veterans, outlined procedures to govern the new territory of Wyoming, and voted praise for the recent victories of General Sherman and his men in Georgia.

All present, however, knew what the most salient remaining business of that Congress would be. The President's annual Message to Congress, written on December 6, 1864, had made this abundantly clear. Calling it "only a question of time as to when the proposed amendment will go to the States for their action," Lincoln had playfully asked, "may we not agree that the sooner the better?"³ House Republicans agreed, but they were anything but playful on this point. They wanted immediate House action on the

version of the abolition amendment (already adopted by the Senate) as soon as they reassembled in the new year. When Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, who chaired the Committee on Ways and Means, called the body into a committee of the whole on January 5, he and Creswell were preparing the ground for the re-introduction of the amendment by its House sponsor, Representative James M. Ashley of Ohio.

The choice of John A.J. Creswell to help set the process in motion was an excellent one. Who better than an influential Border State southerner to explain the need for abolition within the Union? Few had done more to maintain Maryland for the Union than Congressman Creswell. And few had played a more central role in fashioning Maryland's new state constitution, which the voters had just approved, banning slavery within their borders. Creswell is not well-remembered today, but he was a powerful symbol of the nation's dramatic movement toward abolitionism in the 1860s.

Creswell held the floor for about an hour as the shadows lengthened on that short winter day. Burly, bearded, and expensively dressed, he spoke with the flair of one who had long experience in legislative debate. In his speech, he announced his pride in the actions of his state, forcefully condemned the treacherous behavior of the Confederacy, and outlined in clear detail the shining possibilities of a new economic world shorn of bondage. His speech was immediately transcribed and hundreds of copies printed for distribution so that all those across the country would know how and why the final American debate on slavery had begun. For one brief moment, John Creswell was arguably the nation's most important abolitionist. Of course, this is not at all how he has been remembered. Instead, he has become one of a litany of minor nineteenth-century American politicians - a former congressman, senator and widely-admired cabinet officer - now buried within the historical record. Creswell does not even appear in Steven Spielberg's film, "Lincoln" (2012), which concerns this great abolitionist moment when politicians like Creswell secured passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. Yet in many ways, Creswell's complicated and elusive story illustrates many of the salient points of the film and a number of key insights from modern-day scholarship, such as James Oakes's *Freedom National* (2013). Creswell is an important figure in part because he reveals so much about the unlikely path of constitutional abolition and the critical role that democratic politics played in assuring its ultimate triumph.

MARYLANDER

History seems largely to have forgotten the name John Andrew Jackson Creswell. In fact, when he is mentioned in historical literature, this proves to be so literally true that a modern search will reveal that his name has been recorded inconsistently and incorrectly. Several sources refer to him as John Angel James Creswell, an unfathomable error that seems to have originated in the late nineteenth century, possibly when his papers were processed by the Library of Congress.⁴

The difficulty for historians in learning who John Creswell was has some explanation. He left few records of his personal life. There is no autobiography, diary, or memoir to be found beyond a brief and incomplete biographical sketch he wrote in November 1863, presumably for the United States Congressional Directory. He had no children to write reminiscences or biographies in the usual nineteenth-century hagiographic style. Scattered letters found across a number of collections provide intriguing and tantalizing clues about his affiliations, first as a Whig, then a Democrat, and later an ardent Unionist, a pillar of the Republican Party, and an outspoken anti-slavery activist. One of the only historians to turn his attention to Creswell was Robert V. Friedenbergh. In his 1969 article in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, Friedenbergh focused narrowly but comprehensively on Creswell's five-year tenure as Postmaster General from 1869 to 1874, one area where official records are extensive.

The voices of Creswell's contemporaries, therefore, dominate the evidence in a contradictory chorus from friend and foe. For his political enemies, he was the hypocritical political chameleon willing to adopt any position that would advance his unbounded ambitions. His friends and supporters admired his integrity, fairness, efficiency, professionalism, and organization, along with his steadfast devotion to the Union and the cause of free labor. Who then was this man who opened the 1865 debate on the Thirteenth Amendment and how did he come to stand in the well of the House of Representatives that wintery Thursday in January and deliver the speech that he did? What can his experience tell us about the world and the politics of this remarkable and pivotal time in the nation's history?

Because so few of his personal records exist, it is especially important with Creswell to consider his geographical and family heritage when attempting to determine his influences and motivations as an adult. Creswell was born in Port Deposit, Maryland, on November 18, 1828. Port Deposit sits ten miles below the Mason-Dixon Line on the eastern bank of the Susquehanna River, just before it ends its 450-mile journey through Pennsylvania down to the Chesapeake Bay. Closer to Lancaster, Pennsylvania than it was to Baltimore, Creswell's birthplace was a vital transportation link between north and south for timber and agricultural goods making their way to the deep water trade of the Atlantic. The town and the system of canals built to enhance its position had enriched several

generations of entrepreneurs, including Creswell's grandfather, Colonel John Creswell, whose name the local ferry carried until 1814. The family wealth and experience, as well as the economic and geographical links of what had been Creswell's Landing, undoubtedly played no small role in the life and development of the young John A. J. Creswell.

Old Colonel Creswell had been dead for more than a decade in 1828, but his only son, another John, was continuing the family influence when his own heir was born. He was involved as an investor in local canal and early railroad projects, and sat in the Maryland House of Delegates as a representative of the town's business interests. Though his political affiliation is unclear, John Creswell clearly admired one Democrat, the newly-elected President Andrew Jackson, or at least appreciated the historical moment enough, to give his newborn son the president's name. In addition to John Andrew Jackson Creswell, the senior John Creswell had three more children, all girls, with his wife, the former Rebecca Webb,⁵ who had been born and raised in nearby Pennsylvania, part of an eminent Quaker family.



Rebecca Webb Creswell, circa 1840
(Horst Auctioneers, Ephrata, PA)

The senior Creswell's promising future as businessman, politician, and family man was cut cruelly short in 1831, however, when he died suddenly at the age of 29,⁶ leaving his wife to raise their children alone.⁷ Though this was an obvious emotional struggle for a young son, the family's wealth and connections may have cushioned the blow. Creswell's uncle, for example, was banker Jacob Tome, who had arrived in Maryland penniless from his Hanover, Pennsylvania birthplace and by the time of the elder Creswell's death was on his way to becoming one of the richest men in America.

Deprived of his father but still carrying a distinguished local name, young Creswell was soon enrolled in the nearby West Nottingham Academy, a venerable Presbyterian boarding school. Much favored by the Philadelphia elite, the school had a fine reputation and boasted as former pupils two signers of the Declaration of Independence, including Benjamin Rush. In 1844, at the age of 16, Creswell entered Dickinson College,⁸ the institution that, coincidentally, Benjamin Rush had founded in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, not far from where Creswell's maternal grandparents had settled.

After finishing at Dickinson College, Creswell returned to Elkton, Maryland, the county seat of Cecil County, where he studied law in the office of Colonel James B. Groome. By 1850 he had passed the Maryland bar and had made his first foray into politics as an unsuccessful Whig candidate to the Maryland Constitutional Reform Convention. Energetic and intelligent, he showed a particular aptitude for the law and opened his law practice in 1854 in Elkton, partnering with George Earle, who later described the concern as “the largest practice in the State of Maryland outside the city of Baltimore.”⁹ Although Earle later recalled that until 1861 his partner “devoted his undivided attention to the study and practice of the law,”¹⁰ Creswell still maintained the typical involvement in state affairs that his wealth and station enabled. His personal wealth had, in fact, most likely increased when in 1857 he married Hannah J. Richardson, a woman from another wealthy Maryland family.

By then, the Whig Party had disintegrated and, with few alternatives open for a business-minded Marylander, Creswell gravitated to the traditional Democratic Party base of his home environs. In June 1856 he represented Cecil County at the Democratic convention in Cincinnati, Ohio that nominated his fellow Dickinson College graduate, James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, for president of the United States. He then worked with typical fervor for Buchanan's cause in the area, editing a local Democratic newsletter. Efforts like this soon established him sufficiently to be elected in 1860 from the county to the Maryland House of Delegates. He took his seat as a Democrat just as the secession crisis brought Civil War to the United States.

When John A.J. Creswell was thirty-two years old, he was one of the wealthiest men in the region, a talented lawyer, and respected Democrat. He was not unlike hundreds of influential men in Border States politics at this historic moment. Yet just a little more than four years later he would be standing in the House of Representatives not only as a Unionist, but also as a committed abolitionist. He had become one of the main figureheads of a state Republican Party that had just engineered a new state constitution, changing Maryland forever by voluntarily abolishing slavery. From the animated and dangerous atmosphere of a divided 1861 Maryland, what is it that brought him to the radical certainty of January 1865?

Accusations from his opponents claiming that he was ambitious and opportunistic, simply grasping the moment for power and influence, cannot

be ignored. But human motivations are complex and usually a long time in germination, therefore making this simplistic view of Creswell seem unsatisfactory. We can observe Creswell's growth and transformation threading through his experiences between the 1840s and the 1860s, when he was compelled to publicly reconsider the place of slavery in the American union.

Creswell's attitude concerning slavery could well have been influenced in his childhood. No evidence exists that Creswell or his immediate family owned slaves, despite their wealth. The only mention of slave-owning in the history of the Creswells comes in the records of his grandfather, old Colonel Creswell, who near the end of his life in 1811, manumitted his single servant, a thirteen-year-old girl named Sal.¹¹ Too little is known of the precise atmosphere of his childhood to be able to accomplish more than conjecture. In contrast, we know much more about his later, formative youth. He spent his schooldays rubbing shoulders with boys from Philadelphia's elite and then some important years at a northern college in a free state. It was the year 1847 in Pennsylvania when he witnessed and later became involved in a deadly demonstration of the tensions slavery was placing on the constitutional fabric of the nation. This event is worth a long, hard look, since it was the first time that Creswell was obligated to take his first public stand on the great question, at the age of eighteen.

DICKINSON STUDENT

Dickinson College had been chartered in 1783 in Carlisle, the county seat of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, as a Presbyterian college. It was the first college across the Susquehanna River and no more than forty miles from the Maryland border. After a period of difficulty in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it was by 1847 a thriving Methodist institution popular with Southern youth. Such enrollment, especially with students from Virginia and Maryland, meant that Dickinson had a student body divided fairly equally across the Mason-Dixon Line. For example, the college boasted among its alumni both Pennsylvania's James Buchanan, who was in 1847 serving as Secretary of State under James K. Polk, and Roger Taney of Maryland, who had been Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court since 1835. Creswell's class graduated thirty young men, sixteen of them Southerners, eleven from Maryland. Creswell thrived there; on his way to becoming valedictorian of his class, he was a leader in the college's popular debating club, the Belles Lettres Society. The year before, however, there had been the distinct possibility that he would not complete his studies at all.



Dickinson College in the 1840s

(Archives & Special Collections, Dickinson College)

On June 2, 1847, another Marylander in Carlisle was destined not to leave the town alive. James Kennedy had come north from his Hagerstown home to reclaim a family of slaves he owned that had recently escaped across the border into Pennsylvania. He and his companion, Howard Hollingsworth, found the runaways being held at the Cumberland County Courthouse in Carlisle. They were to be returned to Kennedy under the terms of the controversial federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 that required free states to allow slaveholders to recover their runaway slaves, or as the statute delicately put it, “fugitives from labor.”

What became known as the “McClintock Riot” took place on the steps and in the street in front of the courthouse. During a series of hearings that afternoon, Carlisle’s sizeable free black population showed up almost *en masse* to prevent the forcible return to bondage of these three individuals. Two of the fugitives, a woman and child, were spirited away down an alley across the street, but in the melee, Kennedy was badly injured, and one of the runaways (the girl’s father) was recaptured. Kennedy seemed to be recovering in the ensuing days but then died suddenly in his Carlisle hotel room a few weeks later, becoming arguably the first southerner to die on northern soil in an attempt to reclaim his slaves.

The altercation drew its later name from John McClintock, a professor at Dickinson College. McClintock had involved himself in the case by interrupting the court hearing with claims that a new Pennsylvania state law passed six weeks before prohibited state officials from actively assisting in the return of enslaved fugitives. Since the fatal encounter had occurred immediately following McClintock's appearance in the courtroom, many contemporaries blamed the violence on the earnest and outspoken young professor and, by association, Dickinson College.



John McClintock, circa 1845
(Archives & Special Collections, Dickinson College)

Two blocks away, students at the divided college similarly rose to debate and consider what action they should take. The Fugitive Slave Law was a notorious piece of legislation, strongly resented in the North as an

interference with state sovereignty, and celebrated in the South as a national recognition of slavery and the rights of property. Rumors quickly spread in Carlisle and among Dickinson's student body that McClintock had incited rioting on behalf of the fugitive slaves. Dickinson immediately became "a house divided," with most of the southern students making arrangements for departure that very day. [Moncure Daniel Conway](#), a Virginian from a slave-owning family who later became a well-known abolitionist, was fifteen years old and a year behind Creswell at the college. He recalled in his memoirs years later the excitement over the riot:

There was probably not an abolitionist among the students, and most of us perhaps were from slave States. My brother and I, like others, packed our trunks to leave college. A meeting of all the students was held in the evening - in the college chapel - at which President Emory spoke a few reassuring words; but we Southerners, wildly excited, appointed a meeting for the next morning.¹²



Moncure Conway, circa 1849
(Archives & Special Collections, Dickinson College)

McClintock himself appeared at that meeting on June 3, 1847, and “without excitement or gesture”¹³ explained his actions to the student body. He was one of only ten faculty members at the institution and was a popular and respected professor. After he spoke, Creswell, who attended along with the rest of the students, was, in his own words, “convinced of the folly of the accusation”¹⁴ circulating that McClintock had instigated the riot. Creswell was not alone in finding the professor to be persuasive. The college soon returned to good order, and bags were unpacked.

Yet newspapers as far away as South Carolina began printing rumors that McClintock had led Dickinson students in an open attack on the slave owners and that the college itself had become a hotbed of abolition. The first half of

the charge, of course, was preposterous but, in 1847, one could easily find merit in the latter accusation if one desired to see it. Certainly, the college had been trying to walk the difficult line between the controversies over slaveholding that was tearing the Methodist Church apart at the time. John Price Durbin, who had been president of Dickinson during Creswell's first year, had made a widely circulated proposal for the country to embark on a careful program of compensated manumission that would lead to slavery's gradual end.¹⁵ John McClintock's writings, however, had been rather more uncompromising. He had recently used in print the name "Judas" to describe any Methodist who bought or sold slaves for the figurative "thirty pieces of silver."¹⁶

Still, almost unanimously, Dickinson students sprang to defense of their institution and swiftly circulated a letter of support for McClintock signed by all who had attended the college meeting, about ninety. Two of Dickinson's debating societies, the Belles Lettres Society and the Union Philosophical Society, instituted a letter-writing campaign aimed at southern newspaper editors near students' homes. Creswell was prominent in this campaign and wrote a letter that appeared in the *Baltimore American* and other northern Maryland newspapers. In it, he told his audience that he was "endeavor[ing] to state the whole affair as impartially as possible."¹⁷ He went on to refute the wild rumors that students had participated in, and were injured during the fray; that McClintock was the instigator; and that students were demanding his removal. To the contrary, he wrote, "At the time of the riot... the students generally were not aware that anything of the kind had occurred, until the whole affair that was over."¹⁸ He explained the student body's feelings towards their embattled teacher:

As to Prof. McClintock's alleged participation in the transaction, we are not only satisfied, from the most respectable testimony, that the charge is untrue; but from his long established character, we believe him incapable of any such thing. The story did indeed come to us at first, so perverted and exaggerated that, with the natural warmth of Southerners, many of us were excited against him.... The conduct of this gentleman towards the students has always been of such a nature as to call for our warmest commendation. So far are we from desiring his removal from the institution, that we thus publicly express our regard for him, as a Professor, a gentleman, and a Christian.¹⁹

In the *Baltimore American*, the names of all but four of the southern students then at Dickinson were listed below the letter along with their hometowns. Creswell's name was at the head.²⁰

Creswell would have been returning for his final year at the college as McClintock was standing trial, along with thirty-three of Carlisle's African-Americans, for his role in the riot. In the same courtroom where the events had unfolded, before the same judge, the all-white jury acquitted McClintock and twenty of his co-defendants. The district attorney, a prominent Carlisle Democrat, had argued that the whole South was watching and that the

country risked civil war if the jury did not support the Fugitive Slave Act with a conviction. The trial judge, Democrat Samuel Hepburn, was furious at the verdict and stated publicly that he would have overturned it if he could. Instead, he sentenced most of the thirteen blacks convicted to three years of solitary confinement in a Philadelphia prison.²¹

The events that played out in the court room and the streets just a few hundred yards away surely made a strong impression on the young John A.J. Creswell. Certainly, the example of McClintock and the influence of Dickinson College as a whole remained with Creswell throughout his life. He maintained contact with many of his contemporaries there, including McClintock²² and his roommate James W. Marshall, a Virginian who later served as a diplomat in the Lincoln Administration. Creswell named Marshall as his first deputy at the post office when he was Postmaster General and put him in charge of railroad transport of the mail. Creswell himself also twice served on Dickinson's Board of Trustees and died as a sitting member.



James William Marshall, circa 1875
(Library of Congress)

POLITICIAN

In 1848, the newly graduated Creswell returned to Cecil County. Maryland, like Dickinson College was a true “house divided” in various and complex ways. All states have variations in economy, topography, and demography, but the main fissure in Maryland was the same one that had brought death to the steps of the Carlisle Courthouse, that of slavery.

Even though nearly ninety thousand human beings enslaved in the United States were held in Maryland in 1860, it was clear to most at the time that slavery was in decline. The agricultural economy was slowly changing. Each year slave holding became less attractive and many were cashing in by selling their slaves “down the river” to the burgeoning cotton states. Still, the diehards of the slave holding power at the state capital were instituting increasingly draconian measures to protect the institution. Among the punishments for a free black person convicted of a felony was being sold into slavery. In February 1860, the House of Delegates went so far as to pass a measure that would enslave all free blacks who remained in the state. It is a significant comment on the state of slavery in Maryland in 1860 that this proposal, whose main sponsor, Colonel Curtis M. Jacobs, argued strenuously for it, was rejected in a referendum, despite the vote being restricted to the main slaveholding counties on the western and eastern shores of the Chesapeake Bay.²³

Creswell’s home county of Cecil was technically part of the Eastern Shore but its position in the northeastern corner of the state placed it closer to Philadelphia than Annapolis in geography, culture, and economics. In 1860, only 172 slaveholders held 952 slaves there, while its immediate southern neighbor, Kent County, had 611 slaveholders with 2,509 slaves. The slave population increased as one traveled down the Chesapeake; Somerset County’s white residents held more than five thousand people in bondage.²⁴

As Colonel Jacobs’ desperate attempt to restore slavery in Maryland suggests, it was the matter of race, specifically “free blacks,” that troubled champions of slavery as much as anything. Free blacks almost outnumbered the slaves held in the state,²⁵ causing anxiety among whites, even white workers who held no sympathy for rich slaveholders. No other slave state except Delaware came close to such a balance.²⁶ In Creswell’s Cecil County free blacks did outnumber enslaved blacks by the significant margin of three to one.²⁷ In Baltimore, with its abundance of free labor in its factories and on its docks, the ratio was an eye-popping ten to one. Increasingly, it seemed to many that Maryland did not have so much a free versus slave problem but rather a racial, educational, and economic crisis looming, even before 1861.

When the division over slavery in the nation became clear with the results of the election of 1860, Maryland and the other Border States were pitched into the center of national affairs. For Creswell, this was indeed a vital moment. Nominally a Democrat, he had been faced with supporting the official northern ticket of Stephen Douglas, or John Cabell Breckinridge’s

break-away Southern Democratic ticket, or perhaps the more centrist, nonpartisan approach of the Constitutional Unionists led by John Bell of Tennessee, a western Border State. Lincoln and the Republicans were not a serious challenge anywhere in Maryland in 1860 and were overwhelmingly rejected at the polls. Lincoln garnered only 100 votes in Cecil County. From all appearances, Creswell seems to have supported the Constitutional Unionists, in spirit if not necessarily in public. Following the election in February 1861, he participated in a meeting in Cecil County that espoused a middle course of negotiation to avoid war.²⁸

By then, however, the crisis had deepened quickly and the time had neared for Creswell to take a firmer stand. The Deep South, which had seen an almost immediate string of departures from the Union, was desperate to bring more states into its new Confederacy. First among the targets was the influential state of Virginia, but the smaller Maryland was not far behind as a vital target for secession. Maryland's proximity to the national capital, not to mention Philadelphia and its long border with Pennsylvania, made it as vital for the Union not to lose it as it was for the Confederacy to gain.²⁹ The story of how Virginia seceded in April 1861 while Maryland narrowly fought off immediate Southern attentions has been told often. John A.J. Creswell's decision, how he reached it, and his role in consolidating the place of Maryland within the Union, has not.

As the year turned and the inauguration of the new president from the new northern party promised an unknown future, Maryland was in crisis. The nascent Confederacy was growing. In January five states had followed South Carolina into what was to be a new nation of slaveholders, and Texas joined them on February 1, 1861. Pressure on the remaining slave states was intense.

Pro-secession power was concentrated in Maryland's dominant but divided Democratic Party, especially among the thousands who had supported the Breckinridge ticket in the southern counties of the Eastern shore. The anti-immigrant or Know Nothing Maryland Governor Thomas Holliday Hicks, equal in his fiery dedication to the Union as with his support for slavery, resisted calls in January for a special session of the House of Delegates largely because he feared that any debate would end in binding votes for secession. Creswell was sitting in that body, elected as a Democrat. At this stage, his own views seem to have remained with the Bell Constitutional Union faction, still desperately seeking a middle ground between secession and civil war. Many Marylanders certainly could not imagine anything but a negotiated end to the crisis and supported the Washington Peace Conference and its last-ditch efforts to appease both sides of the slave holding issue.

Meanwhile, the intense lobbying from both sides for Maryland to declare itself tended only to exacerbate the sense of crisis. Creswell attended public meetings and put his name to calls for the independence of Maryland to be respected. Years later, following the end of Creswell's life, his friend and law protégé, James Black Groome, the son of his old tutor in the law in Elkton,

spoke in eulogy of his mentor. Groome, a former Democratic governor who in 1892 was a sitting United States senator, remembered the crucial moment in Creswell's career, thirty years before, when he decided to "sever his connection to the Democratic party." He noted significantly that this came only "after some seeming hesitation."³⁰

Groome's good-natured aside recalled the charges Democrats leveled at Creswell for the rest of his career, that he was an ambitious and unprincipled political weathervane. One February 1861 meeting of Cecil County citizens that explicitly opposed Federal coercion against secession provided particular fodder for Creswell's later opponents. Not only did he attend the large gathering at the County Courthouse in Elkton, but he also sat on the "committee on resolutions" that later published a "most solemn protest against any attempt at coercion, believing that such an attempt would precipitate us into civil war with all its untold horrors."³¹ The alternative put forward was a convention of the Border States. Many thought that such a gathering, holding strongly for neutrality, could force the North and South into compromise.³² The Elkton meeting threatened defiantly that if "the North persistently deny to us the constitutional rights which we claim, we are bound by every obligation to our honor and dignity, as well as our interests, to cast our lot with our brethren of the Southern Border States."³³ The date of the meeting would provide especially ample fodder for Creswell's later opponents. The *Cecil Democrat* published the resolutions in its February 16, 1861 edition. The meeting itself had been held on February 14. Just two months later, federal troops lowered the United States flag in surrender at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor.

UNIONIST

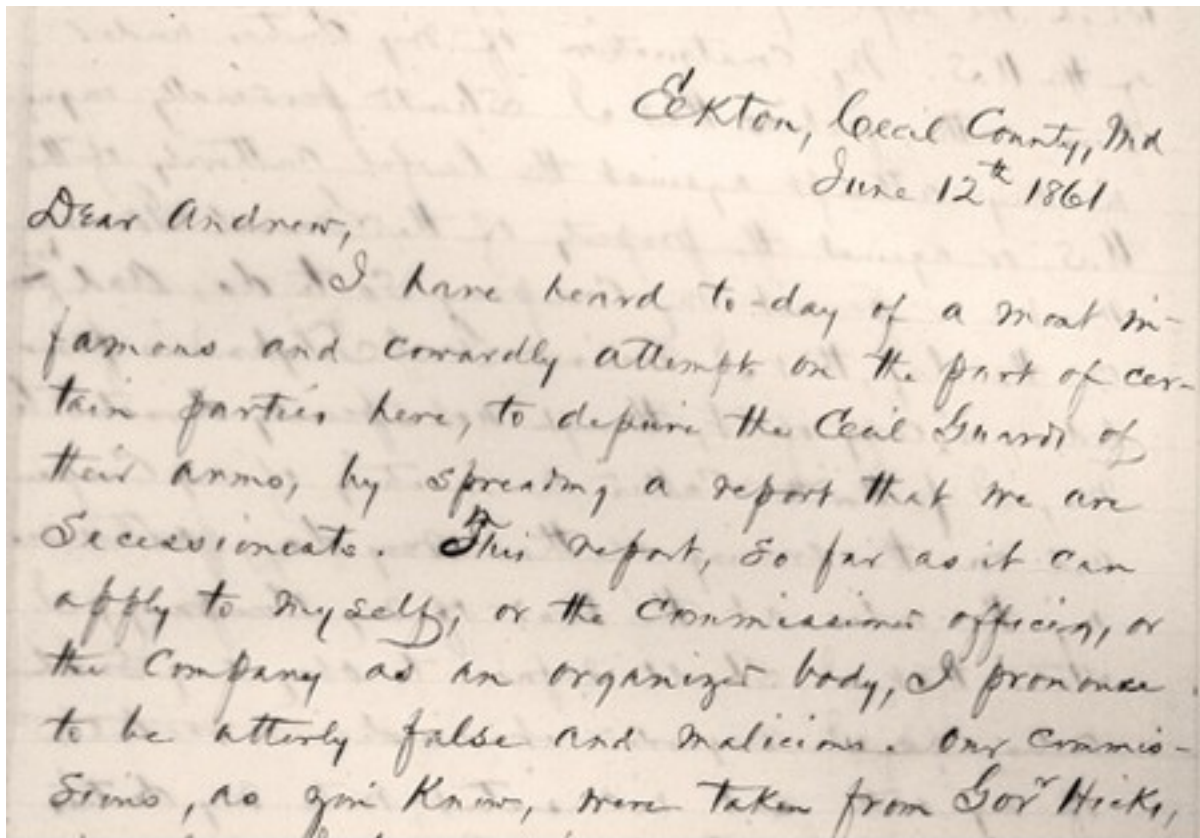
President Lincoln's call for troops to put down the rebellion and the almost immediate secession of Virginia ended any realistic talk of compromise. Instead, the crucial federal task of keeping the Border States in a warring Union began. For Maryland this meant a combination of politics and firmness. After the notorious April 19 attacks on Massachusetts troops passing through Baltimore, along with other attempts to prevent the passing of reinforcements for Washington, the federal gloves came off. Martial law superseded state law and Union Army units fanned out across the state, making arrests and confiscating arms caches. Those deemed a threat to keeping Maryland in the Union were summarily arrested and imprisoned in places like Fort Warren in New York Harbor or Fort McHenry in Baltimore. John Crisfield, a Maryland congressman who would be Creswell's opponent in a later congressional election, noted puckishly that his new Republican rival was lucky that his actions at the February 14 meeting in Elkton came when they did. A few months later and he might have ended up on a crossing to Fort Warren with the others.³⁴

In this atmosphere, Cecil County continued to experience a hectic spring as neighbors came to realize the extent to which Civil War divided them. Men marched away to both sides and those that remained often organized themselves for war. For some months before Sumter, Marylanders unsure of anything but their desire for Maryland to have its own voice had been forming or expanding existing militia units all over the state.

Along with several other leading citizens, Creswell had recruited more than a hundred men for one such group in the town of Elkton called the Cecil Guard. The *Cecil Democrat* reported that Captain Creswell and his second in command, another leading Democrat named John Brown Rowan, had travelled to Annapolis at the start of the year in order to seek modern weapons for the company.³⁵ When Federal military commanders arrived in the state a few months later, such independently raised units worried them, and with good cause. Governor Hicks had resisted calling up the militia for the same reasons he delayed calling the legislature - he was unsure of their loyalties. Rowan soon took the local lead in the "Peace Party" calling for Maryland's neutrality and opening a division between him and Creswell, who was beginning to firmly express his commitment to the Union.

Federal authorities were none too discerning about any groups of armed Marylanders not under federal control and paid little attention to their internal debates. The Cecil Guard was threatened with immediate disarmament in June 1861, due to rumors that the company was secessionist. A passionate appeal based on the company's loyalty to "the Old Flag" from an unknown Elkton militiaman to Creswell³⁶ helped him reverse the order in the following month. At Independence Day celebrations a few weeks later in Elkton, Creswell, recently returned from his service in

the House of Delegates, marched with the Guard and competed in its shooting competition.³⁷



Elkton, Cecil County, Md
June 12th 1861

Dear Andrew,

I have heard to-day of a most infamous and cowardly attempt on the part of certain parties here, to defame the Cecil Guard of their arms, by spreading a report that we are secessionists. This report, so far as it can apply to myself, or the Commissioned officers, or the Company as an organized body, I pronounce to be utterly false and malicious. Our commissions, as you know, were taken from Gov Hicks,

Detail of letter from an unknown Elkton, MD, writer to John A.J. Creswell, June 12, 1861 (Library of Congress)

The Cecil Guard did not last the war. Never called up as a unit, it lost its members to one or other of the armies as Marylander fought Marylander in places like the slopes of Culp's Hill at Gettysburg. Rowan and several others of the Cecil Guard traveled the short journey to Virginia to enlist in the Confederate Army. Rowan was killed wearing gray at the Battle of Atlanta in 1864.

Creswell, on the other hand, seemed to be a committed Unionist by the middle of 1861. He still sat as a nominal Democrat in the state legislature during these and the following months, after it had eventually been reconvened. The ever-cautious Governor Hicks had called it to order at Frederick in the northern part of the state, environs far safer than more distantly southern Annapolis. While in Frederick, as his later opponents claimed endlessly, Creswell cast votes with the moderate majority of delegates. Marking the state of Creswell's slow political evolution at the time, for example, was his vote, if not his vocal support, in favor of a resolution strongly opposing the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. The Maryland body's language was harsh in its condemnation of

the proposal then making its way through the United States Congress. “[T]he agitation of the subject is calculated to disturb the relation of master and slave with this State,” the Maryland resolution stated, “and would strike a serious blow at the interests of the people of Maryland and impress them with the belief that the Government of the United States have not a due regard for their rights, institutions, and feelings.”³⁸ Creswell’s vote for a protest that included such language indicates that, while now fully committed to the Union, he was not ready to break with Democratic sentiment over slavery. There may have been significant political calculation in that decision, but in January 1862, he was nowhere near to being the Radical Republican who opened the debate on the Thirteenth Amendment three years later.

However, Creswell’s Unionist credentials were already strong and growing. He shared platforms in support of Unionists during the autumn 1861 elections and spoke increasingly through 1862 at rallies urging the defense of the Union. Speaking in Cecil County and elsewhere with men such as his fellow Dickinson graduate Edwin Webster would certainly have convinced him that he was not alone in his developing political orientation. As the loose conglomeration of Unionists in the state took form as a political bloc, the new Governor Augustus Bradford, a Union man despite being the father of a Confederate officer, named Creswell in August 1862 as a State Assistant Adjutant General and Superintendent of Enrollment of Militia, with the rank of lieutenant colonel.³⁹

Manpower was a vital issue for both sides in the Civil War and would play a massive role in politics, logistics, race relations, and military success and failure before the end of the struggle. With Maryland’s militia in chaos, Creswell devoted much of his considerable energy and skills to bring it into order. Every Marylander put into Union blue meant a more secure and loyal state. This experience with manpower issues eventually earned him a deserved reputation for efficiency and success. In turn, the constant need to reinforce the Union armies fighting across the country, from Virginia to West Texas, played no small role in pushing him along in his journey toward full membership in the Republican Party.

ABOLITIONIST

As we chart this course from opponent of abolition in the District of Columbia in February 1862 to leading proponent of the Thirteenth Amendment, we can wonder what exactly was the Republican political philosophy? And how was Creswell to adapt to it? In his ground-breaking work, *Freedom National* (2013), James Oakes argues that many modern historians have underestimated the Republican Party's commitment to antislavery and that both the Lincoln administration and the Congress had targeted slavery from the beginning of the conflict even as they emphasized that their war aims were all about saving the union.

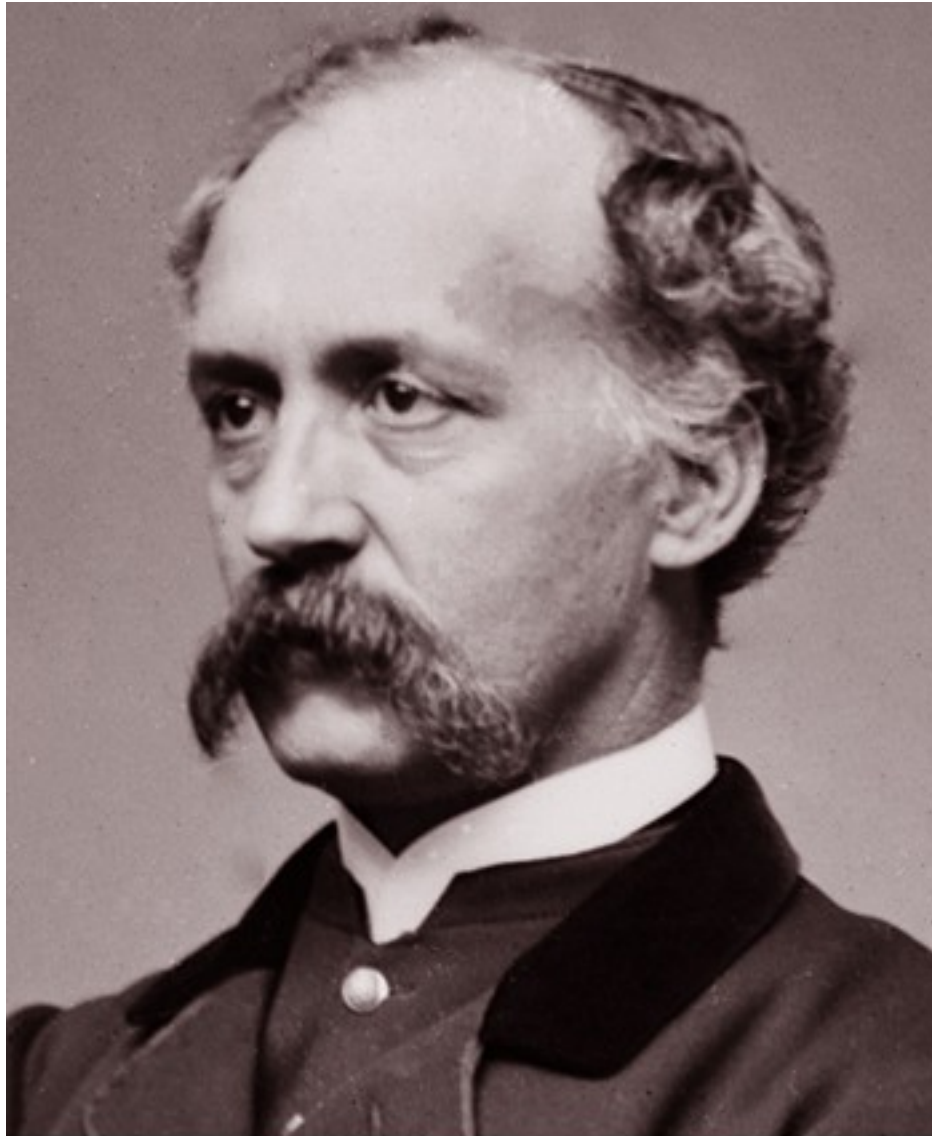
Creswell's political actions in Maryland before 1862 certainly did not blend well with the "freedom national" doctrine as originally espoused by Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner. Creswell may well have been a "free labor" businessman who abhorred slavery and would not accept it within his own economic and family life. However, the dominant political atmosphere of his home state and county had afforded him little encouragement to imagine that such a personal position would make sound public policy.

Yet the Republican concept of espousing emancipation as a military necessity dovetailed much more comfortably with Creswell's experiences by 1862. The thorny task of maintaining Union manpower occupied much of his thoughts and energies in the wake of ever-escalating losses and increasingly ambitious campaigns. Throughout 1862, Creswell was becoming confident and valued for his experiences in navigating the complicated military affairs of his own state. He understood the arguments of necessity and was perceptibly angry at the treachery of the South for inflicting such carnage on the nation. Like many others, he began to move from unionism to full-throated Republicanism. His natural antipathy for slavery and deep belief in free enterprise made certain, furthermore, that the next step on this political journey would include a growing assertion that human bondage must be ended in Maryland, and the sooner the better.

This evolution was not a dramatic surprise. The signs of the times had indicated to all but the most diehard slaveholder that Union victory would bring an end to bondage in Maryland. The move toward it had begun with the contraband and confiscation policies, abolition in the District of Columbia, and the military necessity justifications of the emancipation policy. Arguments over how to implement these policies divided Maryland unionists, though Creswell's own ideas and determination were at last beginning to find voice by 1863.

As Creswell's political ideology evolved, he found himself surrounded by new allies. Some of them he knew, like Edwin Hanson Webster from neighboring Harford County. Webster had been one year ahead of him at Dickinson College and had signed his name just below Creswell's on the letters defending McClintock years before. Some were strangers and some

were former partisan enemies. The most notable among these was the mercurial Henry Winter Davis. Davis was an Annapolis-born former Whig who had sat in the U.S. House of Representatives for the American Party, causing uproar in Maryland by regularly voting with the Republicans. By 1863, Davis was fully committed both to the end of slavery and the advance of the Republican Party in Maryland.



Henry Winter Davis, circa 1855
(Library of Congress)

The pugnacious and argumentative Davis disliked and suspected many of his rivals in his own party, but he hated Democrats, including those who now called themselves Unionists. Davis pushed to purify the unionist movement in Maryland by demanding a separate organization for those who supported the abolition of slavery as a necessity for saving the union. Creswell joined

him in this decision. At their urging, those most adamant that the war needed to be won and slavery destroyed had gathered in May 1863 at a Maryland Union League meeting in Baltimore to form the “Unconditional Unionists.” Loosely affiliating itself with similar radical groups in several other border states, the new movement was soon to test its strength in a difficult series of special congressional elections.

The Unconditional Unionists took aim at the federal congressional elections, which had been delayed in Maryland and were being held in November 1863, and put together a strong ticket. Having lost his seat in 1860 due to his Republican ties, Henry Winter Davis now ran as an Unconditional Unionist for a return to Washington. Two sitting Unionist members, former Democratic governor Francis Thomas and the aforementioned congressman Edwin Webster, also were recruited to seek reelection as Unconditional Unionists.

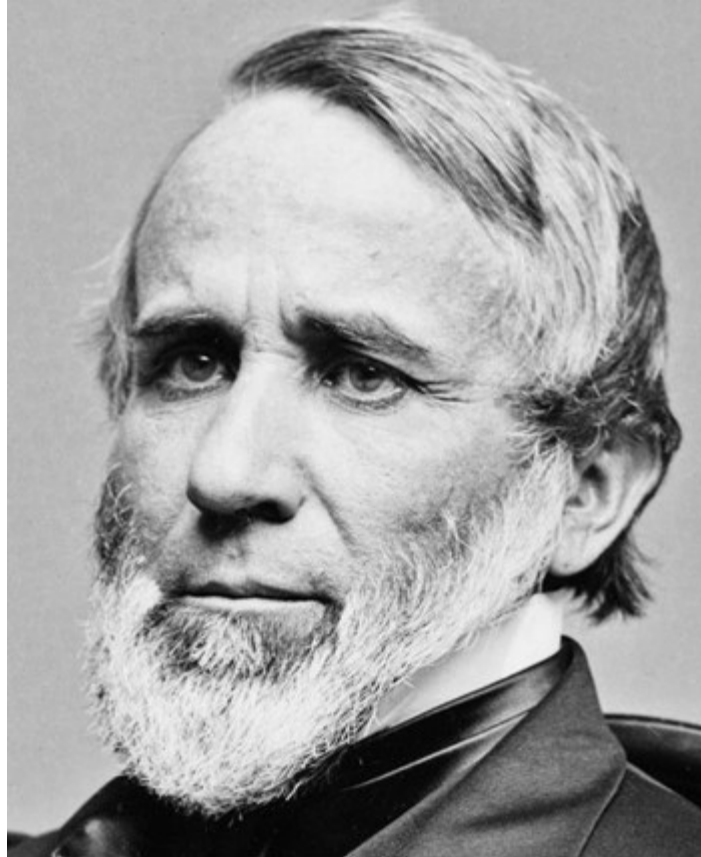


Edwin Hanson Webster, 1860
(Library of Congress)

Of the remaining two Maryland districts, the Fifth was made up of southern, slaveholding counties where Unionists by any name stood little

chance of success. This left the Eastern Shore and its First District. The First also had a significant number of slaves but Unionists had some strength there. The former Whig John W. Crisfield held the seat in the Thirty-seventh Congress as a conservative Unionist.

Crisfield was popular, outspoken, and experienced. He had sat in Congress in the late 1840s with the young Abraham Lincoln and had been one of Maryland's delegates to the Washington Peace Conference in 1860. He was certainly a Unionist but stood as one of the leaders of the more conservative faction, which the new, more radical group had been formed to replace. Crisfield clashed openly and personally with Abraham Lincoln over the federal measures taken to hold Maryland for the Union. He was especially critical of the president's policies concerning slavery. Crisfield held slaves himself. He saw no need for slavery's immediate end and stood by the long-held argument that emancipation would lead to a poverty-stricken free black class. He had been highly critical of the Lincoln Administration's plan in 1862 to initiate gradual and compensated emancipation in the loyal slave states, voted against it in Congress, and was now in opposition to any scheme to enlist slaves into the Army.⁴⁰ It was no accident that the Unconditional Unionists made him a prime electoral target. The man they chose to bring him down was John Andrew Jackson Creswell.



John W. Crisfield, circa 1860
(Library of Congress)

The heated and controversial contest that unfolded in the autumn of 1863 illustrated just how divided Unionism was in Maryland. It also demonstrated how much the state had changed since the firing on Fort Sumter. Creswell's own public acceptance of the notification at the beginning of the campaign made this clear. He said:

Emancipation in Maryland is already an accomplished fact and has come about as a necessary consequence...of the Rebellion. It is all important now for the people, by an amendment to the Constitution, to provide for the legal extinction of Slavery, to the end that the substantial interests of the State may not suffer by a further reliance upon a system of labor which can never more be efficient or desirable.⁴¹

The change was even more pointedly illustrated when the editor of the local Unionist newspaper commented on the speeches of Creswell, Davis, and [William Kelley](#), the visiting radical Republican congressman from Philadelphia, following a mass meeting at Easton in Talbot County. The friendly editorial stated that if these radical sentiments had been delivered in the same spot five years before, such speeches would have "consigned the speakers in all probability to the fate of old John Brown."⁴²

The battle in the First District was a bitter one, subjecting Creswell to a full fury of questions about his political past and present motives. In a long speech in early October 1863, Crisfield mocked the kind of political animal Creswell appeared to be. He used his opponent's own words and votes to describe him in turn as a "Conservative Constitutional Union" man, hesitant and seeking compromise; then as an "Anti-Coercion Southern Rights Revolutionist" threatening common cause with the other Border States; and finally as "Black Republican and Abolitionist," willing to subject the state and the nation to continued civil war to end slavery.

Creswell had certainly exposed himself as a target during his evolution but by October 1863 he was a committed abolitionist. Freedom was national for him now. It was everything. One passage in his election stump speech perhaps says much about not just where he stood, but also, tellingly, from whence he had come in his political development. He told the crowd:

*In years gone by, there was a power here that ruled with a rod of iron. I was under the influence of it, I admit, and so were you. We never dared even to dispute its supremacy. Slavery then was not a question of political economy; it was a question of political power; and we all, cowards as we were, shrank before it. That day has passed in Maryland. The white men of Maryland have been emancipated and we dare now say to the world that our proud old State, though bleeding and torn, shall come out of this fearful contest, like a Goddess disenthralled, with a crown of freedom upon her brow. Maryland must be a free State!*⁴³

This was a theme of newly gained collective courage Creswell would return to over and over again from then on. It would appear in a similar form in his Thirteenth Amendment speech in January 1865.

The campaign was a bitter one, but the election itself was one of the most turbulent and controversial in Maryland history, particularly in the embattled First District. Federal troops were billeted in almost every town there and martial law prevailed over much of the area. Arrest of those seen to be hindering the war effort was common and Election Day, November 3, 1863, saw widespread intimidation of Democrat voters.

The "political general," Major-General Robert Cumming Schenck, a friend and early supporter of President Lincoln, was the local commander of the XIII Corps of the Union army's Middle Department then stationed in the state for behind-the-lines protection. Schenck himself was soon leaving the Army for the Thirty-eighth Congress. He had been narrowly elected as a Republican the previous October in the contentious Third District in Ohio, triumphing over the notorious Copperhead Democrat Clement Vallandigham, who had been running *in absentia* from exile in Canada. Schenck had won in Ohio by only two percentage points and, as an experienced partisan operative, was just the man the War Department wanted to monitor the canvass on the Eastern Shore of Maryland.



Maj-Gen. Robert C. Schenck, 1862
(Library of Congress)

A week before the polling stations opened, General Schenck took sides openly and used his martial law powers to issue General Order 53, designed to prevent all disloyal efforts to “embarrass the approaching election or, through it, foist enemies of the United States into power.”⁴⁴ Among other things, it ordered the arrest of anyone “loitering” around the polls and instituted a requirement for a loyalty oath by any and all voters. The oath included the cruel requirement of an affirmation that they were not in contact with family members serving the South. An appalled Governor Bradford refused to implement this order, and complained to the White House. Lincoln amended the decree but kept the loyalty oath and largely stood behind Schenck, whom he charged with “strictly” carrying through on the Army’s determination that “all loyal men vote, and vote for whom they please.”⁴⁵ Schenck went on to repeat his performance in the Delaware elections held on November 19, 1863.⁴⁶

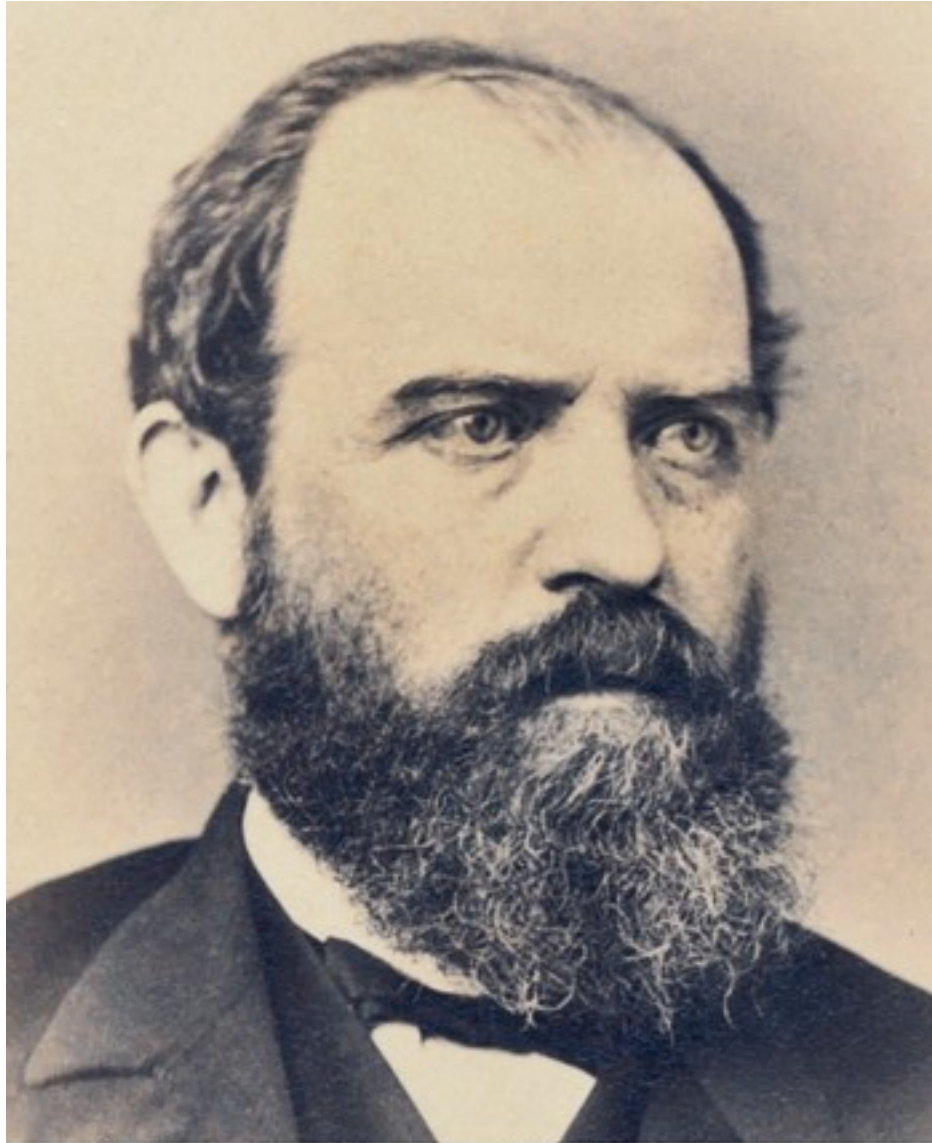
When the Maryland vote was counted, Creswell emerged victorious. The margin was slim, despite the extensive federal assistance of what one can

only describe in modern terms as powerful voter suppression. The count of 6,742 votes to 5,482 indicated how unpopular “Unconditional” ideas still were on the Eastern Shore, even in a seemingly transformed Maryland.

CONGRESSMAN

With Creswell's success, the Unconditional Unionists (or Radical Republicans) swept four of the five Maryland seats in the House of Representatives. The Maryland result did, however, buck the previous national trend for the Thirty-eighth Congress. Democrats had significantly reduced the Republican House majority as war weariness and unpopular Administration policies took their toll. The fact that Maryland had voted in 1863 and not the year before, as had many other states, meant that Maryland's Unionists had enjoyed a boost in morale and attention from the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg.⁴⁷

Congressional Democrats tried to delay their seating in protest over the controversial Maryland election, but Creswell and his companions joined the body at the opening of its first session on December 5, 1863.⁴⁸ Creswell's business acumen was immediately recognized with a seat on the Commerce Committee.



John A.J. Creswell, circa 1863
(Library of Congress)

Despite recent victory on the battlefield in Pennsylvania, Mississippi and Tennessee, the Lincoln Administration remained unpopular in many northern states, and the issue of how to maintain the manpower of the Union armies fighting the war was having an effect on the daily lives of Americans. Crucially and controversially, by late 1863, the manpower demand had come to intersect with the racial question. The previous Congress had passed amendments to the Militia Act that allowed the president to enlist African-American men “for the purpose of constructing trenches, or performing camp service or any other labor, or any other military or naval service for which they may be found competent.”⁴⁹ The law also declared for the first time that slaves held by those in rebellion were henceforth to be free and therefore eligible for enlistment.

Numbers enough to maintain federal forces were still needed, though, and historic measures had to be adopted. The Thirty-Seventh Congress had in its last days passed the Enrollment Act that instituted conscription in the United States for the first time. This mandatory service applied only to white citizens, but its complicated system of loopholes, bounties, and compensations soon involved the black population of loyal slave states who were enlisting under the Militia Act.

Recruiting under the Enrollment Act was conditional on the success at gaining volunteers. Localities were divided into federal districts and assigned manpower quotas. If those quotas were met with voluntary enlistments, the draft would not be implemented; if they were not, men would be compelled by lottery. The enlistment of black volunteers, often with War Department encouragement, immediately complicated matters and quickly caused no shortage of debate in Maryland.⁵⁰ Creswell had certainly used the issue against Crisfield in the recent election, and to good effect. Crisfield opposed black enlistment from the very start. During the election campaign, he repeatedly quoted the famous February 1863 words of Senator John J. Crittenden, the venerable Kentuckian who had attempted compromise to the last in 1861. Crittenden had told the Senate “a negro army is a weakness to your country. It unnerves the white man’s hand; it unnerves the white man’s heart. White men will not fight by the side of negroes.”⁵¹

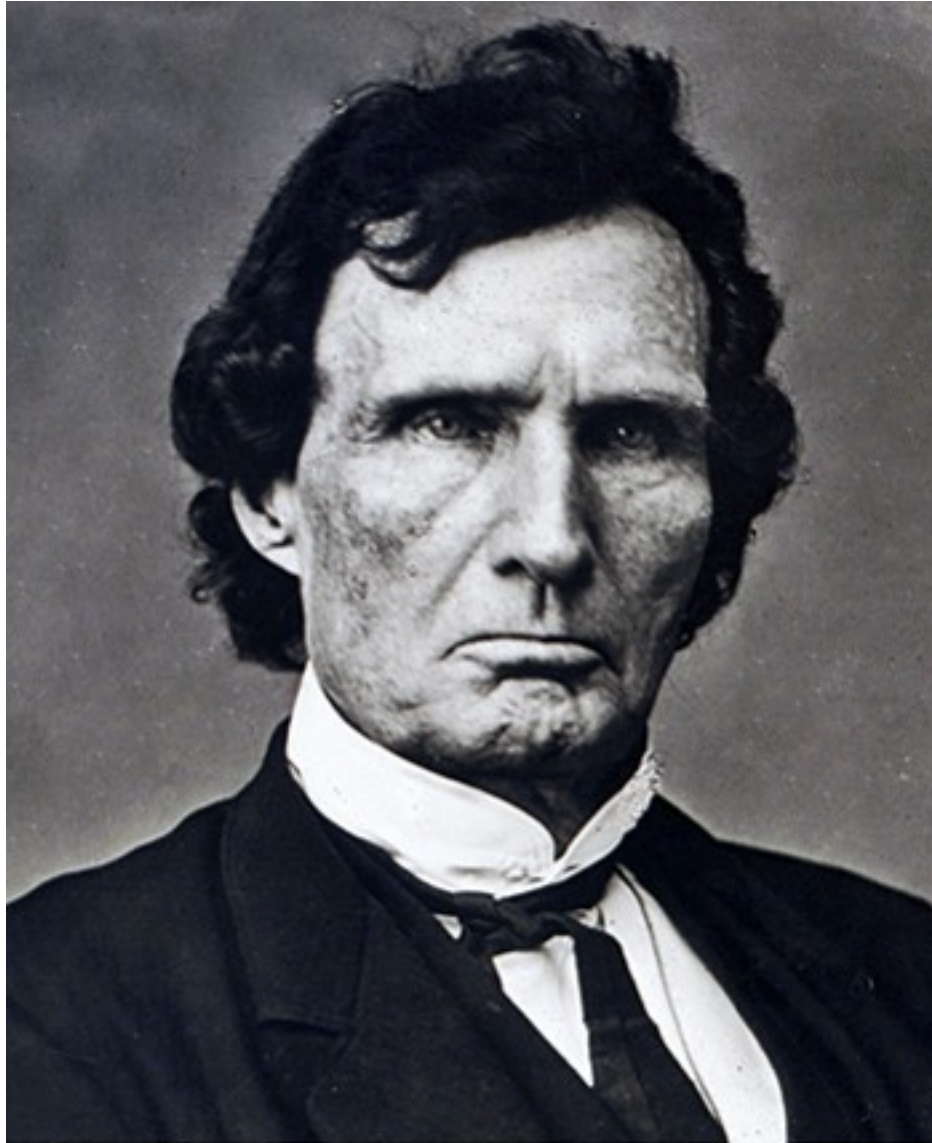
Many white Marylanders threatened with forced draft into the Army in October 1863 did not share Crisfield’s qualms. Creswell knew this and countered his opponent directly in his own election speeches, noting that all blacks enlisting would be counted in any draft quotas and that “many white men will be saved.”⁵² The *Cecil Whig* was even more direct. When the county’s quota was still not met in December 1863, the editor called for the white citizens of Cecil to make a concerted push to recruit “several hundred able-bodied blacks,” and asked “why should not some effort be made to protect us from the draft?”⁵³ Creswell supported that point at the time, as well as a later on the floor of the House in Washington, when he pointed out that enlistment quotas for Cecil County were set based on the entire population, forcing the white citizens to provide all of the numbers levied, since the black men in the county, free or slave, were not liable for conscription.

Many black males in Maryland were indeed enlisting under the Militia Act, though. These included slaves who would just need to reach the nearest Union Army encampment to do so. As these numbers of runaways from loyal slaveholders increased throughout the Border States, confusion and anger over the enlistment of slaves had become a heated and dangerous issue in Maryland. To reduce the confusion and placate the Border States during an election season, the Lincoln Administration directed the Army to issue its General Order 329, dated October 3, 1863. This directed the opening of enlistment centers, set down uniform rules for how the enlistment of slaves would take place, codified a financial compensation of \$300, and instituted a system of appeal for aggrieved loyal slaveholders.⁵⁴

Maryland slave owners often took the immediate opportunity to divest themselves of “property,” perceiving that at any moment the “Black Republican Abolitionist” Government could soon declare it completely worthless. One Marylander who took a clear advantage from the confluence of race and manpower needs, incidentally, was Creswell’s erstwhile rival. John Crisfield enlisted two of his slaves from his Princess Anne County plantation into the Union Army in place of two sons threatened with the draft.⁵⁵

Encouragement for slave owners to consent only grew when Maryland’s state government passed state-funded additional compensation for both white and black Marylanders to enlist in the Union Army. This measure was introduced as the state government grew increasingly worried by the complaints of non-slaveholding white voters, as well as the desire for Maryland to fill the quotas that would exempt the state from the involuntary draft. The bill, funded with state bonds and a ten-cent increase in state taxes, added a state bounty above the federal incentive. For slave owners, this meant an additional \$100 for each slave that enlisted, bringing the total to \$400. The newly emancipated soldier got another \$50.⁵⁶

General Order 329 did provide some relief from slaveholder protest but as events moved far ahead of original enlistment policy concerning African-Americans, especially in Maryland, Congressional action was soon demanded. The Enrollment Act of 1863 sought to bring statutory law in line with the executive action that had in the previous six months so significantly advanced the concept of compensated slave enlistment. The amendments to the Enrollment Act were debated during the early weeks of February 1864 under the watchful eye of Republican floor leader Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. His pivotal rewriting of Section 27 meant that potential conscripts would include under the law “all able-bodied male colored persons.” The amendment also confirmed and simplified the award of a bounty to the loyal owner of any slave who enlisted voluntarily before being drafted.⁵⁷



Thaddeus Stevens, circa 1860
(Library of Congress)

Creswell involved himself enthusiastically in this debate. Although he was no enthusiast for compensation in general, he seemed to be convinced that black enlistment would shorten the war and was among those who must have seen it as a scheme of disguised abolition, weakening slavery to the point of extinction in Maryland. He had spoken several times to voice the complaints of his constituents who were having trouble collecting the bounty, and supported administrative amendments that would avoid “injustice to slaveholders.”⁵⁸ But his most important contributions came with the debate over the new “Section 27,” which Peace Democrats such as Fernando Wood called “clearly, palpably in violation of the Constitution.”⁵⁹

Maryland was central to this debate. When he introduced his Section 27, Stevens had specifically mentioned events of the past months there. Creswell and Henry Winter Davis supported Stevens ably, incurring the wrath of Maryland's one remaining Democratic congressman, Benjamin G. Harris, who accused them of abandoning their state. Creswell struck back forcibly, at one point in the debate facing down Fernando Wood's objections and Harris's condemnation by asserting that compensation for slaves was nothing new in Maryland. Slaveholding legislatures had set values on slaves for decades, Creswell noted, pointing out that Maryland slaveowners were now accepting the state bounty of \$100, which coincidentally brought the compensation in Maryland for a top grade male slave to the maximum value set before the war.⁶⁰ Creswell's political acumen explaining Maryland's experience trumped the complaints of Kentucky and Missouri and the amended Enrollment Act passed at the end of the month, codifying the \$300 award along with the payment of any state bounty in exchange for the official certification that the enlisted soldier was now a permanently free man.

Creswell's broader interest in manpower matters continued when he supported the end of commutation in July 1864. This much-hated loophole allowed anyone drafted to avoid service with the payment of \$300, or about \$6,000 in modern equivalence. The common and outspoken complaints of "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight" were frequently heard. Just in time for the 1864 general election, payment was severely restricted to a one-year time limit, after which immediate service was required.

Even before its passage, Creswell was swift to alert Maryland's Governor Bradford to this development and to offer his advice about its impact. In a lengthy letter written on June 28, 1864, he said, "From the result of a vote just taken in this body, it is evident that the Commutation Clause in the Conscription Act will be repealed...it is, according to my judgment, all important for us to begin a thoroughly matured system as soon as possible."⁶¹ He went on to reiterate his dedication to recruiting, stating "I regard this as the very crisis of rebellion, and feel more than ever resolved to reinforce our armies."⁶²

Still, if the need to win the war was his most immediate concern, Creswell's efforts now rarely strayed far from his new goal of freeing Maryland from what he saw as the great economic and moral burden of slavery. Signs that American slavery was doomed continued to emerge during the Thirty-eighth Congress. For example, Creswell's thoughts must have turned back to his old teacher John McClintock and his college days in Carlisle seventeen years before as he voted in June 1864 for the full repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.⁶³

By 1864, slavery's days were clearly numbered. The recent election had not only sent Unconditional Unionists to Congress but also had brought the Maryland House of Delegates under their control. In January, the new majority drew up plans for a convention to meet in April to craft a new Maryland State Constitution. Everyone knew that the new document would

be devised in such a way as to make Maryland the most important southern slave state yet to abolish slavery, after West Virginia in 1863. This included one especially interested observer living on Pennsylvania Avenue in nearby Washington, DC.

Abraham Lincoln paid close attention to Maryland, knowing all too well from his dealings with men like John Crisfield that supporters of the government were fractured in the state. He was certainly nervous about the bitter enmity between Henry Winter Davis and Montgomery Blair. Blair led Maryland's Conservative Unionists as a member of Lincoln's own cabinet as Postmaster General. Perhaps considering the new congressman as more of a voice of reason than the two main protagonists, the nervous chief executive wrote to John Creswell in early March 1864 urging him not to allow the divisions between those favoring the general idea of emancipation to derail its full and immediate inclusion in the new constitution. [Lincoln wrote](#):

*I am very anxious for emancipation to be effected in Maryland in some substantial form. I think it probable that my expressions of a preference for gradual, over immediate emancipation, are misunderstood. I had thought the gradual would produce less confusion and destitution; and therefore would be more satisfactory; but if those who are better acquainted with the subject, and are more deeply interested in it, prefer the immediate, most certainly I have no objection to their judgment prevailing. My wish is that all who are for emancipation, in any form, shall co-operate, all treating all respectfully, and all adopting and acting upon, the major[ity] opinion when fairly ascertained -- What I have dreaded is the danger that, by jealousies, rivalries, and consequent ill-blood -- driving one another out of meetings and Conventions, perchance from the polls -- the friends of emancipation them selves may divide, and lose the measure altogether.*⁶⁴

Lincoln obviously feared that some Conservative Unionists would favor a form of gradual emancipation or even postpone the measure, while Radicals (or Unconditional Unionists) would insist on terms that would make it impossible to pass. He did not, however, want to be seen as involving himself in such a sensitive matter. A cautious Lincoln trusted Creswell enough to ask that his letter remain between the two of them. But he did also note pointedly: "no man representing me, as I herein represent myself will be in any danger of contradiction by me."⁶⁵

The President was more direct ten days later when he [wrote Creswell again](#), this time more succinctly and positively, saying:

*It needs not to be a secret, that I wish success to emancipation in Maryland. It would aid much to end the rebellion. Hence it is a matter of national consequence, in which every national man may rightfully feel a deep interest. I sincerely hope the friends of the measure will allow no minor considerations to divide and distract them.*⁶⁶

This was not to be the last time that Lincoln turned to Creswell as a mediator in Maryland politics.

Lincoln's fears turned out to be unfounded. The open animosity between Henry Winter Davis and Montgomery Blair did not lose the measure and Maryland's new constitution included a complete and immediate end to slavery in Maryland (subject to a popular referendum). The 96 delegates, of whom only 35 were Democrats, voted in that section of the new document along strict party lines.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the Unionists in Maryland then proceeded to undermine any moral standing for their vote to end human bondage by orchestrating a vain and cynical attempt to consolidate long-term Unionist political influence. They reapportioned the legislature, counting the white population only, and set up a system of loyalty oaths for voters which in remarkably specific terms excluded anyone with ties to the South or its principles. The final indignity for the Democratic minority – which was not forgotten the moment that their party eventually regained control in post-war Maryland – was that these new voting restrictions were to be in place for the very referendum intended to ratify it.

After a pause for the Republican Party Convention in July in Baltimore, the completed document was approved in September 1864 with the Democrats understandably united against it. A popular vote ratified the new constitution the following month with a razor-thin margin provided by the absentee votes of Marylanders serving in the Union Armies.⁶⁸ The new constitution's historic "Declaration of Rights" which held that "all persons held to service or labor as slaves, are hereby declared free," came into effect just a few days after the last votes were counted on November 1, 1864. Maryland was a free state.

It was not a Republican state, though. Despite cynical politics and the new loyalty oaths, the momentary Unconditional Unionist hold on political power in Maryland began to unravel as the 1864 presidential bid of George B. McClellan helped the Democratic Party to discipline and rebuild itself for the general election of 1864. Lincoln carried Maryland at the top of the ticket but Democrats no longer suffering with military interference in elections voted in impressive numbers. This gave their opponents little chance in some narrow districts, particularly on the Eastern Shore.

Three of the Unconditional Unionists held their seats but the Democratic candidate for the First District, Hiram McCullough, defeated Creswell handily. Ironically, Maryland's racial diversity paid a direct part at the ballot box on the Eastern Shore. The former slaveholding counties further down the bay voted overwhelmingly Democratic and Creswell could not close any of the 3,300-vote gap with the usually dependable absentee soldiers' vote. The sparse vote from the troops was only 432 to 27 in Creswell's favor, largely because of the black soldiers that had enlisted to "save whites from the draft," who therefore made up much of the quota of soldiers from Cecil and Kent Counties, and of course could not vote.⁶⁹ McCullough's victory restored a Democratic domination of the First District that would not again be broken until November 1896.

FREEDOM'S ORATOR

Despite this defeat, Creswell's work in the House of Representatives was not yet done. His selection as the [opening speaker](#) in the pivotal debate over the Thirteenth Amendment placed him in the national spotlight. His speech was also a demonstration of both his long-held beliefs and his evolution as an abolitionist and "Freedom National" Republican. The Senate had approved the measure in April 1864 by a vote of 38 to 6. In June, however, the House had not produced the needed super majority, having fallen eleven votes short of the required two-thirds majority for a constitutional amendment. Now, however, after a national landslide for the Republican (or National Unionist) party in November 1864, the tide had turned. Thus, in January 1865, the House leadership was ready to try again, during the last session of the Thirty-eighth Congress, and began their effort with John Andrew Jackson Creswell.

Creswell's selection had much to do with Maryland's status as the first southern slave state to abolish slavery, two months before. Governor Bradford, by coincidence, had on that same day (January 5, 1865) delivered his message to Maryland's House of Delegates that highlighted the ways free labor was already benefiting the state. Creswell also sought to demonstrate that Maryland had not fallen into ruin when it had freed its slaves. On the contrary, he stepped forth to demonstrate that freedom from slavery's shackles pointed to a bright economic future.

Speaking with the authority of an experienced business lawyer, Creswell demolished the long-held claims of slavery's economic value to the nation. Demonstrating the vastly more efficient application of free labor that was at the core of his personal objections to the institution, he said:

*Figures always condemn slavery, and statistics are its irreconcilable foe. Travel through our State at your leisure and you will clearly see that slavery has been a most ungrateful mistress for Maryland. It has wasted our resources, paralyzed our industry, checked our growth in wealth, population, and all substantial interests, refused ingress to the intelligent and enterprising of other States and countries and has even driven our own young men into exile. So far as we have advanced at all we have done so in spite of slavery, and by driving it before us. And so it is everywhere.*⁷⁰

Though economic motivations were central to his argument, Creswell also reminded his listeners that the issue was a moral one. He spoke of his pride in participating as the righter of a great moral wrong, helping personally "to contribute to rights of humanity to a downtrodden race."⁷¹ To a modern audience, this may smack with the condescension of a privileged plutocrat, even if his heart was in the right place for a man of his time. Still, his language illustrated clearly the complicated race relations of the time, and the future, as he continued:

*When passing along through life I encounter these poor freedmen, and hear of them say: 'Master, God bless you,' I feel none the worse that the prayer of a fellow mortal, black though he be, upon whom I have aided in conferring something more of happiness, has been offered up in my behalf.*⁷²

Creswell explained in his speech how slavery had maintained itself and outstayed its welcome. Positing that the founders always intended to find a way over time to dissolve the “unmitigated evil” of slavery, he noted that this intent had been delayed interminably by the way the slaveholding interest had, for the price of maintaining the Union, been allowed to build its power until “it ruled with imperious sway, Congress, court, and president alike, and held at its beck and call the power of a mighty government.”⁷³ Once again, memories of the actual consequences of the federal Fugitive Slave Law in a small Pennsylvania town long ago must have been stirred.

As for the position of current slave-owners, Creswell repeated that the rest of the country had only tolerated and appeased slavery to prevent civil war. Now that the South had carried out that threat regardless, the country no longer owed any such toleration. “Who is so weak as to believe that the rebels can be appeased by concessions to slavery, or that the war can be ended otherwise than by destroying their military power?” he thundered.⁷⁴ He added that the betrayal of the South forfeited any right of slave-owners to demand compensation in exchange for emancipation, having rejected all earlier offers of compromise along these lines. A nation that, as Creswell said, “has been compelled in defense of its life to expend its treasure by thousands of millions and sacrifice hundreds of its best and bravest on almost every hilltop and in almost every valley of the South”⁷⁵ need not entertain such a demand.

Concluding as the shadows fell on that midwinter day, Creswell again recalled that while the Founders defended the reality of slavery in the new nation, they had also deliberately ensured that a constitutional amendment was the tool to deal with the matter. The framers of the document, he claimed, originally intended that slavery be eventually ended using this method. This was surely understood, he said, when slave states entered the Union, and so there could be no complaint “if the people shall choose to exercise their notorious privilege of amendment.”⁷⁶

Creswell’s oration on the floor may well have contributed to the amendment’s narrow and historic victory a little more than three weeks later. Certainly, it set the tone of the debate, and the speech itself was immediately printed and widely distributed. It also cemented Creswell’s reputation, despite his lame-duck status, as a leading member of the radical wing of the Republican Party. The final passage of the measure was not an easy one, however. Democrats pushed back with claims that abolition in a time of war was dangerous, or that it would hinder peace negotiations, or that compensated abolition would be fairer, or even that the constitutional amendment was itself unconstitutional. The longer the talking went, the more supporters of the measure worried. Major newspapers reported fears

“that there is no hope of the passage in the House of the Constitutional Amendment abolishing slavery.”⁷⁷

But pass it did, on January 31, 1865 to unprecedented scenes of celebration in the House. The vote was 119 in the affirmative, twenty-six more than the previous June. Sixteen of the eighty in the Democratic caucus voted for it, with at least ten of them changing their votes from the negative, or registering as “non-voting.” The artist for *Harper’s Weekly Magazine* must have known how hard Creswell worked for the measure because, in his illustration of the celebrations on its passage that filled his publications’ full front page on February 18, 1865, the clearly identifiable John Creswell is depicted, embracing the tall, gaunt figure of Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. A third man, presumably William D. Kelley of Philadelphia, an ardent radical who had stumped for Creswell’s election in 1863, looks on approvingly.



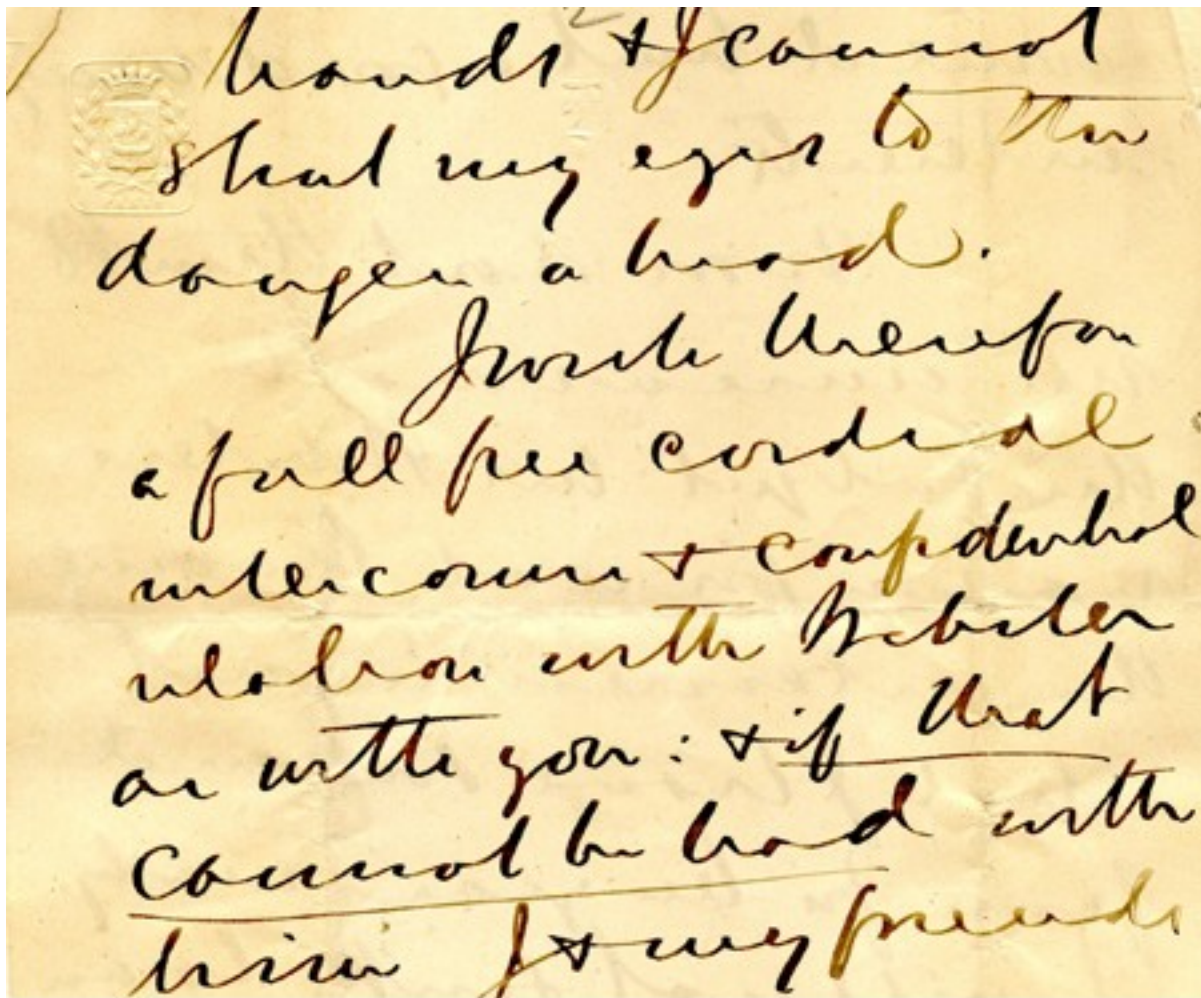
Harper's Weekly Magazine, February 18, 1865, detail depicting final passage of the Thirteenth Amendment.

SENATOR

Despite Creswell's national moment, Republican hopes of maintaining power in Maryland were fading. With the Union saved, politicians such as Montgomery Blair and the Unionist governor, Thomas Swann, were soon to desert the Republican cause and join or rejoin the Democrats. There was still enough of a Republican power base in early 1865, though, to send Creswell back to the Thirty-ninth Congress. In February 1865, Thomas Hicks, the former governor who had once opposed federal troops passing through his state in 1861 and who was now sitting in the U.S. Senate, died. The process of his replacement sparked more bitterness between Blair and Davis. And here again, President Lincoln involved himself, this time with plans for Reconstruction well on his mind.

As was common in nineteenth century politics, the essence of the matter between Blair and Davis concerned patronage. Government jobs could reward party faithful and ensure future repayment of favors. Montgomery Blair was increasingly angry that despite the Davis faction's disloyalty to the President, particularly in the recent general election, they were still being maintained in lucrative federal posts.⁷⁸ Despite having removed Blair from his cabinet six months before, Lincoln would have preferred his more conservative former Postmaster General in the open Senate seat. But others did not. The sixty-five seat Unconditional Unionist (Republican) caucus in the Maryland Senate, under the influence of Davis, capitalized on Creswell's increased standing and chose him as their replacement. The tally in the full Senate on March 8, 1865 was 65 votes to five, with 25 Democrats not bothering to cast a ballot.⁷⁹ Creswell had been out of office in Washington for just three days, but would return directly as a senator.

Lincoln turned once again to Creswell to act as a peacemaker. Addressing the serious patronage issue in the state, the president asked Creswell to meet with Maryland governor Thomas Swann, a Blair supporter, and come up with a list of candidates for federal positions in the state that would please both sides of the divide.⁸⁰ In the first days of April 1865, Davis fired off in his atrocious handwriting a fourteen-page note of complaint to Creswell filled with specific names and suggestions. He was particularly aggrieved to see the name of Edwin Webster, whom he called "Blair's friend against you," to replace the loyal William Hoffman in the lucrative position of Collector at the Port of Baltimore.⁸¹



hands & counsel
- that my eyes to the
danger a head.
I write therefore
a full free cordial
intercourse & confidential
relation with Webster
as with you: & if that
Council be had with
him for my friends

Detail in letter from Henry Winter Davis to
John A.J. Creswell, April 1865.
(Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA)

Davis demanded a meeting with Creswell and Webster before he would accept any compromise and threatened that having the president dictate to Maryland on this would be “a declaration of war in which a good many persons will be hurt - both of us among them.”⁸²

We do not know if Davis met with the two Dickinson College classmates but it is notable that Creswell was apparently standing up to his wartime ally. Davis let Creswell know that he was saddened by the charges that he was too much the opponent of the Lincoln Administration. He denied this but asserted in typically defiant and fiery terms that he would not “change my style of supporting the Administration: I will neither be driven into opposition nor silent where remonstrance or rebuke may be in the future necessary.”⁸³

But Creswell was now a sitting United States senator, and Lincoln accepted the compromise list that Swann and Creswell submitted, with Edwin Hanson Webster at the top of it. Creswell was on increasingly good

terms with Abraham Lincoln, who was sincerely grateful for his efforts in the troublesome Border State. On the morning of April 14, 1865, Lincoln greeted Creswell warmly in the White House. Lincoln told him that he had signed off on his list. Creswell then took the opportunity at the meeting to seek a parole for a Cecil County friend who had served in the Confederate Army. This request, however, Lincoln turned down, though he softened the blow with warm reminiscences of the past years.⁸⁴

Then John Wilkes Booth's bullet changed everything. The new president was Andrew Johnson from Tennessee. Almost immediately, the Radical Republicans saw their freedom agenda under threat. As Democrats returned to dominance in his home state, Creswell must have been doubly fearful.

Creswell struggled against this trend with passion and frustration. His attitude notably hardened against former Rebels, at least those who were not his old friends from Cecil County. For instance, he wrote an angry letter to Colonel A.J. Willis, a Caroline County landowner from Williston, in March 1866 when Southern states sent former Confederate soldiers and office holders to serve in the U.S. Congress. He made his feelings known in no uncertain terms and wrote: "Never with my consent will repentant rebels be admitted into Congress, for I know that their purpose is to break down our national credit or compel us to assume their debt; and to renew by political strategy their desperate attempts to destroy our Government."⁸⁵ He wanted, he said, "a genuine restoration" for the nation, "not a mere hollow truce that will enable our enemies to quietly take possession of our strongholds."⁸⁶ He was determined to resist whatever the opposition would do and concluded with the fighting words of a radical Republican Reconstructionist, "I ask and will accept no favor of them. I scorn and defy them."⁸⁷

These fighting words may have reflected his position as the leader of the Radical Republican faction in Maryland. The true incendiary, Henry Winter Davis, now was [silent in his grave](#) in the Greenmount Cemetery in Baltimore.⁸⁸ His sudden death from pneumonia at age forty-eight had dealt another blow to Republican hopes. Creswell was forced to take up the reigns of a Radical Republican faction in the state that faced an increasingly bleak future in post-Civil War Maryland.

Sixteen months of peacetime under the Johnson Administration had produced the alarming situation in the South where southern unionists or scalawags and former slaves were being harassed and sometimes murdered. Creswell was apoplectic. He attended what was called the Southern Loyalists Convention gathered at Independence Hall in Philadelphia in September 1866. Unionists and Republicans from all over the South and the Border States joined forces and Creswell was charged with heading a sub-committee and drafting a powerful statement.⁸⁹ Billed as "An Appeal of the Loyal Men of the South to their Fellow Citizens of the United States," Creswell delivered the finished address himself in a speech for the endorsement of the gathering on September 6, 1866.

The "Appeal" bore Creswell's stamp as it reprised once again the economic argument and the sway that the slave power had once held over a

timid nation. That power, he said, would overturn all the sacrifice and heroics of the war that had saved the Union. The tools for this return were murder, intimidation, and treachery. Former rebels were returning to their old methods of threatening another war if they did not get their way. The speech painted an exceedingly dark picture in the South, describing a “reign of terror” unleashed by returning Confederates. This horrifying litany he laid directly at the feet of the “accidental” President Johnson, a would-be tyrant:

who was criminally derelict in not preventing more than a thousand murders of Unionists in the South since the surrender. The drafting committee mostly made up of Unionists in former Confederate states risking their lives daily, appealed for justice and stated that ‘our last and only hope is in the hope and fortitude of the loyal people of America’...and the election of a controlling majority in the succeeding or forthcoming Congress.⁹⁰

Those besieged Southerners gathered in Philadelphia knew more than anyone the means by which this “controlling majority” could be assembled, especially where they lived. Enfranchising black male citizens would change the electoral calculus and give Republicans a chance to hold on in traditionally Democratic states. The solution was more simply outlined than achieved, however.

In Maryland meanwhile, Republican prospects of contributing to an increased Republican majority in Congress were narrowing drastically. Strategically, the only hope for the Republican Party in Maryland was full voting citizenship for Maryland’s African-Americans, now 160,000 in number. With loyal black votes, the Democrats could be held at bay and the Republicans could remain competitive politically. Many Republicans outside Maryland held similar views and set about in Congress to provide broadened rights for African-Americans. Such actions ran counter to public opinion in the nation, let alone the South. Connecticut voted down a state voting rights bill for African-Americans by a large margin in late 1865, for example. President Johnson seized on this popular hostility and vetoed successive acts designed to advance the position of blacks, including the Civil Rights Act in 1866.

In Maryland, the issue was especially divisive. Despite his radical rhetoric, Creswell, along with many of his Republican colleagues, had always played raw practical politics with the future of the black Marylanders. To win elections during the war, Unconditional Unionists had downplayed the future role of free blacks in Maryland society, stressed that black enlistments would help prevent white men from being drafted, and steered completely clear of any admission of racial or political equality for African-Americans. Creswell, of course, had been prominent among these wartime Unionists. With the war won, and with the Unionist (Republican) bloc breaking up, the situation became even more critical and divisive, threatening as it did the loyalty of an important, if only potential, bloc of future support. Still, many Republicans like Creswell avoided the hard choice of turning the page on Maryland’s racial history to declare African-Americans worthy of full civil and political

rights. Democrats gleefully tormented the Republicans for this wavering. They noted, for example, the political cynicism of the new Maryland constitution that, in order to reduce Democratic political power, no longer counted African-Americans as constituents in terms of the reapportionment of seats, at the same time as they were lauded as fighting men in the United States Colored Troops.⁹¹

On the floor of the Senate, however, rhetoric ruled the day, especially as the Republican majority battled the hated obstructionist in the White House. Creswell and his companions voted in April 1866 to override Johnson's veto of the Civil Rights Act. The act swept away many restrictions on black life, short of the franchise, of course. Maryland's notorious pre-war "black code" was one glaring example. Still in effect even after state emancipation, the laws required unemployed blacks to seek jobs when whites had no such requirement, prevented them from testifying against whites in court, and placed restrictions on their travel and assembly. The new federal law put an end, at last, to such codified racial insults.⁹²

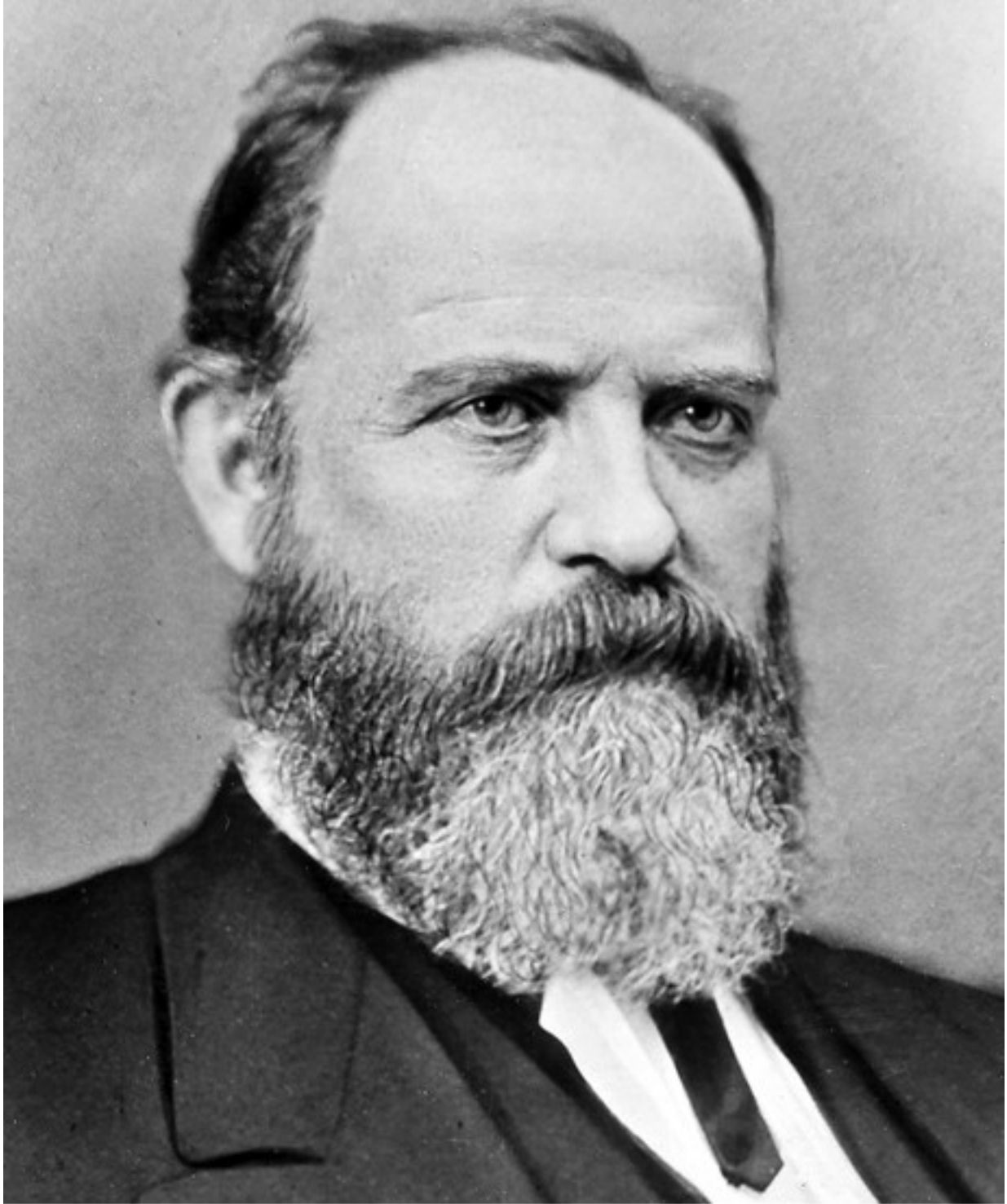
Encouraged by their success but goaded by Johnson's repeated obstruction, Republicans responded with the Fourteenth Amendment, a sweeping measure that answered several radical complaints in one document. The amendment defined citizenship, equal protection, and due process for all Americans, while stopping short of guaranteeing all the right to vote. For good measure, at least as far as Radical Republicans were concerned, it also banned from government those who had broken oaths to the United States and explicitly denied any compensation for slaveholders. It passed the Congress by June 1866. Creswell voted "aye" on all measures in the Senate⁹³ but Maryland's congressional delegation was split, with even some Republicans voting against it. Tellingly, the Maryland Assembly voted on March 23, 1867 not to ratify the measure. The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution did gain its required quota of state ratification, though, and was adopted on July 9, 1868. Maryland, however, only finally ratified it more than ninety years later at the end of the Eisenhower Administration, on April 4, 1959.

Republican reinforcements would arrive in Congress after the November 1866 elections. They were to strengthen Reconstruction and send President Johnson to an impeachment trial, but Creswell was not among them. In Maryland's November 1866 elections, the Democrats had gained momentum and won three-quarters of the seats in the House of Delegates. Creswell's reappointment after completing Hicks' term was therefore impossible and he was replaced with Democrat [Philip F. Thomas](#), a former Treasury Secretary under James Buchanan and, incidentally, another Dickinson College graduate.

Thomas never sat, though, as the Republican-controlled Senate refused to admit him on the grounds that he had given aid and comfort to the enemy - his son, who was a Confederate soldier - and did not qualify under the spirit of the Fourteenth Amendment. The legislature then named Kent County Democrat George Vickers as the state's next U.S. senator. American political

history may well have been different if Creswell had held on to the seat; Vickers provided the one vote margin against the removal of President Andrew Johnson at his impeachment trial in 1868. Creswell would almost certainly have voted for the end of Johnson's presidency.

Creswell continued to wield a powerful influence but all efforts to establish a competitive Republican Party in the state were doomed almost from the start. Historian Jean Baker, in *The Politics of Continuity*, argues convincingly that the long-held power of the Democratic Party could not be broken even by Civil War. She shows, in fact, that Maryland politics demonstrated remarkable resistance to change throughout the century. The new Republican opposition, like the Whigs and the American Party before them, could not for long resist Democratic unanimity and the older party was destined to return to full control of the state, much as it had when ejecting Creswell in the First District and pulling him off his seat in the U.S. Senate.



John A.J. Creswell, circa 1869
(National Archives)

Returning home, Creswell was faced with that united and disciplined Democratic Party which soon controlled the governor's mansion as well as

the legislature. He even had to endure Democratic mockery over his full name, which they continuously used to remind him that they were explicitly rebuilding their party in the image of Andrew Jackson,⁹⁴ with a past-oriented future they touted as simpler and more comfortable than Republican radicalism could offer.

The Republican opposition enjoyed no such unity or focus. As Jean Baker outlines, Creswell led a pragmatic faction of the state Republicans based on the continued disposition of federal patronage from a central government likely to be in Republican hands for some time. Creswell's rival for party leadership was Hugh Lennox Bond, a Baltimore-based state judge. Bond spearheaded a more aggressive and principled faction that sought bolder action, like the education and enfranchisement of African-Americans. The Creswell-Bond contest was fought out in the press and through appointments of the faithful to the lucrative federal posts in Maryland, particularly at the Port of Baltimore, which had so concerned Lincoln in the last days of his life.

Patronage was important but could never compete with the ballot box. Here the Democrats prospered. With the advocacy of men like Bond, who gave a voice to the multitude of African-Americans in Baltimore, the complicated politics of Maryland returned again to the matter of race. During the immediate post-war years, the state was suffering under an ugly and heightened racial tension that Democrats did not hesitate to exploit. Despite his record and his rhetoric, Creswell was ever the businessman pragmatist and he still held firm to the idea that now was not the political time to support enfranchisement. It was better to wait for another constitutional amendment from Washington that would dictate black voting to the states as the Fourteenth Amendment had dictated other black civil rights. Meanwhile Bond, more the principled ideologue, argued for the state enfranchisement of black voters.⁹⁵

The year 1867 was another hard one for Republicans in Maryland. Democrats engineered another state constitutional convention that during the summer months rewrote the hated Unionist Constitution of 1864. Symbolically, the president of the convention was [Judge Richard Bennett Carmichael](#), the Eastern Shore jurist, and Dickinson College graduate. In May 1862, Carmichael had been charged with disloyalty, beaten, and dragged unconscious from his courtroom to military imprisonment without trial at Fort McHenry. Not a single Republican bothered to attend the gathering at Annapolis as the Democrats settled old scores. The completed document received popular approval in September 1867 and went into effect on October 5, 1867. It remains the constitution in force in Maryland today.⁹⁶

Then came the state elections in November. Tortured calculation over whether or not to engage in racial politics paid few dividends in the campaign. Democrats happily painted all of their opponents with the same brush and in the harsh and racist colors of the day. Bond was merely the more fanatical, and Creswell, "John Andrew Jackson Creswell," the more devious and hypocritical. Without the actuality of black voters to back them up, Republicans continued to be thrashed at the polls. In the November

1867 election for governor, Democrat Oden Bowie emerged victorious, with Bond receiving less than 25% of the (all white) vote.⁹⁷

The Fifteenth Amendment did arrive in due course. From March 1870, Maryland was compelled to allow black males to vote. The state's African-American leaders did not seem to hold grudges over the delay or the equivocation of Republican Party men like Creswell. On May 19, 1870, a massive celebration of the adoption of the amendment took place in Baltimore. A lengthy parade of black Baltimoreans took an hour to pass on its eight-mile route, and then, under a clear sky and a cooling breeze off the bay, speakers held forth from the balcony of the Gilmore Hotel. The main invited participant who spoke longer than any other and was cheered as much as any other was John A.J. Creswell.

His invitation may have owed much to his representation, now as a sitting cabinet officer of the government of President Grant, but his welcome was genuine. His speech before a heavily African-American audience seemed to be genuine as well and, for us, perhaps instructive. Here was the mature Creswell, forty-two years old, his philosophical journey complete, most of his ambitions for respect and position fulfilled. He knew that he had some explaining to do.

His speech began with an announcement that emancipation was a cause for celebration for the white man as well as the black. Taking the story back into the past, as we have seen he often did, he noted that the original Marylanders voted side-by-side, black and white. It was not until 1810 that cotton and greed began to destroy the hopes of progress to emancipation for which he claimed the nation's founders had planned. The sacrifice of the war had paid the price for this but had also washed away this sin. He then laid out the story of emancipation and the progress towards the ballot box for black Americans. Saying that universal manhood suffrage had proved as difficult a task as taking down slavery, Creswell embarked on an exposition of the events of the previous ten years. In this he was apologetic. White men, including Abraham Lincoln, had made every attempt to compromise with other white men, at the cost of black suffrage. He was specific, saying "it is clear that as late as August 1864, neither a Republican President nor a Republican Congress was prepared to proffer the ballot to the colored man."⁹⁸ Only "after years of trial cautiously - I might say reluctantly"⁹⁹ were the measures emancipating the black citizen brought to where they were today.

But they were here now. Creswell gave the lion's share of the credit for the Fifteenth Amendment to President Grant, saying, "To him more than any other living man is its final success attributable."¹⁰⁰ He could not resist, nevertheless, showing at several points his pride in his own role, especially in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments. Ending with a rousing call for all Americans to go forward together, he received, according to Republican newspaper accounts, lengthy and repeated applause throughout his speech. We might wonder, though, what Judge Hugh Lenox Bond, seated behind him on the platform, later to speak for less than five minutes, was thinking during

Creswell's oration. To Bond's possible reservations we might add those of Frederick Douglass, who followed Creswell on the platform.

During his speech, Creswell claimed that the Republican Party had followed its course towards black suffrage "not as a means of retaining its ascendancy."¹⁰¹ But the result obviously could not hurt. It came as the Republicans were in desperate need of assistance in Maryland. In his speech, Douglass urged all to strike against Democrats at the ballot box wherever and whenever they could. And the resolutions voted on at the end of the meeting included the following: "That we pledge the newly enfranchised vote in Maryland to the Republican Party and that we look forward with confidence and satisfaction to the day - not long to be waited for - when we shall aid in placing our beloved State in line with the Republican States of the Union."¹⁰²

Bold words do not necessarily make for election victory, however. The loyal contributions of the black vote did narrow the gap but most often over the following decades did not overcome Democratic domination in Maryland. Creswell urged that the races go together into the future, yet the black citizens of Baltimore leaving the rally for their homes that evening still could only ride on the outside platform of the city's omnibuses, a restriction that had been recently upheld in a Maryland court.¹⁰³ They could ride inside if they were in the company of a white person, a relic of slavery days. The restriction was finally lifted the following year in 1871.

POSTMASTER GENERAL

If 1867 had been a bad year for Creswell and his Maryland Republicans, 1868 saw at least his own prospects picking up. As a capable and loyal Republican from below the Mason-Dixon Line, he was now highly regarded in his party nationally. He was discussed as a possible running mate for Ulysses S. Grant at the May 1868 Republican National Convention in Chicago.¹⁰⁴

When Grant put together his unconventional first cabinet¹⁰⁵ and needed a dependable candidate to represent the South, he chose Creswell as his Postmaster General shortly after the election. This cabinet assignment always went to a dependable party loyalist, but the comment from one modern historian on Creswell's appointment that "no-one expected much from this party hack"¹⁰⁶ severely understates the complexity of the man, the politics of the time, and the Post Office. The Post Office Department was indeed important for any party occupying the White House. It was the second largest employer in the federal system after the Army, and reached into every community in the United States and its territories. More than seventy percent of its 20,000 workers were postmasters, all in place by federal appointment in a system that rewarded party support from Maine to New Mexico.

The Post Office needed more than a "political hack" in 1868. The nation was expanding, the transcontinental railroad was completed, and new settlements on the western frontier were being incorporated every day. As important, the post offices in the former Confederate states remained in a chaotic state that Reconstruction made all the more complicated. It did not take long to demonstrate that of Ulysses Grant's appointments, Creswell's was one of the most inspired. He served from March 1869 to July 1874. His tenure was the longest since the 1840s and remained so until Harry Truman's choice, Jesse Donaldson, served in the post between 1947 and 1953.¹⁰⁷ Creswell served with an almost universal appreciation of his efficiency and his reforming zeal that helped prepare the department for the remainder of the century.

His skills as a lawyer and a businessman were put to excellent use. He honed in on waste and inefficiency. One of his earliest targets in reducing the sizeable departmental deficit was the remarkably abused congressional "franking privilege" by which any member could post anything he wished with the simple signing of his name on the item. This enabled free electioneering to continue throughout the year as congressmen sent all kinds of printed materials to their constituents at home. Free gifts of seed to farmers in their district were a popular item with many congressmen. Creswell would have known first-hand of the abuses that routinely were publicized second-hand in the press. Many members allowed friends and family to use the free service and one congressman was reported even to send his laundry home using the privilege.¹⁰⁸

Creswell immediately recommended that franking be replaced with stamps. He then ordered his postmasters to produce a count of congressionally franked items for the first six months of 1870. Only a third were able to answer in time for the report, but the 8,583 officials who did respond reported handling more than five million franked letters and more than two million pounds of other postage, at a total cost of more than nine hundred thousand dollars. Extrapolating from these figures, Creswell estimated that franking cost the nation more than \$2.5 million that it could ill afford.¹⁰⁹ Congress agreed and after the issue had become a plank in the platform of the 1872 Republican National Convention, the privilege was abolished on January 31, 1873. Free mail would return for members of congress in several guises before too long, but Creswell had broken for good much of the corruption involved in the practice - not what one would usually expect from a political hack.

Since the advent of the department as a cabinet post, African-Americans had been stringently banned from postal employment, and from even touching the U.S. mail. Southern influence helped portray black involvement with the mails as a tool they could use to gather intelligence and possibly disseminate materials that would encourage slaves to flee or even organize murderous revolt.¹¹⁰ This restriction, like so many others of its kind, had been removed in 1865 but other than a few clerks in major cities, postal jobs remained white until Creswell arrived on the scene.



Postmaster General John A.J. Creswell
and his staff, circa 1873 (Library of Congress)

Overcoming difficult hurdles such as the requirement for postmasters to post a bond before they could be appointed, black postmasters began to appear after Creswell's appointment, all with his approval. In the South, black pioneers like Charles Miller in Columbia, South Carolina in 1869, braved hostile reception. On November 15, 1872, Mrs. Anna M. Dumas became the nation's first African-American woman postmaster in Covington, Louisiana.¹¹¹ Although more than 71% of postal jobs were held by postmasters, there were other opportunities evolving in the Department. Until 1864, mail traveled only from post office to post office; people had to pick up their letters and packages at the post office building. After 1864, on the initiative of Montgomery Blair, free mail delivery began in large American cities following the British model. By the end of the Civil War, post offices in sixty-five American cities had hired 685 mail carriers.

All of these carriers were white, until Creswell arrived. James Christian of Richmond, Virginia is considered to have become the first black letter carrier when, on June 1, 1869, he began his "appointed rounds." Five months later, William Carney, Medal of Honor hero of the 54th Massachusetts' attack on

Fort Wagner, began his thirty-two year career as a letter carrier in Bedford, Massachusetts, wearing on cold days his Union Army greatcoat over his postal uniform.¹¹² John W. Curry became Washington DC's first black postman on April 20, 1870.

Higher positions in the Department were well in the future, of course, but Creswell did his part. He appointed Isaac Myers of Baltimore to a successful tenure as the first African-American postal inspector, for example. Creswell's efforts were quickly recognized among the African-American population. When he spoke at the Fifteenth Amendment rally in Baltimore in 1870, the African-American Dean of the Howard University Law School, John M. Langston, introduced him. After praising President Grant, Langston evoked cheers when he asked the crowd, "Do you know the Postmaster General of the United States? He is the only one who seconded the proposition of the President, and gave the Negro official place in his Department!"¹¹³ He then provoked the crowd to laughter when he concluded by wondering "if they are purely white - if they have not some portion of Negro blood in their composition."¹¹⁴

Creswell's record at the Post Office continued to draw praise from many directions. He was certainly a popular figure in Washington, made even more so by his wife. Hannah Creswell was acknowledged as one of the most elegant and beautiful of Washington wives, described as having a "Greek profile" that "takes you back to the days of Louis XIV, and you feel that some beauty of that period has stepped out of her picture frame and stands flesh and blood before you."¹¹⁵ Hannah became one of the District's leading hostesses and entertained in well-regarded and lavish gatherings at the spacious Creswell home at the corner of Eighteenth and "Eye" Streets.¹¹⁶ The couple also cemented a strong and lasting friendship with the Grants, visiting them several times at their summer home in Long Branch, New Jersey.¹¹⁷

Creswell resigned his cabinet post a year into Grant's second term, in June 1874, after more than five years of service. Though he was probably dismayed by the scandals beginning to engulf the president's administration, there is little evidence to suggest that this, or any looming impropriety of his own, was the reason for his resignation. There was only mutual affection between the departing Creswell and his chief. Grant's letter of acceptance of the resignation was a nostalgic personal commentary on Creswell's tenure in which he expressed his hope that he could find in Creswell's successor "a personal friend that I can have the same attachment for."¹¹⁸ The Creswells remained close friends with the president after his return to private life, and they were with Mrs. Grant at the old general's deathbed on July 23, 1885.

In the midst of widespread scandal in government, Creswell departed the Cabinet with his reputation for efficiency and honesty intact. The *New York Times* commented sadly on the loss from the Cabinet of a "hardworking, pains-taking, energetic officer."¹¹⁹ Reflecting at a further distance on his work as Postmaster General, the historian can see that he had earned his reputation as a reformer and innovator. He had overseen the introduction of

international money orders in 1869, and of the well-received and lucrative “Penny Postcard” in 1873. His attention to money-saving efficiencies in areas such as the negotiations of contracts and the development of international mail service helped lead soon after to a reduction in domestic postal charges from three cents for a half ounce letter to two cents, regardless of distance. He handed over a largely healthy department to the temporary keeping of his deputy, James Marshall, the old Dickinson College roommate whom he had narrowly beaten for valedictorian honors decades before.

Although some public suggestions were made, including by Hugh Lenox Bond, that Creswell would be a fine Maryland Republican candidate to return to the Senate when the party took control of the House of Delegates, they were only pipe dreams.¹²⁰ Republicans would not hold the Maryland Legislature for years to come, even with the loyal black vote operating in its favor. The ink on Creswell’s resignation letter from the Cabinet was barely dry when President Grant appointed his friend as chief counsel to the Alabama Claims Commission. In 1872, after international arbitration, Britain had paid millions of dollars in compensation for its adjudged breach of international law in helping the Confederate States of America acquire warships - notably among them, the *C.S.S. Alabama* - that had then preyed on Union merchant shipping all around the world. The Commission was to accomplish the final task of finding the victims of raiders like the *Alabama*, then award or reject their claims. A panel of judges was set up to sit in Washington, with offices at 514 H Street. Creswell took on what one judge called “the onerous duty” of processing claims as they were received and gathering the testimony judges needed to establish their validity and decide on amounts to be paid.¹²¹

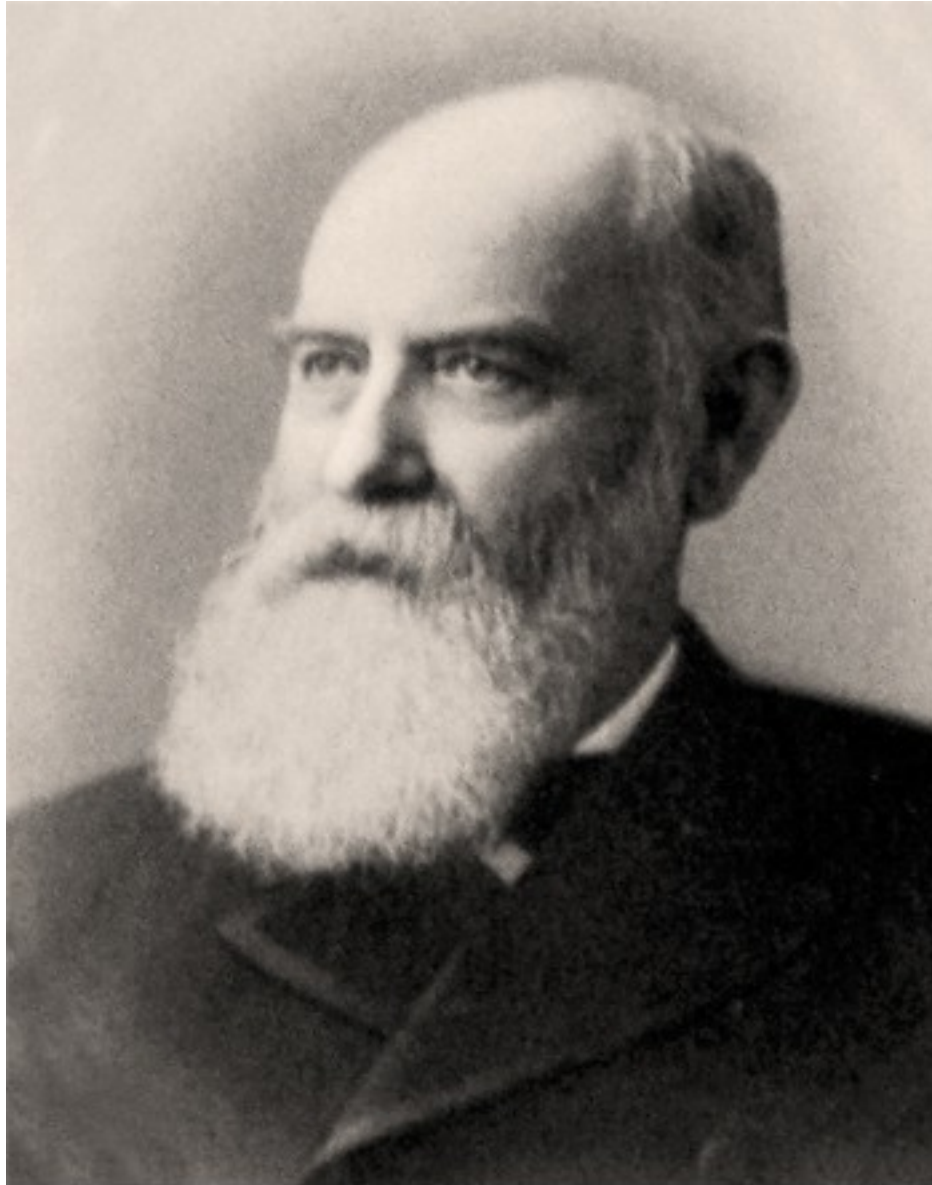
Creswell and his team of assistants worked tirelessly in the next months. They collected testimony from almost every state in the Union and from foreign countries around the world, including Great Britain, France, Germany, China, Japan, and India, supporting the thousands of applications claiming damages on the high seas at the hands of the Confederate Navy. The court sat from July 22, 1874 till December 31, 1876 and dispersed \$9,315,753 in upheld claims. This was a particularly busy time for Creswell since he served simultaneously as one of the three commissioners winding up the affairs of the Freedman’s Savings Bank, which had crashed in the Panic of 1873.

The Court disbanded but the work was not yet done. With Alabama Claims funds remaining and claims still being made, a second court was set up in July 1882 under President Rutherford B. Hayes. Once again Creswell took on the role of chief counsel. The work was completed, for good this time, in December 1885. The two courts had in over sixty months made over eleven thousand judgments and awarded all of the sixteen million dollars the British had paid, including interest.¹²² This had all taken place smoothly and without the slightest whiff of impropriety quite often attached to the American government’s financial dealings during the period.

CONCLUSION

His work on the Alabama Claims Commission was Creswell's final public service. He and his wife returned home to his Elkton mansion after living in hotels like Willards' and The Portland during his second stint on the Alabama Claims Commission¹²³ and settled to a quieter life as an executive in several Maryland merchant banks. He also maintained his law practice but at what appeared to be a much lower key than his Washington work had demanded. Perhaps the heart trouble that was to help bring his end was already debilitating him.

After leaving Washington, DC, Creswell showed little interest in active Republican matters, and his influence in Maryland politics was largely over. He was well respected now and time had mellowed his image even amongst his erstwhile opponents. When President Benjamin Harrison was presented with a Supreme Court vacancy on the death of Associate Justice Stanley Matthews of Ohio in March 1889, a powerful lobbying effort came from Maryland to nominate Creswell for the vacant position. Along with the expected Republican support, numerous Democrats, including some of his old and fiercest adversaries, along with several former Democratic governors, wrote letters of praise for his long career.¹²⁴ The White House, however, ignored the call for southern representation this time and appointed instead the younger career judge David J. Brewer, a westerner and the first Kansan to sit on the court.



John A.J. Creswell, circa 1890
(*Portrait and Biographical Record of Harford
and Cecil Counties, Maryland.* New York,
Chapman Publishing Company, 1897)

Two days before Christmas, 1891, and a month after his sixty-third birthday, John Creswell died at his country mansion near Elkton. He had contracted a deep winter pneumonia, which strained his weakened heart and took his life quickly. His funeral the following week was well attended although few from outside Cecil County were present. His pastor from Washington, DC and the sitting president of Dickinson College, where Creswell had for a second time been serving as a trustee, were the only

visitors of note. But the Cecil County contingent was large and included both Democrats and Republicans, come to bid farewell to one of the county's most famous and influential sons. No mention of African-American attendance was made in the newspaper reports.

How do we assess John Andrew Jackson Creswell? He is credited with helping to keep Maryland in the Union, but many others could make similar claims. Maryland Governor Thomas Hicks, for example, arguably played a more active and vital role in the crucial spring of 1861. As time went on, though, Creswell contributed mightily, not least in his early recognition that manpower was the key to the success of the long conflict, and also that Marylanders in blue uniforms, whatever their skin color, were vital to both Maryland's loyalty and the Union's success. Creswell's work for the Thirteenth Amendment was in many ways as important to the future as his wartime efforts. He was a son of the South, a symbol as a Border State politician who had seen the light and could speak forcefully for the final economic and moral demolition of the myth of the value of slavery to the nation.

Creswell appears just once in James Oakes's sweeping survey of the destruction of slavery, but it was a pivotal appearance in this grand narrative. *Freedom National* details how seriously the Republicans took the issue of slavery's ultimate destruction and how the pressures of military necessity accelerated and sometimes altered their plans, but never seriously changed their vision. "Republicans equated liberty with Union and slavery with disunion," Oakes writes, and the figure he quotes to prove this insight is Creswell, who said succinctly during the debates over the abolition amendment: "On the one side is disunion for the sake of slavery, on the other side is freedom for the sake of Union."¹²⁵

His speech before Congress announced his ideas to the national stage and just a few years later, while exasperated at the failures of Reconstruction, he put them into real application as head of the largest civilian federal workforce in the country. After his tenure, the nation could never imagine a Post Office where federal law banned black hands from touching a letter or parcel in the United States mail. Any judgment then must mark Creswell as an influential and neglected figure in the racial history not only of Maryland, but also of the wider United States. Yet if his legacy was radical in some respects, it is clear that Creswell was not a radical by nature. He was a true Border State pragmatist who came to embrace what were at the time considered radical ideas about abolishing slavery and promoting equality. He came late to these ideas of "freedom national," but when he joined the movement, he was as ardent as any of its adherents. Creswell could be ambitious and opportunistic, but he could also stand firmly for important values. Creswell brought a boundless energy to whatever endeavor he committed himself. Whether it was a letter-writing campaign to defend his alma mater, the organizing of Maryland's wartime militia, or a worldwide effort to determine the rightful compensation for

aggrieved ship owners, his determination was remarkable. He was educated to succeed and, without a doubt, deserved his reputation for efficiency.

Despite what his enemies and rivals believed, ambition was not the driving force behind Creswell's energy. Once it became clear that the Republican Party in Maryland would not dominate as the Unionist coalition had, Creswell did not adjust or retreat. He did not rejoin the Democrats, as did Montgomery Blair and the many others who came to dominate Maryland politics for years. He had perhaps burned too many bridges, but he was also by then clearly committed to a new path that he could not and did not wish to leave. That path had taken him to the halls of the United States Congress and eventually to become the valued confidante of two presidents.

Often the answer to questions of motivations comes down to the normal complications of being human. Creswell spoke in his Thirteenth Amendment speech of the way in which non-slaveholding America had been held in thrall before the Civil War with the threats and cajolements of the slave power, afraid to act, preferring silence to outrage, and compromise to confrontation. In this he was telling the world as much about himself as he was the United States of the previous decades. The war brought immense challenges for the nation and for individuals. It also meant a real political and personal liberation for John A.J. Creswell and men and women like him.

Creswell's political activities began at home in familiar surroundings with duties like officering a town militia, but his political horizons soon expanded markedly and swiftly. He shared platforms with talented and outspoken men from all over the state and beyond. He was placed in increasingly important positions and he met and was influenced by more and more like minds. Henry Winter Davis, William Kelley, and Thaddeus Stevens all played their roles in boosting the confidence and convictions of the young Cecil County lawyer and businessman. By the time Abraham Lincoln sought his help on Maryland matters, Creswell's years of tolerating the political bondage of the slave power were long past.

Finally, John A.J. Creswell illustrates the inherent complexity of a border state like Maryland. There were all types of Marylanders in the mid-nineteenth century. Among them were John Crisfield, the proud slave owning Unionist of Somerset County, the fierce radical Henry Winter Davis of Baltimore, John Brown Rowan in his Confederate grave seven hundred miles from his Cecil County home, or thousands of black men who fought valiantly for the Union army, in some cases because their masters did not want their own sons to be drafted. Yet none could better represent Maryland and its complicated politics as much as Creswell, an unlikely and now mostly forgotten abolitionist whose rich story deserves much wider appreciation.

AFTERWORD

John A.J. Creswell first commanded our attention in 2006 when we were helping Dickinson College students complete a project that Professor Osborne assigned to a class studying historical methodology. He asked them to reconstruct the lives of prominent Dickinson College alumni using all resources available to historians through the library and the college's archives. While identifying potential names to assign for this biography project, we did some sample searching using Creswell as a case study to make sure that the project was feasible for burgeoning undergraduate historians. During this search, we became both perplexed and exasperated about the different ways that Creswell's name appeared in various encyclopedias, dictionaries, journal articles, newspaper articles, and even in primary sources themselves. Not only was our alumnus John Andrew Jackson Creswell sometimes referred to as "John Angel James Creswell," but we also found variations such as "Cresswell," "Captain Creswell," "Col. Creswell," "General Creswell," and the most amusing "Angle James Creswell," which was clearly a typesetting error. After some cursory searches, we were unable to find anything definitive about Creswell's official name, although archival records showed that he matriculated at Dickinson College as "John Andrew Jackson Creswell." We rarely found instances at any point during his life when he referred to himself as anything but "John A.J. Creswell," which is how he almost always signed documents, though frequently using the archaic abbreviation "Jno." in place of "John." With even the Library of Congress appearing to be confused about this, we have used the Creswell story for many years in historical methodology courses as a prime example of the iterative nature of research, and how any good historian must approach a research project with patience and creativity.

Our wrangling over Creswell's name, however, turned out to be a diversion from the complicated and intriguing man who eventually, though agonizingly slowly, revealed his life history to us. While researching evidence of how he referred to himself for a separate project conducted by a Dickinson intern, we discovered that Creswell was far more important than we had imagined. We realized that he was almost a perfect representation of Maryland and its divided politics during the Civil War, signifying as well, perhaps, the slow but deliberate shift in attitude toward slavery taking place in the rest of the nation, both North and South.

When history is written, some people need to be remembered and some forgotten; there is sometimes little fairness in this regard. However, the more we read, the more difficult it was to believe that Creswell had been lost in the annals of history. Even to say that he was quite well-known on the national stage in his day minimizes his roles as a confidante of Abraham Lincoln, friend of Ulysses S. Grant, the Congressman credited with keeping Maryland in the Union, the riveting orator who shared a stage with Frederick Douglass, the reformer who saved millions in government funds, the

powerful attorney who helped to dispense justice following the Civil War. It may be that his fading from the scene was no accident, though. By the accounts of his contemporaries, Creswell was a modest, reserved, and dignified man. An unusual politician, Creswell stood in the background, deliberating quietly until he was called upon to speak, while others who were more prone to political theatrics and self-aggrandizement ensured that their legacies would be recorded. Even if it may be against Creswell's wishes, we think that it is long past time to remember this civil servant whose actions both in Congress and beyond still affect American life.

Like any research project, our study of Creswell was not completed in isolation. Our commitment to reviving his life story took us to many places where we encountered helpful people who were interested in this project and enthusiastically supported it.

First, of course, we are grateful to Matthew Pinsker of Dickinson College, who recognized value in Creswell's story for his House Divided project. He agreed to turn our originally conceived ten-page article into a full-length study that enabled us to include nearly all of our important discoveries. This naturally allowed us to explore Creswell and his Maryland in far greater depth than would otherwise have been possible.

As fellow denizens of Dickinson College, our interest in Creswell stemmed from his life-long association with his alma mater. We thank Archivist Jim Gerencser and Special Collections Librarian Malinda Triller-Doran in Archives and Special Collections at Dickinson for their frequent assistance.

The staff members and volunteers of the Historical Society of Cecil County in Elkton, Maryland were especially interested in helping us research their home town's most famous son. We received assistance from Billie Todd, Carol Donache, Mike Dixon, Gary Burns, and Darlene McCall.

Barry Rauhauser and Marjorie Bardeen of LancasterHistory.org in Lancaster, PA provided us with some intriguing information about Creswell's mother, Rebecca Webb Creswell, and her family. Steve Smith at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA provided us with images of the Creswell family Bible which proved that our subject was born "John Andrew Jackson Creswell." John Monopoli, Dickinson College Class of 2011, was a research assistant for another project involving Creswell and gathered much of the material that sparked our interest in pursuing a full-length Creswell biography.

Finally, we are deeply indebted to historian James Oakes for lending his expertise to this work as a peer reviewer. His vast knowledge of Civil War history significantly improved our final product. One emeritus professor and one librarian were honored to have his attention for the time it took to read and comment upon this work.

NOTES

¹John A.J. Creswell, ["Speech of Hon. John A.J. Creswell of Maryland on the Proposed Amendment to the Constitution of the United States,"](#) Delivered in the House of Representatives January 5, 1865 (Washington, DC: Printed by L. Towers), 15, or <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llcg&fileName=068/llcg068.db&recNum=121>

²Creswell, "Speech," 1.

³Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, 6 December 1864, in Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 8: 149.

⁴Creswell's birth is recorded in his family's Bible: "John Andrew Jackson Creswell, son of John and Rebecca Eliza Creswell, was born on the 18th day of Nov. 1828 at 10 O'clock AM." Bible Records of John Creswell and Rebecca Webb His Wife: Includes the Allied Family of Boynton, 1797-1886, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

⁵Rebecca Webb was born to Jonathan and Rachel (Ash) Webb, Quakers who owned an iron forge on the Octararo Creek in Little Britain Township, PA. She married John Creswell of Port Deposit, MD. After his death, she married Dr. Murphy of Port Deposit, MD where they operated Murphy's Tavern. This information courtesy of LancasterHistory.org in Lancaster, PA and Horst Auctioneers of Ephrata, PA.

⁶*Biographical Cyclopedia of Representative Men of Maryland and the District of Columbia* (Baltimore: National Biographical Publishing Company, 1879), 624.

⁷Rebecca Murphy died in June 1889. Her obituary appears in the *Baltimore Sun*, 12 June 1889. It also states that Dr. Murphy preceded her in death in 1860.

⁸Dickinson College's Sophomore Class Listing of 1845 and Graduation List of 1848 record his name as "John Andrew Jackson Creswell." Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

⁹George Earle, Georgetown, 7 June 1889, Copy Book of Correspondence: Letters and Testimonials Featuring Recommendations for Creswell for the Supreme Court - March-May 1889, 128-129, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

¹⁰Earle, 130-131.

¹¹Cecil County Land Records, Liber JS 7, Folio 106, Historical Society of Cecil County, Elkton, MD. The manumission was made on February 6, 1811

freeing Sal on February 2, 1826, when she would have reached 28 years old. The manumission states that all of Sal's children born before she is freed are to be Creswell's property. At the end of the manumission, Creswell sold her to Edward Price, Esq. of Martick Iron Works in Lancaster, PA.

¹²Moncure Daniel Conway. *Autobiography: Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*. Vol. 1. (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 51.

¹³Conway, 51.

¹⁴John A.J. Creswell, "The Riot at Carlisle," *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, 14 June 1847.

¹⁵David G. Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom: The Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1820-1870* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 107.

¹⁶Smith, 108-109.

¹⁷Creswell, 14 June 1847.

¹⁸Creswell, 14 June 1847.

¹⁹Creswell, 14 June 1847.

²⁰The second name on the list was that of Edwin Webster who Creswell would come to know well as a fellow Unionist during the war and who also sat in the United States Congress.

²¹Smith, 108.

²²John McClintock, Madison, NJ, Letter to John A.J. Creswell, 27 May 1869, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

²³Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland, A Middle Temperament: 1634-1980* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), 268-269.

²⁴1860 U.S. Census, Historical Census Browser from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

²⁵1860 Census.

²⁶Brugger, 268-269.

²⁷1860 Census.

²⁸“Creswell Unmasked,” 1864 and “Address of Mr. Crisfield,” *Easton Gazette*, 31 October 1863.

²⁹William Gienapp, “Lincoln and the Border States,” *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 13 (1992), 14.

³⁰James Black Groome, “Tribute of Former U.S. Senator James B. Groome to the Memory of John A.J. Creswell, Delivered at meeting of the Cecil County Bar Association, 5 January 1892” (Elkton, MD: Cecil County Bar Association, 1892).

³¹“Address of Mr. Crisfield,” *Easton Gazette*, 31 October 1863.

³²A.J. Donelson of Tennessee was still making a plea for such a convention “as a last resort” in March 1861. See “General Political Intelligence,” *New York Times*, 21 March 1861.

³³“Public Meeting,” *Cecil Democrat*, 16 February 1861.

³⁴“Address of Mr. Crisfield,” *Easton Gazette*, 31 October 1863.

³⁵Jerre Garrett, *Muffled Drums and Mustard Spoons: Cecil County, Maryland 1860-1865* (Shippensburg, PA: Burd Street Press, 1996), 29-30.

³⁶Anonymous, Elkton, Cecil County, MD, Letter to John A.J. Creswell, 12 June 1861, John A.J. Creswell Papers, Library of Congress. The writer of this letter addresses Creswell intimately as “Andrew” in the salutation.

³⁷Garrett, 46.

³⁸“Address of Mr. Crisfield,” *Easton Gazette*, 31 October 1863.

³⁹Augustus W. Bradford, Letter to John A.J. Creswell, 11 April 1863, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD.

⁴⁰John R. Wennersten, “John W. Crisfield and Civil War Politics on Maryland’s Eastern Shore, 1860-1864,” *Maryland Historical Magazine* 99, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 10.

⁴¹“Maryland,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 16 October 1863.

⁴²“Grand Rally at Easton of the Unconditional Union Men,” *Easton Gazette*, 24 October 1863.

⁴³*Easton Gazette*, 31 October 1863.

⁴⁴Robert C. Schenck and W. H. Chesebrough, “General Orders, No. 53 for the 8th Army Corps,” Baltimore, MD, 27 October 1863, Duke University

Libraries, Digital Collections, retrieved 10 March 2013,
http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/broadsides_bdsmd51002/.

⁴⁵Abraham Lincoln to A.W. Bradford, 3 November 1863, reproduced in Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America, During the Great Rebellion* (Washington, DC: Philips and Solomon, 1865), 310-311.

⁴⁶Lincoln in McPherson, 312.

⁴⁷At this time states could choose the dates of their general elections. The 37th Congress had adjourned in March 1863 and the 38th would not sit until December 5, 1863.

⁴⁸Crisfield complained to Lincoln but nothing came of the affair. John R. Wennersten, "John W. Crisfield and Civil War Politics on Maryland's Eastern Shore, 1860-1864," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 99, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 14-15.

⁴⁹George P. Sanger, ed., "Militia Act of 1862," *United States Statutes at Large: Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America from December 5, 1859 to March 3, 1863*, Vol. 12 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1863), 597-600.

⁵⁰Ira Berlin, ed. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*. Series II (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 184-186.

⁵¹*The Congressional Globe*, Volume 54, Part 2, 25 February 1863, 1291.

⁵²*Easton Gazette*, 24 October 1863.

⁵³*Cecil Whig*, 23 December 1863, 2.

⁵⁴E.D. Townsend, United States War Department, Adjutant General's Office, "General Orders No. 329," 3 October 1863, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 860-861.
<http://www.afrigeneas.com/forum-militaryarchive/index.cgi/md/read/id/1633/sbj/general-orders-no-329/>. See also "Enlistment of Slaves in Maryland," *Valley Register*, 6 November 1863, 2.

⁵⁵Jason Rhodes, *Somerset County, Maryland: A Brief History* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2007), 59.

⁵⁶State of Maryland, *Laws of the State of Maryland* (Annapolis, MD: Department of Legislative Reference, 1864), 22-24.

⁵⁷Elihu Root, Fred C. Ainsworth, and Joseph W. Kirkley, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), 657.

⁵⁸United States Congress, *Congressional Globe: Debates and Proceedings, 1833-1873* (Washington, DC: Globe Office), 11 Feb 1864, 600.

⁵⁹United States Congress, *Congressional Globe: Debates and Proceedings, 1833-1873* (Washington, DC: Globe Office), 11 February 1864, 600.

⁶⁰United States Congress, *Congressional Globe: Debates and Proceedings, 1833-1873* (Washington, DC: Globe Office), 11 February 1864, 600.

⁶¹John A.J. Creswell, House of Representatives, Letter to Augustus W. Bradford, Governor of Maryland, 28 June 1864, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD.

⁶²Creswell to Bradford, 28 June 1864.

⁶³"Repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law," *The Liberator*, 17 June 1864.

⁶⁴Abraham Lincoln, Washington, DC, to John A.J. Creswell, 7 March 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, American Memory Project, or at the [House Divided Project](#).

⁶⁵Lincoln to Creswell, 7 March 1864.

⁶⁶Abraham Lincoln, Washington, DC, Letter to John A.J. Creswell, 17 March 1864, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress, American Memory Project, or at the [House Divided Project](#).

⁶⁷Jean H. Baker, *The Politics of Continuity: Maryland Political Parties from 1858 to 1870* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 104. The new constitution also removed all religious tests, thereby also emancipating those of the Jewish faith, and set up for the first time a centralized system of (white) public schools.

⁶⁸Baker, 109.

⁶⁹"Maryland," *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 March 1865.

⁷⁰Creswell, "Speech," 8.

⁷¹Creswell, "Speech," 11.

⁷²Creswell, "Speech," 11.

⁷³Creswell, "Speech," 2.

⁷⁴Creswell, "Speech," 15.

⁷⁵Creswell, "Speech," 14.

⁷⁶Creswell, "Speech," 14.

⁷⁷News from Washington," *New York Times*, 12 January 1865, 1.

⁷⁸William C. Harris, *Lincoln's Last Months* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2009), 80.

⁷⁹"Maryland," *New York Herald Tribune*, 13 March 1865.

⁸⁰Harris, *Lincoln's Last Months*, 81.

⁸¹Henry Winter Davis, Letter to John A.J. Creswell, April 1865, Pennsylvania State Library, Harrisburg, PA.

⁸²Davis to Creswell, April 1865.

⁸³Davis to Creswell, April 1865.

⁸⁴Jim Bishop, *The Day Lincoln Was Shot* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955), 116.

⁸⁵John A.J. Creswell, United States Senate, Letter to Colonel A.J. Willis, 22 March 1866, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD.

⁸⁶Creswell to Willis, 22 March 1866.

⁸⁷Creswell to Willis, 22 March 1866.

⁸⁸In 1866, Creswell delivered a speech on the Floor of the House of Representatives in honor of his friend and mentor, praising particularly the ways in which Davis "heroically and constantly" worked to end slavery. See John A.J. Creswell, "[Oration on the Life and Character of Henry Winter Davis, Delivered in the House of Representatives](#)" (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC: 22 February 1866) or, <https://archive.org/details/orationonlifean01cresgoog>.

⁸⁹The Southern Loyalists Convention, "[Call for a Convention of Southern Unionists, to Meet at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on Monday, the Third Day of September, 1866](#)" (Philadelphia, PA: 1866), 22-24. <https://archive.org/details/southernloyalist02sout>.

⁹⁰John A.J. Creswell, "Address to the People," *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 13 September 1866.

⁹¹“Senate Vote #153 to Pass H. J. RES. 127. (P. 3042-2),” 39th Congress, 8 June 1866, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/39-1/s153>. Creswell votes aye.

⁹²Brugger, 308.

⁹³See <https://www.govtrack.us/>.

⁹⁴Baker, 182. See “Maryland Politics,” *New York Herald*, 4 July 1877 for an example of Creswell’s political detractors using his full name. This is seen again in an article entitled “Creswell,” published 13 July 1869, in an unidentifiable newspaper, probably the *Cecil Democrat*.

⁹⁵Baker, 187-188.

⁹⁶Brugger, 306.

⁹⁷Baker, 186.

⁹⁸Speech of Hon. John A. J. Creswell, Postmaster General,” *Baltimore American and Commercial Advisor*, 20 May 1870, 4.

⁹⁹Speech of Hon. John A.J. Creswell, 4.

¹⁰⁰Speech of Hon. John A.J. Creswell, 4.

¹⁰¹Speech of Hon. John A.J. Creswell, 4.

¹⁰²Speech of Hon. John A.J. Creswell, 4.

¹⁰³Brugger, 310.

¹⁰⁴“Messrs. Creswell and Thomas,” *Annapolis Gazette*, 7 March 1867.

¹⁰⁵Gideon Welles, 5 March 1869, *Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. III, edited by Edgar Thaddeus Welles (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1911), 671.

¹⁰⁶Edward S. Cooper, *William Worth Belknap: An American Disgrace* (Farleigh Dickinson UP, 2003), 117.

¹⁰⁷United States Post Office, "[The United States Postal Service: An American History, 1775-2006](https://about.usps.com/publications/pub100/welcome.htm)," Publication 100 (November 2012), <https://about.usps.com/publications/pub100/welcome.htm>.

¹⁰⁸United States Post Office, "The United States Postal Service: An American History."

¹⁰⁹United States Senate, "Franking," included in *Precedents Relating to the Privileges of the Senate of the United States*, compiled by George P. Furber (Washington, DC: GPO, 1893), 157-159.

¹¹⁰Philip Rubia, *There's Always Work at the Post Office: African American Postal Workers and the Fight for Jobs, Justice, and Equality* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 16.

¹¹¹Rubia, 22.

¹¹²Rubia, 22.

¹¹³*Baltimore American*, 20 May 1870.

¹¹⁴*Baltimore American*, 20 May 1870.

¹¹⁵Cooper, 117.

¹¹⁶Cooper, 117.

¹¹⁷Ulysses S. Grant, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, edited by John Y. Simon (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 165. Grant used "Honorable John Andrew Jackson Creswell" in the address of his letters to Creswell.

¹¹⁸U.S. Grant to John A.J. Creswell, 24 June 1874, Washington, DC, in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant: 1874*, edited by John Y. Simon (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 136-137.

¹¹⁹"Editorial Article 1," *New York Times*, 25 June 1874, 4.

¹²⁰*Annapolis Gazette*, 14 August 1873.

¹²¹John Bassett Moore, *History and Digest of the International Arbitrations to Which the United States Has Been a Party*, Vol. 5 (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1898), 4657.

¹²²Moore, 4664.

¹²³United States Congress, *Congressional Directory*, Vol. 47 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), 145 and *Congressional Directory*, Vol. 48 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1883), 160.

¹²⁴Copy Book of Correspondence: Letters and Testimonials Featuring Recommendations for Creswell for the Supreme Court - March-May 1889, Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA. Includes letters from Democratic former Maryland governors Henry Lloyd, Oden Bowie and Elihu Jackson.

[125](#)Oakes, 453-4.

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