

Strange News

In the chapter titled "Strange News," dated December 27, Edmund Ruffin's steamer approaches Fernandina, Florida, as he seeks to sway the state's legislature toward secession. His plans involve taking a train to Gainesville and then visiting the Marion County plantation of his friend, William Owens, before attending Florida's secession convention in Tallahassee on January 3.

While on the train, Ruffin receives telegrams, one of which reports that the garrison at Fort Moultrie has moved to Fort Sumter. This news shocks him, prompting him to question the veracity of the report and consider abandoning his journey to return to Charleston. However, he ultimately decides to continue, unsure if the information is credible since messages can often be unreliable. He suspects that the Southern authorities have been misled by the federal government, specifically by the President and Secretary of War.

Upon arriving at his friend Owens' plantation, located near Fort Drane, Ruffin feels out of touch with the latest developments surrounding Major Anderson's movements, as he is unable to access current news due to the remote location. Days-old newspapers do little to ease his anxiety regarding the situation in Charleston.

Simultaneously, three commissioners from South Carolina reach Washington, fully expecting to negotiate with President Buchanan as representatives of a new nation. They secure a well-appointed lodging while hoping for productive discussions. On December 27, a senator bursts in with news of Anderson's move, casting doubt among the commissioners and prompting intense speculation about military orders and intentions.

Amidst this uncertainty, Secretary of War John B. Floyd responds skeptically, outright denying the news. However, as reliable telegrams confirm Anderson's actions, Floyd is compelled to act, sending his own telegram to Anderson, expressing disbelief at the reports of the abandonment of Fort Moultrie. Anderson quickly clarifies the situation, justifying his actions in moving to Fort Sumter to prevent potential casualties.

As news circulates and the reality of Fort Sumter's status emerges, Anderson faces the daunting task of readying the fort for impending conflict, realizing the gravity of his strategic choices in this volatile moment in American history.