

## CHAPTER *Geography in History*

# 16



### One Virginia Becomes Two

In January 1861, Virginians talked of secession. Many believed that the election of Abraham Lincoln meant disaster. But people in western Virginia opposed secession. "Our hopes of happiness and future security depend on preserving the Union as it is," declared a resident of Parkersburg.

Four months later, representatives from around the state met to vote on secession. Delegates from counties in western Virginia voted against the move. When Virginia joined the Confederacy, the westerners formed their own state. In June 1863, West Virginia entered the Union as the thirty-fifth state.

#### **REGIONAL DIFFERENCES**

Since colonial times, important differences had divided the people of eastern and western Virginia. Virginia's most fertile soil lies in the Tidewater region, along the Atlantic coastal plain. Here, early settlers carved out great plantations for growing tobacco and other crops. They brought in slaves to work the land.

By the 1800s, many settlers had pushed west across the Allegheny Mountains, which formed a natural boundary between eastern and western Virginia. Much of western Virginia had poor soil and rugged terrain. Settlers built small farms on the flatlands along streams and in river valleys. These rivers and streams flow west into the Ohio or Kanawha rivers.

Some westerners owned slaves, but most western farms were too small to support many slaves. Many westerners were descended from indentured servants who had served their terms of labor and then moved west where land was cheap. Others were descended from German and Scotch-Irish immigrants who had migrated west from the Shenandoah Valley. Some, such as those who had come from the Middle States, had few ties to eastern Virginia.

In western Virginia, feelings ran strong against the Tidewater. In 1840, the population of western Virginia outnumbered that of the rest of the state, but it had fewer seats in the state legislature. Easterners refused to give up any seats. The dispute was settled in 1851, when a state constitutional convention gave westerners more votes in the legislature.

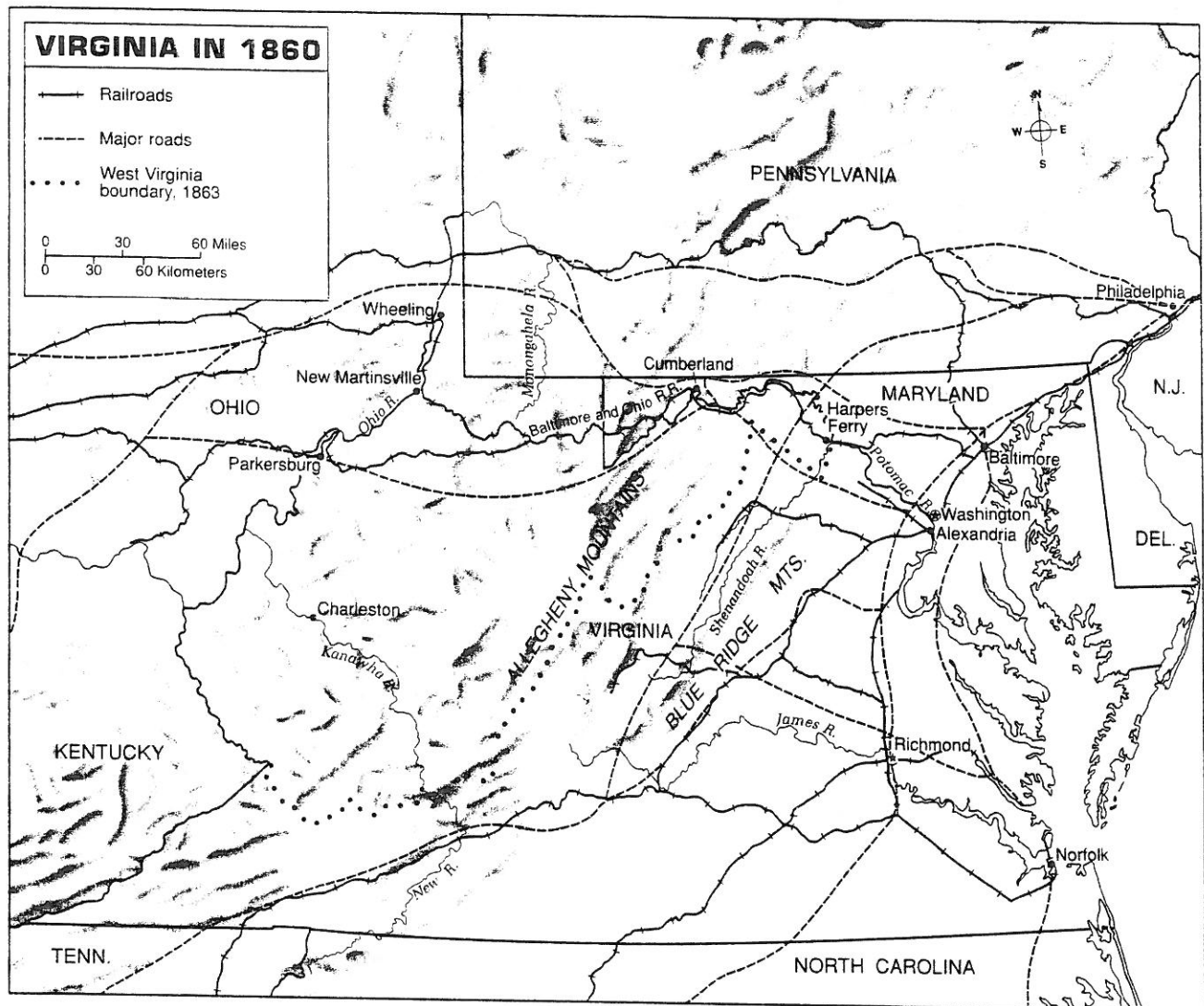
#### **SAYING NO TO THE B & O**

The need to improve transportation was another issue dividing westerners and easterners. Eastern Virginia had a network of roads and railroads. It also benefited from rivers that flowed into the Atlantic. Western Virginia had few roads, and those that existed were poor.

In 1818, western Virginians petitioned state lawmakers to build turnpikes in their region. They also wanted a canal to connect the Kanawha and James rivers. Such a system would enable westerners to send products to the coast for shipment to other states and overseas. After much debate, lawmakers agreed to fund the canal. But work on the project never got started because easterners opposed it.

Easterners also opposed western requests for money for railroads. In 1844, officials of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad—known as the B & O—asked the General Assembly for permission to extend its tracks from Harpers Ferry to the Ohio River. The route would run through the Shenandoah Valley, then follow the Kanawha River valley to the Ohio River.

Easterners opposed the B & O extension because it would link western and central Virginia to Baltimore, in Maryland. Such a link might cause the eastern Virginia cities of Richmond and Norfolk to lose trade. After western counties threatened to secede from the state, the General Assembly gave in. But they forbade the railroad to lay tracks farther west than present-day New Martinsville.



### A. FOCUS ON GEOGRAPHY

- Location** (a) Which cities are located along the James River? (b) Which city is located along the Kanawha River?
- Place** Describe two geographic differences between eastern and western Virginia.
- Interaction** What did westerners want the state of Virginia to do to improve the economy of their region?
- Movement** How might the building of the B & O extension have affected trade in Virginia and Maryland?
- Region** What physical and human characteristics helped to unify western Virginia?

### B. CRITICAL THINKING

- Analyzing Information** What natural advantages do cities along the James River have over cities along the Kanawha?
- Understanding Causes and Effects** How did geographic differences contribute to economic differences between western and eastern Virginia?