

MADISON COUNTY
JAMES RECORD COLLECTION

William Hooper Council: The Making of a Black Democrat and
Accommodationist Leader in Post-Reconstruction Alabama

I

Born a slave in Fayetteville, North Carolina, in 1848, and sold into North Alabama a decade later, William Hooper Council became the property of David C. Humphreys, Huntsville lawyer, political leader, and large landowner. Before the close of the Civil War Council shook loose the shackles of slavery and made his way to a Freedmen's school in Stevenson, Alabama. There he began a process that would continue unbroken until his death: self-education. His teacher then was a Quaker who risked the terrorist tactics of the white bullies to teach. Within two years, Council was assisting him and also faced the threats of growing Ku Klux Klan activity. In 1869, Council fled to Huntsville and began a school for Negroes. He quickly learned that public education and the future of the freedman was a political question. Becoming active in the Republican Party, Council was elected to serve as Assistant Enrolling Clerk in the Alabama Legislature, 1872-1874, and was the Republican party's unsuccessful candidate for the legislature in 1874.¹

After the 1874 elections Council changed his political affiliation from Radical Republican to Independent Republican and finally in 1877 to Democrat.² This was a surprising move for a man who was an ex-slave and a Republican officeholder, and it did not sit well with the

black community. Even though the Grant Administration in 1875 appointed Councilll Receiver-General of the Land Office of the Northern District of Alabama, a remunerative and prestigious post, Councilll did not accept the appointment. The stage was set for the achievement of what he prized more than anything else in life. He was named principal of the state Colored Normal School in Huntsville, a position he held, excepting 1876 and 1887, until his death in 1909.²

Councilll's political choices were based on his assessment that the Republican Party was not going to succeed in post reconstruction Alabama. He believed that the future of black education in the state would be in the hands of the Redeemers, the Conservative-Democrats. He also believed as he stated in an address in Tuscumbia, that "The republican party will grow tired of you . . . and like the bat who was disowned by the beasts and not recognized by the birds, you will find favor with neither democrats or republicans." The way to avoid this eventuality was for blacks to join with the Democrats, their former owners, and through a policy of enlightened accommodation achieve greater educational, political, and economic gains.³

A man of many parts—a classicist and lawyer admitted to practice before the Alabama Supreme Court in 1883, the founder and editor of a newspaper, the Huntsville Herald, from 1877 to 1884, an ordained A.M.E. minister, a Mason, husband and father--Councilll put the interest of his school above everything. He was principal of Huntsville Normal School and implemented industrial education before Tuskegee was founded or Booker T. Washington heard from. Louis R. Harlan, the editor of the Booker T. Washington Papers and author of a definitive biography of Washington, said of Councilll that he could "out-Booker Booker" and

"frequently did." Horace Mann Bond and August Meier have also indicated that Councilll was more of an accommodationist than Washington. Robert G. Sherer, who has done the closest study of Councilll, contends that both Washington and Councilll strove to please whites, "Washington--Northern industrialists, Councilll--Southern politicians."⁴ Councilll's error was betting on the wrong horse, not gambling." This paper contends that the political and economic conditions in the state in the 1870s set limits on the choices Councilll could make. There was only one horse he could bet on.

Since Booker T. Washington made himself into everybody's favorite Negro and Tuskegee made it into all the history books, William Hooper Councilll has become William Hooper Who? This study will examine the mainsprings of Councilll's radicalism and sources of his accommodationist position and assess the response to it by whites and blacks. To judge Councilll fairly is not to compare him to Washington who only began his tenure at Tuskegee in 1881, but to view his actions in the 1870s, within the context of the final days of radical control and the initial stages of Redemption. By using contemporary newspapers, letters, Councilll's speeches and writings, a clearer picture will emerge not only of Councilll but of the milieu in which he acted. Only then can Councilll be evaluated in the broader perspective of Post Reconstruction Alabama.

II

More important than the names of Councilll's white owners in North Carolina or Alabama was the identity of his own parents. Slaves though they were, each gave to Councilll an example of dogged determination to survive and be strong in adversity. His father gave to the boy a legacy of honor--an example of manhood denied so many slave families. By becoming his own man, a so called "fugitive slave," Councilll's father set an example of courage and independence that the boy would look to and sorely need in his development as a leader. No less did his mother influence him, as she struggled, though ill, to hold her family together when they were sold to a slave dealer in Richmond and then taken by another dealer into Alabama where they--mother and two sons, Cicero and William Hooper--were sold to D. C. Humphreys and placed on a plantation in Jackson County, east of Huntsville.⁵

When union troops moved into North Alabama in 1864, slaves left their plantations by droves. Councilll made his way to Stevenson where the Yankee soldiers had secured the railroad and where "neo-abolitionist" missionary teachers from the Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Society were bringing the rudiments of education to the blacks freed by the U. S. occupation of the area. One of those teachers, Wilmer Walton, took special interest in Councilll as he perceived the young ex-slave's active intelligence and keen desire to learn.⁶ Councilll later described his striving for an education in the midst of poverty:

I slept in a cotton pen a whole winter because I had no better place. I washed an only shirt and then sat down in the shade of a tree while it dried. I wore a pair of "Yankee" drawers for pants a whole winter. I wore low-cut shoes in winter, without socks. When a boy I never had an undershirt, nor dreamed of an overcoat. I plowed three days for an old Greenleaf's Arithmetic.

I had only split cedar for a light three years. Later, I walked eight miles, three times a week, for three lessons a week in Physics and Chemistry and paid the learned Professor fifty cents for each lesson.⁷

Because of the destitute condition of the area, the desperate need for teachers, and the hostility manifested by defeated Southerners to the presence of Yankee school teachers, there was an urgency to the education of William Hooper Council. A bequest channeled through the Pittsburgh Freedmen Aid Society in 1866 was used to purchase twenty acres of land with the idea of establishing a community along with a school, to be located at Stevenson, in Jackson County. Averyville, as it was called after the benefactor, was divided into lots which could then be purchased at easy terms by the freedmen.⁸ The community, the school, and the Yankee school teachers came under constant harassment. When the original Stevenson schoolhouse built in 1865 was removed three quarters of a mile east of Stevenson to Averyville and rebuilt in the Fall of 1866--all with the assistance of the blacks of the area--no sooner was it rebuilt and ready for opening than it was burned by an unknown incendiary. Two years later another schoolhouse was burned.⁹ Council's anger strengthened his resolve to learn and to teach.

The conditions around Stevenson are recorded in a report, dated Christmas day of 1865, from the Rev. T. M. Goodfellow, Sub-assistant Commissioner in Huntsville, to Gen. Swayne, Assistant Commissioner for Alabama's Freedmen's Bureau in Montgomery. Goodfellow wrote "the valleys and hills are full of a class of men who do the mean work for the whole country, and who cannot be controlled by the . . . weak arms of the civil authority."¹⁰ Another observer said of Stevenson, "the country there . . . reminds one of the country through which Dickens' Jo guided the

lady of Bleak House."¹¹ All of rural north Alabama was in a destitute condition in those years following the war. Even the land--the only thing of real value then--was unable, because of drought and crop failures, to sustain the population. Goodfellow wrote "can anything be done for the poor? The county cannot. Citizens have not the means, and until supplies reach us from the Societies of the North, if the Gov't does not provide parish [sic] they must."¹² Poor whites felt even poorer now that the slaves were not only freed but being assisted by the Government and private agencies and in open competition with them for the few jobs available.

Blacks and whites felt the economic pinch in those postwar years, and Stevenson's freedmen found themselves easy targets of poor white hostility. In the summer of 1868, R. D. Harper, State Superintendent of Education, wrote to General O. O. Howard, after visiting the Stevenson and Huntsville areas:

It should be borne in mind however that on account of failure of crops, the depreciation in the price of cotton and the continued hostility of the white population, the colored people are still very poor. So far as my observation goes it is with them a question of bread. . . . they are willing to labor and desire to sustain themselves and educate their children if possible. But it is not possible for them to do so under existing conditions.¹³

In those early Stevenson years Council had learned to scratch to make a living. During the war he served as valet or body servant to a Union officer. At another time, Council worked as a waiter at a hotel on Lookout Mountain near Chattanooga. He was married to Betty Council who was born in Alabama but had family in Chattanooga. Little is known about those years. When the Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Society turned over its educational efforts to The Home Mission Society of the

Presbyterian Church, Miss Starkweather, the teacher sent to be in charge, wrote of her initial visit to Stevenson:

Mr. Council the colored teacher who wrote the letters Miss Dean sent to yourself was our guide to Averyville. This evening mine hostess says they will have nothing to do with me, if I teach the colored children, so that is the word I go to bed upon. . . .

We have given out word that the school for colored children will open on next Monday in the Methodist Church. . . . I arrived here this A.M. as a teacher under the care of the Committee of Home Missions, of the General Assembly. I have two apologies for school rooms, the Methodist and Baptist Churches, neither of which could afford shelter from a storm.

In view of the deep poverty of the freedmen I would solicit a government appropriation of \$500--to provide a suitable room, or rather to replace the burned one, for those still down trodden people.

. . . Mr. Council employ at the rate of \$3.00 a week till I hear from you sir; he has taught two & a half months, and has received for his services a little more than \$19.00; he says he will have to go back to his old buisness of waiter; unless he can earn more than that. Mr. Council learned his letters in March, 64; he says he is the best scholar of all that school. He is just 21 and were he not a married man I should think he was worthy of a scholarship in the Ashman Institute. He will be very glad to belong to the Normal Class, if he can teach at the same time, he says there are several girls in this place that he thinks would do the same.¹⁴

In 1871 Congressional Hearings were held in Huntsville, investigating conditions and especially looking into Ku Klux Klan activity in the North Alabama area. John H. Wager, who had served as clerk to Colonel Edwin Beecher in charge of the Freedmen's Bureau, Huntsville office, testified:

In Jackson County, at Stevenson, there is a community (I suppose that Mr. Labin reported that fact) of some society from Pittsburgh that bought some ground there and put some negroes upon it; that it sold them the lots, and they were to pay for them by installments. I think the Freedmen's Bureau built a school-house and donated some money. That was burnt, I think, in the summer of 1868. They have been continually the mark for these disguised men to annoy and worry.

Question: You mean that colony?

Answer: Yes sir, that colony. The ladies that were teaching the school there have several times written to me letters, asking

military protection. I think General Crawford has the letters. I always forwarded them to him. . . . I see the Jackson County papers. I have seen a dozen accounts of outrages there until it got to be an old thing, and there seemed to be no way of doing anything with them, and I quit trying to do anything there.¹⁵

Several blacks who lived in Averyville also testified before the Committee. Sir Daniel, who fled to Huntsville in March, 1870, stated that "from about the last of January, in 1869, until I was broken up there, we never saw any peace at all. They would not let us be for a space of three weeks without coming to see us." When asked what these disguised men were after, he replied: "They wanted to burn the school-house," and they kept telling them, "all you Grant niggers will have to leave here or else . . . be killed."¹⁶

Councill was run out of Stevenson in February of 1869. In her Monthly School Report Miss Starkweather simply wrote in answer to the question of public sentiment towards Colored Schools: "Harsh, Colored Male assistant ordered to leave, a female employed." The month before in January, she had written in answer: "Rather harsh, night school broken up by threats."¹⁷ Knowing the kind of man he was, we can assume that Councill had stood up to these threats. The tranquility of the school and the community required that he leave. But he did not give up teaching. Within a month he had moved to Huntsville and started a school there on land owned by Reuben Jones, a prominent Black Republican who would be elected to the Alabama legislature in 1872.¹⁸

III

At Averyville, politics, religion, and social affiliations all went together bringing blacks there into a community of strength disproportionate to its numbers. The whites who associated with the community were outsiders, missionary or teacher types and a few ex-Union soldiers. Lines had been drawn pretty tautly separating the local whites of Stevenson from this black and bagger village. When Councill moved to Huntsville, he found himself in a much more fluid, heterogeneous situation. In Stevenson he had become a "race man"--absolutely, unflinchingly committed to his people. He knew that his first need as a freedman had been to secure enough education to stand on his own feet as a man, meaning enough learning to make a living and to make decisions. Beside freedom itself, education became the dominant value in Councill's life. Yet he had discovered in Averyville that education was a political question. It had been so before the war when the Alabama state legislature had made it against the law to teach slaves to read or write.¹⁹ It was even more so now that the slaves had been freed by the mighty arm of the federal government and initial efforts to set up schools had been achieved by the Freedmen's Bureau.²⁰ Throughout the United States education had traditionally been a local matter; in the South, especially in Alabama, it had been a private concern. It would remain so in the reconstruction-restoration years, as poor whites were apathetic and the more able class returned to their academies. The Freedmen's Bureau and the efforts of Yankee abolitionists-turned-missionary and teacher, imposing as they did federal or foreign influence and controls, were politically untenable in Alabama. If blacks were to be educated in a

systematic, permanent way, it would have to be an undertaking generated and perpetuated from within their own ranks.²¹

Yet this undertaking was a political question, a matter of votes and allocation of revenues. The passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had created a situation in Alabama where the freedmen could vote, while many ex-confederates were proscribed, thereby giving the blacks a potential numerical strength at the polls that was indeed tantalizing. Because Unionist Republicans--antebellum Whigs and Douglass or Bell Democrats who had opposed secession--were also in many instances proscribed, the political chaos of dislocation and defeat was accompanied by a power vacuum within the ranks of the Republican party as well. Councilll saw an opportunity to become a political spokesman for his people through the party.²²

Population figures show why Councilll might turn to politics. The 1870 Census for Huntsville showed a total population of 5,378 with 2,719 whites and a close 2,659 blacks. Madison County totals were 31,253, with blacks having the upper ranking, 15,750 to 15,503 for whites.²³ Translated into political terms, it meant that in free elections blacks with their white allies could exercise some political clout. Thus Councilll had good reason for looking to political action as a means to achieve educational objectives for his people.

Realizing that he had much to learn about power and politics, he set about learning by doing: an educational principle he espoused to his students. As "spouter" for the Republican party, he became an orator, improving his rhetoric, grammar and composition, and broadening his reading and thinking at the same time he was getting a first rate

political education. Huntsville, he discovered, was a good place in which to learn and to teach.

The vast majority of Huntsville's whites were Southerners, in fact, native Alabamians.²⁴ The city's antebellum aristocracy provided the cultural leadership and stability in an era when their political power was threatened. Before the war they had been Democrats and Whigs and had tolerated their differences. This became harder to do when war divided them first into secessionists/cooperationists, then into Confederates/Unionists, and finally into Secession Democrats/Whig Unionists, Douglass Democrats and Republicans.²⁵ The scalawags, as these latter were called, represented some of Huntsville's finest families: Jeremiah Clements, Nicholas Davis, and D. C. Humphreys. These men gave legitimacy and leadership to Unionism throughout the state.²⁶

Carpetbaggers made up the other significant group in the city. All outsiders underwent a "sniff" test of sorts. Not all Yankees "stank." Since the early occupation of Huntsville by Union forces in 1863, Huntsvillians had grown used to them and had learned to differentiate between those who had something to offer to the community and those who came empty-handed, the latter including the much hated carpetbaggers. Most Northerners who came to the city and its environs during and after the war wanted to settle and remain aloof from political controversy.

In the 1871 Congressional Investigation of Conditions in the South, Huntsville native William M. Lowe, a liberal Democrat of strong Unionist sentiment, testified that as a candidate for the legislature in 1870, he believed he "received the suffrage of every northern soldier living in the county." He especially had the "active and warm support

of Colonel Van Valkenburg, of Captain Day, of Captain Fordyce, of the banking firm of Fordyce and Rison, and of a number of other northern men and northern soldiers who lived in the county." These Northerners were not called carpetbaggers because that term was reserved exclusively for Northerners who came into the area "for the purpose of holding office, and out of it making money" or for the purpose of associating with the freedmen even in benevolent roles as teachers and missionaries.²⁷

Teachers and missionaries usually don't receive a bad press, but those who came to Huntsville in the wake of the Civil War bore with the white community's anguish and contempt. As late as March, 1868, R. D. Harper wrote in his monthly report:

The amount of self denial and suffering which they are heroically [sic] enduring deserves a better record than they are likely to receive. Destitute of all the comforts of home life, ostracized by the people of the South, cut off from all social life, despised and persecuted & their very lives in danger, they are standing up nobly & fearlessly at their posts. . . . School houses have been burned and those that are still standing are in danger. Teachers find it difficult to obtain boarding in families of white people, and are despised and threatened with personal violence. Recently two of our teachers have [been] beaten and driven from our work. Never was the spirit of opposition more bitter and defiant than at the present time. The Civil authorities being in sympathy with this feeling wink at all these outrages and the military located at few points are unable to reach the perpetrators of these wrongs until they have been concealed or have made their escape. . . . The truth is--we are in the midst of a reign of terror.²⁸

Much of the hostility that was addressed to the teachers was an indirect way to get at the person who epitomized a local carpetbagger type: The Reverend A. S. Lakin, the chief organizer of The Northern Methodist Episcopal Church in Alabama--or as he called it, the "only" Methodist church. Lakin, while principally a clergyman, became embroiled in education and politics. Controversy apparently followed the man wherever he went. In his study, Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama,

Walter Fleming says that Lakin "was much addicted to fabrication and exaggeration" as he acted to drive a wedge between southern whites and blacks, attempting to swing blacks from their Southern Methodist identification with their previous owners to an affiliation with the northern church.²⁹ The KKK testimony of Howell Echols, a colored elder of the M. E. Church, indicates the situation Lakin stepped into and exacerbated. Echols had been promised by Mr. William Moore, a white member of his M. E. Church, a piece of land for "the worship of the colored people so long as it remained in that church" (the Tennessee Conference). Mr. Bill Brandon, bricklayer, helped to do the building. The blacks took pledges, worked, saved, and built the church. Then it was used by Union forces for over a year and reverted to Mr. Moore. But Moore said the church belonged to the Methodist Church South and that since the newly freed blacks had become a part of Lakin's Cincinnati Conference, they would have to find another church or else return to the Southern Church. Echols said that although the blacks had built that church and felt it was theirs, they gave it up.³⁰ Such was the power of Lakin among the blacks. Samuel Horton, a white Methodist of Blount County, testified that Lakin was "as fine a man; if there is any Christian on earth, he is one."³¹

Several attempts were made on Lakin's life--in 1868 his boarding room was shot into, endangering him, his family, and the Raineses, another carpetbagger couple. In 1874 he was again a target. These two attempts were attributed to men in disguise.³² If the Klan was after his skin, so too were some Huntsville blacks who earlier in 1867 wrote to General Swayne, accusing Lakin of misappropriating bricks and

lumber from a church he promised to build for another building--a bank.

The letter concluded:

The col'd people of this place would die for you and Genl Kolas but we can't stand & sustain such men as this Lakin he pretended to be our friend until he got all we had. . . .³³

Lakin became something of a national symbol of the disreputable carpetbagger when he accepted the Presidency of the University of Alabama, obviously a political present, from the hands of the State Board of Education. He and State Superintendent Cloud went to Tuscaloosa for Lakin's assumption of duty only to be turned back by the acting president and a Ku Klux Klan mob. To celebrate the event or at least to capture the spirit of it, the inimitable editor of the Tuscaloosa Independent Monitor, Ryland Randolph, published an original woodcut of Cloud and Lakin with his Ohio carpetbag hanging from a tree, the work of the KKK, symbolized by a bareback mule bearing those initials smugly walking away from the dangling bodies. And if the picture didn't say it plainly enough, the caption read "A Prospective Scene in the City of Oaks, 4th of March, 1869." The message to get out of town before it was too late was answered with a quick retreat back to Huntsville.³⁴

Being the emissary for the Methodist Episcopal Church, Lakin actively supported the efforts of the school teachers funded by the Freedmen's Aid Society of his church under Dr. R. S. Rust. Lakin became the local embodiment of the alien yankee presence. He embittered local feelings toward black Methodists as well as white; all who identified with the northern church, were in local parlance, called "Republican" Methodists and were hated for their political affiliation.³⁵

By 1870 blacks and native whites in Huntsville had reached a stand-off arrangement acknowledging black numerical power on the one hand and white supremacy on the other. Both groups were decidedly color conscious but not entirely cohesive along the color line. Each had its own structure; whites, for the most part, resuming antebellum social, economic, and political positions and attitudes. Blacks hastily built upon the small but highly respected free black base of the prewar years and looked to the freedmen who had been skilled slaves and town-house servants of the antebellum aristocracy of the city for fresh leadership.

There was a correlation between the quality of the cultural leaders of both races: many shared the same names, the Hendleys, Donegans, Lowes, Fearn, Binfords, Weedens, Brandons, Betts, Battles, and some even the same fortunes, the Townsends, Steeles, Scruggs. Freedom came relatively easy to these slaves of the "privileged" as they had to varying degrees already tasted more freedom than most slaves and already enjoyed the rudiments of social organization. They readily organized--often with the cooperation of the white society--their own churches, lodges, and schools.³⁶

IV

His school established, in 1870 Councilll jumped into politics. Taking an active part in the formation of the Republican Club of Madison County, Councilll served on the nominating committee. It was an auspicious beginning of a decade: blacks and whites working together in a Republican party numerically dominated, of course, by blacks but effectively run by a blend of scalawags, carpetbaggers, and blacks.³⁷

The effectiveness of the group and its potential for action and elective office roused the editor of the weekly Democrat to create dissension within its ranks. J. Withers Clay--of the Clay clan which had produced his father, Governor Clement Comer Clay, and his brother, Clement Claiborne Clay, the U. S. Senator who later served in the Confederate Senate--was the cranky, irascible Democrat who used his paper as a club, a sword, a dagger, and sometimes a bouquet or a syringe to bully, cajole or charm his readers into line behind the Democratic party.³⁸

Dissension threatened a mass meeting of the local Republican party in June, 1870. In an effort to promote unity among carpetbaggers, scalawags, and blacks, Nicholas Davis proposed the election of two whites and three blacks as delegates to the state convention in Selma. Because of the large number of blacks and black candidates, however, the local convention was rowdy and disorganized, with candidates breaking into small groups to gather their loyal followers. Out of it all, Councilll emerged as a convention alternate and was elected to the 13-man County Executive Committee. His political star was rising. But it was going to be at the cost of party unity. An editorial in the Republican Advocate (June 24, 1870) described the situation:

The Republican Meeting on Saturday, was a large one, . . . and somewhat resembled a New York Democrat Tammany Hall Meeting. There were as many candidates as eager to go as Delegates to Selma, as if by so doing each one was to be made Governor himself, or Minister to Timbuctoo!³⁹

While the issue of delegate selection excited commotion, the issue of Governor William H. Smith's renomination revealed a serious rift in party ranks, a rift which would becloud Council's political future. Many blacks charged that Smith had failed to act forcefully against the Ku Klux Klan. Their "soft on the Klan" claims had been reinforced in the Democratic press. Black and white Radicals, including Council, made "violent speeches" denouncing Governor Smith and splitting the convention into what appeared to be youthful hot-heads of a more Radical bent and reasoned level-heads of a more moderate temper.⁴⁰

What may have appeared a local contest--after all Governor Smith was from North Alabama too--was in effect a statewide rift between carpetbaggers led by Senator George E. Spencer, J. J. Hinds, and I. D. Sibley and scalawags led by Governor Smith. In this contest blacks and baggers were obliged to accept Governor Smith's renomination in Selma, but locally they were most encouraged by the party's nomination of James T. Rapier, a mulatto, for Secretary of State. Yet this choice in all probability cost the Republicans the election.⁴¹

By October 12, 1870, the Huntsville Republicans were in a shambles. On that Wednesday--Columbus Day--a Radical County Meeting was held in the Court Room to nominate candidates for the State Legislature. Outside the Court House Nicholas Davis had gathered a crowd to hear speeches from Governor Smith, Senator Willard Warner, and Judge S. F. Rice. W. B. Figures, Advocate editor, had hoped to bring the radical and moderate wings together but failed. The irrepressible editor of the

Democrat delighted in making jest of the Republican rift and fools of the Republicans.

Radical County Meeting

About 11 o'clock today, the Radicals met in the Court Room, and, on motion, T. J. Fullerton (one of Col. J. C. Bradley's "new comers") was called to the Chair and Wm. Council, colored, appointed Secretary. . . .

Geo. Williams--the irrepressible darkey Stentor--arose within the bar and started to deliver himself in a most excited and indignant style. He said "De cullurd folks had de majority and didn' have justice. Some five or six try to have it all dere own way." The Chair called him to order and, with the help of one of his own unadulterated black color, got Williams to sit down. . . .

After a considerable lapse of time, the Committee returned and I. D. Sibley Chairman, reported that a majority of the Committee nominate Justin Ronayne (carpet-bagger) Wm. Gaston, col'd, and Geo. W. Kennard, Scallawag, the minority are opposed to the nomination. . . .

George Womack (col'd) then, moved that the meeting elect the nominees to represent the Republican party for the next two years in the State Legislature. Carried. So they were "elected."

Wm. Council (colored) appears and declares that he is for doing what will be for the good of the rising generation, and that he is opposed to, at least, one of the nominees (understood to be George Kennard) who will prove a dead weight. He warns them to beware what they are about. He can see difficulties in the dim distance of the future. He wants to bury the Democratic party beyond the reach of resurrection. He said these little fellows, who were running around with stiff shirt collars and bosoms, were not proper leaders.

George Womack and one or two other darkey's, with such collars and bosoms, retorted that he was one of the same sort, and no more than any body else.

Councill was called to order and sat down. Another darkey arose and said those culled people were ignorant and did not understand what they were doing and undertook to put the question on acceptance or rejection again, and the negroes voted again. . . .⁴²

Councill was seconded in his displeasure over the selection of George W. Kennard by Jos. C. Bradley and W. B. Figures. The latter gentlemen were opposed to Roynane also.⁴³ The editor of the Democrat hastened to note: "Radicalism Gone Up in Madison.--the nominations . . . were a death blow to the Radical party in this County--the Radicals themselves being the judges."⁴⁴ On the 17th Clay was at it again.

While reporting on a Radical rally at which Governor Smith, Senator Warner, and Judge Rice spoke, Clay noted that Rapier--unannounced--gave a better, more appreciated speech than they and also noted that Gaston, Kennard, and George Williams, an independent candidate, spoke, followed by Wm. Council, "colored striker for the regular nominees."⁴⁵ Although the party was suffering, Council was making a difference in their rallies. Even Clay began to show respect by responding to him in an editorial and not resorting to mimicry. Council had taken issue with the Democrat for calling the Republicans a party of thieves and fools. Clay took note:

Wm. Council, colored Radical spouter in this county, objects to the application of the above term to his party. He says, he understands the Democrats to apply the term "Fools" to the colored people, and the term "thieves" to the white Radicals. He takes the "better horn of the dilemma for his own race; for there is not, necessarily, moral guilt in merely being a fool; a man may be a "natural born fool," and can't help it. But a thief is a criminal, morally and legally, and a fool for being so."⁴⁶

The local party rent itself further when the Executive Committee--or a majority of it--nominated and broadly circulated a new slate for the legislature.⁴⁷ Election results in 1870 confirmed the party's damage. The Democrats swept the state winning in Madison County by a majority of approximately 900 votes. The legislative races, in which Council had been most involved, saw the Democrats winning by over 900 votes.⁴⁸

The election taught him that politics was tough, and that without leadership, cooperation, and full black participation, the Republicans could not hope "to bury the Democratic party beyond the reach of resurrection." He learned that to be a respected leader he had to broaden his contacts and his constituency. Speech-making became his entree to Republican rallies. His radicalism lent itself to a rabble-rousing style

which made him a popular orator. Politics, especially speech-making, had a cathartic effect on him, providing a release for hostilities.

In his reflections on power, perhaps hovering in the periphery of Councill's consciousness, was a growing awareness of the dominance in his life of "white" power. Slavery, which had shaped his earliest perceptions, represented stark white power. The Civil War was a further reflection of white power gone mad for good and evil. The benevolent Yankee teachers and preachers were white. All the sources of power were white--even the KKK in its white sheets. He may have felt like a hobo jumping a train at a crossing. It didn't really matter much whether the train was headed north or south, because all the engineers, conductors, and crew were white.

V

Councill was learning in the early seventies to carry himself wherever his star took him. He was active in the church, serving as a marshall for picnics and teaching Sunday School. At Stevenson, he had affiliated with the Methodist Church and he affiliated with the A. M. E. Church in Huntsville. In Stevenson, also, he had joined a Temperance Society connected with the Freedmen's School. When he started his school in Huntsville in March of 1869, he initiated a Sunday School program and a Temperance Society.⁴⁹ He even joined the Masons and the Immaculates and became identified with the black elite.⁵⁰ He was every inch a man--a gentleman. Force of character and courage he possessed in plenitude. He maintained an open mind and was always eager to learn and to think deeply on a subject. He liked to reason and to argue a point, developing it as he waxed more eloquent. He was a powerful leader

and teacher, a man who would rise above the crowd in any place or situation. Yet there were some things about himself that all the learning and moralizing he besieged himself with didn't change.

In the milieu of loss, hate, and revenge so rampant in the late sixties and early seventies, a cool-headed, sleight-handed gambler would have fared better than an unsophisticated, rather straight-laced young school teacher and politician. The self-interest of the gambler would have filled a void in Councill's character: he was totally lacking in guile. Not only was he a straight-shooter, but he always shot from the hip. His targets changed, but his aim did not. Fortunately he usually missed! He really wanted to.

The slave experience did not allow Councill to savor a time in a young man's life when he may lustily grope toward full manhood, make mistakes, drink from many cups, and still start fresh in the morning. Councill's training was not that of a young pup--that was reserved for the white aristocracy--but rather that of a trapped Alabama bobcat. He was a complex mixture of action: a self-generating spiritual source springing deep from within; and reaction: the combination of instinctive feigns, flinches, and attacks triggered in response to a hostile environment and usually tempered by elaborate strategy and disciplined role-playing. There were times, however, when he was so quick to react that the gun was pulled, the fist extended before his usual self-control could protect him from himself.

But in the early 1870s he had himself together and was working hard addressing the needs of his people. He felt that to be effective as an educator, to ensure that his people had schools and teachers and the money to sustain them, he had to do his job as a politician.

Councill proved such an effective "spouter" for his party that he was selected to serve the 1872-1874 General Assembly as Assistant Engrossing Clerk.⁵¹ This position in the inner circle of state government exposed him to a wide assortment of his fellow man--both white and black--and to the swirl of political agitation.

Montgomery, located in the heart of the black belt with its predominant black population, was a heady place for a young black to be. Councill's radicalism was undoubtedly fed by such black leaders as Jeremiah Haralson of Dallas County, John Dozier of Perry County, Phillip Joseph of Mobile, Engrossing Clerk with Councill and President of an 1874 Civil Rights Convention of Colored Citizens, and especially by James T. Rapier, whose advocacy of labor and land reforms was shared in by Councill.⁵²

A cursory perusal of the newspaper files for 1873-74 gives an idea of Councill's political activity.

Jan. 17, 1873 - Made speech at Court House Rally.

Sept. 11, 1873 - Councill now in town "looking after the approaching election."

Oct. 30, 1873 - Makes "short but spicy speech" at Republican County Convention.

Jan. 3, 1874 - Delivers "lengthy address" at Labor Union meeting.

Feb. 5, 1874 - Spearheads organizational meeting of Labor Union in Madison County.

March 5, 1874 - As District Agent, helps Jackson County organize a Labor Union.

March 26, 1874 - Republicans meet to nominate mayoral candidate. Councill opposes Nick Davis, supports Dr. Ridley.

June 4, 1874 - Councill will probably be Radical candidate for Legislature.

June 6, 1874 - "Equal Rights" Council read an address to the Colored People of Alabama.

June 25-27, 1874 - Council attends Equal Rights Convention in Montgomery, resolutions signed by Council.

July 16, 1874 - "Unterrified" met at Court house and elected delegates to Montgomery Convention.

July 23, 1874 - Big Rally at Beaver Dam, Council addresses the crowd.

Aug. 6, 1874 - Grand Rally at Lincoln Club #1, July 29, Council President

Sept. 24, 1874 - Council spoke at Mayesville. Shot at on way home.⁵³

VI

Council's activities in 1874 centered around organizing local branches of the National Labor Union in North Alabama and campaigning for the passage of the Civil Rights Bill. Under James Rapier's lead, Alabama in January 1871⁵⁴ became the first southern state to launch a state Negro union movement. Unlike urban industrial labor in the North, Rapier and Council argued that black tillers of the soil needed lower land rents rather than shorter hours and more school houses rather than poor houses. Because Council had local and state connections with Republican party men, he used the party's organization and constituency to organize branches of the National Labor Union. Party rolls became union rolls. Spero and Harris, in The Black Worker: The Negro and The Labor Movement, contend that this close association between Republican politics and union organization weakened the labor movement, arguing that black leaders were "more interested in keeping the Negro loyal to Republican politicians than they were in his problems as a workingman,

or in labor reform, or in bridging the gap between the white and black labor classes."⁵⁵ These charges, if modified to fit the southern black's peculiar labor situation, could be pressed against Councill's organizing efforts. By attaching black labor reform to the Republican banner, the failure of the party in 1874 doomed the union too.⁵⁶

The economic purposes of the union deserved recognition and airing in their own right. At the first organizational meeting of the Huntsville Union, Councill, assisted by Nicholas Davis, secured the following resolutions of purpose:

1. Each member of the union agrees to form . . . ourselves into a Society to be known as the Madison County Branch of the Labor Union of the State of Alabama, and pledge ourselves to be governed by all the rules and regulations made by the State Convention of the Labor Union for the government of the same, held in the city of Montgomery, November 10th, 1873.
2. Whereas we believe it to be a correct principle that those who cultivate the soil should strive to become the owners of it, and whereas it is a recognized truth that no country ever prospered in which labor was not remunerated and respected, therefore
3. Resolved 1st,--That it is the sense of this Labor Union in view of the high rates at which the tilable lands of the country are rented and in consideration of the quality of such lands which are left at waste and not in cultivation, that the laboring population should simply or in combination become the purchasers instead of the lessees of the land, whenever upon suitable terms such bargains can be made.
4. Resolved 2nd,--That a committee of five--whose duty it shall be to aid all members of this "union" in the purchase of lands, further to aid and encourage all parties in the sale thereof, in view of giving permanence and stability to the laboring classes of our population--be appointed, . . .
. . . said committee: Nich. Davis, W. H. Councill, A. W. McCullough, Wm. Gaston and Sandy Bynum.
5. That the executive committee is hereby authorized to take any steps which may appear proper to bring about a reduction of the high rent paid for land, and produce higher wages, and

prompt payment of the same, and do all things whatsoever they think expedient for the elevation of the laboring classes.

6. That whenever it shall seem necessary the executive Committee of the Labor Union shall appoint an Agent, whose duty it shall be to suggest a place and plan of immigration.⁵⁷

Here was opportunity during the Depression of the 1870s to bring black and white workers together in common cause for class interests. And it might have worked in the fusion politics of the late 1870s and 1880s.⁵⁸ But in 1874, the race issue pushed aside class concerns and limited the union to serving only as a Republican vehicle. Councill used it as such later that year to garner the party's nomination for the legislature.

Union proselytizing also lent itself to civil rights advocacy. It was hard for him to address a crowd and not wax nigh hysterical on civil rights. No one it seems could speak dispassionately on the subject. The editor of the Democrat eagerly equated Councill's urgings on civil rights with utterances favoring social equality and miscegenation. To alert Democrats to the radical drift of Negro sentiment in Madison, Clay reproduced an editorial reporting a speech Councill made six months previously, before the Negro Labor Union of Madison County, on January 6, 1874:

He [Councill] gave an account of his recent trip to Washington, as a delegate to the National Labor Union, his enjoyment of perfect equality in the first class theater and opera houses of that city, his pride in the hearty reception given him and other delegates by President Grant and Charles Sumner, and the encouragement both of those distinguished gentlemen gave them to claim all their rights, with the assurance that they would soon obtain all they asked. He assured his hearers that the civil rights bill would become a law within thirty days, and, then, triumphantly declared that the strongest Government on earth would see that the colored people should have equal rights. Mr. Sheriff would then, be forced to put colored men on the juries; and they would go as freely as white men in cars, hotels,

theaters, etc. He said, if, then, he should go into the Huntsville Hotel or a railroad car and offered to pay for first class accommodations, and they were refused and an attempt was made to put him out, they would have to do it over his dead body.⁵⁹

Clay used Councilll to incite in his white readers a heightened consciousness of the race issue and the threat to white supremacy posed by the Civil Rights Bill. The impending November gubernatorial and legislative race was the top news story of 1874, and working up white fever by making the blood boil over the heated issue of integration and mixed marriages was the single-minded pursuit of the racist editor. Unlike some of his Black Belt colleagues who soft-pedalled the race issue to win black votes, Clay called upon white wives and daughters to rally their menfolk to the preservation of the white family and maintenance of racial purity by voting against the party of social equality and miscegenation.⁶⁰

Councilll, on the other hand, used the Civil Rights Bill to attract black support to his candidacy for the legislature. He projected the image of a fighter, willing to risk his life for his rights as a man and a citizen. Some of his hyperbole would have been accepted as defense of Southern manhood and honor had he been white. But for a black man to carry on in the same vein smacked of "uppityness." To insure his own party's support of his brave stand Councilll offered two Resolutions at a Civil Rights meeting in Huntsville June 6, 1874. He called for the full endorsement of the Sumner Civil Rights Bill and for the Republican party to withhold support from any candidate not pledging that support.⁶¹

A blow to Councilll's united front came when the new editor of the Advocate, G. M. Johnston, the Republican mouthpiece, announced that

the paper could not support the Civil Rights Bill, as it was bound to cause white Republicans to desert, thus killing the Negro's future. He warned that blacks would lose their educational gains. Furthermore, with an education-property qualification for voting, they would lose their vote.⁶² Johnston's Advocate was not the only Republican paper that spoke against the Civil Rights Bill. The Florence Republican echoed the Advocate, and the State Journal cautioned: "while the constitution may guarantee a certain right, it may be very inexpedient to exercise it."⁶³

Hesitation was not yet built into Councilll's character, but the ensuing campaign would make permanent inroads on his bravado. The air grew so tense in the Fall of 1874 that Councilll may have carried a gun with him as he campaigned about the countryside.⁶⁴ The presence of United States troops quartered in Huntsville served to mitigate flare-ups in the city, but at Meridianville, Triana, Whitesburg, and Maysville trouble loomed.⁶⁵

Councilll was not sidetracked by the temerity of others. At the Madison County Republican party nominating convention, he enthusiastically cheered Nicholas Davis when he said ". . . if you candidates don't stand up for equal rights and fair play, I'll see you farther in hell than a red fox can run in ninety days."⁶⁶ Councilll called again for all candidates of the party to endorse Sumner's Civil Rights Bill, saying he "couldn't be half free and half slave" and demanding the right if he so chose for his son "to attend the University of Alabama." Councilll was chosen by acclamation to be his party's nominee for the legislature. Accepting the party's endorsement, he alluded to the frequency with which his old master had "raised his shirt tail." In

commenting on the speech, editor Clay observed that Councilll's old master, D. C. Humphreys, was by "natural inference" either "very cruel" or Councilll "was a very bad nigger."⁶⁷ The inference Councilll wanted to convey was that he was a fighter--a worthy advocate for the black man and the black man's "nigger."

Perhaps Councilll and his fellow Radicals spoke so boldly in 1874 because they were quite literally "asking for trouble." It was a notorious fact that the presence of United States troops in an area during an election made the difference between either fair or fradulent elections or Republican or Democratic victories and maybe both.⁶⁸ Both sides played a dangerous game, the Republicans played "Wolf" while the Democrats played "Bully." The Democrats used intimidation and scare tactics up to and just short of the point that the Republicans would call "Wolf." "Bully" turned out to be the more effective tactic: When the Huntsville Republicans did call "Wolf," their appeal was ignored by Washington.

In September, 1874, two incidents, similar in nature, were reported in the papers and to Washington. On the 3rd, Z. E. Thomas, the United States Marshal was shot at by an "assassin, who was concealed in the bushes by the roadside." He and another man were returning from a political rally. The incident was attributed to "the active part Thomas has taken in the political campaign."⁶⁹

On September 17, another nocturnal shooting occurred, this one involving Councilll. The Montgomery State Journal carried a report of the incident similar to one Councilll sent in protest to Washington. The article republished in the Advocate was entitled "Ku Klux at Work." It described the scene:

. . . while W. H. Councill, candidate for the Legislature, in company with two other parties, was returning from a Republican club meeting, near Maysville about 14 miles from Huntsville, . . . some persons, concealed within an enclosure skirted with small trees and bushes, called out to them. "Halt you d___ Radical s___ of ___" and immediately opened fire upon them. About five shots were fired, one passing within a few inches of Councill's head, and another penetrated the front part of his saddle. Councill and his party luckily escaped by riding off at full speed. The parties are yet unknown. We learn that several threats have been made to break up that club. . . . The saddle was brought to the Marshal's office and the ball, which proved to be a large buckshot was taken from it.⁷⁰

H. C. Binford, Secretary of the Madison County Republican Party Executive Committee, also addressed a brief appeal to George H. Williams, the Attorney-General of the United States, asking him to send more troops. "The democratic party," he claimed, "have been so bold in their threats that the colored people will not come to the polls unless they have some assurance that they will be protected in their rights."⁷¹

Finally on October 23rd, with less than two weeks until elections, U. S. Marshal Thomas sent another call for help to Attorney-General Williams. Reminding Williams of the firings upon himself and other political speakers, he reported that he had "definite information" that previously reported militia activity on the part of white citizens was "nothing more nor less than White Leagues whose avowed object is the prevention of a fair election." What convinced him of this was an arms build-up. In view of these activities, he requested that a "much larger force" of cavalry be sent to protect the citizens in their free exercise of elections.⁷²

The Democrat called Thomas and Councill liars, contending that by supporting the Civil Rights Bill they knew they couldn't win unless they

had the aid of United States troops.⁷³ The election in Madison County was close enough to speculate that placement of troops out in the county to counter Democratic intimidation and fraud would have made the difference. George S. Houston only carried the county by 74 votes and William Hooper Council lost by about 174 votes in the county but by only two votes in Huntsville, where troops protected black voters.⁷⁴ His avid support of the Civil Rights Bill undoubtedly helped kill his chances to win elective office. That bill caused white Alabama males of both parties to see red. In municipal elections held earlier in 1874, where the color line was not drawn, the Huntsville Republicans had been able to elect a mayor and five councilmen.⁷⁵

Huntsville's Republicans would still have some clout in local elections, but they were finished on the state level. Federal patronage was about all that was left to quarrel over.⁷⁶

At the congressional post mortem hearings, chaired by Republican Congressman John Coburn of Indiana, a lone black man testified in Washington, D. C. about the Huntsville-Madison County election. He was G. R. Williams, a patronage recipient of James T. Rapier and Senator George E. Spencer, holding a menial job in the Government Printing Office where he gathered wood for the engine room and cleaned up, for a salary of about \$60.00 a month. Judging the source of his livelihood and the fact that he was in Huntsville at the time of elections helping to organize Republican votes, Williams not surprisingly supported Council whom he declared was "as good and as intelligent as anybody," with "a heap more sense than some of the white men today." Williams testified that the Democrats purchased a good many black votes, some

with new pairs of boots, others with money. Black men were kept from voting he said, and that made the difference in who won.⁷⁷

Having failed at the polls Councilll began studying his options. The Democrat announced on March 4, 1875, that he had been confirmed as the Receiver of Public Moneys in the Huntsville Land Office. Editor Clay then commented:

We hear it hinted that the bestowal of the office on Councilll is only nominal, not real--that it is not expected that he will be able to give the body of 15,000, and the office will revert to Blackwell. Hence the appointment of Councilll is only a trick, a cheat, a sop to conciliate the African cerberus, which it was never intended he should devour. We shall see.⁷⁸

Unlike other black political leaders in Reconstruction Alabama such as Rapier, Holland Thompson, and Jack Turner, Councilll saw himself as a school teacher, first, and a politician only incidentally.⁷⁹ His local black constituency could not foot the educational bill or sustain black institutional growth in a climate of white racism and economic stagnation. Like his ex-owner, D. C. Humphreys, he could have taken a patronage position and done quite well for himself.⁸⁰ But that would have been deserting his people and his commitment to education.

VII

In early 1875, when the newly formed Democratic Board of Trustees for the Huntsville Normal School called for applications for the principalship of the school, Councilll, the Republican, seized his opportunity. This was something he may have worked for while an Assistant Enrolling Clerk for the legislature. And that would have given him some claim to the job. When he won the position he may have had another, less obvious, reason for celebration.

The school that Council was called upon to lead in 1875 could trace its lineal descent back to the Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Society and to the desire on the part of this group to use the bequest of the Reverend Charles Avery, a native of New York who spent the greater part of his life and his self-made fortune in the Pittsburgh area of Pennsylvania.⁸¹ The Pittsburgh Freedmen's Aid Society which sent missionaries and teachers into Stevenson, Alabama, and purchased the land called Averyville and educated that young ex-slave named William Hooper Council was carrying out an Avery bequest. In letters to C. W. Buckley, State Superintendent of Education, the secretary of the Pittsburgh Society expressed the philosophy of that group toward their mission of establishing a normal in Huntsville:

Our Board may be able to give direction to a large sum of money for a normal. Huntsville is the place that strikes us most favorably now. An act of incorporation by the legislature of Alabama--embracing in its incorporators some of the officials and most respected people of the state--with the prospect of kind treatment of the institution would probably be essential.⁸²

In a September letter to Buckley, the Society's secretary reiterated that "everything will depend" on the "feeling manifested by prominent gentlemen there." If they are "cordial and friendly disposed" he predicted the normal school would be established. In another letter he wrote:

So far as it can be done without real sacrifice of principles and rights we regard it as of the utmost importance to conciliate the whites.⁸³

This is the language of accommodation, the language William Hooper Council adopted when he realized that "everything" depended upon it. There can be no doubting it, Council--the ex-slave from Averyville--was the spiritual heir of the Avery bequest to found a normal and to educate and Christianize persons of the African race. Just as

the Freedmen's Aid Societies traveled what Richard B. Drake called "the road from partnership in Radical Reconstruction to partnership in sectional compromise," so too would Councilll travel that road from radicalism to accommodation and bourbon redemption. It was indeed "a strange one" for old abolitionists and ex-slaves to travel.⁸⁴

It is quite probable that Councilll knew of the Pittsburgh Society's efforts to start a normal school in Huntsville. He was, after all, one of its first "graduates" and had been a front line fighter in the trenches against klan attacks. As conditions worsened in 1866-1867, the Stevenson teachers probably did discuss the possibility of moving to Huntsville. Matilda Hindman, who conducted that first normal in Huntsville, was one of the workers for the Society. Travelli coordinated the teachers at both places.⁸⁵ The conciliatory approach toward local white leadership, the necessity to accommodate local prejudice and to establish a black school with white approval was the philosophy Councilll was early exposed to. When Miss Hindman left the employ of the Pittsburgh group and moved over to the Methodist Aid Society with its carpetbag Christianity and neo-abolitionist leanings, the non-sectarian, accommodationist legacy of Avery was abandoned.⁸⁶ When Councilll saw an opportunity to take back from the sectarians what the Pittsburgh Society with Miss Hindman started, he did so. To the Rust group he was an opportunist usurper, and they never forgave him. In his eyes and in the light of history, he was justified.

VIII

Any thoughts Councilll may have had of permanence when he was selected to be principal of the State Normal with its new Democratic beginnings were premature. In those days a school could be a person--the teacher, a place--the schoolhouse, or a thing--the articles of incorporation. In this case, the act establishing the school made the Board of Trustees the school.⁸⁷ The Huntsville normal school had changed hands several times. Was it fair to anticipate that in 1875 Councilll with his Democratic trustees would together stay the course?

The trustees had ushered in their new era with the hero of the old: Bourbonism with a black twist of irony. Councilll often exclaimed that the trustees of his school were the finest gentlemen of the old order--embodying the ideas of the confederate generals. The trustees, on the other hand, in selecting Councilll had wrestled the school from the hated carpetbagger elements--their first objective--and had isolated Councilll, neutralizing him so that he was no longer as readily able to identify with the most radical elements of the community or with the "elite" of the black community--the Brandons, Binfords, and Hendleys--who had become attached to the Rust school and had sought to stabilize the black-carpetbagger community into a substantial power block under their leadership.

Recognizing his vulnerability to attacks from both the carpet-bagger and black communities, Councilll saw from accounts in the press the tactics of his opposition and perceived the possibilities of support from an unexpected, though not completely welcome, quarter.

On May 20, 1875, the firey "latter-day" Yancy, editor of the Democrat, wrote an editorial justifying the board's appointment of

Council and the removal of the State's \$1,000 annual funding from Rust school with its carpetbag commissioner, J. W. Raines. Clay's comment elicited a hasty reply from Raines, who fired off a letter to the Democrat. When Clay dragged his feet about publishing it, Raines turned to the Huntsville-based North Alabama Reporter, which gladly gave it front page airing:

For the REPORTER
HUNTSVILLE COLORED NORMAL SCHOOL

In a recent issue of the Democrat there appeared an article under the above heading which is a perfect tissue of misrepresentation.

I gave the editor the facts in the case but he refuses to publish them. I now propose to "ventilate" his article, so present herewith a brief statement of the matter.

He says by act of the Board of Education said school was established Dec. 6th 1873. I say that said school was established by an act approved Dec. 20th 1871 (under the administration of Hon. Joseph Hodgson) with John H. Raines, John H. Wager, and Howell Echols as commissioners. I being elected chairman gave bond in double the amount of the appropriation as required by section 4, of the act, drew the money and paid the teachers. We of this Board agreed to employ the teachers of the Freedmen's Aid Society, in consideration of the use of the Building owned by them, free of rent, the act providing that the yearly appropriation of \$1000 should "only be applied to the payment of teachers." and there being no funds for any other purpose.

Upon the resignation of John H. Wager in the summer of 1873 the remaining members of the Board met and chose I. D. Sibley to fill the vacancy as empowered by section 3. In Dec. 1873, a new Board was appointed consisting of J. W. Steel, J. C. Bradley, and S. Robinson. These failing to qualify the old Board continued in force, both by established precedent of law and by direct instruction of the Superintendent of Education dated Jan. 24 1874. In this capacity we entered into contract with Mr. Willis and Miss Fisher for the school year of 1874-75. The contract was made Oct. 21 1874, before the qualification of the new Board. Some time after this new Board qualified and officially recognized the action of the old Board by accepting the report of the teachers and rendering their report to the Supt. of Public Instruction for the first quarter. Dec. 14 1874, still another Board of Commissioners was appointed, consisting of John M. Crowder, A. S. Fletcher and Stephen Johnson, who also admitted the legality of the action of previous Boards by paying on their contract \$250. . . .

Remember, a school recognized for a succession of years by the State--its reports received and accepted and payments made,

not only by the old Commissioners but by the new Board, which afterward endeavors to deny its obligation and establish a bogus school for purposes so evident they need not be named. Not only is the school seen by the above facts to be legally established, but by the Constitution of the United States, and of the State of Alabama, there could be no ex-poste facto law passed by the Board of Education rendering null a contract already in operation. If any doubts still remain in the minds of the gentleman they will probably be settled at the next term of the United States Court.

As to the conduct of this new school he says: "Two negro teachers presented themselves for examination and they stood the test so well that they were appointed teachers of the Colored Normal School." In addition to the common branches the following have been successfully taught in the Normal School. Natural Philosophy, Physiology, Latin, Algebra and Geometry. We have yet to learn that the teachers referred to claim even to have studied much less to have borne an examination in these or other of the higher branches taught in Normal Schools. We can scarcely imagine by what standard such teachers would be considered "competent" to teach branches, though it may be regarded by some as un-necessary that "negroes," even as teachers of Colored Normal Schools should become familiar with the higher departments of an ordinary education. This, however, is not to the point. The school was established in good faith and is entitled to an administration equal to that of other schools of the same grade. May we ask if teachers of like proficiency would have been appointed in a White Normal School.

Again, "when Council rose to speak at a recent exhibition of negro scholars at the colored Methodist church, the adherents of the present school left and would not listen to him." Council did not attempt to speak at said time, so nobody left and nobody refused to listen to him. At a regular church service on a recent Sabbath night, Council did attempt to make some remarks of a personal nature when the entire congregation arose and withdrew.

The statement that the teachers "not only received salaries from the Aid Society, but, also 50 cents per month for each schollar from the parents" is on a par with other misrepresentations. The 50 cents per month was well known and advertised to be the customary "incidental fee" charged by nearly all insitutions of learning the world over--and in this instance failed to meet the running expenses of the school, such as fuel, school materials, necessary repairs &c. by about \$10 as can be shown by an itemized statement to any interested party.

In conclusion I would say, that all the money ever received by me as Chairman of the Board, was legally drawn and paid out by me according to the strict letter of the law, before the qualification of either of the later appointed Boards, and that I have the receipts for the same. So much for a true statement of the facts.

Respectfully,
JOHN H. RAINES. 88

Before the publication of Raines' letter, Clay, adding coals to the fire, accused Raines of writing a letter to the Democrat and signing it, "an anonymous friend":

. . . warning us to "handle easy" a certain Radical carpetbagger, and to beware of his vengeance, for "he means mischief." We have no special fear of any of that infamous class of bipeds, provided they will not assassinate us in the dark; and a week or two will develop how much we heed the warning of this pretended "Friend," who cannot furnish his name. We think we can "spot" the author of the letter, the aforesaid carpetbagger himself.⁸⁹

On June 17, Clay took the opportunity of the school's closing exercises to comment further on the Raines controversy:

We were agreeably surprised to see that they [the students] had been well taught; and that Councill and Carter proved, through their pupils, the wisdom of their recent appointment as Principals of the Colored Normal School (instead of the former Freedmen's Aid carpetbag white teachers) by the Democratic Commissioners. Their demonstrated capacity ought, too, to rebuke the sneers of the white carpetbag cavalier, John W. Raines, as to their incompetency and put him to the blush--if such double-distilled hypocrites have not lost the capacity to blush.⁹⁰

Finally in the July 8 issue of the Independent, another Huntsville paper of Democratic party hue, Councill presented his position:

[Personal Communication.]

"Fair Play."

Huntsville, Ala. July 5, 1875

Editor Independent:--Please allow space in the columns of your paper for the following remarks by way of reply to certain falsehoods in circulation concerning me.

Principal among those who have sought to make me rediculously conspicuous is Mr. Raines, in an article which appeared, recently in the columns of the Reporter.

He and others censure me for having accepted the position as Principal of the State Normal School at this place. They say I have conspired with Democrats to break down the Rust School; have turned Democrat and expect to teach my pupils Democratic principles. Baser and more malicious falsehoods were never put in circulation.

In accepting the position as Principal of said School I acted as any gentleman would have done under similar

circumstances. Hearing the Commissioners intended having an examination for teachers, I put in my application and appeared before the Board. I gave satisfaction, was elected opened the school, and have not been proven incompetent, notwithstanding all of Mr. Raines' bosh and nonsense. The Commissioners had a right to establish a separate school, and I do not hesitate to say they acted expediently after a deliberate consideration of the circumstances.

If my mode of teaching brought to my school scholars from the Rust School, was breaking it down, then I am guilty of the charge, otherwise the statement that I combined with Democrats to break down the school, is a malicious fabrication of falsities and slanders. Knowing that the interest of this country depends upon the education and improvement of the blackman--to a great extent--no sensible Democrat would desire such a thing, and I should treat any proposition looking to that end with the greatest contempt. On the contrary I have always appreciated the Rust School, and with my own hand assisted Mr. Raines in planting shrubbery upon the lot.

I thought it wrong to tax each pupil of said school 50 cents per month when the state appropriates \$1000 annually for the purpose of making it a free school, to poor homeless people who by honest toil, from morning until night earn scarcely enough to provide for themselves the poorest food and clothing. These being facts and knowing the impoverished condition of my race, it was my duty to inform them of the matter, which I did. Every friend of the poor and oppressed will at once agree that I was right.

In regard to my politics I will state that I am a Republican-- a teacher in the school-room but not of politics or sectarianism. I served my race and party faithfully for more than five years in the political arena, and reserve the right to retire from its slums and gutters to the nobler station of instructor of my people whenever I think proper.

No one of sane mind would assert that it was necessary for me to compromise my manhood or a single principle to get the position I hold. The Commissioners though Democrats, are gentlemen, and are far above making such demands as the honorable gentleman is beneath the point of truthfulness in his statements.

I feel very thankful to the kind people of the North for what they have done for the elevation of my race. It would be unmanly to feel otherwise. I acknowledge that they have done much for us, and shall ever hold them in grateful remembrance. Yet there are some who claim to be our friends, who are "wolves in sheeps clothing." I am right as long as I am under them but as soon as I undertake to think, speak and act for myself I am all wrong in their estimation and turned Democrat. A friend should feel proud of my acquirements and advancement in life. I made of myself all that I am by my own hard labor, and Mr. Raines should feel proud to see me advance if I am a blackman recently emerged from the valley of slavery. He assails my qualifications. For his information I will say I have studied the branches referred to

and shall teach any thing which has been so "successfully" taught in the Rust School.

I confess I never attended an Ohio or Tennessee College or a Theological Institute, yet I would willingly challenge him for a competitive examination in orthography and English Grammar,-- let the prize be an elementary Speller and First Lines in English (not Latin) Grammar--as I am convinced their careful perusal would prove beneficial.

In conclusion, I am a great deal more interested in the welfare of my race than he is. I work for the love of my people while he works for the loaves and fishes. When I find I can do my people no good then I shall willingly resign for my superiors and not in the least frightened by Mr. Raines and his associate slanderers. I shall ever be found battling in the cause of truth and justice, at any point where duty calls and I can do my race most good.

Respectfully,
W. H. Council⁹¹

In its accompanying article "Fair Play," the Independent objectively commented that Council's statement was plain and pointed and "rather difficult to answer." The paper refused to comment on the charges, choosing, instead to praise Council saying he had "certainly proved himself fully competent to fill the position" and that the people "are perfectly satisfied as to that matter." The paper called him the "right man in the right place," and concluded:

We are truly glad to see a man of Council's ability turning away from the "slums and gutters" of politics, and using his talent to elevate his race to a standard of intelligence that will make them good citizens. All good men, of whatever party, will rejoice to see this.⁹²

Ironically, but importantly, the same issue of the Independent included notice of an upcoming baseball match--a new game in town--that would take place at the Fair Grounds at the Grand Masonic Pic-Nic to be given by The Evening Star Lodge No. 6 on July 15. The committee for arrangements included: Edward Pope, H. C. Binford, D. S. Brandon, Lafayette Robinson, W. H. Council, and Nelson Hendley.⁹³ Politically split, and now further estranged by the economics as well as politics

of the normal school appointment, the leaders of the black community could still slug it out in a friendly manner socially. The day was fast approaching when this last thread would be put to the severest test, when these black leaders and friends, because of economic pressures and political jealousies would, too, turn on Council.

Assessing the newspaper battles, Council reflected on the turn of events. Here he was, a spokesman of Radicalism, incurring the wrath of fellow Radicals and Republicans and enjoying the support of the Democratic press. Was J. Withers Clay, who had maliciously attacked him in the past, becoming his ally and what would that alliance cost him?

On July 1, 1875, armed with all the facts at his disposal about the immediate legality--if not the long-range legitimacy--of the Democratically-appointed Board's actions and selection of Council, the Democrat's indefatigable editor devoted four columns to his campaign to "get" Raines and to "clear" the Democratic Board. Clay argued that the Act of 1873 was original legislation "establishing" a new normal school. He documented the relevant Acts of the State Board of Education commencing with the Act approved December 20, 1871, establishing a Colored Normal School at Huntsville and appointing John H. Raines, John H. Wager (two carpetbaggers) and Howell Echols (Negro) Commissioners. I. D. Sibley replaced Wager in the summer of 1873. This board employed teachers of the Freedmen's Aid Society to take charge of the normal school. Clay admitted that he had no evidence of illegal conduct of the Commissioners during their legal term. But he argued that the State Board "under the Scalawag dynasty of David P. Lewis, as Governor" did legislate the carpetbag normal school "out of existence" and its

carpetbag commissioners "out of office." The Act of December 9, 1873, he said, established a new state normal school "for the education of colored teachers," appropriated \$1,000 for the "maintenance and support" of the school and "appointed Jas. W. Steel, Jos. C. Bradley (whites) and Larkin Robinson (Negro) all old residents, and not carpetbaggers-- as Commissioners." This board did not qualify and begin operations before the Democrats took office in 1874 and appointed a new board of Democratic Commissioners which in turn appointed Councill as Principal in 1875.

Clay then broke into a scathing attack on Raines and concluded his lengthy, four-column article by questioning state support of a sectarian institution:

It is very natural that Raines, the son-in-law of Parson Lakin, the recognized head of the Northern Methodist Church in North Alabama, should desire to bolster up Rust College, but there is no rhyme, reason or law, to justify taxation of the people of Alabama, of any other or no religious creed, to sustain an institution of the Northern Methodist Church.⁹⁴

IX

If the Democratic trustees of the Huntsville normal school had thought, when they appointed Councill, that he would forgo his party or his politics, they were mistaken. Councill voted with the Radical Republicans on the major political issues of 1875: against the calling of a convention to write a new Constitution and, that passing, against the Democratically-sanctioned Constitution itself.⁹⁵ White Republicans, on the other hand, especially the scalawags, voted with their Democratic friends, many easing their way back into the Democratic party by way of this partially non-partisan issue.⁹⁶

The vote had been largely along the color line. That meant that the black vote was still potentially damning to the Democratic party in the north Alabama county of Madison. The charges of Klan-like activities--intimidation, obstructions in voting, and foul play--that accompanied the general statewide elections in 1874 had brought in its wake a Congressional investigation. Wanting to avoid further problems with the federal government, especially in view of the presidential election just a little over a year away, the editor of the Democrat warned Democrats not to relax their upper hand as they had done in 1870, but instead to bring it down firmly enough to crush any of the opposition not willing to take hold and vote Democratic. Clay advocated a policy of befriending cooperative blacks and bedeviling the rest:

We exhort all white Democrats to manifest special friendship toward those negroes who vote with and trust the whites, and, whenever they get in trouble or distress, to help them; and to let the rest, who continue hostile to the whites, go to the carpetbaggers for aid and comfort, when they get into trouble and need white friends.⁹⁷

White Democrats were "putting the screws" on black Republicans by threatening their right to jobs, shares, credit, etc., if they didn't absent themselves from the polls or vote a Democratic ticket. In Madison County most blacks, trying to make it on shares, were falling deeper in debt as the 1870s progressed.⁹⁸ Their economic dependence served as a halter or bridle to turn them away from voting. The effectiveness of the Democratic campaign can be assessed by comparing their majority of 779 votes for the Constitution to that of 375 votes for the Convention, to 176 votes for the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 1874.⁹⁹

In view of Democratic party strategy it is perhaps not surprising that before the 1876 session of the Huntsville State Normal got underway,

the Democratic Board of Trustees appointed Matt McClung Robinson to be Principal of the school. All the Democrat said when announcing the appointment was that, "it is far better that they [blacks] shall be taught by native Southern white men than by carpetbaggers." There was no mention of Council. ¹⁰⁰ The Advocate, the ready voice for Republican matters, responded to the new appointment by printing in full a letter signed "Colored Men." It unmercifully tore into Council with some of the most acrimonious, though not unusual, sorts of charges made against male teachers. Scurrilous as the charges were, and unsubstantiated, they served to taint and to poison the man's good name.

Sir: - The employment of a teacher for the H'ville State Normal School, designed to fit colored youth for teachers, has again brought that School into prominent notice. When, more than a year since, the money appropriated to this school by the State was withdrawn by the new Board of Commissioners from the Rust Normal Institute, where it had been used ever since the legislature made provision for its establishment, public attention was for the first directed to it. The school was then given to Wm. H. Council, and to him was intrusted the very delicate task of organizing and drawing the sympathy and support of the best youth to this important Institution. The selection was received with surprise and regret by the intelligent colored people who knew the man. But beyond an interchange of several letters to the press by interested parties nothing was done. One session has demonstrated his utter unfitness for the position, and the Commissioners have very wisely made a change, and placed the school under the charge of Mr. Matt McClung Robinson, a gentleman fit for the position by scholarship and character. Council was highly indignant over this action: therefore the colored people must be highly indignant. Reasoning somewhat after this fashion, he went to work, using the colored people as a lever to thwart the will of the Commissioners. He planned an indignation meeting to be held at the Courthouse last Friday evening. He patrolled the streets, storming every person with a colored skin, inciting their prejudices against what he styled "the outrage of appointing a white man over a colored man," always beginning and ending with an earnest appeal to attend the meeting at the Courthouse. He appointed a committee of three in the name of the colored people to wait upon Gen. Walker and request his interference. He wrote, or had written, a petition certifying his competency and calling for his reappointment, and has scattered it to the four winds for signatures, using, as his

syrup to catch the innocent flies, the plea that he is a martyr because of his republicanism (?). Now, the honest and respectable class of colored people want it understood that this man does not represent them; that he is a low and cunning adventurer, and a scoundrel. His veracity is such that no man who know him will rely on. It is to be regretted that the good name and welfare of our people require the exposure of this man; and was it not that his bold assumption of representing us seems to be believed by some, we would not now speak. It is common street talk of his prostituting his influence as teacher over some of his female pupils to base use. So common is the talk that it has got among the small children. We put the question to the school authorities, whether it is safe, especially in the present crude condition of our society, when so many evils demand repression instead of encouragement, whether it is safe to have such a character set up before the rising generation as an example? We ask the public will it tolerate it? The worthy c.p. think that this position requires a person whose character for morality is above question, and would choose such a one was it left to them.

We trust the Commissioners will not be deluded by this man's petitions, or his indignation meetings, or any thing else he may do into placing him at the head of the State Normal School.

We ask you to give place in your columns for this for the public good, and can substantiate every statement with reliable evidence.

Colored Men.

Huntsville, March 28, 1876

Commenting on the letter the Advocate's editor observed:

The Communication signed Colored Men, that appears in this issue, is significant in several particulars. It is significant, first, because of its outspoken denunciation of a colored man who has exercised considerable influence among the colored voters in this county, and second, because there seems to be a wide-spread disposition among the better and more reliable class of colored people to ignore the claims of one of their own color when his color comprises his stock in trade. Our correspondents earnestly demand a competent teacher for their school--they consider Council incompetent and unfitted for the position--and acquiesce in the selection of Mr. Matt McClung Robinson. We know nothing of the charges made, but we understand they are susceptible of proof, and until some satisfactory refutation or explanation is made they will pass as verities among those who know Council.¹⁰¹

Again Council was quick to come to his own defense. The Advocate's next issue, April 6, contained his denial of the charges. Furthermore, Council identified and addressed the so-called "Colored

Men" individually, attempting to show each man's motivation for his attempted character assassination.

Self Defense.

Huntsville, Ala. April 3, 1876

Editor Huntsville Advocate:

Please allow space in the columns of your paper for the following answer to an article which appeared in your issue of last week, headed "Colored Normal School" and signed "Colored Men."

The article is a slanderous fabrication conceived in jealousy and brought forth in malice, and those gentlemen are called upon to prove and sustain every statement. These "immaculate" gentlemen who wrote the article withheld their names, for what purpose I will leave the public to determine. But I have them, and it now becomes my painful duty to make them known. A duty which I owe to myself, my family, numerous patrons and a generous public. These are they: Daniel Shadrach Brandon, Henry Claxton Binford, Little Charlie Hendly, Reuben Jones and Reuben M. Lowe, all of whom are teachers except Mr. Jones, who states, as I learn from very reliable gentlemen, that his name was used without his knowledge or consent. Binford, Brandon and Hendly are brothers-in-law and teachers in the same school, which accounts for their unity in the matter. These gentlemen and myself have hitherto been very friendly, they visited my school and I theirs. Binford, Brandon and myself are members of the same Church--officers therein--officers of the same Masonic Lodge. Neither of them have ever uttered a single complaint against me either in Church or Lodge.

I regard the friendship which ought to exist between Mr. Brandon, Binford and myself too much to make a personal attack upon them, therefore I shall leave them to be dealt with through another source.

Little Charlie Hendly is a minor both in age and popularity. He is one of those ambitious nice little fellows that wishes to excite notice and thinking the best way to do so is to get his name into the papers, which I do not object to. But bide ye time, me laddie.

Reuben M. Lowe has taken stock in the aforesaid article, I suppose, because he visited my school in company with another teacher, and was invited to hear the recitations. A class in arithmetic was called. The lesson was in simple interest. A very little girl "got stuck" on an example and so did Mr. Lowe. He worked and he sweated and he sweated and he worked and yet came no success. Of course I was compelled to "give light." He went away very sad and stated that the pupils and I laughed at him, which is as false as his article. This, I suppose, is the trouble with him,

"a little learning is a dangerous thing."

There seems to have been a conspiracy, as I am informed that Mr. Lowe says that he is "sworn never to aid me in public." Thanking you for the space allowed, I shall hereafter refrain from bringing this unpleasant matter before the public again

through the press. I shall leave my Church and my Lodge to decide upon my guilt or innocence. The gentlemen are welcome to continue their malicious persecutions, but I defy proof.

Who steals my purse steals trash -
 But he who filches from me my good name
 Robs me of that which enriches not him
 And makes me poor indeed.

Respectfully,
 W. H. Councilll¹⁰²

At this point in his career a lesser man than Councilll might have given up. Being attacked from all sides, Councilll squared that already-so-inclined jaw of his and girded himself for battle. To shore up his academic credentials--an acknowledged weak spot in his armor-- Councilll took private instruction from Charles Shepherd, S. J. Mayhew, C. G. Smith, Ned J. Mastin, and Milton Humes. These men were not only among the most learned in North Alabama, but they also were good Democrats.

Undoubtedly the tutors talked politics with Councilll--in a broad philosophical sense. They quite possibly tried to share their political point of view as reflective of the dominant society. Even in their scholarly role, one can be sure, Southern white arrogance was detectable. Certainly this was so of Milton Humes whose maternal grandfather was a vast landowner with mineral and planting interests, and whose wife was a daughter of ex-Governor of Alabama, Reuben Chapman, a man of wealth. Humes was an attorney for the Memphis and Chattanooga and other railroads.¹⁰³

Councilll also took stock of the political situation which he suspected had a greater bearing on his acceptability to the Democratic trustees than either his morality or competency. A man does not easily get rid of the reputation for the former or the impediment of the latter. Councilll received the principalship in the first place after a long and

thorough examination by the trustees. He was qualified through experience in teaching and by his extensive self-education at "pine-knot" college, as he called it, reminiscent of all the kindling he had fed the fires to study by.

Councill probably felt he had been used by the trustees and certainly by the Democratic press to wrest power from the carpetbaggers in May, 1875. But the rest of the year saw Councill working at political cross-currents with the trustees. Undoubtedly they may well have regarded his radical behavior as ungrateful and unfitting and something they did not have to put up with. Perhaps they had even schemed to bring Councill to their side by setting him up--giving him the principalship in May, and then when he did not go along with them politically, yanking the school out from under him, denying him reappointment as principal the following year. The politics of sticking his neck out, of standing tough to the point of rigidity on such issues as Sumner's Civil Rights Bill and the Constitution of 1875 had lost him his job but had not changed the course of either the elections of 1874 or 1875. A time for fresh assessment was at hand.

Councill remained on the County Republican Executive Committee in 1875. Both the local and state organizations were split along the same old lines as when Councill first joined. Scalawags and carpetbaggers still could not work together. The corruption of the Grant years had cut a deep and fatal swath into Alabama irreparably separating newcomers and natives. In North Alabama, the carpetbag villains were few but fatal in their effect on the party.¹⁰⁴

In 1876 the Republican party resembled a mopping-up exercise after a hurricane. The damage had been done, the party was too

internally weakened to be kept together by a new roof here and there. Two groups were claiming to lead--the Spencerites, supported locally by the still monolithic black vote with a scattering of whites, and the scalawags, whose numbers were being eroded by death, disaffection with the Republican party as the heir to Whig and Unionist loyalties and disillusionment with the failures of reconstruction. It was as though the hurricane had swept through accompanied by a tornado which picked the whole Southern landscape up, swirled it around a time or two and then let drop pretty much as it was before. Death, destruction, and reconstruction--all for naught. Cotton was still an ailing king, blacks were still a servile race, and the Democratic party was back in power. The Democrats had used the color line, Republican corruption, and the dismal economy to redeem the state. After 1876, the carpetbaggers packed up and returned to wherever they had come from or headed west--except for those with federal patronage jobs who were able to ride out the storm. As for the scalawags, they, after all, were first, last, and always, Southerners--gifted in political savvy and to-the-manor-born--but also infused with a sense of responsibility for leadership in an age of revolution. They had become Republicans because of this sense of honor, to save their homeland and to lead it into the unpredictable future. As Unionists and as Republicans they had failed to do much more than act as the conscience of the South. In the end, the third element of the Republican party in the state, the blacks, were pretty much deserted and even their numbers could not guarantee Republican victories.

It was in the light of these facts--a darkness at noon to be sure--that William Hooper Council, with all the manhood he could summons, acted to save himself and his people by back-tracking on

civil rights and advocating an Independence movement, urging blacks to declare themselves independent of both major parties and hold their vote in reserve to tilt an election one way or another depending on which side addressed best the needs of black people.

As near as can be pinpointed Councilll made his initial move to the center on May 17, 1876, in a meeting of the local party leadership at which he presided. As chairman of the gathering, he may have hoped to use the meeting as a sounding board for an Independent party movement. But it didn't work out that way. The group called for a signed statement in support of enforcement of the Civil Rights Act. Councilll refused to sign it, saying:

Gentlemen, I can't sign that paper. I regard the civil rights bill as a dead issue; and I am as good a Republican as can be found anywhere. I advocated Sumner's civil rights bill from Huntsville to Mobile; but the men that passed it have gone back on it; the Courts of the country won't sustain it, it has caused a great deal of trouble and bloodshed; and I am opposed to introducing it as an issue in this canvass.¹⁰⁵

By July of 1876, Councilll was at dead center, the eye of the hurricane. Clay, his watchdog, reported his remarks and conduct at a Radical meeting.

Dr. Ridley's remarks were received with repeated marks of approval and "dat's so! give it to 'em," by his sable hearers, but he failed to excite any of the old time enthusiasm excited by Jemison and George Williams. When he concluded, Wm. H. Councilll was called for, and Dr. Ridley grasped him by the hand, and helped him on the stand, with the loud remark, "I'm not ashamed to take a nigger by the hand." Councilll was understood to reply: "I prefer to be called a negro." Councilll's speech bore a very favorable contrast to Dr. Ridley's. It was in better English and in better spirit, free from all bitterness and denunciation. He spoke specially to and for his race, and said they were rising, and he wanted to raise them by education, until they should be qualified to occupy the highest plane of Civilization, intelligence and refinement, whilst Dr. Ridley's speech and conduct were calculated to level down the white race to the low grade of the negro race. Councilll was conciliatory.

He declared himself as devoted a Republican as ever, but he reminded his Republican friends that this is the centennial year, and counselled them to peace and harmony, instead of discord and confusion, and to this end, that they ought to "let the dead Past bury its dead," to exclude from the canvass all the old issues of the emancipation proclamation, the war, the enforcement act, and the civil rights bill, and devote themselves to the living issues of today. Dr. Ridley was exasperating in his language, tone and manner, tending to inflame class prejudices and passions, strife, discord, hatred and hostility. We heard a number of white men say, if they were driven to the necessity of choosing between Council and Ridley, they would vote for Council, and we agreed with them. We did not hear any applause of Council's speech.¹⁰⁶

If ever a man paid a price for his independence, Council did. It was as a Radical Republican that Council was first courted by the Democrats who appointed him Principal of the State Normal and then took his side in the Raines-Rust controversy over the appointment. With carpetbagger control of the school removed, Council's position as principal was then withheld from him and a white was named in his place. This must have been viewed as a temporary political maneuver to coerce Council into line as a Democrat. The other black teachers were quick to further discredit him in an attempt to assure that he not be reappointed, whatever his politics. Their morals charges they undoubtedly hoped would be sufficient to remove Council from contention for the job for good. They then would be able to reclaim for the school with which they were associated, Rust, or for themselves the designation as state normal. If then, a black man was named principal, a precedent set by Council's appointment, it would be one of them, flanked by the others. Council was after all an outsider--not a native. Furthermore, his politics had been of a more stridently radical--even rabble-rousing tone.

Ironically, at the same time that the black elite was attacking him, another outsider, recently arrived, was out-spouting and out-maneuvering Councilll from the left--his earlier radical, equal-rights position. This new man in town was Samuel Lowery, a lawyer from the Nashville, Tennessee, area, and a man of great energy who dared to go out on limbs--for his race and for the silk worm culture he championed as a suitable replacement for cotton culture. Lowery was admitted to practice before the Madison County Bar in July, 1876.¹⁰⁷

On September 28th the Advocate reported "A Family Row" between Councilll and Lowery on the Courthouse steps before "a crowd of about three hundred, about equally divided as to color." Councilll told the crowd that he "had not joined or sold out to the Democratic party and never intended to." He urged that blacks pursue "freedom of action," claiming that "they would rise in the estimation of the white people, and as they held the balance of power, politicians would be forced to respect them." Councilll contended that he had consulted with other black leaders and had hoped that they would join him in the formation of an independent black party, just as he hoped those people assembled there would join him. Lowery shot back that as a Radical black Republican, he "of course, could not consent to follow Councilll in the formation of an Independent party." The Advocate concluded that Lowery

was willing to let the wayward brother go in peace, but urged his colored brethren to stick to the Republican party. He intimated that Councilll was selling his political birthright for a mess of pottage, etc.

Councilll came back at him without gloves, and the discussion descended into bitter personalities.¹⁰⁸

Then on September 28, 1876, H. C. Binford and B. E. Scruggs, the Huntsville-born and bred black medical doctor in town, published a card

in the Advocate saying that they were not "disciples of a new party called "Independent Republicans."¹⁰⁹

Things finally came to a head. On Saturday, October 14, at another Courthouse rally, Dr. J. L. Ridley, local white Radical leader, accused Councilll of selling out to the Democrats for \$100 and announced to the crowd that on his motion, Councilll had been expelled from the County Executive Committee. Upon hearing the announcement Councilll asked to be heard, but Ridley refused. Some whites in the crowd started calling out "Councilll, Councilll," but Ridley instead turned the meeting over to Lowery. When a subsequent speaker told the crowd that Councilll could speak, Ridley adjourned the rally.

Only about a hundred ignored Ridley's move and drew closer to hear Councilll speak. Councilll tore into Ridley, calling his charge that he had sold out to the Democrats "an infamous lie." He then accused Ridley of having taken \$500 to help swing another election. The Democrat described the rest of the happenings of the evening:

the most of the negroes went on Washington Street and heard an inflammatory speech from Lowery. When Councilll finished, they returned, and Ridley made a very top-heavy speech, repeating the charge of bribery against Councilll, who called out from the crowd, "Dr. Ridley, that is a lie, and you or any other man, who says so, is a liar, a thief, and a scoundrel, and I can whip him," walking toward the stand. Deputy Sheriff Cooper stepped up to Councilll, and told him to be quiet. Several negroes rushed toward Councilll, crying "put him out." Two police took Councilll to the rear of the crowd, and the excitement subsided. . . .¹¹⁰

Possibly one of the reasons the crowd was so easily whipped up about the idea that Councilll sold out to the Democrats was that Councilll had, just two weeks before, been elected, after the usual examinations by S. J. Mayhew, the local Superintendent of Schools, to be principal of the colored intermediate or higher school. Charles Donegan was made his

assistant, while Daniel S. Brandon was made principal of one lower school with S. J. B. Carter as assistant. The intermediate school was to meet in the Councill home. Councill's accommodation--not his competence or morality--had put him back in line for the 1877 normal school appointment.

The November 1876 elections went off peaceably. The Democrats out-pollled the Republicans approximately 3400 to 2700, a margin of 700 votes in Madison County. Many blacks were demoralized and did not vote. As many as 10,000 throughout the state were reported to have voted Democratic.¹¹¹ Undoubtedly many of the blacks were exercising their right to vote as Independent Republicans. The majority, however, if they could vote freely, without fear or favor, voted Republican.

When passions on both sides stirred animosities beyond reasonable limits. Councill saw that his theory of Independence simply could not be put into practice. It just wouldn't work. Most blacks still believed as they did in 1874 that to vote for a Democrat was a sin and a crime against their race and that "negro children should not go to schools where the teachers were Democrats."¹¹² Independence was not a viable political alternative for the mass of black voters. The Republican party was moribund, perhaps, but sacrosanct. Many blacks would not reason with Councill but only reacted emotionally to his arguments. That certainly was the case when in early December, 1876, Councill ran into a Radical hothead at a popular saloon, Linski's, under the Opera House. Councill had gone in looking for an umbrella he had lost. The Democrat described what happened.

Councill stepped into Linski's in search of a lost umbrella, and Yearger addressed him in abusive language, and struck him

a violent blow on the head with (it is supposed) a slung shot, or something equivalent. Councill drew a revolver, shot at Yearger and missed him. Yearger ran and Councill ran after, but failed to overtake him. The parties were arraigned before Mayor Murphy on Monday last, no witnesses appeared, and the cases were dismissed for want of evidence.¹¹³

Alienated from members of his own party, having failed in his attempt to lead an independence movement, Councill was indeed a man without a party. He had voted for the Democratic Electors in 1876, but he still thought of himself as a Republican.¹¹⁴ That changed, however, as he saw the Republican party collapse in Alabama and the National party desert his people in the Compromise of 1877. If there was hope for blacks he concluded, it was with the white man of the South and the white man's party. Shortly after Councill became a Democrat, he wrote:

Our only hope--only salvation lies in the kindness of the big hearted ex-rebels of the South. We predict that every right which is necessary for the enjoyment and happiness of the two races of the South will be granted and enjoyed by both, without the least encroachment upon the social rights of either.

A white Correspondent to the Advocate wrote in 1878.

It would please me to do justice to the Principle of this School, Wm. H. Councill, but I cannot. A simple pen and ink sketch is not sufficient. That he is a man of talent and superior attainments is a fact well known in this community, and that he is the right man in the right place is equally palpable. While he might be a passible politician or a good lawyer, he would do himself great injustice to follow either profession, while it is so evident that he is endowed with the faculties so necessary to the instruction of youth. He is certainly where he ought to be, and "the powers that be" should keep him there if possible.¹¹⁵

X

The Democrats may have had him where they wanted him, but that was, after all, where he wanted to be. Although often called a "hireling" of the Democratic party, the charge doesn't stick. Councilll took pride in exercising the property rights of a free man. His real estate investments were centered around his ambitions for his school. In 1870 he and his wife Elizabeth purchased an acre of land on Athens Pike in "Jonesville" and mortgaged it for \$100.00. This was cleared in 1871. In 1872, he mortgaged another half acre for \$100.00.¹¹⁶ Both mortgagees were Republicans. In July, 1875, he and Bettie purchased on mortgage a home in town on Mill Street for \$900.00. This time the holder was John J. McDavid, a realtor and a Democrat.¹¹⁷ A case could, perhaps, be made that Councilll was extended the credit as a favor. As the newly appointed principal of the State Normal, it could be argued that he was a good credit risk. If there was any chicanery involved, it was more likely on the part of the Democrats and not Councilll. With the mortgage hanging over his head, Councilll would be easier to control--perhaps. Diabolical as it may sound, there is that possibility.

In those shaky economic times, few people weren't just "making it." Delinquents on city tax lists included many of Huntsville's leading citizens--a veritable who's who among the propertied class. In 1874, Councilll was included in this list, being assessed \$4.10 for his property on Athens Pike.¹¹⁸

To make matters worse, in June of 1874, the Freedmen's Bank, with an active and supposedly healthy branch in Huntsville under the original direction of Lafayette Robinson, became a victim of Jay Cooke's financial collapse and the Panic of 1873.¹¹⁹ This Panic became a

depression in Alabama, the state's economy not having found a stable agri-industrial base since mobilization for war in the early 1860s. As a teacher in Huntsville, Councilll would have been expected to make about \$40.00 a month under the Radical Board of Education.¹²⁰ However, many teachers were not paid for services rendered in the period 1868 to 1872.¹²¹ Just how much Councilll received is not known. As Engrossing Clerk, Councilll probably made just enough to conduct his active political canvasses. But he and Bettie had their first child, William L., in 1870 and their second, James H., in 1872.¹²² Two new mouths to feed and heads to house dictated budgetary restraint just at a time when the economy took its sharp downward turn.

Peter Young's unpublished Honor's Thesis for Louisiana State University entitled "The Negro Community of Huntsville, Alabama, 1881-1894" takes as its thesis that while there was in Huntsville a Negro elite, there was also that "other" Huntsville. For most Huntsville Negroes, he argued, "life was a simple and grim struggle for survival . . . a losing struggle." Estranged from the land, blacks sought work or comfort in the city. Lack of jobs forced them back on the land, back to debt and the "marginal edge of starvation."¹²³

Councilll was well-off compared to that picture, but in 1878, he too found himself near bankruptcy. Typical of his straightforward way of dealing with people, he sent the following statement to a list of forty-two individuals and business firms:

Huntsville Mch 4" 1878

To My Creditors--

Gentlemen:

I desire to settle my debts and have made every effort to do so but so far have succeeded only in part. I [have a family to support] (this has a scratch line through it) secured a sufficient sum to pay 25% on my indebtedness and ask you to

take the amount and release me. If you are willing to do so, please indicate the same by writing your names in the second column opposite the amount due you. I have been advised to go into Bankruptcy but deem this mode of settlement more honorable and best for all concerned.

Respectfully,
W. H. Council¹²⁴

In those deflationary days, Council¹²⁴ owed \$744.70, of which \$286.25 was entered opposite as having been paid. Many of these bills were undoubtedly assumed for his school. This manly baring of his financial soul was not the act of a hireling of the Democratic party.

The final irony to the charge of being a hireling is that had Council¹²⁴ wanted to be a hireling, had he been motivated by financial self-interest, he would have accepted the offer made to him by the Republican party in 1875 to be the Receiver of Public Moneys in the U. S. Land Office. The Democratic press at the time of President Grant's appointment panned it, claiming that it was a Republican ruse to placate Council¹²⁴ with the flattery of an offer. Resourceful as he was, Council¹²⁴ may well have fooled the Democratic editor had a political patronage job been his objective. He was too far along the path to the schoolhouse door to be side-tracked by the Republican ploy--if it was that.

How do we account for the political machinations of Council¹²⁴? Why did he become a Democrat? Obviously a man who could poll 3,269 votes as a Republican candidate for the legislature and who received patronage offers was a man with a bright political future--or so it seems. But politics was not his life's ambition. He did not want to campaign for men's votes but for their minds. He saw education as the basis--the only solid foundation for his people's progress upward from slavery. Politics was not an end but simply a means. If as a Democrat Council¹²⁴ could help build that solid foundation, then Democrat he would be.