

'Quash Rebellion' Was

In Fall River during the Civil War the underlying issue of the centralization or decentralization of federal government power was virtually ignored by a populace which was then preoccupied with its own economic development.

Newspaper headlines were mostly aimed at rallying men to arms in attempt to quash the rebellion, as it was first called. The issue of slavery and its abolishment was not a key issue until some time after the war started in 1861.

In 1861, Fall River had a population of 14,000 and had been a city for seven years. Already, however, the city was becoming nationally recognized as a leading cotton manufacturing center.

At the outbreak of the war, Fall River had 11 cotton mills in full operation. But as cotton shipments from the South ended, and efforts to raise cotton here failed, the cotton industry came to a virtual halt. But one new mill, the Granite, was established during the war. That was in 1863, but it did not go into production until January 1865.

So with Fall River's economic growth in jeopardy because of the war, citizens here were concerned primarily with putting down the rebellion quickly. But they were not so concerned with putting down the rebellion because of a particular issue but with putting down because it was

considered a major threat to the city's economic growth.

The issue of the centralists vs. the decentralists was nowhere to be found in the pages of newspapers of the day.

Volunteers were needed to fight the war, and the newspapers attempted to rally the men to enlist in the military. Enlistments were few, however, until the issue of slavery was introduced later in the war. Enlistments soared as the government had the sectional issue it needed to fill the ranks of the armies on the battle fields. The war then rolled on to its tragic course with the men in arms and the families at home having a "reason" to fight in

support the government's war effort.

In the midst of the chaos of the war, the sectional issue between the centralists and the decentralists was lost, perhaps for all time.

The issue of slavery was both a sectional and an emotional issue, and therefore it soon dominated the thinking of the people as the prime reason for the war. Then, as now, sectional issues, which tend to also draw on

Civil War Rallying Cry

the emotions, are the kind of issues which can motivate men to fight. Newspapers merely mirrored the thinking of the time.

Since politicians are the most adept at raising sectional issues, the politicians of the day are the ones to claim credit for escalating the rebellion into a full-scale war.

Those who only remember the issue of slavery in the Civil War

still believe that the war was fought to free the slaves. However, it was the centralists who were willing to free the slaves to win the war.

It is no secret that the decentralists lost the war. Terms such as centralists and decentralists had come to mean the position one took in terms of the federal government's power. The centralists, of course, favored all government power at the top. The decentralists

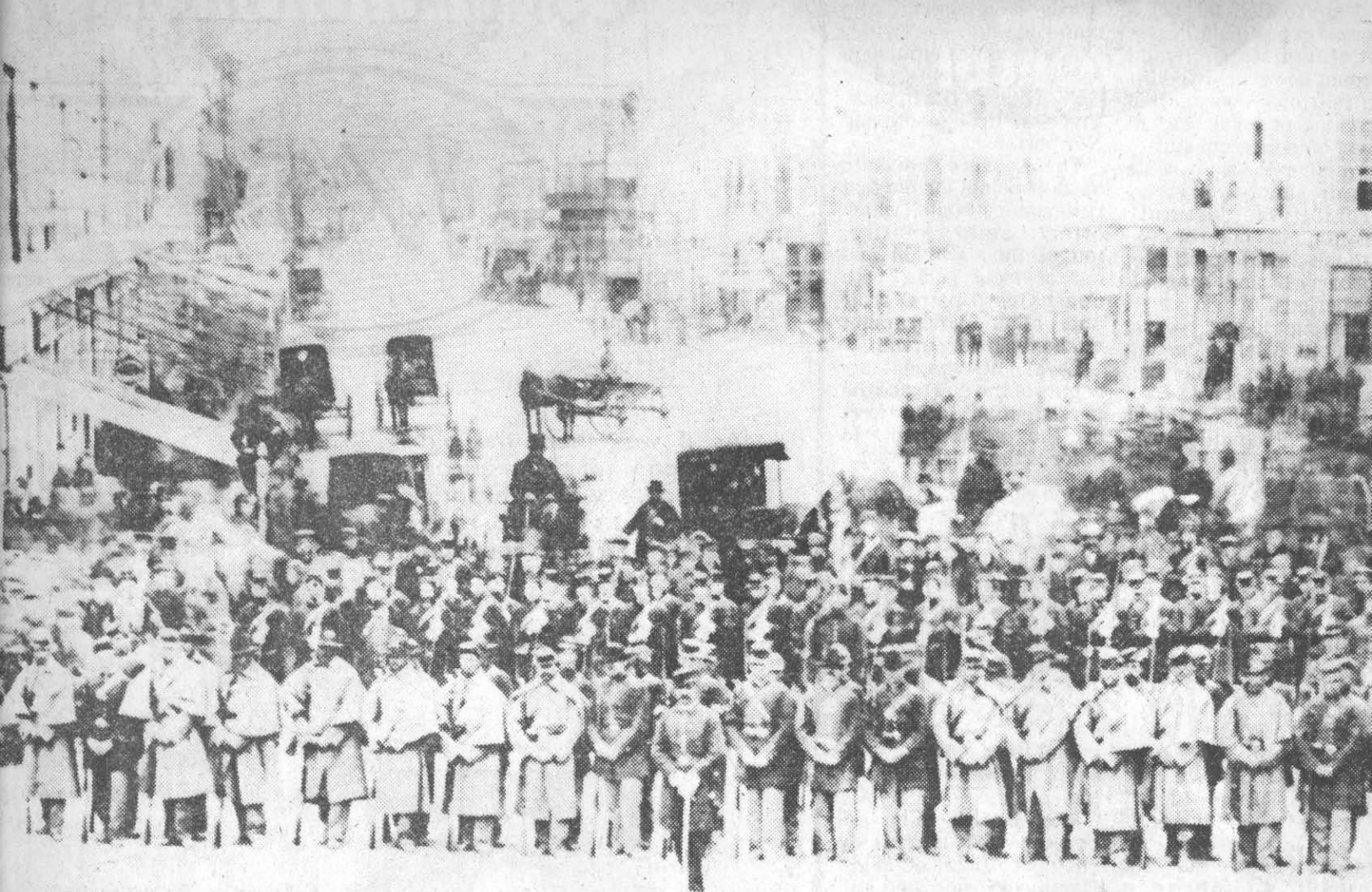
favored limited government at the top.

The centralists won the war largely because they were successful in convincing enough Americans that to be a decentralist was to also be against the abolishment of slavery. As a result, brother fought brother to the death over the issue, and the war raged on.

Before the war, there had been several decentralist presidents, including James Madison, Andrew Jackson and

Martin Van Buren. Since the war, there have been others, namely John Garfield, William McKinley, and even John F. Kennedy for a time.

The latter three were assassinated. Kennedy's position as a centralist was not as pronounced as that of the other presidents, but there was reason to believe that Kennedy was beginning to lean toward decentralized power when he issued several million in debt-free U.S. notes.



Fall River area men muster in uniform on Main Street as the Grand Army of the Republic members prepare to depart for training camps. Recruits received bounties for

enlisting in those days. But bounty jumpers became a problem as more and more men deserted before being sent to the battlefields.