

Today in Columbus History:

On Tuesday, September 12, 1882, the *Columbus Enquirer-Sun* announced that Hon. A. H. Stephens would be arriving in the city later that day. Alexander Hamilton Stephens was a Taliaferro County native and a politician before, during and after the Civil War. He held offices in both the United States and Confederate governments but is best known as the former Vice President of the Confederate States of America.

Stephens was a graduate of Franklin College (now UGA) and served in the Georgia legislature from 1836-1843 and then in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1843 - 1859. He served as the only Vice President of the Confederate States and did a short stint in prison for it after the War. Elected to the U.S. Senate from Georgia in 1866, the Republicans prevented him from taking his seat.

Originally against secession, he took the next couple years off to write a two-volume book on the right of states to secede from the Union entitled *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States: Its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results*. Stephens then won a seat in the House Representatives in 1873 and remained there until running for the office of governor of Georgia in 1882. His run for governor was the reason for his visit to Columbus.

His arrival and activities dominated the news for the next few days. The committee to welcome him to Columbus included civic leaders William H. Young, J. M. McNeil, John King, Cliff Grimes, G. Gunby Jordan, Porter Ingram, T.K. Wynne, Reese Crawford and C. A. Redd. He would arrive on the 1:40 train from Macon on the 12th and would speak at the Springer Opera House the next day.

Stephens was orphaned at the age of fourteen and was dependent on benefactors for his education. This led to his nickname, "The Great Commoner" seen in several articles. He suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and other ailments throughout his life. Although he was five-foot seven, he sometimes weighed less than one hundred pounds, leading to another nickname "Little Alex."

He was seventy years old when he came to Columbus, however, the coverage of his visit made a point of saying how sharp he was, despite his physical frailty. In discussing his arrival, one story anticipated that hundreds of citizens would call on him at the Rankin House and said, "Mr. Stephens is in excellent health, better than he has been for years, and while his frame has been shaken by time and disease, his mind is as active and vigorous as when in former years, he fired with patriotism the hearts of all who heard him." However, upon his arrival, the throngs who converged at the station to greet him were told that "owing to the fatigue of the ride, he would receive no company during the day." The story on his speech the next day acknowledged that "Mr. Stephens is older now and his frame is more infirm, but his mind and heart is as fresh and vigorous, and his love of country equally as great."

Stephens appears in several photos (not from this visit) with crutches. However, it sounds like he was using a wheelchair while in Columbus. The article describing his speech says, "At 8 o'clock the curtain rose, and Mr. Stephens wheeled himself on the stage amid the most enthusiastic applause." Also, when the Columbus Guards visited him at the Rankin House earlier that day, they said that he "wheeled himself out on the veranda and addressed the company."

In his speech, Stephens recalled the last time he had spoken in Columbus twenty-two years earlier when he introduced Stephen A. Douglass at Temperance Hall during the presidential election of 1860. He spoke glowingly of this country's form of government, constitution, and history. The focus of his message was to

keep his party together. He emphasized the need for everyone to vote the Democratic ticket as any vote for an independent candidate was a vote for the radical Republicans.

Stephens easily won the election on October 4, 1882, with the next day's headline in the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun* referring to him as "Little Alex." He won Muscogee County in a landslide, taking 960 votes to the challenger's 151. Stephens was sworn in as Georgia's 50th governor on November 4, 1882. However, his infirmities caught up with him rather quickly. He had one of the shortest terms as governor, dying four months later, on March 4, 1883.

Compiled by Daniel A. Bellware, Muscogee Genealogical Society

Clipping from Georgia Historic Newspapers (GALILEO).

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days-worth of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

HON. A. H. STEPHENS

Will Reach the City To-day.

Preparations for His Entertainment.

Hon. Alexander H. Stephens will reach this city by the 1:40 train this afternoon and will be met at the depot by a committee who have been selected for the purpose. Doubtless many others will be at the depot on the arrival of the train to give the great commoner a cordial reception. The executive committee held a meeting yesterday afternoon to prepare for his reception and entertainment. The following gentlemen were appointed a committee on reception: Messrs. W. H. Young, J. M. McNeill, John King, C. B. Grimes, G. Gunby Jordan, Porter Ingram, T. K. Wynne, Reese Crawford and C. A. Redd.

Rooms have been selected at the Rankin House where Mr. Stephens will be entertained during his stay in the city. He will hold receptions this afternoon and to-morrow when his friends in the city are invited to call upon him. The ladies are especially invited to call and extend him a welcome to the city. He will be serenaded by his friends to-night, a band having been engaged for the purpose.

To-morrow night he will address the people upon the political questions of the day. The speaking will take place at Springer Opera House, and special arrangements will be made for the ladies, the chairs being reserved for them and their escorts. There will no doubt be a large attendance at the opera house as many from adjoining counties are expected. None should lose the opportunity of hearing this great statesman.

Article announcing the visit of "Hon. A. H. Stephens" from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, September 12, 1882, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.



Photo of Alexander Hamilton Stephens with crutches taken in Washington, DC in 1879, from the Digital Library of Georgia <https://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/vanga/photos/tlf/jpg/tlf008.jpg>



Alexander H. Stephens using a crutch and being assisting in an undated photo, from the *New Georgia Encyclopedia* <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/file/8450>

HON. A. H. STEPHENS

**Receives the Grandest Ovation
Ever Given a Political
Candidate**

By the Citizens of Columbus.

**He Arraigned the Republican
Party,**

**And Gave Convincing Argu-
ments that the Independents
are in Full Accord
With Them.**

Address From Hon. Clifford Anderson.

Brilliant Introductory Speeches.

Last night the largest audience that ever assembled in Springer Opera House was present to hear Hon. Alexander H. Stephens, the great commoner and gubernatorial candidate, speak

Coverage of Stephens' speech in the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, September 14, 1882, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

THE GREAT COMMONER.

**He Arrived in the City Yesterday and
Entertained by the Citizens.**

THE PROGRAMME FOR TO-DAY.

Yesterday morning a telegram was received announcing that Hon. A. H. Stephens was on board the regular passenger train to this city. At 1:40 o'clock, the hour for the arrival of the train, the passenger depot was crowded with people anxious to

Headline from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, September 13, 1882, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

COLUMBUS GUARDS.

Dress Parade and Target Practice Yesterday.

Three Cheers for the Next Governor Responded to by the Great Commoner.

The Columbus Guards turned out yesterday afternoon for target practice. The com-

Headline for Columbus Guards visit with reference to the "Great Commoner," from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, September 14, 1882, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

THE ELECTION YESTERDAY.

Stephens and the Democratic State Ticket Receive Over One Thousand Majority.

No Opposition to Senator or Representatives.

The election for governor, state house officers and members of the general assembly of the state, was held in this city yesterday. It was the most quiet and orderly election that we have ever seen in the city, and but little more than half the vote of two years ago was polled. The entire vote cast at this precinct was 1,124, while in the election two years ago 2,096 tickets passed into the box. The colored voters seemed to take no interest or stock in the election and many of those who voted at all cast a ballot for the democratic ticket.

The executive committee had taken the precaution to arrange for carrying the voters to the polls and engaged carriages for the purpose. In all parts of the city could be seen carriages drawn by horses decorated with large placards.

VOTE FOR LITTLE ALEX
—AND THE—
DEMOCRATIC TICKET.

At the polls there was no rush and every voter was allowed to cast his ballot without fear or favor, and there was no discrimination on account of race, color or previous condition, etc. The following is the vote in the city :

FOR GOVERNOR.

A H Stephens.....	960
L J Gartrel.....	151

Election results with a reference to "Little Alex," from the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, October 5, 1882, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.

GEORGIA ELECTION.

**Little Alex. Governor by Forty or
Fifty Thousand Majority.**

**The Democratic State House Of-
ficers Elected.**

A Grand Democratic Victory.

Headline announcing the election of "Little Alex" from page one the *Columbus Daily Enquirer-Sun*, October 5, 1882, <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>.