

Reconstruction politics

made strange bedfellows

Ex-slaves, scalawags, carpetbaggers united

Following the Civil War, politics at the county level was a continuous struggle between two major factions.

One faction was made up of the old-timers who wished to revert to the society and its governance as it was before the "late unpleasantness."

Since those who had served in

the Confederate army were disfranchised and because women could not vote, this left few eligibles.

NEARBY HISTORY



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too old to serve or were disabled and could not serve.

The changes in the electorate allowed a group of people to take

office who, under the old system, would never have been elected. This group was composed of various factions.

There were the "carpetbaggers" from the North (non-natives who divided into two groups - idealists who wanted to reconstruct the South and opportunists quite willing to take whatever they could get).

There were native S.C. whites who also were opportunists and were called "scalawags" by other natives.

And there were the ex-slaves,

enfranchised in 1866 by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The ex-slaves were numerous and, by a sizable majority, would vote with those they considered their liberators.

The ex-slaves, carpetbaggers and scalawags not only controlled the state and county governments, but they were backed by federal troops. All of these varying factions united as the Republican Party.

The Republicans were in power until the Disputed Election of 1876 when the federal government

agreed to withdraw troops from four occupied Southern states, including South Carolina.

In 1876 Wade Hampton, a Democrat and a former Confederate general who represented the old aristocracy, was elected governor of South Carolina. It was a campaign marked by violence and widespread vote fraud on both sides.

The Democratic Party from 1867 until 1876 had been on the outside and had formed what were called rifle clubs, defined by the historian D.D. Wallace as "a

well-drilled extra-legal white militia."

In some cases, particularly in York County, the rifle clubs and the Ku Klux Klan were generally the same people.

In 1882, six years after the federal troops decamped, the York County Democratic Party met and dissolved the "clubs" in favor of voting by precincts. This broadened the franchise considerably.

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