

# Voting Viva Voce

UNLOCKING THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF PAST POLITICS

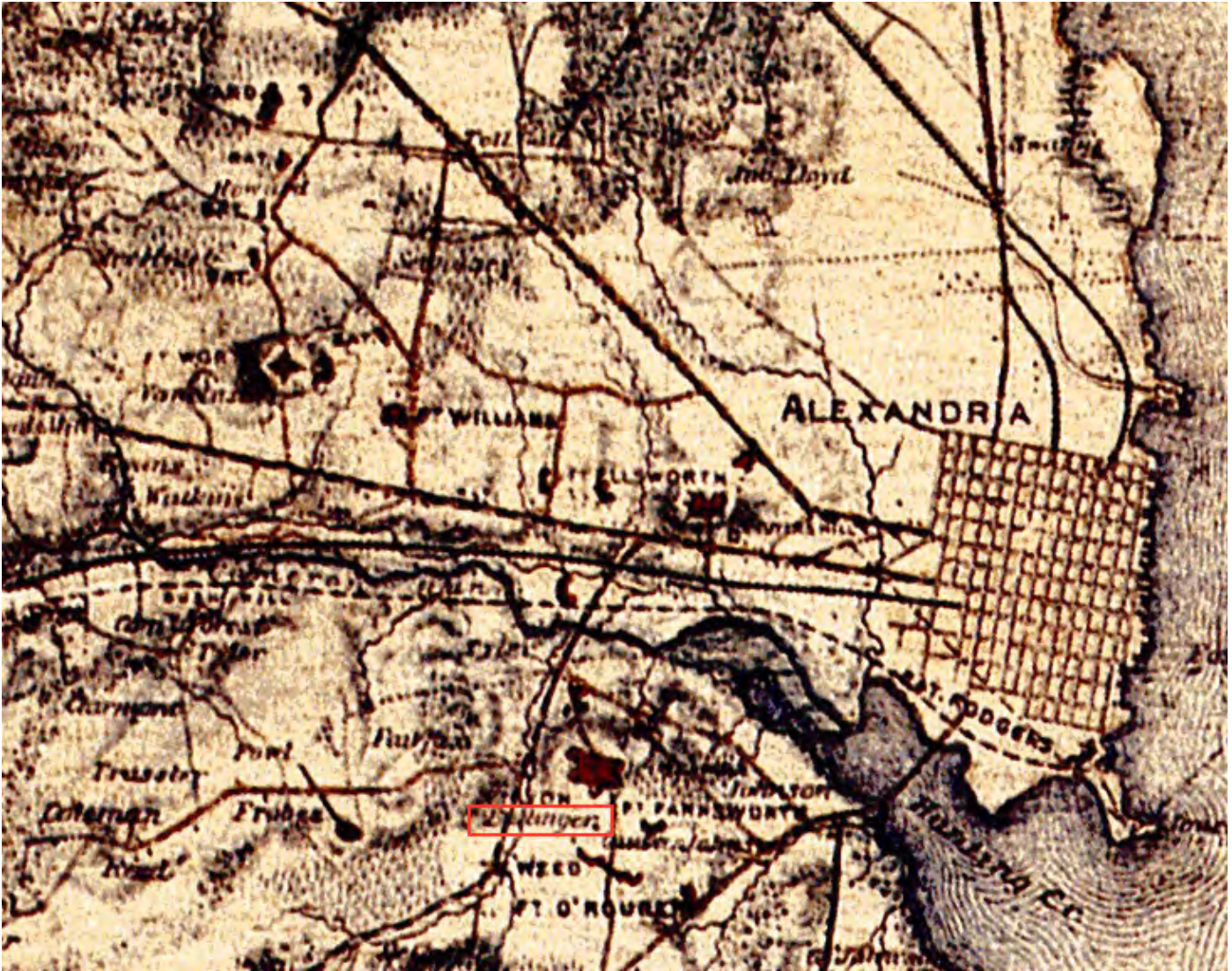


# Peyton Ballinger

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Extract of Military Map of Northeast Virginia, 1865. The Ballinger family estate, Mount Pleasant, is highlighted in red. Located just south of Fort Lyon, Mount Pleasant was used as a Union camp during the Civil War.

Courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology

Profile

# Peyton Ballinger

by  
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Votes Democrat, more like the laborers in his trade than his fellow prosperous manufacturers and wholesalers of shoes and boots.

When Alexandria's Peyton Ballinger, 45, called out the names of his chosen candidates on Election Day, May 26, 1859, he stood before the rowdy crowd as a homegrown success story: a self-made shoe manufacturer, he had learned his shoemaker's trade at Dean's Shoe Factory in Alexandria. Now he had a wholesale business, employed 35 skilled laborers (25 men and 10 women), and owned a retail shoe store and shoe factory at 126 King Street (now 508–512 King Street). He and his household (wife Jane and their five children, plus two “rented-in” slaves) lived above the store. In three months, Peyton and Jane would finalize the purchase of Mount Pleasant—a large, 150-acre property and mansion on the high land just beyond Alexandria's city limits, where he and his family would live.

Peyton was a wealthy man, one of the elite, and even better off than other wholesale shoe manufactures in Alexandria: Ballinger declared in the 1860 census that he possessed a combined real and personal wealth of \$25,000 and was assessed in 1859 as having a taxable wealth of \$11,600. These figures easily put him in the top 20 percent of all adult white males in terms of wealth. His shoe business had a capitalization of \$10,000 and each year produced shoes and boots valued at \$20,000. Ballinger paid out \$9720 in wages in 1859.

Payton voted Democratic, but Alexandria was a Whig/Opposition town, a tendency that was more pronounced among the city's elite. Ballinger was politically unlike the men of similar wealth and rank in Alexandria and unlike his fellow footwear manufacturers. His vote was more like the craftsmen he employed, especially the lowly shoe cutters who cut and shaped the leather who, in the aggregate, voted Democratic by a margin of nearly two to one in a city that was only 43 percent Democratic.

In voting a straight Democratic slate of candidates, perhaps Ballinger was remaining true to his more humble roots, still identifying with the craft workers who made his shoe business function. Or were the shoe cutters identifying with their wealthy employer—who, after all, could hear and see their voting decisions? Was deference a factor in their voting decisions? We don't know the names of the individual shoe cutters whom Ballinger employed, as no company records survive, but if we look at the 23 shoe cutters who lived within two blocks in any direction of the Ballinger factory, those most likely to be employed by him, we see they voted almost the same—if slightly less Democratic—than the town's shoe cutters generally.

Overall, 62 percent of Alexandria's 147 shoe cutters voted and they split 65 to 35 percent Democratic; of the 23 shoe cutters who lived closest to Ballinger's shop and factory, 57 percent voted and they shouted out Democratic candidates 62 to 38 percent. Those closest to Ballinger were slightly less likely to vote and to vote Democratic than the population of shoe cutters in the city. If in fact these men worked for Ballinger, he seems not to have sought (or if he did try, was not very successful in his efforts) to shape their political decisions.

“Shoe business” was important in Alexandria—it was the city's largest single employment sector (156) and the second largest employer of women (52) after the Mt. Vernon Cotton Factory where 88 of 135 employees were female. Peyton was one of the most successful of the eleven shoe manufacturers in the city. He paid his men and women about the average going monthly wage: \$30 to the men and a remarkably smaller wage, \$6 a month, to the women who made the shoes and boots he sold. We don't know whether these men and women were working full-time but the average of all wages in Alexandria's shoe-making trade was \$28.18 a month for men and \$6.50 for women. Other industries were similar: Furniture manufacturer James Green was paying his 25 male workers \$30 a month and his single female employee \$10 a month. The average annual wage in the US in 1860 as reported in the US census was \$289, adjusted slightly upwards a century later by the National Bureau of Economic Research to \$297, pretty much what Ballinger's men were making.

Peyton may well have worn a pair of his own fine custom-fitted boots when he presented himself to the election officials that day. Certainly, some of the town's eminent citizens would have been wearing Peyton's boots—and no doubt listening to his vote with some interest.





A Man's Boot and Child's Shoe, c1860. The boot and shoe were both discovered during the excavation of a privy at 508-512 King Street. The shoe, which could fit either foot and had a nailed sole, was crafted around 1860. The right footed, square-toed boot was made after 1862. Both were likely produced at Ballinger's shop. In 1850 his business produced 9,000 pairs of boots and shoes.

Courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology

Most other men at the top of the shoe business in Alexandria voted for the Opposition candidates, or a mixed ticket, almost always supporting the local candidate for House of Delegates, Lewis McKenzie. Of the 21 men who listed themselves as having a boot and shoe warehouse and store or who were boot and shoe makers according to the city directory, only two voted a straight Democratic ticket—Ballinger and Louis Brill. And Brill was very poor: he told the census taker that he had only \$50 in wealth and had no taxable assets; he was also, according to what he told the census taker, more of a shoe cutter than a shoe maker, certainly not a shoe manufacturer.

Likewise of the 131 men in Alexandria with Peyton's level of wealth, only nine voted a straight Democratic ticket as he did. Unlike many others, these men chose to call out for Smith, not Alexandria's own Lewis McKenzie, for House of Delegates. Among his religious and economic and business peers, only Ballinger stood against the local candidate. This in spite of the likelihood that McKenzie, who had lived on King Street near Peyton's store only a few years earlier, would have been a familiar face (McKenzie's feet could also have been known to Peyton!). It may have taken a high degree of deliberate independence to refrain from declaring for so close a connection.



Methodist Episcopal South Church, c1860-1865. Ballinger and his wife, Jane, both regularly attended services at this Methodist Church, located at 109 South Washington Street. Union forces occupied the church, using it as a hospital from 1862 to 1865.

Courtesy of National Archives

Peyton was a regular churchgoer—a trustee of Washington Street Methodist Episcopal South Church, of which both he and his wife were among its 165 adult members. The church was just a quick walk from their home. Peyton Ballinger’s vote was also unlike those of his fellow parishioners in the Methodist Episcopal church who were Opposition voters. However, the church itself was a part of a break away movement that defended the institution of slavery. And Ballinger was indeed involved in slavery, renting but not owning slaves, not for his shoe-making business but for his household.

Peyton was a solid family man. A husband—to Jane, 43. A father—to at least three boys and two girls: a family that ranged from the baby to young adults still at home. His son Robert may have already flown the coop. The 1860 census also lists two slaves, both rented from owners living in Fairfax County, living in the household: a 28-year-old mulatto female, and a 14-year-old black female. No doubt, both would have been fully occupied tending to the needs of this large family. Half of all men, and all of the wealthy men, who attended the Methodist Episcopal Church were slave-owners. Despite this, they voted overwhelmingly for the Opposition party. Where Peyton Ballinger did find his niche was amongst

members of the church who as he did: “rented in,” rather than owned, slaves. Four of this small group of five men voted exactly alike for all Democratic candidates, also slighting McKenzie.

Peyton Ballinger, like James Green (see Emma Green sketch), built on the heights above Alexandria and they thus shared the destruction the War brought. Union troops from Fort Lyon, just nearby, camped on his Mount Pleasant property, finding it indeed a pleasant change after uncomfortable nights spent on the low land by the river. It’s unlikely Peyton the Democrat voter and Southerner would have been pleased to see the Union flag flying on his land.

Despite Civil War upheavals and being a Confederate sympathizer, Peyton prospered throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century. He manufactured custom-fitted boots and shoes in his King Street store until he retired in 1888. By then, a widower, he had married a younger widow, Anne Sheet.

Incredibly, the business he founded still exists today, as Bradshaw’s Shoes! The store on Peyton’s original premises operated until 1966 and Bradshaw’s Children’s Shoes of Arlington, Virginia, is the commercial descendent of Peyton Ballinger, shoemaker. ■



Bradshaw’s Shoe Store, 508–512 King Street, c1967. Peyton Ballinger owned the property and operated his shoe store there from 1850 until about 1890. After Ballinger’s retirement, his business partner, Philip Bradshaw, continued running the shoe store. Renamed Bradshaw’s Shoes, the business remained at this location until 1977 when the block of 500 King Street was demolished as part of Alexandria’s Urban Renewal Project.

Courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology



# Voting Viva Voce

UNLOCKING THE SOCIAL LOGIC OF PAST POLITICS

## Voting Viva Voce

### *Unlocking the Social Logic of Past Politics*

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Two mid-nineteenth century cities—Alexandria, Virginia and Newport, Kentucky—shared a common voting arrangement: both states required all votes in all elections to be cast in public by voice (viva voce). The poll books provided an official written record of every voter's spoken declaration. Professor Don DeBats presents and analyses this data on the website.

**Public Voting.** This project reveals the world of American politics at a time when every citizen's vote was public knowledge, and shows how social identity influenced votes.

**Alexandria, Virginia | 1850s.** On the Potomac just opposite Washington DC, Alexandria was a thriving commercial city based on slave labor in the late 1850's as the secession crisis loomed.

**Newport, Kentucky | 1870.** On the Ohio just opposite Cincinnati, Newport was, as the Panic of 1873 crashed down, a thriving industrial city based on immigrant labor.

## Colophon

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