

THE IOWA ELECTIONS OF 1852

BY DR. MORTON M. ROSENBERG
BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Until the advent of the Civil War, Iowa was still very much of a frontier state. The sole non-slave state to be formed north of the Missouri Compromise Line, Iowa was only sparsely settled in her north-central and northwestern portions by the beginning of the 1850's. The threat of Indian depredations continued to menace Iowans in these lightly settled regions, as the Spirit Lake Massacre so horribly attested.¹

In the early 1850's the people of Iowa had the typical characteristics and traits associated with the inhabitants of the frontier. They were ambitious, industrious, energetic, aggressive, hospitable, self-reliant, serious in their politics, active in support of their principles and ideals, and dedicated to the prevailing democratic political system.

The dynamicism and restless energy of the frontier settlers were especially obvious in the political activities of the times. Iowans took their politics personally and earnestly during these early years, and they enjoyed themselves immensely. They delighted to attend rallies, dine at well-supplied barbecues, and listen to long, sonorous speeches.² The election battles of 1850 had been hard fought and exciting principally because of the emotion generated by the execution of the Compromise Acts. Iowa voters had almost universally supported these compromise measures, as the election results of that year testified.³

¹ "The Seventh Census of the United States." Manuscript census reports for Iowa located at the Iowa State Department of History and Archives; *The Census Returns of the Different Counties of the State of Iowa For 1856* (Iowa City, 1857).

² Clement Eaton, *Henry Clay and the Art of American Politics* (Boston, 1957), 153.

³ Morton M. Rosenberg, "Iowa Politics and the Compromise of 1850," *Iowa Journal of History*, 56, 1958, 204-206.

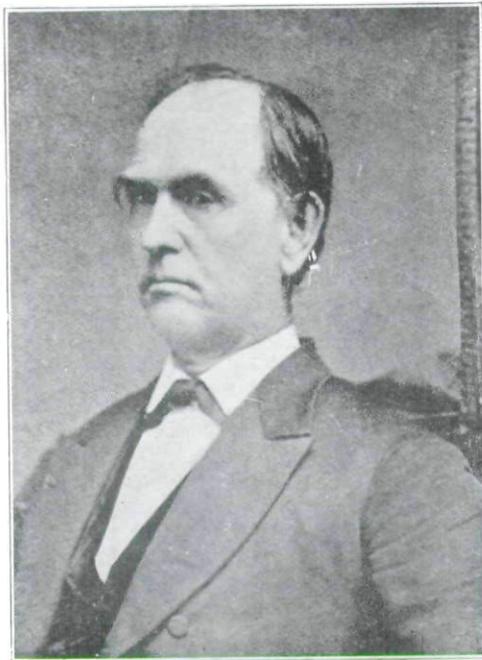
But the election year, 1852, was no less significant for Iowa's voters. Presidential, Congressional, and State contests would take place in 1852. Moreover, the elections to fill the vacancies in the Iowa legislature were more important than usual, for the newly chosen General Assembly faced the responsibility of selecting a United States Senator. The term of the incumbent Democrat, George W. Jones, was scheduled to expire in 1853.

Iowa's politicians of all parties—the strongly entrenched Democrats, the aspiring Whigs, and the highly vocal Free Soilers—eagerly awaited the approaching contests in which the policies of the preceding two years, both nationally and locally, would be weighed and evaluated by the voters. Iowans had ample time to live with, ponder upon, and react to the various components of the Compromise of 1850. The coming elections would undoubtedly reflect their sentiments. In addition, a host of local and state problems had to be resolved. The political leaders of the period were untiring in their efforts to focus the attention of the voters upon these issues. Whig partisans optimistically expected to make sizeable inroads into what had always been the exclusive domain of the Democrats, while the Free Soilers were no less hopeful, for the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was unpopular with Northern voters.

The Whigs actually launched their election campaign at the end of 1851. They endeavored, among other things, to increase popular support for their long-cherished program of internal improvements with Federal aid. Theirs was the task of convincing Iowans that a vote for a Democrat would be a wasted ballot, for the national Democratic Party continued to oppose internal improvements at Federal expense.⁴ This was the only line of attack which the Whigs could have adopted on the issue of internal improvements. Even their own newspapers conceded that Iowa's Congressional delegation had been working diligently to persuade Congress to make appropriations for river and road improvements in the state. That Senators Augustus C. Dodge and George W. Jones,

⁴ *The Iowa Republican*, June 11, 1851.

especially, had been industrious in their efforts to secure Federal funds for use within the state, not even the most partisan Whig could deny. That these men had been unsuccessful could not have been disputed either.



SENATOR AUGUSTUS C. DODGE

Dear to the hearts of Iowans, especially those who lived along the banks of the Mississippi, was the project to improve the navigation of the upper portions of the river. Just above Keokuk a series of rapids considerably hampered navigation, if they did not, during certain times of the year, make ship passage totally impossible. Iowa's Senators continually sought to win funds from Congress to improve the river channel.⁵ Nor was Democratic press support for certain projects entirely absent. In the words of one of the more influential papers,

⁵ *Congressional Globe* 1st Session 32nd Congress, 41; 2nd Session 33rd Congress, 580, 782, 850, 525; Richard M. Young to George W. Jones, Dec. 26, 1851, Jones Papers (State Historical Society of Iowa).

the *Iowa State Gazette*, the West required a "permanent system of internal improvements."⁶ Consequently, all the Whigs could do was to hammer away at the obvious inconsistency between the programs of the state and national Democratic organizations.

The Whigs also toiled to win public acceptance of their tariff position. They painted a glowing picture of an industrialized state which could become a reality only through "adequate and constant protection—to our industry, against the half-paid laborers of Europe."⁷ They chided the Democrats for continuing the Tariff of 1846, for everyone knew that Democrats professed "to believe in *free trade*."⁸ Iowans, however, were still not fully convinced that a high protective tariff would advance their own self-interest.

The Whigs were hopeful of greater success in their appeal to the voters with the constitution issue. The state constitution, adopted in 1864, essentially embodied all the Jacksonian principles valued by the Democratic party, which, dominating the constitutional convention, wrote the provisions of the document. As early as 1850, Whig journals began to criticize the constitution, particularly the provision which prohibited the establishment of public banking facilities in the state. The only public bank ever incorporated in the state, from the earliest settlement to the adoption of a new constitution in 1857, was the Miner's Bank of Dubuque. This institution, however, has received its charter of incorporation from the Territorial Legislature of Wisconsin in 1836, and had remained active only until 1844. Thus, during Iowa's history as a state the citizens had been without public banks.⁹

The absence of public banks in Iowa, the Whigs carefully pointed out, was creating a great deal of hardship and inconvenience for Iowa's farmers and businessmen. Paper currency from other states flooded Iowa in ever-increasing quan-

⁶ *Iowa State Gazette*, March 26, 1851.

⁷ *Des Moines Valley Whig* quoted in *The Iowa Republican*, June 11, 1851.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ruth A. Gallaher, "Money in Pioneer Iowa 1838-1865," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 32, 1934, 13.

tities, drawing the gold and silver out of the state. The adoption of a free banking system would, Whigs believed, remove the objections of monopolistic control, but at the same time would carry with it all the practical advantages of public banking.¹⁰ Moreover, the Whig press added, other states had erected proper safeguards to prevent or guard against the few evils that might arise in connection with banking.¹¹

The chartering of public banks, however, called for a revision of the state constitution, a step the Democrats were as



STEPHEN B. HEMPSTEAD

loath to take as the Whigs were quick to advocate.¹² In his inaugural address late in 1850 Governor Stephen B. Hempstead stated the official Democratic position on the question of public banks and, indirectly on the issue of revising the constitution to effect this objective. He declared that without banks in Iowa "to create distress or panic

by their failures, contractions, and expansions . . . our citizens relying on their own industry and frugality . . . [are] . . . showing to the world that bank indulgences, paper money, and special privileges are unnecessary to secure to a people happiness and prosperity."¹³ Supporters of changes in the

¹⁰ *The Frontier Guardian*, March 7, 1851.

¹¹ Louis Pelzer, "The History and Principles of the Democratic Party of Iowa, 1846-1857," *Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 6, 1908, 201-202; *Des Moines Valley Whig*, March 11, May 20, 1852; *The Iowa Republican*, Jan. 28, 1852; *The Davenport Gazette*, May 20, 1852; *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, Oct. 12, 1852.

¹² *Des Moines Valley Whig*, May 15, 1851; *The Iowa Republican*, Dec. 11, 1850.

¹³ Benjamin F. Shambaugh, ed., *The Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa* (Iowa City, 1903), I, 426.

constitution could be certain that as long as Hempstead remained in office the constitution would be undisturbed. This was an area in which the Democrats maintained an increasingly unpopular position vulnerable to criticism. The Whigs did not spare their opponents from embarrassment when they called attention to the fact that the Democrats claimed to favor "*an exclusive metallic currency*," and yet did nothing to prevent the circulation in Iowa of paper currency from banks in other states.¹⁴

The Whigs probed to discover other areas where the Democrats might be susceptible to effective attack. Shrewdly assessing the difficulties that had occurred during the Democratic convention in the Second Congressional District in 1850, the Whigs sought to fan any slumbering embers into real flames of party discord. The press, for example, pointedly remarked that both Senators Dodge and Jones, while visiting various portions of the state prior to their departure for Washington to attend the opening of Congress, had neglected to visit the counties of central Iowa. At the nominating convention in 1850 several delegates from central Iowa had expressed bitter feelings to the assembly because of their dissatisfaction with the nomination of Lincoln Clark for Congress. Whigs wryly noted that while southern Iowa had benefited from Dodge's exertions, and while Jones had faithfully served northern Iowa, the central sections of the state derived no benefits from these gentlemen.¹⁵ Dodge lived in Burlington and Jones lived in Dubuque.

While the Whigs tried to generate support for their program, and tried to stir discontent in the ranks of their opponents, the Democrats late in 1851 selected the issue which would be the basis for the party's presidential campaign in 1852. On December 16, Senator Jones introduced in the Senate the supportive resolutions of the Iowa General Assembly on the Compromise of 1850. Jones himself added that he believed that "these resolutions . . . reflect the sentiments of the Democratic party of Iowa."¹⁶ On March 8, 1852, Lincoln

¹⁴ *The Iowa Republican*, June 11, 1851.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Oct. 15, 1851.

¹⁶ *Congressional Globe* 1st Session 32nd Congress, 103.

Clark introduced the same resolutions in the House of Representatives.¹⁷ The Democrats intended to adopt as their main issue for the approaching campaign the Compromise of 1850 which they had so successfully promoted two years earlier.

The Whigs began the political activity of this important election year by calling a state convention for February, primarily to select delegates for the Whig national convention due to meet in mid-summer to choose the party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates. Nominees for the minor offices of the state, also selected by the Whig convention, were J. W. Jenkins, Secretary of State; Asbury B. Porter, Auditor; and Hosea B. Horn, Treasurer.¹⁸ None of the delegates chosen to represent Iowa at the national Whig conclave, D. W. Kilbourn, S. M. Ballard, G. L. Nightingale, and Archibald McKenny, ever achieved prominence in Iowa political circles.¹⁹ They would journey to Baltimore unpledged to any of the aspiring presidential candidates, but with a known sympathy for Millard Fillmore, undoubtedly because of his close identification with the Compromise of 1850.²⁰

The platform which the Whigs adopted at the February meeting differed little from the official statement of the national party, drawn up four months later. The national platform, a rather innocuous statement of principles in keeping with the vague and unknown sentiments of the party's nominees, Winfield Scott and William A. Green, affirmed the adherence of the Whigs to the tenets of the Federal constitution and to states' rights. It reaffirmed the party position regarding the tariff and internal improvements. On the question of the Compromise of 1850 the Whig attitude was, at best, lukewarm. Due to strong antislavery adherents in the organization, the party merely "acquiesced in" that series of laws and promised to "maintain them and insist upon their strict enforcement until time and experience shall demonstrate the necessity of further legislation to guard against the evasion of the law on

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 700.

¹⁸ *The Iowa Republican*, Jan. 21, 1852; *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, March 1, 1852.

¹⁹ Whig alternates were H. T. Reid, James Noster, T. D. Crocker, and W. G. Woodward. *Ibid.*

²⁰ *The Iowa Republican*, July 30, 1851.

the one hand, and the abuse of their powers on the other." Quite clearly, the Whigs did not intend to accept the Compromise as a 'finality.'²¹

The Whig state platform praised the Fillmore administration, called for the usual tariff and internal improvements, and pledged to support the nominees of the party, whoever they were. On the Compromise issue, the state platform adopted a more favorable plank than did the national convention. One plank declared that the Whigs of Iowa considered the slavery question "as settled now and forever."²²

The state convention of the Democratic party met in May. Like the Whigs, the Democrats selected their delegates to the party's national convention, scheduled to gather in Baltimore on June 1, without encumbering them with official instructions. It was no secret, however, that the delegates, William F. Coolbaugh, A. W. Carpenter, George Gillaspie, and Philip B. Bradley, leaned strongly toward Stephen A. Douglas, popular Senator from neighboring Illinois, because he was, in the words of a partisan journal, the "Young Giant of the West."²³ For the minor state offices the convention renominated two incumbents, George W. McCleary for Secretary of State and William Pattie for Auditor. Martin L. Morris, a newcomer, received the nomination for Treasurer.

The national Democratic platform reiterated the party's official views on the chief issues of the day, supporting a low tariff and opposing a national bank, internal improvements, and Federal interference in state affairs. Concerning the Compromise of 1850, the national platform promised to "abide by and adhere to a faithful execution of the acts known as the compromise measures." Other planks stated that the war with Mexico had been a just conflict, upheld the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798, vowed to maintain the rights of the states, and pledged continued resistance to "all monopolies and exclusive legislation for the benefit of the few at the

²¹ Kirk Porter, comp., *National Party Platforms* (New York, 1924), 36-37.

²² Roy V. Sherman, "Political Party Platforms in Iowa." Unpublished M.A. Thesis (State University of Iowa, 1926), 116-118.

²³ *Jackson County Democrat* quoted in *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, May 12, 1852.

expense of the many."²⁴ The refusal of the national convention to endorse the Compromise as final reflected the failure of the Democratic congressional caucus to declare the compromise measures a finality.²⁵ To head its ticket the national Democratic party selected a dark-horse with Southern sympathies, Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. William R. King of Alabama became his running-mate.

The Democratic state platform was briefer than that of the national party, but quite similar in tone and content. It opposed a national bank and a protective tariff, but in a carefully worded plank announced that the state organization favored internal improvements of a national character as opposed to the "wasteful, extravagant, and corrupt system of internal improvements" advocated by the Whigs. On the Compromise of 1850 the state platform was unequivocal: "We are in favor of the 'Compromise' as a *final* settlement of the questions which have so long agitated the country upon the subject of domestic slavery." Concerning the proposed revision of the state constitution, they assured the voters that it would endorse such a move "when the people shall manifest a desire for an alteration of the present constitution." Other planks opposed any change in the naturalization laws, called for a strict construction of the Federal constitution, and condemned 'nullification' by any state, North or South.²⁶

Adding to the excitement of a presidential election was the presence on the ballot of the Free Soil Party with its own slate of candidates and platform. The Free Soilers did not enter candidates in the congressional races, preferring to concentrate on the county as well as the presidential contests. Campaigning in Iowa under the label of Free Democracy, the Free Soil candidates planned to conduct their electioneering on a platform of undisguised opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act coupled with a demand for the eradication of slavery from American soil. Various county gatherings pledged support to the Free Soil presidential ticket of John P. Hale and George

²⁴ Porter, *National Party Platforms*, 28-32.

²⁵ Roy F. Nichols, *The Democratic Machine 1850-1854* (New York, 1923), 88.

²⁶ Sherman, "Political Party Platforms in Iowa," 113-115. Italics inserted.

W. Julian. Thus, the stage was set for a three-party fight for Iowa's presidential electors.²⁷

A few weeks after the close of their state convention, the Whigs published "An Address to the People of Iowa" which attacked the Democrats for their views on internal improvements, state banking and constitutional revision. The "Address," favored a change in the constitution to permit banking and demanded Federal aid "to improve the navigation of our rivers, harbors, and lakes; and make all needful appropriations for the general welfare, prosperity, and improvement of the country."²⁸ Moreover, the Whigs taunted the Democrats for attempting to maintain a ridiculous and inconsistent position: the local party favored internal improvements, but the national organization opposed them. Was not the stand of the Democrats on this issue weak and absurd?²⁸ Undoubtedly this charge disturbed some of the local Democratic leaders, but the state Democratic platform had been vague on the question of internal improvements as the party tried to steer clear of the issue.

The Whigs also continued to labor on behalf of a higher tariff. They insisted that a protective tariff would be beneficial not only to the interests of national industry, but also of value to the western farmer. A tariff would enable manufacturers to be certain of a home market for their goods and would increase employment, thus providing an expanded market for the produce of farms.²⁹ Here was another attempt to link the farmers of the West to the industrialists of the East in support of a protective tariff. Such a union was still about ten years shy of ultimate realization.

But the efforts of the Whigs to stimulate interest in their time-honored issues seemed to meet with little or no success. Discussions of the tariff stirred few persons. Remarks favoring internal improvements, though somewhat embarrassing to the Democrats, caused little concern. Even an appeal to the pocketbooks of Iowans regarding the lack of public banking

²⁷ *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, June 7, 1852; *The Davenport Gazette*, Oct. 28, 1852.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, April 22, 1852.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1852; *The Dubuque Tribune* quoted in *The Iowa Republican*, April 21, 1852.

facilities in the state did not seem to provoke the voters as much as the Whigs desired.³⁰

All of the issues which the Whigs sought to promote fell short of the mark when measured against the mainspring of the Democratic campaign, the Compromise of 1850. Two years earlier the Compromise had demonstrated its extreme popularity. Although some of its appeal had worn off, it still held a hypnotic power of the voters of Iowa. That the slavery problem had been settled once and for all was a source of deep gratification to Iowans.

One historian of the period contends that the Democrats of Iowa were divided over the question of homesteads and internal improvements. To prevent damage to the party's cause in 1852, the Democrats, this historian suggests, decided to close ranks behind the Compromise, a move which all factions could support.³¹ There may be some validity to these contentions, but the fact remains that the Iowa Democrats were not alone in omitting a homestead plank from their platform. The Whigs, too, did not mention homesteads in their platform, but there is no evidence that they were split over this issue. Actually, Democratic solidarity behind the Compromise had served the party well in 1850 and could prove to be valuable again.³²

Everything considered, the presidential campaign of 1852 in Iowa, as elsewhere in the nation, was rather devoid of inspiring issues.³³ No one seemed greatly excited by any of the Whig policies, while the Compromise, except for the Fugitive Slave Act, received general public approval. Before long, the campaign degenerated into a series of personal attacks against the major candidates. Whigs ridiculed Pierce as lacking in fitness to hold the presidential office. Some attacked him for being too friendly to Southern interests. Democrats criticized

³⁰ David S. Sparks, "The Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa, 1848 to 1860." Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Chicago, 1951), 52.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 29-30; 55.

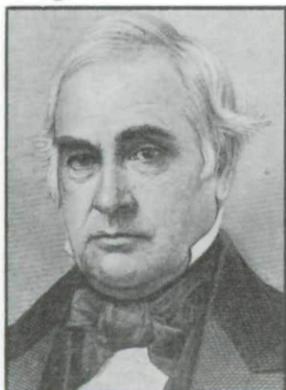
³² *Iowa Capital Reporter*, May 19, 1852, quoted in *The Iowa Republican*, May 26, 1852; *Congressional Globe* 1st Session 32nd Congress. Appendix. 1118-1119.

³³ Nichols, *The Democratic Machine*, 153-154.

Winfield Scott for harboring anti-foreign views, as well as for supporting abolitionism and Free Soilism.³⁴

The Democrats tried to vitalize their campaign by inviting Senator Stephen A. Douglas, always a popular figure with Iowans, to speak in the state during the Fall. Douglas accepted the invitation and appeared in Burlington on October 4, where he shared the speakers' platform with Dodge, Jones, Lincoln Clark and other local party officials. The audience of 5,000 or more, patiently listened to at least six hours of political haranguing. German-speaking persons at the meeting heard speeches in their native tongue. But aside from this brief stimulant, the presidential campaign appeared to lack the enthusiasm usually characteristic of frontier politics.³⁵

A similar indictment could not be made concerning the Congressional elections, especially in the Second District,



LINCOLN CLARK

where Lincoln Clark sought another term. In the First District the Democratic incumbent, Bernhard Henn, again won his party's endorsement to run against the Whig, Philip Viele. Viele, a native of New York and an alumnus of Union College, left the Democratic party in 1840, three years after arriving in Iowa.³⁶ Delazon Smith, disappointed as an office-seeker and extremely dissatisfied, bolted the Democrats as he had done in 1850 and organized what he called "The Young Democracy of Van Buren County."³⁷ What he hoped to gain for himself is not quite clear, but perhaps revenge was his principal motive. If

³⁴ Pelzer, "History of the Democratic Party of Iowa," 198; *Des Moines Valley Whig*, Oct. 14, 1852.

³⁵ Charles Waters to George W. Jones, Sept. 20, 1852, Jones Correspondence (Iowa State Department of History and Archives); *Iowa State Gazette*, Oct. 6, 1852; Pelzer, "History of the Democratic Party of Iowa," 198.

³⁶ *The Frontier Guardian*, June 18, 1852; Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa* (New York, 1903), IV, 273.

³⁷ *Autobiography of Charles Clinton Nourse* (Cedar Rapids, 1911), 23.

the Democrats persisted in being unfriendly to his candidacy, he would work to secure the defeat of the regular party nominee. Thus, as in 1850, Smith became a thorn in the side of the Democratic party in the First Congressional District.

Trouble came early for the Democrats in the Second District. At the nominating convention in the district, held in Muscatine on June 30, several delegates appeared who were critical of Lincoln Clark's record in Congress. Clark had worked hard for the Dubuque and Keokuk Railroad, a north-south line running along the Mississippi, while the central counties preferred their own favorite east-west route across the center of the state. Nevertheless, Clark succeeded in winning re-nomination despite the grumbling of the delegates from the central counties.³⁸

Clark also attracted some opposition from the Dubuque delegation, men from his own county, a strong indication that all was not serene in the Dubuque organization. Difficulties in Dubuque involved a clash of personalities and feuding among the leadership which dated back to 1848. In that year George W. Jones was elected United States Senator. This won for him the lasting hostility of Judge Thomas S. Wilson, who had been the chief Democratic contender for the senatorial vacancy. Also personally at odds with Jones was Dennis A. Mahoney, editor of the *Dubuque Herald*. Wilson and Mahoney became the leading figures of an anti-Jones faction which emerged in Dubuque. Clark leaned toward the Wilson-Mahoney camp, thus accounting for some opposition from the Dubuque delegation. Later, when the Jones group became stalwart supporters of the Buchanan Administration, the anti-Jones faction, save for Mahoney, became anti-Administration men. Clark, too, would be numbered among the leaders of the anti-Administration Democrats in the state.³⁹

The unreconciled dissenters of the Second District called a convention of their own to meet in Cedar Rapids on July 15 to

³⁸ *The Davenport Gazette*, July 15, 1852; *Congressional Globe* 1st Session 32nd Congress. Appendix. 672-675.

³⁹ *Dubuque Herald* quoted in the *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, July 14, 1852; David S. Sparks, "The Decline of the Democratic Party in Iowa, 1850-1860," *Iowa Journal of History*, 53, 1955, 11-12; John C. Parish, *George Wallace Jones* (Iowa City, 1912), 34, 44-45, 50-51.

nominate a man of their own choice for Congress. On the appointed date representatives from Johnson, Cedar, Linn, Iowa, and Benton counties convened at Cedar Rapids. Le Grand Byington, railroad promoter from Iowa City, was one of the leaders of the gathering. This rump group picked Judge Carlton to run for Clark's seat, but Carlton declined the honor.⁴⁰

So serious did the Democratic leadership deem the situation in the Second District that they published an address to the voters there, imploring them to stand together behind the regular party nominee, lest the opposition be able to capitalize on the Democratic division. The leaders called upon the voters to lay aside sectional jealousy and close ranks behind Clark.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the Whigs worked diligently to take advantage of the Democratic rupture. Very early in the campaign they had accused the Democrats of neglecting the central counties. Now the Whigs intended to profit at their opponents' expense. To run against Clark they chose John P. Cook, a long-time resident of Davenport, and known to possess 'safe' ideas on the railroad issue which had so aroused Byington and his friends. Cook, it was hoped, would receive the votes of the Democratic bolters.⁴²

Democratic party regulars strove to make Clark acceptable to the voters of his district. They characterized him as a friend to all sectors of his district, not merely to a particular area. He was described as "a faithful, talented representative" who merited the votes of all true Democrats.⁴³

But the outcome of the race in the Second District was a decided shock to the Democrats. With 74% of the electorate casting ballots, John P. Cook vanquished Lincoln Clark by a vote of 7,767 to 7,194. Cook received 51.9% of the total vote to Clark's 48.09%, the latter figure representing a decline

⁴⁰ *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, July 21, 24, 1852.

⁴¹ *Iowa State Gazette*, July 21, 1852.

⁴² *Ibid.*, July 28, 1852; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1949* (Washington, 1950), 1014. Cook joined the Democratic party after the formation of the Republican party. Gue, *History of Iowa*, IV, 59.

⁴³ *Iowa State Gazette*, July 7, 1852.

of 5.64 percentage points from his share of the vote two years earlier. Clark lost his race for re-election in Linn, Cedar, Iowa, and Johnson counties. In these four counties, which would benefit from a railroad west from Davenport, Cook amassed 1,120 votes more than his competitor.⁴⁴ In 1850 Clark had carried these central counties without any difficulty. Thus, the Democrats suffered defeat because they failed in their efforts to mend their political fences in the Second District. Much credit must go to the Whigs for successfully exploiting Democratic dissension. The Democratic press described Clark as a victim of fraud and treachery within the ranks of the Democratic Party.⁴⁵ However, local interests, as reflected in the railroad projects of the different sectors, contributed more to his defeat than political disloyalty.

In the First District, where Delazon Smith was busy creating as much trouble for the Democrats as he could, Bernhard Henn experienced no difficulty defeating his Whig opponent, Phil Viele, by a vote of 9,714 to 7,874. Henn received 55.23% of the total vote. This was an increase of 4.72 percentage points above his record in 1850. The departure of the Mormons from Pottawattamie county contributed substantially to Henn's victory. Whig totals declined from 457 to 68 votes.⁴⁶

The returns from the presidential balloting sharply pointed up the Democratic loss in the Second District. The Democratic electors ran ahead of Clark in seventeen of the twenty-three counties of the district. Cedar, Linn, and Johnson counties wound up in the Democratic column in the presidential voting.⁴⁷

In a close contest Franklin Pierce defeated Winfield Scott in the state by a vote of 17,823 to 15,895. The Free Soil party attracted 1,612 votes, more than double the number of votes given to the Free Soil candidate in the gubernatorial election in 1850. Evidently the antislavery impulse was gaining momentum in Iowa. Pierce received 50.45% of the total votes cast, while Scott obtained 44.99% and Hale won 4.56%. Since the

⁴⁴ *Election Records 1848-1860*. Office of the Secretary of State, Des Moines.

⁴⁵ *Iowa State Gazette*, Aug. 11, 1852.

⁴⁶ *Election Records*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Democrats had narrowly squeezed through the victory, the opposition had good reason to look forward to the future with renewed optimism.⁴⁸ A coalition of opposition elements could well spell disaster for the Democratic party in future elections.

Pierce's slim margin in Iowa accurately reflected his narrow triumph in the rest of the nation. Although he carried all of the states except Vermont, Massachusetts, Kentucky, and Tennessee, and accumulated a tremendous majority in the electoral college, his margin of victory over all other candidates combined was barely 30,000 votes in a total of 3,100,000 votes cast.

The Free Soil party maintained or increased its following in the areas where it had exhibited considerable strength in 1850. In eleven counties the party polled 6% of the votes or better. Three counties, Cedar, Henry, and Washington, gave the Free Soilers 12% of their ballots, and Louisa county almost matched this figure. The party registered gains throughout the entire eastern portion of the state. For the most part, the Free Soilers were strongest in the Whig counties, but they also made inroads among centers of Democratic popularity such as Lee, Scott, and Monroe counties. In the latter two counties, however, the Democrats were beginning to betray signs of weakness. The same was true for several other counties which once were 'safe' Democratic strongholds, including Des Moines, Jefferson, Jones, Iowa, Muscatine, and Clinton counties.⁴⁹

In other state contests, the Democratic hopefuls swept into offices by margins of 1,000 votes or better. George W. McCleary was re-elected Secretary of State, William Pattie was re-elected Auditor, and Martin L. Morris was elected Treasurer. In the important races for the Iowa legislature, the Democrats elected 20 of the 31 Senators and 40 of the 62 members of the Lower House, thus assuring that a Democrat would be returned to the United States Senate.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, the returns of the voting for the General Assembly affirmed what the congressional and presidential re-

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Pelzer, "History of the Democratic Party of Iowa," 198.

sults indicated, the Democrats were losing popularity. Partly it was a matter of Whig persistence in hammering away in favor of such issues as internal improvements, the tariff, and public banking, whose adherents were increasing in numbers. Partly it occurred because the Democrats were too closely identified with the South and slavery, and the election reflected the growing antislavery sentiment in the state. And finally, the decreasing Democratic appeal could be attributed to a split within the organization provoked by disagreements over conflicting railroad projects as well as by personal squabbles in Dubuque.

The growing restiveness within the Democratic party manifested itself again during the voting in the Iowa legislature for Senator of the United States. The term of George W. Jones was soon to expire and he eagerly sought to be returned to Washington. Support for Jones' candidacy, however, was not universal. One paper, the *Telegraph* of Burlington, reputedly a 'neutral' organ, made Jones its favorite whipping boy and worked hard to secure his defeat. Jones' delayed departure for the Capital, causing him to miss the opening of Congress, had hurt his popularity.⁵¹ Said to be seeking the senatorial seat which Jones coveted were Joseph Williams, Stephen B. Hempstead, Thomas S. Wilson, James Grant, and Ver Planck Van Antwerp. Hempstead still had two years remaining as Governor and therefore could not be a serious candidate for the Senate.⁵²

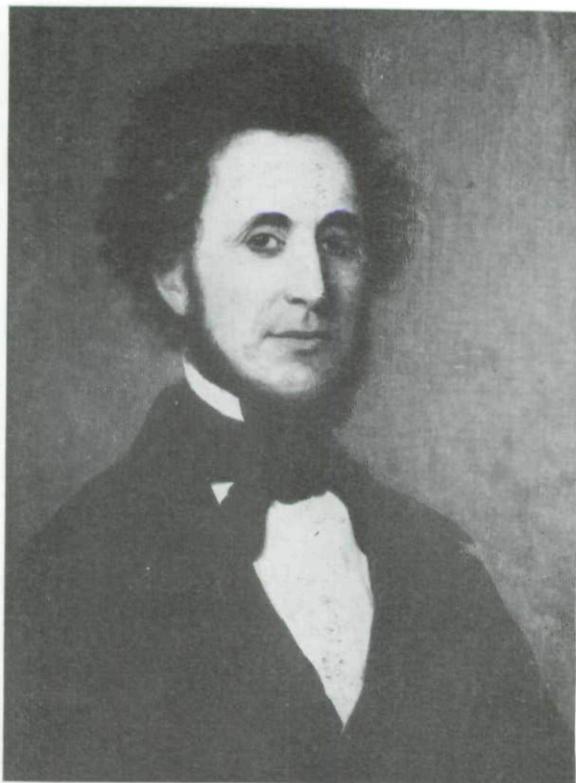
Strong opposition to Jones came also from the southern portion of the state. This area charged that Jones, a resident of the north, was more partial to the interests of his own region than to the state at large. Railroad interests in Des Moines county, especially, felt aggrieved at Jones for failing to champion their favorite railroad project, a line from Burlington to Fort Des Moines, as energetically as he pushed the Dubuque and Keokuk line.⁵³ Knowing the charges against him, Jones

⁵¹ *Burlington Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 10, 30, 1852; Dec. 3, 1852.

⁵² Dan E. Clark, *History of Senatorial Elections in Iowa: A Study in American Politics* (Iowa City, 1912), 55.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 52; James Grimes to Charles Mason, February 13, 1852, Mason Papers (Iowa State Department of History and Archives); Parish, *George W. Jones*, 44.

denied that he had been working against the interests of the Burlington people. Unfortunately for him, the bill to grant land for construction of the Burlington road failed to make any headway in Congress, and Jones had to shoulder the



SENATOR GEORGE W. JONES

blame for its lack of success. Nevertheless, he assured a Burlington leader, Charles Mason, that "*each one* of the Iowa delegation will exert himself to the utmost for the accomplishment of the wishes of our constituents in the south in relation to their favorite R.R. project." He could make this promise, he insisted, not because he was a candidate for re-election, but because he was "bound by every principle and every feeling of gratitude to serve my constituents everywhere and particularly those about Burlington and everywhere in the southern part

of the state who on all occasions have sustained me."⁵⁴ In the end, the regular Democrats, urged on by Dodge and Henn, kept the rebels in line. The General Assembly re-elected Jones to another six-year term to the United States Senate over his Whig rival, George G. Wright, by a vote of 59 to 31.⁵⁵

Everything considered, the Democrats of Iowa had no reason to view the election results of 1852 with satisfaction. At best, the frontier voter was an uncertain and unpredictable individual who switched political allegiance rather readily, depending upon the urgency of his immediate needs. Failure to accommodate the railroad desires of Iowa's central counties contributed heavily to the Democratic defeat in the Second District's congressional race. Continued failure to gratify the growing aspirations of Iowans for public banking facilities, internal improvements, and homestead legislation, as well as the lack of success in stilling the controversy over slavery, would eventually lead to the dislodgement of the Democrats from their positions of power, prestige, and authority in the state.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ George W. Jones to Charles Mason, May 18, 1852, Mason Papers.

⁵⁵ *Journal of the Senate*, Fourth General Assembly of Iowa, 1852, 79-80.

⁵⁶ Morton M. Rosenberg, "The Kansas-Nebraska Act in Iowa: A Case Study," *Annals of Iowa*, Third Series, 37, 1964, 455-457.

BOOK REVIEW

"Anyone who undertakes to abridge the right of any American to life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness commits three great wrongs. He wrongs the individual first, but in addition, he wrongs his country and he betrays the hopes of mankind." These words were spoken by President Harry S. Truman on July 4, 1951, at the Washington Monument. Quotes such as this one convey the spirit of the American people, and the book *Harry S. Truman 1951, Public Papers of the Presidents* conveys the spirit of this American President. The Government Printing Office in Washington D. C., has volumes on Presidents from 1945 to 1964. These books more than adequately portray each President since they include press conferences reproduced word for word, plus the letters, speeches, and messages to Congress given by the President for that year. If you are interested in purchasing this 749-page volume on Harry Truman @ \$6.25, or the volumes on Eisenhower, Kennedy or Johnson, write to: Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402, for more information.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.