

THE BIRTH OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN IOWA, 1854-1856

By *David S. Sparks**

When the great Senator from Illinois chose to throw all the power and prestige of his commanding position in the Senate, as well as using his remarkable talents as a political manager, behind a measure, the result was very nearly a foregone conclusion. Stephen A. Douglas had proved his power in the 1850 Compromise measures, and now in 1854 he was putting everything he had into the fight for his bill to organize the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. In the reasonable hope that the vexing question of slavery might be banished from national political discussions, Douglas bowed to Southern demands that his bill include a provision repealing the 1820 prohibition against slavery north of 36° 30' in the Louisiana Territory. When the Kansas-Nebraska Bill became law, the thirty-four-year-old barrier against the northward expansion of slavery had been destroyed. Northern reaction was instantaneous and violent. Douglas was burned in effigy. His Democratic party was stigmatized as the party of "slavocracy," and in one Northern state after another it looked as though the Democratic organization might join the moribund Whigs on the road to oblivion.

In Iowa the political calendar called for a gubernatorial campaign in 1854; the state thus became an early testing ground for the effect the Kansas-Nebraska Bill would have on Northern politics. The early reaction involved creating "Opposition" or "Coalition" organizations to challenge the vulnerable Democrats. Within two years, however, the transition phase had passed; "Opposition" and "Coalition" expedients had given way, and the Republican party had been born in Iowa.

The man who led both the revolt against the Nebraska Bill and the movement toward the new political organization in Iowa was James W. Grimes. Starting as the Whig (or "Opposition") candidate for governor in the 1854 race, Grimes gathered support from so many factions and splinter groups that he himself probably could not have said what political designation he deserved when he won the coveted office. But all his doubts had

*David S. Sparks is assistant professor of history at the University of Maryland.

disappeared by 1855, for by then he was proudly calling himself the first Republican governor in the nation. Not yet forty years old when chosen by the "Whig" state convention to make the gubernatorial race, young Grimes was the embodiment of a new moral fervor that was permeating Iowa politics even before the Nebraska embroglio. He was a product of the New England puritanism that believed manners and morals frequently needed legislative correction.

In 1836, at the age of twenty, Grimes had left his home in Deering, New Hampshire, and migrated to Burlington, in what was then known as the Black Hawk Purchase. By 1838 he had been chosen as one of the representatives of Des Moines County in the First Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa.¹ His first act in this new capacity was the introduction of a bill to prevent gambling; the bill became law in that session of the Assembly. In the same session Grimes presented a substitute bill for a proposed measure concerning divorce. He was also a strong temperance man and joined that movement as it spread throughout the state. Obviously, from the very beginning of his legislative career, James W. Grimes was interested in ordering the manners and morals of a people through legislation.²

Of even greater importance in the young Grimes's political advancement was his interest in railroads. He was displaying a promoter's enthusiasm for the subject as early as 1838. By the beginning of 1851 he wrote to his father, describing the great railroad and plank road fever then raging in Iowa and his own part in the story. In the same year he became a director of the Peoria & Oquawka Railroad which was to have its western terminus on the Mississippi River opposite the town of Burlington. In the 1851-1852 session of the Iowa General Assembly, Grimes's primary activity as a legislator was in furthering railroad interests. In a letter to his wife from Iowa City, December 18, 1851, he proudly reported: "I have succeeded in the principal object for which I came here, viz., upon the subject of railroads, and I am told, have elevated the character of your husband as a tactician and parliamentary leader."³

¹ William Salter, *The Life of James W. Grimes* . . . (New York, 1876), 18.

² *Ibid.*, 18; *Keokuk Register*, Apr. 20, 1848; Fred B. Lewellen, "Political Ideas of James W. Grimes," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 42:341 (October, 1944).

³ Salter, *Grimes*, 27, 30, 32. In 1838 Grimes introduced a motion ordering the Committee of Corporations to prepare a memorial to Congress asking for a land grant for a railroad in Iowa. *Ibid.*, 348.

Throughout his early political career Grimes was a confirmed Whig, having achieved considerable prominence in the local party long before 1854. In 1848 the Whig state convention had selected him and Ralph P. Lowe as delegates-at-large to the national Whig convention.⁴ At this convention Grimes's early preference for John McLean marked him as a conservative, although he was quick to join the Taylor band wagon when it began to roll, a change befitting a good Western Whig.

But by 1854 the conservative Grimes of 1848 had become a radical. The reasons for his conversion from conservative to radical Whiggism are difficult to pin down. His biographer and intimate friend, William Salter, speaks of Grimes's indignation at the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, while Grimes himself repeatedly emphasized the importance of the Nebraska Bill.⁵ To credit his conversion to political ambition merely begs the question of why the path to success appeared to run along radical Whig lines. Grimes's advocacy of homestead legislation, plus his opposition to nativism, probably contributed in no small measure to his change to radicalism.

The small Free Soil element in Iowa was certainly a factor in Grimes's conversion. This group, meeting as the Free Democracy of Iowa early in February, 1854, nominated a full ticket headed by Simeon Waters for governor and George Shedd for superintendent of public instruction.⁶ Their platform contained the usual Free Soil planks with the addition of a specific anti-Nebraska protest. It began to appear that the Free Democracy of Iowa might win a balance of power in the state if it could consolidate antislavery Whigs and Democrats on a simple anti-Nebraska stand. And, in large measure, the story of the campaign of 1854 in Iowa was the successful consolidation of all kinds of anti-Nebraska feeling into the "Opposition" or "Coalition" party.

The Whig or Opposition convention, which convened in Iowa City on February 22, 1854, was only nominally a Whig gathering. The convention date had been chosen in a conscious effort to emphasize union and nationalism. Since the "Silver Gray" or conservative Whig element was barely

⁴ Keokuk *Des Moines Valley Whig*, Jan. 21, 1848.

⁵ Salter, *Grimes*, 26; "Address to the People of Iowa," Burlington, April 8, 1854, quoted in *ibid.*, 34-50.

⁶ *Muscatine Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Feb. 7, 1854. The remainder of the ticket included J. W. Cattell, secretary of state; Levi Jenkins, auditor; and J. J. McMaken, treasurer.

represented in the convention, the belligerent antislavery wing of the party was in full control from the beginning. After choosing Grimes to head the ticket, the convention endorsed Shedd for superintendent of public instruction and named the Free Soil gubernatorial nominee, Waters, for secretary of state. The lesser nominations went to Andrew J. Stevens of Polk County, auditor; Eliphalet Price of Clayton County, treasurer; and James W. Sennett of Scott County, attorney-general.⁷ The choice of Shedd, in particular, revealed the extent of coalition in the Opposition. Shedd had been a Free Soil candidate for Congress from the First District in 1850; in the presidential election of 1852 he had received 1,612 votes as a presidential elector on the Hale ticket; in 1853 he was described as a "veteran abolitionist" at the Free Democratic convention of that year.⁸ With Grimes heading the Opposition ticket, it was apparent that the conservative wing of the Whig party had received only scraps from the table.

Only a few traditional Whig planks found their way into the Opposition platform, which was even more radical than the nominations.⁹ The paramount importance of the Nebraska controversy was evident in the references to it in the second and third planks, where the Opposition pledged itself "to recognize the binding force and obligation of the Act of Congress of 1820, known as the Missouri Compromise," and to "view the same as a compact between the North and South, mutually binding, obligatory, and as a *final* settlement of the question of slavery within the geographical limits to which it applies."

The convention found in Stephen A. Douglas the evil genius of the hour. After "most unqualifiedly and emphatically" disapproving of the "efforts now being made in Congress to legislate slavery into the free Territory of Nebraska," they accused Douglas "and his aides and abettors" of "pretense" in mentioning "that 'the eighth section of the Missouri Compromise is suppressed by the acts of 1850.'" Douglas' action was "conceived in bad faith and prompted by an ignoble and most unworthy ambition for party and personal political preferment." There was a striking similarity between this declaration and the impassioned "Appeal of the Independent Democrats," issued by congressional Free Soilers just a few weeks earlier.

⁷ Herbert S. Fairall, *Manual of Iowa Politics . . .* (Iowa City, 1884), 37.

⁸ Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Oct. 5, 1850; Fairall, *Manual*, 14; Theodore Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (New York, 1897), 260.

⁹ See Fairall, *Manual*, 37-8, for entire platform.

The traditional Whig program was contained in a series of planks dealing with state and local issues, among them a demand for internal improvements at federal expense, a request for an amendment to the state constitution to permit an increase in the debt limit allowed for internal improvements, and a declaration calling for the repeal of the constitutional prohibition of banks within the state.¹⁰ The final section of the Opposition platform called for a law prohibiting the manufacture and sale of "ardent spirits."

The Opposition party of the First Congressional District chose Rufus L. B. Clarke as its candidate; that of the Second District chose James Thorington. Both district conventions adopted platforms identical to that of the state convention. Rufus Clarke, the lesser known of the two candidates, was a minor politician of Free Soil leanings. Born in Connecticut in 1817, he had migrated to Iowa during the winter of 1849-1850 and had begun to practice law in Henry County. Although cultured and possessed of a particularly keen legal mind, Clarke's reserve had prevented him from gaining any real popularity in a Western community. Never an outstanding power in Iowa politics, he did serve as a prominent member of the 1857 constitutional convention and later as a delegate to the Wigwam in 1860.¹¹

On the other hand, James Thorington was an outstanding Whig. A resident of Davenport at the time of his nomination by the Second District convention, Thorington had been born and reared in Wilmington, North Carolina. After attending the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, Thorington briefly studied law in Montgomery and settled permanently in Davenport in 1839. His two terms as mayor of that city were followed by a county judgeship and a term as clerk of the district court of Scott County.¹² Through Thorington the Opposition hoped to capture the support of the strong Southern element in Iowa.

The Democrats of the state, badly split in 1854, were not alone in wres-

¹⁰ Under the new constitution adopted in 1857, the debt limit was raised from \$100,000 to \$250,000. Banks were also permitted under the 1857 constitution. *Constitution of Iowa*, Art. 7, Sec. 2; Art. 8, Sec. 6.

¹¹ Edward H. Stiles, *Recollections and Sketches of Notable Lawyers and Public Men of Early Iowa* (Des Moines, 1916), 672-3; Erik Eriksson, "The Framers of the Constitution of 1857," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 22:77 (January, 1924).

¹² *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949* (Washington, D. C., 1950), 1917.

ting with the problems of schism.¹³ The Opposition almost at once began to show signs of strain. The adoption of a radical platform was too much for the "Silver Gray" Whigs, and with their departure from the fold the Opposition began to fall apart. The most influential Whig paper in the state, the Burlington *Hawk-Eye*, denounced Grimes as an abolitionist and opposed Simeon Waters on the rather thin ground that he had already been nominated for governor on the Free Democracy ticket.¹⁴ The two Whig papers of Dubuque, the *Tribune* and the *Observer*, spent more time maligning each other than they did in fighting the Democrats. Even more serious signs of division appeared when Simeon Waters, Eliphalet Price, and George Shedd flatly refused to run at all.¹⁵ The *Hawk-Eye* began to campaign for a new convention "to fill the vacancies." It was even possible that the old-line Whigs might control such a new convention and rescue it from the Free Soil-abolitionist "kidnapping." The opposition of the *Hawk-Eye* was finally silenced when it was purchased by Clark Dunham, who had become a staunch Grimes supporter as well as his personal friend.¹⁶ But the mere silencing of the discordant elements of the party press would not win the election — something far more drastic was needed.

Relying upon his own shrewd judgment of the anti-Nebraska storm rolling over Iowa, and reinforced by his own convictions on the issue of slavery, Grimes resolved to make one more effort to win and hold the Free Soil vote, regardless of the cost in alienating old-line Whigs. Taking a projected statement of his political beliefs with him, he went down to Denmark in Lee County to seek definite abolitionist and Free Soil support.¹⁷ In Denmark, Grimes talked to George F. Magoun and Rev. Asa Turner who, together, were the heart and soul of the Iowa abolitionist movement. Magoun and Turner agreed to endorse his candidacy openly.

¹³ For the Democratic party in these years, see David S. Sparks, "The Decline of the Democratic Party in Iowa, 1850-1860," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 53:1-30 (January, 1955).

¹⁴ Charles E. Snyder, "Curtis Bates," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 44: 291-3 (July, 1946).

¹⁵ Dubuque *Weekly Miner's Express*, July 19, 1854; Frank I. Herriott, "James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 15:325-7 (July, 1926).

¹⁶ Muscatine *Tri-Weekly Journal*, Apr. 14, 1854. Clark Dunham was a Vermonter by birth. He spent his childhood in Licking County, Ohio, and from 1840 to 1854 he was editor of the *Gazette* of Newark, Ohio. See George Frazee, "Clark Dunham," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 4:209-217 (October, 1899).

¹⁷ Herriott, "James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons," 327-8.

True to their pledge, Magoun and Turner called a new convention of the Free Democracy to meet in Crawfordsville, Washington County, on March 28. The convention adjourned after passing two resolutions which sealed the bargain between Magoun, Turner, and Grimes:

That the great object to be secured by our suffrages is 1. Such State officers, and such a Legislature, and thereby such a Senator in the U. S. Congress, as will resist the extension of slavery, in any form, over the territory of the United States. 2. Such as will give the people of Iowa a Maine Law. Therefore . . . we recommend the Free Democracy to cast their votes for James W. Grimes, of Des Moines County, for Governor, because we believe, if elected, that he will maintain and carry out these principles.¹⁸

Since the Free Soilers, under the impetus of a presidential campaign, had polled over 1,500 votes in 1852, the pledge of their support was a considerable addition to Grimes's strength.

On April 8 Grimes published as his own political platform "An Address to the People of Iowa." The title was a conscious effort to invoke memories of the "Appeal of the Independent Democrats." The Address, widely printed throughout the state, was published in full in the *Ledger* of Fairfield, the *Keokuk Des Moines Valley Whig*, the *Ottumwa Courier*, and the *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*. Parts of it also appeared in several other Iowa Whig papers. Outside of the state the Address was given particularly hearty approbation by Horace Greeley in his *New York Tribune*. According to Greeley, "It is a plain and manly appeal to the people. The views he advocates are so undeniably sound . . . that they could hardly fail to receive the endorsement of every citizen of the state."¹⁹

Grimes's Address was designed to drive home the wedge in the Democratic ranks, as well as to hold Whig support. He began his message with words calculated to win the old-line Whigs to his standard. His opening statement was a flat declaration that the judges of the state supreme court should be elected rather than appointed—a favorite Whig demand. He followed with an endorsement of the Whig desire for banks in Iowa. The constitutional prohibition of banks had left the state dependent upon the local and state banks of Illinois, Ohio, and Missouri, with consequent high interest rates. The growing business community had long been demanding a

¹⁸ *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*, Apr. 7, 1854.

¹⁹ *New York Tribune*, May 10, 1854.

constitutional amendment, but the Democrats, full of fear of speculators and the evils of paper money, steadily resisted any effort at change. Old-line Whigs softened a bit after Grimes's Address.

Afraid of alienating crucial German voters, Grimes was forced to turn his back on his long temperance record and equivocate on the subject. He declared that he would neither veto a temperance measure nor a free liquor law.²⁰ Temperance, in short, was to be a matter for the legislature to determine.

Over and above the local questions of constitutional amendments and temperance were the national problems of internal improvements, homesteads, and Nebraska. It was upon these questions that Grimes outlined the common ground on which abolitionists, antislavery Whigs, antislavery Democrats, and even Know-Nothings might stand. In so doing, he anticipated most of the program and some of the specific arguments with which the Republicans achieved national power in 1860.

In the Address, Douglas was made to appear the betrayer of the sacred compromise and the tool of the slavocracy. Grimes pictured him as willing to sacrifice the Western businessman. Referring to the Douglas plan for tonnage duties, Grimes complained:

After draining the West to perfect the improvement of Eastern harbors, and while voting annually millions of dollars to build lighthouses and breakwaters, and to support a navy, all for the protection of Eastern commerce, the West is told that *her* commerce must languish unless she commits a *felo-de-se* by voluntary taxation. . . . It seems to me that a more absurd and preposterous project was never presented to Congress, and a more suicidal policy could not be adopted by the West.

Grimes continued to play upon the hopes of Western settlers, particularly on the hopes of the German immigrants to Iowa. Regarding the homestead idea as "beneficent" and "calculated to greatly advance the material interests of Iowa," Grimes deprecated any discrimination against foreigners. The full import of his appeal to the Germans on the issue can be understood only in reference to events then transpiring in Washington. There Western Congressmen, without reference to party, were proposing and supporting homestead legislation in every Congress. Iowa's Democratic

²⁰ Apparently the temperance issue was too hot to handle; Curtis Bates, the Democratic nominee, dodged the issue in exactly the same manner.

Senator Augustus Caesar Dodge was so assiduous in behalf of homesteads that the *Iowa Star* claimed for him the honor of being the "father and most untiring advocate of the Homestead bill in the Senate." And there is considerable evidence to substantiate such a claim.²¹ Meanwhile, Representative Bernhart Henn, a Democrat, was holding up his end in the House. On December 15, 1853, he had introduced a homestead bill and had spent the rest of the session working diligently for its passage. The first section of the Henn bill opened with the provision:

That any person, who is the head of a family, and is a citizen of the United States [or anyone] who is the head of a family, and who has prior to the first day of December, 1853, declared his intention to become a citizen of the United States, shall be entitled to settle upon and locate free of cost, one hundred and sixty acres.

The German voters, already sensitive because of the rising undercurrent of nativism, were quick to see in such a restriction of benefits to those who had immigrated before the end of 1853 a definite antiforeign prejudice. Grimes, unable to hit the Democrats on homesteads in general, was careful to concentrate his attack at the one spot in the whole controversy where the Democrats were most vulnerable.

Only after having carefully appealed to every major economic interest in the state did Grimes move on to his main contention that "the most important of all the questions now engrossing the public attention is the attempt to introduce slavery into the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas, by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise act." He dismissed the argument over the constitutionality of the Missouri Compromise as nothing but "an afterthought" devised by the South "to cover up discomfiture on other arguments." The Compromise was an "irrepealable law that settled the character of Nebraska as a free Territory" and "to the maintenance of that law the public faith was pledged."

But Douglas and the Democrats were the principal targets of the Address, and Grimes never let his Iowa readers forget it. "And to what does this doctrine of 'squatter sovereignty' tend if carried to its legitimate conclusions?" he asked. "What is to prevent the Legislature of Utah from declaring that no man shall enjoy the rights of citizenship in that Territory unless he becomes a member of and pays tithes to the Mormon church?"

²¹ Des Moines *Iowa Star*, Jan. 22, 1854. For a typical entry see *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., 1127-8, 1662.

Such a statement was obviously a well-calculated play upon the traditional Iowa prejudice against the Mormons. "What is to hinder the Catholics," Grimes continued, "from taking possession of New Mexico, the Methodists of Nebraska, and the Presbyterians of Kansas? Why cannot the first thousand settlers create a state religion in each Territory and exclude people of all other creeds from the rights of citizenship?" And finally, Grimes asked, "Where will be the remedy against such religious and political tyranny? . . . Revolution, revolution by the sword will be the only remedy."

With consummate skill, Grimes played upon the fears and prejudices of Iowans as a musician plays upon his instrument. "With a slave state on our Western border, I see nothing but trouble and darkness in the future," he wrote. "Bounded on two sides by slave States, we shall be intersected with underground railroads, and continually distracted by slave-hunts. . . . I sincerely believe that, should the Missouri Compromise be repealed, there will soon be a contest for the mastery between freedom and slavery on the soil of Iowa."

Fears for Iowa's economic dreams were not overlooked. "Shall populous, thriving villages and cities spring up all over the face of Nebraska," Grimes asked, "or shall unthrift and sparseness, stand-still and decay, ever characterize that State?" "Shall unpaid, unwilling toil, inspired by no hope and impelled by no affection, drag its weary, indolent limbs over that State, hurry the soil to barrenness and leaving the wilderness a wilderness still, or shall it be thrown open to the hardy and adventurous freemen of our own country, and to the constantly-increasing tide of foreign exiles?"

Thus Grimes, in his Address, sought to present the Opposition as the one hope for the enactment of the Northwestern economic program, as well as the only possessor of a platform upon which reasonable antislavery men could stand. By inference as well as by direct charge, Grimes maintained that the Democrats, controlled by a Southern and Eastern leadership, were unable to meet the needs of the Northwest and were soft toward an aggressive slavocracy. The Opposition platform of 1854 became, with hardly a change, the Republican platform of 1856.

Shortly after the Address was published, voters went to the Iowa polls to choose a new superintendent of public instruction. While the Opposition platform had called for a major overhaul in this office by means of a constitutional amendment, the Democrats had made no mention of the problem in their convention. On the other hand, the withdrawal of George

Shedd left the Opposition sponsoring a last-minute candidate. As a result, James D. Eads, the regular Democratic nominee, won easily in a large turnout.²² The vote of 17,793 to 13,462 showed once again the traditional Democratic preponderance in Iowa as well as the magnitude of the job which the Opposition had cut out for itself.

James W. Grimes had been called home to New Hampshire shortly after his Address was published. Apparently the extent of the Democratic victory in the April election convinced him that an all-out campaign would be necessary for any possibility of success. Cutting short his visit, Grimes hurried back to Iowa.²³ As soon as he reached Burlington he did three things. First, he reiterated his previous platform, incorporating it in a firm reply to a broadside in the Washington (D. C.) *Daily Union*. Second, he made plans for an extensive speaking tour of the state, to cover every sizeable town between the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. And, finally, he offered to meet Curtis Bates, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, at any or all of the places on his itinerary and debate with him the issues of the campaign.²⁴

Very early in the ensuing canvass, Grimes began to feel some hope for the success of the Opposition. On April 3 he wrote a political lieutenant:

I can carry Des Moines County by a larger majority than any man ever got in it and so far as I can learn the chances are that I can be elected. What do you think, a democrat in this town and the representative of Gen'l Dodge in his absence admits that I can out run the party by 3,000 in the state but says that they can still beat me 1,000 votes for he claims that there is 4,000 democratic majority in the State.²⁵

The ensuing campaign dealt with many issues — banking, temperance, internal improvements, the foreign vote — but there can be little doubt that the 1854 contest in Iowa was basically a contest over Nebraska and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Apparently the Opposition and Grimes had correctly estimated the public's reaction to the subject. By

²² Dubuque *Daily Miner's Express*, May 17, 1854.

²³ Frank I. Herriott has disproved the commonly held theory that Grimes rushed home to reply to a certain article in the Washington (D. C.) *Daily Union* attacking him. Herriott, "James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons," 423.

²⁴ Washington (D. C.) *Daily Union*, Apr. 29, 1854; Herriott, "James W. Grimes Versus the Southrons," 404.

²⁵ Grimes to William Penn Clarke, Burlington, Apr. 3, 1854, *William Penn Clarke Papers* (Iowa State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines).

May 2 the citizens of Fayette County had forced Senator Dodge to submit to the Senate a petition against the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Less than two weeks later, on May 12, the strongly Democratic Hollanders of Pella, Marion County, unanimously agreed to protest to Congress the passage of the bill. Senator George Wallace Jones felt the sting of the Opposition, too, being forced to introduce petitions from normally Democratic constituents protesting passage of the Nebraska Bill.²⁶

By June, Grimes began to reap the harvest of the anti-Nebraska feeling. Mahaska County received him with open arms. Apparently his plank on slavery extension was gaining converts for his running mates as well as for himself. Democrats continued to be won over to anti-Nebraska principles. When he appeared for a scheduled speech in Mills County, Grimes was warned that the Southern backgrounds of this staunchly Democratic county would require some gentle treatment on the subjects of slavery and Nebraska. Despite this warning, Grimes proudly reported to his wife later that he had maintained the same principles on the Missouri as on the Mississippi and in every latitude of Iowa and had been warmly received.²⁷

But when he returned to the eastern part of the state Grimes ran into a more determined opposition. He immediately sent out a call for aid from Salmon P. Chase, Joshua R. Giddings, and Elihu B. Washburne. Writing to Washburne from Wapello, Louisa County, on July 13, Grimes directed him to

Cause Mr. Chase to write a letter immediately to Col. John Runolds, Grandview, Louisa County, and Mr. Giddings to Dr. John M. Robertson, Columbus City, Iowa, and John M. Williams, of Port Louisa, in the same county urging them to rally to the Whig support. It is claimed in this county that Nebraska is not an issue — that it is not an issue between me & Bates & they are trying to get the free soilers to support Dodge men for the legislature. The prospects are cheering for a total overthrow of the Nebraskaites. In my canvass I make it the sole issue. When I started out I talked about amending the Constitution, but I have given up everything but this main issue. There is no time to lose in sending these letters.²⁸

²⁶ *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 773.

²⁷ Grimes to Mrs. Grimes, Oskaloosa, June 4, 18, 1854, Salter, *Grimes*, 51, 52; *Muscataine Tri-Weekly Journal*, June 14, 1854.

²⁸ Grimes to Elihu B. Washburne, Wapello, July 13, 1854, *Elihu B. Washburne Papers* (Library of Congress).

Thus, as the campaign progressed, Nebraska became more and more the major bone of contention. Elkader, in Clayton County, held an anti-Nebraska convention on July 15. After speeches by Timothy Davis and Reuben Noble had opened the proceedings, the convention passed a series of resolutions, all of which were unequivocal in their opposition to the "slave power." The convention vowed "that from this time forward we will make no concession to nor compromise with, the institution of slavery, but will demand . . . a restoration of the Missouri Compromise and a repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law."²⁹

When election day came in August, the margin of victory for the Opposition was exceedingly narrow. In the gubernatorial race, James W. Grimes defeated Curtis Bates by a vote of 23,312 to 21,192.³⁰ In the crucial campaign for control of the state legislature (which would elect a United States Senator to succeed A. C. Dodge), the Opposition was again victorious. Although the Democrats retained control of the state Senate by a count of sixteen to fifteen, the Opposition party elected forty out of seventy Representatives. This gave them control of the House and a clear majority on the joint ballot to elect a Senator.³¹ The Opposition divided the honors with the Democrats in the congressional contest: Democrat Augustus Hall defeated R. L. B. Clarke in the First District by a little more than 200 votes, thereby becoming the last Democrat to represent Iowa in Congress before the Civil War and for many years thereafter. In the Second District, Thorington dealt the Democratic candidate, retiring Governor Stephen Hempstead, a smashing defeat. In addition to the governorship, the Opposition captured the auditor's office, but the remainder of the executive offices went to the Democrats.³²

In determining the causes for the Opposition victory, the first thing to be noted is the narrow margin of that conquest. Grimes won by a majority of 2,120 votes. A switch of 1,061 votes out of a total of 44,504 would have defeated him. Of the eight offices available in 1854, the Opposition garnered only three: governor, auditor, and Representative in Congress

²⁹ Realto E. Price (ed.), *History of Clayton County, Iowa* . . . (2 vols., Chicago, 1916), 1:97. Both Davis and Noble became staunch Republicans.

³⁰ Official vote in *Census of Iowa . . . 1867* (Des Moines, 1867), 228-32.

³¹ Dan E. Clark, *History of Senatorial Elections in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1912), 62-3.

³² Fairall, *Manual*, 19. Louis Pelzer, "The History and Principles of the Democratic Party in Iowa, 1846-1857," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 7:210 (April, 1908).

from the Second District. But winning control of the General Assembly, which would name a new Senator, made the victory more important than the figures showed.

Of those issues affecting the outcome of the election, temperance was considered one of the major ones. Contemporary newspaper opinion agreed in according the whisky question a prominent place among the causes for the surprising blow dealt the Democrats. The Washington (D. C.) *Daily Union* declared that the Whigs had rallied on the temperance question with all their forces. Greeley's *Tribune* felt that the importance of the whisky issue in deciding the election should not be underestimated. The *Democratic Enquirer* of Muscatine maintained that "In many counties, Muscatine among the number, the democratic candidates for legislature, were known to be . . . or at least believed to be, strongly opposed to the passage of any prohibitory liquor law, and this fact ranged against the opposition of the Maine law men; and their force in this State is by no means inconsiderable."³³

Further evidence of the decisive role played by the temperance question in some localities can easily be found in the vote for James Thorington in the Second District. Thorington had a long temperance record and maintained it throughout the campaign, this against the better judgment of Grimes. In the final tally, Thorington ran over 400 votes ahead of Grimes in the Second District and defeated his license law opponent by over 1,600 votes. In time Grimes himself came to believe that temperance was a more popular issue in Iowa than he had once thought. In the following April the temperance forces, with the backing of Grimes, succeeded in bringing a prohibitory liquor law to a vote and passage.³⁴

Traditional sectional divisions within the state probably accounted for part of the Opposition victory. On a county basis, Grimes secured thirty-three counties,³⁵ while Bates won thirty-two. On a north-south divi-

³³ Washington (D. C.) *Daily Union*, Aug. 18, 1854; New York *Weekly Tribune*, Aug. 26, 1854; Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Aug. 31, 1854.

³⁴ When plotted on maps, the picture of the dry vote shows a ready resemblance to the Grimes vote in 1854. Compare the 1854 gubernatorial results published in the *Oskaloosa Herald*, Dec. 22, 1854, with the vote on the prohibitory law, Apr. 2, 1855, as given in *Iowa Official Register*, 1889, 207-208.

³⁵ Grimes, in a letter to Salmon P. Chase, wrote: "The southern half of our State is strongly pro-slavery, but I think we will be able to carry a majority with us for free principles, and for a disconnection with slavery. The Whigs are just now learning that it does not hurt them to be called 'abolitionists, woolly-heads, etc.' and, when

sion, Grimes was more popular in the northern than in the southern half of the state. There he carried fifteen counties, while Bates was successful in only ten. On the other hand, Bates carried twenty-two of the southern counties, while Grimes won in only eighteen. However, Grimes carried enough of the more populous counties to give him a majority of some 1,600 votes in the southern half of the state. Dividing the state on an east-west line, the Opposition strength lay in the eastern half of the state. The two candidates divided the ten Mississippi River counties between them on a five to five basis, but Grimes won twenty-six counties in the eastern half of the state, while Bates was successful in only fourteen. The position was reversed in the western half, where Bates captured eighteen counties while Grimes came through in only seven.³⁶ Thus the older and more settled portions of the state tended to vote with the Opposition, while the newly settled western counties remained Democratic.

A comparison of the county returns for presidential electors in 1852 and the county returns in the gubernatorial campaign of 1854 further shows that ten counties switched from the Democratic to the Opposition ranks in 1854, while only one county left the Whig camp for the Democratic column. Among those counties which changed allegiance at this time were the well-peopled counties of Van Buren, Jefferson, Muscatine, Johnson, Cedar, and Linn — all of them in the first three tiers west of the Mississippi River. The strong abolition counties, such as Washington and Henry, traditionally Whig, went for Grimes as part of the Denmark bargain or because Whig planks in the Opposition platform appealed to them. In spite of strenuous efforts, the Opposition could not bring about an overthrow of the Democrats in a few counties where the German vote was particularly heavy. Yet the Opposition did win in Scott, Muscatine, and Clay counties, as well as managing to win from 40 to 50 per cent of the votes in the river counties they did lose.³⁷

Although there is considerable room for debate about the relative importance of the great contest of 1856 comes on, they will be prepared for and callous to all such epithets. The north third of our State will be to Iowa, politically, what the Western Reserve is to the State of Ohio. No man can obtain the electoral vote in Iowa, in 1856, who was in favor of the repeal of the 'Fugitive Slave Law.' Such, at any rate, is my opinion at this time." Grimes to Chase, Burlington, Oct. 3, 1854, Salter, *Grimes*, 54.

³⁶ Compiled from official returns as presented in *Oskaloosa Herald*, Dec. 22, 1854.

³⁷ *Dubuque Miner's Express*, Dec. 15, 1852; *Oskaloosa Herald*, Dec. 22, 1854.

tance of temperance, sectional division, and minor issues in the outcome of the election, there can be no doubt about the decisive nature of the Nebraska question. Nebraska had promoted, as well as symbolized, the long standing divisions in the Democratic party. Men who had abandoned their Democratic loyalty because of the party's obvious inability to bring homesteads, internal improvements, or even banks to Iowa, had continued to vote the Democratic ticket because there was no ready alternative. Now the Opposition presented the alternative; the result could almost have been foreseen.

The Democratic editors of the Muscatine *Enquirer*, after noting that there had been issues of varying importance in the campaign, concluded that "The all absorbing question of interest was 'Nebraska,' and had it not been for *that* the democrats would have carried the State triumphantly, despite the other factions in the field and the other issues raised." But the *Enquirer* failed to account for the results in the southern part of the state. There, in the First District, Augustus Hall defeated Rufus L. B. Clarke by 200 votes. The pro-Nebraska Democratic newspaper of Keokuk stoutly maintained that Hall's election proved that the Nebraska issue was not the cause of the general Democratic defeat in Iowa.³⁸ But both the *Enquirer* and the *Dispatch* had temporarily overlooked the traditional sectional division within the state, making the Nebraska bill more palatable in the southern portion of the state than in the northern.

A minor factor in the Opposition victory was the part played by influential Free Soilers in Ohio and Illinois on behalf of Grimes's candidacy. The appeal to Washburne, asking for letters from Chase and Giddings, was undoubtedly representative of a fairly large correspondence between prominent Free Soilers and undecided voters in Iowa. Writing to Salmon P. Chase in 1858, Grimes reported

I have always regarded myself and the cause greatly indebted to you for your influence in my gubernatorial campaign, now four years ago. . . . Had we not succeeded in securing the old Free-Soil vote, which was done mainly through your influence . . . the General Assembly would have been against us, Mr. Dodge returned to the Senate, the State would probably have remained Democratic, and the succession of anti-Nebraska triumphs that

³⁸ Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Aug. 31, 1854; Keokuk *Weekly Dispatch*, Sept. 13, 1854.

followed our election in the autumn of 1854 would probably have never occurred.³⁹

A last factor of some importance in deciding the outcome of the 1854 election was a bad case of overconfidence on the part of the Democrats. A. C. Dodge's seat in the Senate was up for re-election in 1855. The new General Assembly, to be elected in 1854, would either re-elect Dodge or choose a successor. Under these circumstances, Dodge was as much a candidate as was Curtis Bates or Augustus Hall. And yet Dodge failed to return to Iowa and actively enter the campaign. Senator Jones also remained in Washington. Even Bates, ignoring the challenge tendered by Grimes to engage in joint debates during the campaign, failed to undertake the kind of intensive and extensive canvass which Grimes conducted.

The Opposition victory, slim as it was, gave the coalition considerable spoils, and no time was lost in distributing choice offices. Grimes appointed George G. Wright of Keosauqua, Norman W. Isbell of Marion, and William G. Woodward of Muscatine to the state supreme court. While there is no record that the appointments caused any serious disputes among the faithful, the difficulties which faced the coalition were foreshadowed in the inaugural address which Grimes delivered on December 9, 1854, as well as in the election of James Harlan to the United States Senate in January, 1855.

In his inaugural address, Grimes sought to soften his position on slavery. He reiterated his firm opposition to any extension of slavery, but denied any intention on the part of the free states of interfering with the internal affairs of the South. On the other hand, he maintained that the South had "forced upon the country an issue between free labor, political equality and manhood on the one hand; and . . . slave-labor, political degradation and wrong."⁴⁰

At the same time that Grimes was seeking to quiet the fears of the old-line Whigs, he held firm to the radical Whig support through the election of James Harlan to the Senate. Harlan, known in Iowa political circles as a Whig, although he had stumped for James K. Polk in Indiana in 1844, was

³⁹ Grimes to Chase, Burlington, Feb. 20, 1858, Salter, *Grimes*, 116-17.

⁴⁰ The inaugural address is printed in full in Salter, *Grimes*, 55-63. Grimes was working closely with Free Soil elements in other states. On Oct. 3, 1854, he assured Chase that he was going to take the ground in his inaugural address which Chase had suggested in a previous letter to him. Grimes to Chase, Burlington, Oct. 3, 1854, *ibid.*, 54.

a marked man in frontier politics from the day he arrived in Iowa City in 1845, for he possessed a college degree. He had continued his interest in education, being elected superintendent of public instruction in 1847 as a Whig. Latin quotations, sprinkled liberally throughout his stump speeches, gave frontier opponents a field day with their constant references to "Professor" Harlan. After declining the Whig nomination for governor in 1850, Harlan spent the intervening years as president of Iowa Wesleyan University at Mount Pleasant.

Although the Opposition held a majority in the legislature, that did not mean that the various factions making up the party could agree on a candidate for the Senate. When Harlan was nominated by a caucus of anti-Nebraska Whigs, the Opposition had split wide open. The "Silver Gray" faction rallied around Ebenezer Cook, who was one of the original organizers of the Mississippi & Missouri Railroad and had been a Taylor man in 1848.⁴¹ A third man receiving considerable notice in connection with the race for the Senate was Fitz Henry Warren, who had been a prominent Whig in the state since 1848. In his position as chairman of the Whig state central committee, treasurer of the national committee, and elector on the Taylor ticket in Iowa, he had been active in the campaign for Taylor. In return for his services he had been appointed Second Assistant Postmaster General. By 1854 Warren had acquired prominence as a banker in Burlington, as well as a permanent antipathy to James W. Grimes.⁴²

The balloting for the senatorship continued in the General Assembly throughout December. The old-line Whigs gradually concentrated on Ebenezer Cook, and the Democrats indicated a preference for him over either Warren or Harlan. But by January 4, 1855, the Opposition leadership was in a position to overcome both the old-line Whigs and the dilatory tactics of the Democrats. On January 6 Harlan was elected at a joint convention of the House and as many Senators as would attend. The Democrats, by a party vote of sixteen to fifteen, had succeeded in adjourning the Senate in order to avoid going into joint session to elect a Senator, but

⁴¹ Clark, *History of Senatorial Elections in Iowa*, 70; Jack T. Johnson, *Peter Anthony Dey* (Iowa City, 1939), 64; *Keokuk Register*, May 4, 1848.

⁴² *Muscatine Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Apr. 14, 1849; Dec. 4, 1854; Edward H. Stiles, "General Fitz Henry Warren," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 6:481-7 (October, 1904); Fairall, *Manual*, 13; *Keokuk Register*, May 4, 1848; Clark, *History of Senatorial Elections in Iowa*, 63.

the Opposition went ahead, and Harlan received fifty-two votes, a majority of all those cast as well as a majority of the entire General Assembly.

Harlan's election in 1855 showed the full proportion of the split in Opposition ranks and led directly to the decision, on the part of Grimes and the Free Soilers, to form a new party free of all 'Silver Gray' elements. By the first week in April, 1855, Grimes was ready to begin the organization of the Republican party in Iowa. In the transition from Opposition to Republican, the Free Soil and anti-Nebraska men were aided by the Know-Nothing organization which suddenly mushroomed in Iowa.

The Know-Nothing interlude lasted from mid-1854 to late 1856. By October, 1854, the American party, as it preferred to be known, had acquired its own newspaper through the conversion of C. H. Wilson, editor of the *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*. The *Keokuk Whig* displayed considerable sympathy for the cause but did not make a complete conversion to it.⁴³ Within a year the *Dubuque Daily Observer*, the *Ottumwa Des Moines Courier*, and the *Oskaloosa Herald* joined the ranks of the American party. The Know-Nothing movement acquired more strength in one year than antislavery had won in ten.

This new movement worried the Democrats. A. C. Dodge mentioned their fears in a speech to the Senate in July, 1854. Fully aware of its threat to Democratic primacy, he labeled the Know-Nothing movement as "miserable and contemptible."⁴⁴ The two main sources of Democratic strength in Iowa were the older Southern settlers and the immigrant elements in the river counties. The antiforeign prejudices of the Know-Nothings were highly popular in many of the southern counties and just as unpopular, of course, among the foreign elements settled along the river. Indeed, antiforeign sentiment bid fair to shatter completely the Democratic party which continued to be badly split. They tried to stifle the Know-Nothing movement before it drove the German vote into the arms of the eager Opposition. A Democratic convention of the Eighth Judicial District of Iowa, a district which comprised the counties of Jones, Clinton, Muscatine, Scott, Cedar, and Jackson—all with large German populations—passed only one resolution and that took a strong stand against any acceptance of Know-Nothing precepts. A similar meeting of the Muscatine

⁴³ *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*, Oct. 25, Nov. 24, Dec. 4, 1854; *ibid.*, Jan. 8, March 5, May 30, 1855.

⁴⁴ *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., 1778.

Democrats followed exactly the same course of action.⁴⁵ A Jefferson County Democratic convention provided a variation: as a preliminary to participation in the convention, each delegate was required to "rise in his place and give a pledge that he was a Democrat and had no sympathy with Know-Nothings."⁴⁶

The first evidence that the Know-Nothing movement might hurt the Opposition as well as the Democrats came in February, 1855, when the *Dubuque Daily Observer*, a Grimes paper in 1854, went over to the Americans. By March the new organization was winning local elections when the mayor, treasurer, wharf-master, and two out of the three aldermen elected in Muscatine were American party men.⁴⁷ But Grimes continued undisturbed in his confidence that the breakup of the two old parties would ultimately benefit the Republican party he was working to organize. According to Grimes, the Know-Nothings would drive the foreign vote away from the Democrats, and the Opposition could probably count on at least half of the Know-Nothing strength in addition to winning most of the foreign vote.⁴⁸ A neat trick, if it could be done.

But the Know-Nothings themselves were attempting to broaden their base and submerge their one-idea party character in a wider organization. The Muscatine County convention of the Americans was full of the usual fulminations against Catholics and foreigners, but, in addition, the platform contained planks condemning the Missouri Compromise repeal and the "aggressions" of slavery in Kansas, and endorsing a prohibitory liquor law.⁴⁹

Thus the political scene in Iowa at the close of 1855 presented the greatest variety of parties and factions that state had ever known or would know. The Opposition had virtually broken up into its component parts. Some members of the group were ready to follow Grimes into a new party—the Republican—if it should become a reality; others were active in the Know-Nothing movement. And while a good many old-line Whigs remained, they possessed neither organization nor a spirit of cohesion.

⁴⁵ Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, March 15, July 19, 1855.

⁴⁶ Charles J. Fulton, "Jefferson County Politics Before the Civil War," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 11:437 (July, 1914).

⁴⁷ *Dubuque Daily Observer*, Feb. 27, 1855; *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*, March 5, 1855.

⁴⁸ Grimes to Chase, Burlington, Apr. 8, May 12, 1855, Salter, *Grimes*, 68-70.

⁴⁹ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, July 21, 1855.

A decisive minority of Iowa voters was standing clear of any party. This group included those who stood on one-idea grounds, such as prohibition or abolition, and a larger percentage who were simply without a political roof and looking for a party which would best express their needs and desires. Any party that could organize a large portion of the splinter elements would easily be able to defeat the small hard core of Administration Democrats. The 1856 election in Iowa proved that it could be done again as it had been done in 1854. The major difference lay in the fact that in 1854 it had been done in a haphazard fashion, largely through the efforts of one man — James W. Grimes. In 1856, on the other hand, the victory grew out of a distinct, though as yet immature, party organization.

The need for this party organization was obvious. One man might be able to carry a single campaign, but continued success depended upon a thorough grass roots organization. Furthermore, national questions were coming to dominate local political discussions, and decisive action on such questions as slavery, the Pacific railroad, internal improvements, and homesteads demanded a party organized on an equivalent scale. And significantly more and more of the political spoils were controlled from Washington; the hunger for office would only be satisfied by national control.

In April, 1855, Grimes wrote to Salmon P. Chase concerning politics in general and asked: "What is going to be done in 1856? How are we to bring the antislavery forces into the field, and under whose standard?" Although he felt that "it is time to thoroughly organize the Republican party," for the time being the projected party advanced no further than the discussion stage. In Iowa, the public still knew Grimes only as the leader of the Opposition. Chase was not optimistic about the 1856 prospects of a Republican party in the national arena, and by July, Grimes had succumbed to his pessimism. As the year rolled on his fears did not lessen, but he began to feel sure that "there can be no difficulty in combining all the opposition to the Nebraska swindle in this State, and carrying it under the Republican banner."⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Grimes to Chase, Burlington, Apr. 8, July 16, 1855, Salter, *Grimes*, 68-9, 75-6. His pessimism was confined to Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. "I am satisfied that there is a large majority of the people of [Illinois] opposed to the Administration, and to Douglas, but there will be very great difficulty if not an entire impossibility to unite them so as to insure their defeat. From what I hear such is the case, too, in Pennsylvania and Indiana. With these three States secured to us, the Republican cause would, I conceive, be certain of triumph next year in the presidential canvass. Can they be secured?" Grimes to Chase, Nov. 2, 1855, *ibid.*, 79.

While there is ample evidence of Grimes's Republicanism, there is almost none chronicling James Harlan's conversion to the idea of a new Republican party. Throughout 1855 Harlan wrote to a host of local politicians scattered the breadth of Iowa, but there is no indication that he felt the need for a new party organization. But Harlan's Free Soil proclivities were well known, and it is certain that he courted favor with the group which came to represent all Iowa Free Soil elements—the Republicans. While the exact time of his acceptance of the Republican label remains in doubt, he was completely identified with them in the campaign of 1856.⁵¹

Another valuable recruit to the embryonic Republican organization in Iowa was Samuel Jordan Kirkwood, who moved to Iowa City in 1855. Kirkwood, an outstanding Democrat of Mansfield, Ohio, had been born in Harford County, Maryland, where his father and brothers were slaveholders. At the age of twenty-two, Kirkwood had moved with his father to Ohio, where he made a name for himself as the prosecuting attorney of Richland County and as a member of the state constitutional convention of 1850-1851. In 1854 Kirkwood had left the Democratic party because of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. While the bill was pending in Congress, he wrote a series of articles against it for a local newspaper. Just before he moved to Iowa, he was a candidate for the nomination to Congress from the Richland area on an anti-Nebraska ticket.⁵²

Although Kirkwood had left the Democratic party in 1854, he did not find a new party to his liking until 1855. In September of that year he wrote a former Ohio neighbor that the Republican party in that state would have had his support if he had remained there. "I would not only vote for that ticket," he declared, "but I would stump it whenever I could find a stump to stand on, and a dozen voters to listen to me." Kansas was still the central factor guiding Kirkwood's political course. "In my opinion," he wrote, "the only way to save Kansas from the evils of slavery . . . is for the men of the North . . . without distinction of party—all men who are Democrats in fact, and not in name merely . . . to unite and say by their votes, this foul deed shall not be done."⁵³

⁵¹ Johnson Brigham, *James Harlan* (Iowa City, 1913), 91-2.

⁵² Frank I. Herriott, *Iowa and Abraham Lincoln* . . . (Des Moines, 1911), 60, 79; Dan Elbert Clark, *Samuel Jordan Kirkwood* (Iowa City, 1917), 76-7.

⁵³ Printed in the Des Moines *Iowa Weekly Citizen*, Sept. 14, 1859, during Kirkwood's campaign for the governorship.

In Iowa, Grimes continued to grow more and more enthusiastic about the possibilities of success for a Republican party in 1856, in spite of expressions of doubt by Chase. "I am sanguine," he wrote to Chase, "that we shall organize a party that will carry the elections in most of the Northern States in 1856, and in all of them in 1860." The echoes of the Kansas conflict gave Grimes additional encouragement. He was soon convinced that "the outrages in Kansas have opened the eyes of the people to the intent with which the Missouri Compromise was repealed." As the churches, too, began to divide on the subject of slavery, Grimes saw "the right sentiment . . . firmer and more intense every day in this State."⁵⁴

To Grimes there seemed to be no doubt that it was upon the subject of slavery in Kansas that the bedrock Republican doctrines were to be formed. Regarding the possibility of the candidacy of Chase for the Ohio governorship, Grimes hoped "that the men who would nominate you would be sure that the resolution should be orthodox upon the slavery question . . . that is the only subject connected with politics about which I care a farthing." Meanwhile, Grimes's thoughts turned to the German vote: "Cannot you in some way secure the German vote? We must in some way secure the German vote in the free States, and that class of citizens elsewhere will, in a great measure, follow the example of those in Ohio."⁵⁵

While established politicians in Iowa were leading the transition from Opposition to Republican party organization, there were also signs of a grass roots movement in the same direction. A "transitional" group met in Jefferson County in July. A call, signed by more than a hundred citizens, had brought out a large gathering of people which called itself a "Peoples Republican Convention." Being essentially a conservative group, they rejected planks decrying the "Nebraska outrage" and the "assault upon the elective franchise of Kansas," while at the same time they declared that slavery must be confined to slave states; they also opposed the growing Know-Nothing party in Iowa.⁵⁶ Prominent in these proceedings was Caleb Baldwin, later elected as a Republican to the supreme court of Iowa.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Grimes replied to a Chase letter of April 13, 1855, with the words, "I have more hope than you have." Grimes to Chase, Burlington, May 12, 1855, Salter, *Grimes*, 70. Grimes to Mrs. Grimes, Burlington, June 17, 1855, *ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁵ Grimes to Chase, Burlington, July 16, 1855, *ibid.*, 75-6.

⁵⁶ Fulton, "Jefferson County Politics," 438-9.

⁵⁷ George G. Wright, "Chief Justice Caleb Baldwin," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 1:209 (October, 1893).

The call for the first Republican state convention was issued January 3, 1856. By and large, the press reception of the call was a friendly one.⁵⁸ Most of the newspapers hoped that the convention would refrain from committing itself to specific candidates and confine itself to the single problem of organizing a party. The press generally agreed that the new party ought to concentrate its efforts on the single question of opposition to the extension of slavery and avoid all attempts to reconcile the differences of conflicting groups on other questions.

Some counties held conventions to choose delegates to the state meeting. In Muscatine County such a convention was led by a former Whig, a former Know-Nothing, and one of the former editors of the *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*—an anti-Nebraska organ. In Van Buren County, C. C. Nourse, the sole remaining official of the county Whig organization, issued the call for a local Republican convention and later became one of the four county delegates to the state convention.⁵⁹ In other counties delegates appointed themselves. The editor of the *Ottumwa Des Moines Courier* attended the state convention for the purpose of covering its proceedings but became a delegate and a loyal Republican.⁶⁰ In most cases the platforms of these small county meetings were cautious affairs—limited to condemnation of the aggressive slavocracy and approval of the doctrine that slavery was sectional in nature while only freedom was national.⁶¹

Winter and poor roads prevented many from making the trip to Iowa City for the state convention, but Johnson and the neighboring counties swelled the total with exceptionally large delegations. Johnson County sent 54 accredited delegates; Scott and Muscatine, 27; Jackson, 20; Dubuque, 15; Washington and Lee, 11; with the numbers decreasing in direct proportion to the distance of the locality from Iowa City. There was little or no attempt to check credentials; everyone was welcome.

The difficulties facing the convention began to multiply before it convened. The German voters of Muscatine held a protest meeting on the

⁵⁸ *Oskaloosa Herald*, Feb. 1, 1856; *Dubuque Daily Republican*, Feb. 7, 1856; *Muscatine Daily Journal*, Feb. 18, 1856.

⁵⁹ Charles C. Nourse, "Beginning Fifty Years of Practice at the Iowa Bar," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 8:490-95 (October, 1908).

⁶⁰ *Ottumwa Des Moines Courier*, Feb. 21, 1856.

⁶¹ Louis Pelzer, "The Origins and Organization of the Republican Party in Iowa," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 4:521-4 (October, 1906); *Muscatine Daily Journal*, Feb. 18, 1856.

night of February 21, where they charged that German-Americans had not been represented in the county Republican convention and therefore would not be represented in the state Republican convention. They further declared that they had "reason to believe that neither our opinions, nor our interest will be represented by the delegates already sent from this place." After appointing three delegates of their own, the group of Germans instructed these men to register a protest with the convention and to withdraw if the "Democratic Republican" platform was not kept free of "all the isms of the day—such as nativism, abolitionism, religious fanaticism, Maine Lawism, etc."⁶² The convention had its work cut out for it: how were they to gain the support of the important foreign vote as well as all the other splinter elements without eliminating most of the same "isms" in the process?

Quite aware of the necessity for conciliatory tactics in any successful political party, the Republican convention met in the Capitol in Iowa City on February 22, 1856. It was an assembly containing the full rainbow of Iowa political sentiment, with the one exception of Administration Democrats. Anti-Nebraska Democrats, old-line Whigs, Free Soilers, abolitionists, temperance men, and Know-Nothings were present. Governor Grimes apparently felt that it did not behoove the chief executive to take a public part in the proceedings; but, although he was not officially connected with the convention, he certainly came nearer than any other man to guiding its work. William Penn Clarke was not present either, since he had gone to the preliminary Republican convention in Pittsburgh, but he kept in close touch with the events in Iowa City through his friend, Henry W. Lathrop.⁶³ Samuel J. Kirkwood took a seat in the back during most of the proceedings, in keeping with his recent arrival in the community, but he warmed to the movement before the convention was over. Loathe to declare himself an out-and-out Republican, he did make it quite clear that he stood for the principles which had inspired the convention. James Harlan stayed in Washington but sent a long letter which was read to the convention by

⁶² Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Feb. 28, 1856.

⁶³ Henry W. Lathrop was a prominent railroad man. He was one of the organizers of the Davenport & Iowa City Railroad (predecessor of the Mississippi & Missouri) in 1850. Also an outstanding Know-Nothing as late as December, 1855, he was a member of the state central committee of the American party which signed a call for an American party convention for March, 1856. *Muscatine Daily Journal*, Dec. 7, 1855.

Lathrop.⁶⁴ In this letter, which was mainly an exposition of the Republican creed, Harlan firmly announced his Republican affiliations.

The nominations made by the convention were the least important part of its work, since only minor state offices were up for election in 1856. (The governor held office for four years under the Iowa constitution then in force.) Recognizing only the usual geographic distribution of candidates for state offices, the group quickly named Elijah Sells of Muscatine for secretary of state, John Pattee of Bremer County for auditor, Martin L. Morris of Polk County for treasurer, and Samuel A. Rice of Mahaska County for attorney-general. In addition, Reuben Noble, Henry O'Connor, Daniel F. Miller, and William M. Stone were named presidential electors, and a slate of eight delegates and eight alternates selected for the national Republican convention.⁶⁵

The convention's program was surprisingly harmonious in view of the discordant elements needing conciliation. Speaker after speaker renounced all former allegiance to the Democrats or Whigs and vowed to work only for the new party. Exceptions to the general accord came only when the convention turned to consideration of its platform. Here the general harmony disappeared over two issues: temperance and the naturalization law.

In the first instance, temperance men made a determined effort to put the convention on record in favor of the Maine Law or a similar prohibitory enactment.⁶⁶ In the second, the German-Americans continued their efforts to check Know-Nothing sentiment by asking the convention to go on record favoring the existing naturalization laws. The convention rejected their demand, however, on the grounds that it ought to confine itself to the single issue of slavery.⁶⁷ A combination of Know-Nothings and the German-Americans then sought to defeat the efforts of the temperance advocates. The platform finally produced by the convention successfully avoided the "isms" of the day. It was broad enough to satisfy all antislavery elements, and there was nothing in it to offend former Democrats, temper-

⁶⁴ John E. Briggs, *William Peters Hepburn* (Iowa City, 1919), 23, 29; Clark, *Kirkwood*, 89.

⁶⁵ Fairall, *Manual*, 40-41; Keokuk *Gate City*, Feb. 27, 1856.

⁶⁶ Josiah B. Grinnell, *Men and Events of Forty Years* (Boston, 1891), 118-19; B. F. Gue, "The Public Services of Hiram Price," *Annals of Iowa* (third series), 1:593-4 (January, 1895).

⁶⁷ Grimes favored the resolution, fearing the loss of German-American support. Grimes to Chase, Burlington, March 28, 1856, Salter, *Grimes*, 79-80.

ance men, Whigs, Know-Nothings, or abolitionists, although it did run into trouble with the German-American vote.

"Slavery is local and freedom, alone, is national" was the tenor of the platform. The "slave power" was taken to task for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Slavery in the states was a local institution, "beyond our reach and above our authority," declared the platform, but "we will oppose its spread and demand that all national territory shall be free."⁶⁸ The gathering declared that Republicanism was national and looked to the perpetuity of the Union, but there was no attempt to disguise the threatening tone of the declaration that the Republicans "will shrink from no conflict and shirk no responsibility on this issue." The influence of the traditional Democrats in the conclave appeared in the plank calling for a strict construction of the Constitution.

While there was nothing in the platform to offer positive offense, the obvious silence on the question of the naturalization laws disturbed the German-Americans. One of the leading Democratic papers maintained that John Bittman, a German delegate from Davenport, was refused an opportunity to speak to the convention. The *Muscatine Journal* reported that four days after the convention the editors of the German-American press in Iowa had repudiated the work of the convention. This repudiation was addressed to German-American voters and was signed by Theodore Guelich of the Davenport *Der Demokrat*, Louis Mader of the Burlington *Die Freie Presse*, and John Bittman of the Dubuque *Die Staats-Zeitung*. In this protest, the editors declared that they were not "satisfied with the position which the Republican Party of Iowa has assumed, because we consider it their duty to take issue not only on the endangered rights and interests of certain sections of the Union, but also on those of certain parts of its population."⁶⁹ Furthermore, the editors maintained that the candidates nominated by the convention were unacceptable and the party unworthy of the German-American support until such time as it had driven out the "impure elements" of nativists and prohibitionists.

In addition to its platform, the Republican convention appointed a committee to draw up an "Address to the People of Iowa" stating the reasons for a new political party and the program it hoped to advance. Apparently the "Address" was little more than a recital of the general principles of the

⁶⁸ Fairall, *Manual*, 40-41.

⁶⁹ *Muscatine Journal*, March 17, 1856.

new party.⁷⁰ The membership of the committee reflected the almost constant attempt to conciliate the splinter groups of the convention. The committee consisted of Josiah B. Grinnell of Poweshiek County, Henry W. Lathrop of Johnson, Alvin Saunders of Henry, J. B. Howell of Lee, W. M. Stone of Marion, Hiram Price of Scott, J. A. Parvin of Muscatine, L. A. Thomas of Dubuque, and Samuel J. Kirkwood of Johnson. Whigs were represented on the committee by Lathrop and Saunders; Democrats by Price, Parvin, and Kirkwood; abolitionists by Grinnell; and temperance men by both Grinnell and Price.⁷¹

Obviously the Republicans were right in making it their first concern to unite all possible splinter groups in their organization. But a union of so many divergent elements would require great and long labor, and the Republican leaders were fully aware that a vague platform and representative committees would only begin the work. Apparently the leaders agreed to confine the state platform to the one issue of the extension of slavery with the understanding that the rejected planks in regard to prohibition and naturalization would be put back in at the county ratification conventions.⁷²

The Republican press now began to send up trial balloons. In March the Muscatine *Daily Journal* suggested a national ticket of John McLean of Ohio for President and Francis P. Blair for Vice President. But by April the editors of that paper had switched to John C. Fremont, and his name remained on their masthead until the election. Governor Grimes himself favored Fremont on the ground that a "new man" was needed against whom there would be no "old chronic prejudices." The Maquoketa *Excelsior* joined the Fremont ranks in April.⁷³ But for the most part, Iowa Repub-

⁷⁰ Grinnell claimed to have written the "Address" and received praise for his work from Salmon Chase "too flattering for the public eye." Grinnell, *Men and Events*, 118-19. The "Address" was printed in full in three issues of the Keokuk *Daily Gate City*, March 24, 25, 26, 1856, but did not receive wide circulation.

⁷¹ Pelzer, "Origins and Organization of the Republican Party in Iowa," 525. Price had been a delegate to the Democratic convention of the Second Congressional District in 1850. Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, June 13, 1850. Kirkwood left the Democratic party in 1854. Clark, *Kirkwood*, 76. Parvin left the Democrats just before coming to the convention. Grinnell, *Men and Events*, 118; Gue, "Public Services of Hiram Price," 587-91.

⁷² Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Feb. 28, 1856. An example of this strategy appeared in Jefferson County. There the ratification meeting approved the state platform, but added a plank opposing the extension of the time required for naturalization. Fulton, "Jefferson County Politics," 440.

⁷³ Muscatine *Daily Journal*, March 4, Apr. 16, 19, 1856; Grimes to William Penn Clarke, Burlington, Apr. 3, 1856, *Clarke Papers*.

licans adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward all candidates and concentrated their attentions on local organizations.

Meanwhile, the Know-Nothings appeared to be ready for fusion with the Republicans. The victory of the Southern Know-Nothings in the futile American convention in Philadelphia on February 21-22 drove the Iowa delegates into joining the general Northern bolt. This action left the local party isolated. A few Know-Nothing papers vainly hoisted the names of Millard Fillmore and Andrew Jackson Donelson to their mastheads, only to let them fall a few days later. The whole train of events led to a general political schizophrenia in which the Republican presidential electors and state tickets were supported, while the American party nominations for local offices continued to receive endorsement.⁷⁴

On March 5 a listless remnant of the American party met in convention in Iowa City. Forty-five delegates made up the convention roster. They endorsed Fillmore and Donelson and accepted the Republican slate for state offices. The only spark of fire shown during the meeting was that contained in the closing blast at the Republican platform for not favoring the extension of time required for naturalization.⁷⁵ It was an empty gesture, however, for the American strength had already gone over to the Republicans. By April, Grimes was able to write to William Penn Clarke that "Know Nothingism *per se* is very weak in this State. . . . Take away the republican vote . . . & their nakedness would be shown. . . . Fillmore is so universally repudiated by everybody in the North, that I think they will come to their senses & thus come into the republican movement."⁷⁶ And so it proved; by May the *Oskaloosa Herald* reported that the American party in Mahaska County was the only part of the state organization which was still determined to remain apart from the Republican organization and candidates. By November the American vote had faded to less than 10 per cent of the total state vote, and this 10 per cent was confined largely to the southern counties.⁷⁷

Kansas, as everyone recognized, was the real issue. Could the Republi-

⁷⁴ *Muscatine Daily Journal* supported Fillmore and Donelson from March 4 to 15, 1856.

⁷⁵ *Dubuque Daily Republican*, March 10, 1856.

⁷⁶ Grimes to Clarke, Burlington, Apr. 3, 1856, *Clarke Papers*.

⁷⁷ *Oskaloosa Herald*, May 30, 1856; *Mount Vernon Democratic Mirror*, Dec. 19, 1856.

cans keep the Kansas issue alive long enough to carry the state for Fremont and perfect their state and local organizations? The issue of freedom or slavery in Kansas seemed to be vital to the people of Iowa. From the day the Kansas-Nebraska Bill had become law, anxiety over the future of Kansas absorbed them. At first their chief concern was a fear that slavery would spread from Missouri and Kansas into Nebraska. Railroad promoters and Iowa land speculators had little interest in the future of Kansas; what interest there was stemmed first from individual settlers who wanted a free West to which they or their sons might move. But, second and far more important, interest in Kansas sprang from the abolitionist elements in the state, elements which had now progressed through the Free Soil into the Republican party.

The little community of Tabor in the southwestern corner of Iowa soon became an arsenal and a hospital for the Free State fighters in Kansas. Josiah B. Grinnell, founder of the town of Grinnell and Grinnell College, was incensed over the "Border Ruffianism" on which a member of his faculty reported after a visit to Kansas.⁷⁸ The *Muscatine Daily Journal* printed regular letters from a former Muscatine resident who had gone to Leavenworth City. The *Journal's* correspondent filled these letters with pleas for Northern aid. Meanwhile the press, as a whole, began to carry stories of "Civil War" in Kansas.⁷⁹ "Eyewitnesses" addressed indignation meetings. The Republicans extended their deepest sympathies to the "Free State men of Kansas in their struggles against Border Ruffianism" and promised to sustain them with "material aid."⁸⁰

It was obvious that Kansas was "bleeding," at least in part, for partisan political purposes. Overlooked were all the natural reasons for bloodshed in a raw frontier community. There was no mention of claim jumping, horse stealing, and the combination of corn liquor and boredom which raised the death toll in all the American West. The *Iowa Democratic Enquirer* pointed out that "It has all along been obvious that the Kansas excitement was kept up by the Black Republicans, as a hobby out of which to make political capital."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Charles E. Payne, *Josiah Bushnell Grinnell* (Iowa City, 1938), 101-103.

⁷⁹ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, Oct. 17, 1855; June 6, 1856.

⁸⁰ Pelzer, "History and Principles of the Democratic Party in Iowa," 227; Pelzer, "Origins and Organization of the Republican Party in Iowa," 515.

⁸¹ *Muscatine Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Aug. 20, 1856.

Not only did the Republican press of Iowa keep up the howl over Kansas, but party leaders took an active part in support of the "Free Staters" in Kansas. William P. Clarke took time out from his campaign work to help send arms and men of James H. Lane. As chairman of the Kansas central committee of Iowa, he was instrumental in laying out the "Lane Trail" across the state to aid "Free Staters" on their way to Kansas.⁸² In July he attended the National Kansas Aid Convention at Buffalo and was appointed a member of the national committee. A fellow state committeeman, Henry O'Connor, spent a large part of the summer in Kansas in active aid to the Free State cause, making frequent trips back to Iowa to muster aid and sympathy.⁸³ Grenville M. Dodge, active in railroads, Nebraska land speculation, and the Republican party, relayed muskets to Council Bluffs for use in Kansas.⁸⁴ Governor Grimes was surreptitiously engaged in the Kansas struggle. His method of help was to leave the key to the Iowa arsenal on his desk, where it could be "found" by Richard F. Hinton who commanded a Free State band on its way to Kansas. Hinton "found" the key and "appropriated" fifteen hundred muskets for use in Kansas.⁸⁵

When Representative Brooks took a cane to the head of Senator Sumner, Governor Grimes sprang into action and called a mass meeting for May 31 at Burlington. Taking the chair, Grimes opened the program with a violent speech in which he maintained that Senator Sumner and Massachusetts were not alone in this affair. The possibility that "Iowa might next be stricken down" made it a matter of concern to all the North.⁸⁶ Linking "bleeding Sumner" with "bleeding Kansas," Grimes spoke of the "legalized robberies, burnings and murders" committed "with the complicity of the President of the United States."

On August 28, following the example of Governor Chase of Ohio, Grimes responded to the pleas of former Iowa citizens who had settled in Kansas. In a letter to President Pierce, Grimes indulged in some of the

⁸² Erik Eriksson, "William Penn Clarke," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 25:39-40 (January, 1927). James H. Lane, a Free Soil politician of Kansas, organized the "Lane Trail" across Iowa and Nebraska to bring Northern settlers into Kansas. *Dictionary of American Biography*, 10:576-7.

⁸³ Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, Sept. 11, 1856.

⁸⁴ G. M. Dodge to John T. Baldwin, Iowa City, Sept. 5, 1856, *Grenville M. Dodge Papers* (Iowa State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines).

⁸⁵ Payne, *Grinnell*, 101-103.

⁸⁶ Salter, *Grimes*, 80-81.

most highhanded accusations to come out of the Kansas affair. He opened his letter with a listing of the outrages charged by former Iowa citizens against the federal authorities in Kansas. Claims that they had not been protected in their rights by federal soldiers were given full credence. Grimes himself then maintained that three former Iowans had been killed by guns obtained from a federal official. Overlooking the absurdity of demanding Southern noninterference in Kansas while threatening to interfere up to the hilt himself, Grimes penned an astounding threat:

The Central Government having failed to perform its duty by protecting the people of Kansas in the enjoyment of their rights, it is manifestly the right of each of the States to adopt measures to protect its former citizens. If the people of Iowa are not permitted to enjoy the right of citizenship in that Territory, they retain their former citizenship in this State, and are as much entitled to protection from the State while upon the public domain, as they would be if the General Government failed to protect them in a foreign country. . . .⁸⁷

The Republicans kept Kansas "bleeding" long enough to encourage a steady stream of Know-Nothings as well as Nebraska Democrats into their ranks. Meanwhile the Whigs had disappeared completely. It was not all clear sailing, however, for there was a movement among the Know-Nothings to back Fillmore in order to bend the Republicans to a strong nativist stand.⁸⁸ It was an abortive attempt. In September, the State Council of the American party met and, after formally repudiating Fillmore and Donelson, endorsed the Fremont and Dayton nomination of the "North American" party. Local Fillmore clubs followed suit. The Burlington Know-Nothings resolved "That in this contest, we will sink our peculiar American opinions, and battle manfully for a Free Press, Free Speech and Fremont." In the final vote, the Know-Nothings went over completely to the state Republican ticket, but many refused to follow the State Council and voted for the Fillmore slate.⁸⁹

The outcome of the Iowa election in 1856 was never in any real doubt. The only question was the size of the Republican victory. The Fremont electors won by a vote of roughly 45,000 to 37,000 for Buchanan; Fillmore

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁸⁸ Dodge to Baldwin, Iowa City, Sept. 5, 1856, *Dodge Papers*.

⁸⁹ *Muscatine Daily Journal*, Sept. 5, Nov. 18, 1856.

received 9,500 votes. The Republican state ticket as a whole was elected by a vote of 40,500 to 32,000.⁹⁰

In the congressional elections, the Republican victory was narrower. In the southern half of the state the Republicans had chosen a political unknown to make the race for Congress from the First District. This was Samuel Ryan Curtis, an engineer and graduate of West Point. Born in New York and reared in Ohio, he had engineered the improvement of the Muskingum River in Ohio during the late thirties. After service during the Mexican War, he moved to Iowa, where he took over the task of chief engineer for the improvement of the Des Moines River. After a stint as city engineer for St. Louis, Col. Curtis turned to railroads. In the fall of 1853 he had led the surveying party for the "Lyons Road" across Iowa in an attempt to beat G. M. Dodge and the Mississippi & Missouri Railroad to the Missouri River. In the spring of 1856 Curtis was elected mayor of Keokuk.⁹¹ He squeaked past the Democratic incumbent, Augustus Hall, by a vote of 18,065 to 17,110. It was a real triumph for the Republicans; for the first time they had broken the Democratic grip on the southern portion of the state. By comparison, the contest in the Second District was a walk-away. Timothy Davis, an anti-Nebraska Whig in 1854, defeated former Representative Shepherd Leffler by a vote of 21,885 to 15,868.⁹²

The returns in the presidential contest showed the sectional division which had become traditional in Iowa. Democratic strength was confined largely to the two southern tiers of counties. There the Democrats recaptured the three counties, Fremont, Wayne, and Van Buren, which they lost to Grimes in 1854.⁹³ A handful of sparsely settled western counties and the northern stronghold of Dubuque were all that remained to the Democrats outside of their southern citadel. The Republicans successfully invaded the southern Democratic camp and captured ten new counties in addition to holding all but three of their 1854 gains. With the exception of Dubuque, Jackson, and Black Hawk counties, the entire northern part of the state went Republican.

⁹⁰ Fairall, *Manual*, 14, 41.

⁹¹ Ruth A. Gallaher, "Samuel Ryan Curtis," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 25:331-7, 338-9 (July, 1929). J. R. Perkins, *Trails, Rails and War: The Life of General G. M. Dodge* (Indianapolis, 1929), 25.

⁹² Fairall, *Manual*, 21-2.

⁹³ Mount Vernon *Democratic Mirror*, Dec. 19, 1856. The returns published by the *Mirror* were listed as official by the editors, who noted a few minor errors.

The Know-Nothing vote was spotty. In the southern tier of counties, Appanoose, Davis, and Page gave Fillmore second place after Buchanan. In the river counties the Know-Nothing vote ran from 4 to as high as 20 per cent and, as expected, was lowest in the counties with heavy German or Irish populations. It was clear that the waning strength of the Know-Nothings lay in the southern tiers where it cut into the Democratic as well as Republican strength.

All in all, 1854 to 1856 were years during which Iowa political elements shifted and realigned themselves. The Opposition victory had broken the grip of the Democrats in 1854, but it was mainly the determined efforts of Grimes, pounding away at the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, together with the internal dissension of the Democrats which secured this victory. More time was needed for perfecting and strengthening the embryonic organization. This time, furnished by the Democrats who continued to squabble among themselves, allowed the Opposition to fuse with the remnants of the Whigs and to absorb a large portion of the Know-Nothing group. From such fusion the Opposition leaders formed a successful permanent state organization under the Republican banner and carried Iowa into the Republican ranks for Fremont in 1856 and Lincoln in 1860.