

IOWA POLITICS AND THE COMPROMISE OF 1850

*By Morton M. Rosenberg**

America in 1850 was the scene of a fierce political fight whose battle-grounds extended beyond the legislative chambers of Congress. The struggle was a sectional one between the mutually antagonistic North and South, but complicated by the intrusion of important Western factors: California clamored for admission into the Union as a free state, and Utah and New Mexico pressed for territorial status. To add further to the already difficult and complex situation, Texas insisted on certain adjustments, both financial and territorial, while the South as a unit demanded some sort of aid in retrieving runaway slaves, fleeing from bondage in ever increasing numbers. On its part, the North was equally insistent that those barbarous eyesores, the slave auctions and markets, be eliminated from the nation's capital. Any of these urgent matters would have been sufficient to inflame tempers in both sections. Already the sectional controversy had so far advanced that any bill in Congress sponsored by one side seemed assured of being opposed by the other.

Amid the warring passions Henry Clay introduced the bills which he earnestly hoped would soothe ruffled feelings and furnish an equitable settlement to the problems confronting the country. Others, notably Stephen A. Douglas, hammered out the legislation which contemporaries and history alike dubbed the Compromise of 1850.

While Iowa reflected to some degree the issues which then stirred the nation, the Hawkeye State had its own problems to consider. The year 1850 was an important election year for Iowans. A new Governor, a new General Assembly, other state officers, as well as Representatives from the state's two congressional districts, were to be selected in the coming elections. As an added item of attraction politically, a special election was also to be held during the year to fill an unexpired term in Congress from the First Congressional District, an investigating committee in the House of

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Representatives having declared the seat vacant. Control of the machinery of government in the state rested with the elections.

When Henry Clay introduced his proposed compromise resolutions into the United States Senate in late January, 1850, he gave the Democratic party in Iowa the vital political ammunition needed for the ensuing electoral campaign. Democratic party leaders, as subsequent events would soon demonstrate, intended to exert all their energy and talents to secure the success of the Compromise, support of which became the cardinal tenet in the Democratic program of 1850.

Quick to take a cue, the Democratic state convention assembled to nominate candidates as well as to provide the voting public with a statement of its principles. The platform wholeheartedly endorsed the compromise bills as introduced into the Senate and hoped for the success of the measures.¹

While giving its traditional approval to the retiring state Democratic administration, the platform condemned the national administration principally because it was in the hands of the opposition party. Certain removals of Democrats from state offices and the subsequent appointment of Whigs to succeed them stung many of the party leaders who gave expression to their feelings in the platform of their party.

On the question of internal improvements, that tested rallying call of the Whig party, the Democrats inserted a plank into their platform calling the attention of the voters to the action of the Secretary of the Interior, Thomas Ewing, who had recently declared illegal Iowa's title to a portion of the original Des Moines River Land Grant which the state had received during the late forties. Ewing ordered that the land should revert to federal jurisdiction.² To be sure, Ewing was a Whig in a Whig administration.

Finally, the state Democratic platform called for universal support of the party's nominees for the state offices and for the two congressional seats. To succeed the retiring Democratic governor, Ansel Briggs, the convention nominated Stephen Hempstead. George W. McCleary was named for Secretary of State, while William Pattie and Israel Kister obtained the convention's approval for Auditor and Treasurer, respectively.

Hempstead's nomination for the gubernatorial chair was a wise move. As a native of New England he would appeal to the Northern element in

¹ Roy V. Sherman, "Political Party Platforms in Iowa" (unpublished M.A. thesis, State University of Iowa, 1926), 106-110.

² *Iowa City Republican*, June 5, 1850.

the state; as a loyal Democrat he would receive the support of the Southern group. His was a record of long service to the state, dating back to 1838 when he had won election to the First Legislative Assembly of Iowa Territory. Thus, Hempstead's nomination was a fitting reward for loyal service to the Democratic party as well as to the people of Iowa.³

The Democratic press applauded the selection of Stephen Hempstead as his party's standard bearer. The Democratic Burlington *Gazette*, perhaps one of the two or three most influential papers in the state, hailed Hempstead as a man of "talent . . . and valuable experience. Possessed of enlarged and comprehensive views . . . his nomination . . . gives general satisfaction."⁴

The Whig party, striving to wrest the state away from the Democrats for the first time, held its convention in May.⁵ The Whigs nominated James Harlan for Governor, Isaac Cook for Secretary of State, William H. Seevers for Auditor, and Evan Jay for Treasurer. Harlan, not yet thirty years old, a native of Illinois, and recently arrived in the state, later declined the nomination because of his age.⁶ (According to the state constitution, a Governor has to be thirty years old at the time of the election. Harlan would not reach that age until eleven days after the election.) His withdrawal forced the Whig executive committee to make a substitute nomination one month later in the person of James L. Thompson of Johnson County.⁷

The Whig platform betrays evidence of a divided organization which leaned very strongly to, or was dominated by, the free-soil or antislavery elements in the party. The platform contained a forceful plank on "Free Men, Free Territory, and Free States."⁸ This same sentiment found reflection in the plank dealing with the compromise bills in the Senate. While calling for the immediate admission of California into the Union as a free

³ Benjamin F. Shambaugh (ed.), *The Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Iowa* (7 vols., Iowa City, 1903-1905), 1:423-4.

⁴ Burlington *Gazette*, June 19, 1850.

⁵ Iowa City *Republican*, Jan. 9, Apr. 7, 1850.

⁶ James Harlan to Whig State Executive Committee, May 25, 1850, published in *ibid.*, May 29, 1850.

⁷ *Ibid.*, May 29, July 3, 1850; the Dubuque *Tribune* described Thompson as "an exemplary Christian, a friend to more liberal constitutional provisions in behalf of companies chartered within the State for objects of Public Improvement, and a tiller of the soil." Iowa City *Republican*, July 24, 1850.

⁸ Sherman, "Political Party Platforms in Iowa," 110-12.

state, the platform remained awkwardly silent on the other compromise resolutions. Perhaps silence provided the only solution for the unfortunate dilemma facing the Whigs. To condemn the other measures would be tantamount to a disavowal of the national party stalwarts, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. On the other hand, unqualified endorsement of the bills would have brought abuse from the free-soil wing of the party.

Other planks in the Whig platform lauded the administration of Zachary Taylor and called for the election of a Whig Congress to sustain his program. Another plank demanded an amendment of the Iowa constitution which had been pretty much a Democratic creation. At this early date, however, such an appeal fell upon deaf ears, but within a year or two, it would receive a wider endorsement. On the matter of internal improvements the Whigs, for reasons best known to themselves, said absolutely nothing.

Thus the Whigs prepared to wage political battle with their heretofore victorious opponents armed with a slate of candidates weakened by the withdrawal of their principal nominee, and with a platform distinguished mainly by its irresolute position on the most popular issues of the day. For the Whig party the battle would be an uphill struggle.

For Congress, the Democrats of the First Congressional District, which embraced the southern half of Iowa, nominated, with a minimum of haggling, Bernhart Henn, a native of New York and a resident of Iowa since its territorial days.⁹ His Whig opponent was George G. Wright, an Indiana native.¹⁰

In the Second Congressional District, covering the northern portion of the state, but including the southeastern counties down as far as Des Moines County, the Whigs nominated William H. Henderson,¹¹ who was to conduct his campaign on the basis of the time-honored Whig tenets of internal improvements and high tariff, accompanied by a general condemnation of slavery.¹² To run against him, the Democrats designated Lincoln Clark of Dubuque at their June district convention, but not without a good deal of

⁹ *Burlington Gazette*, June 5, 1850; *Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1949* (Washington, 1950), 1299.

¹⁰ *Iowa City Republican*, Apr. 17, 1850; Edward Stiles, "Prominent Men of Early Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* (3rd ser.), 10:255 (January-April, 1912).

¹¹ *Iowa City Republican*, June 26, 1850.

¹² *Dubuque Telegraph*, quoted in *ibid.*, July 11, 1850.

internal bickering and a long session of balloting.¹³ The representatives from central Iowa, principally those from Johnson, Scott, and Cedar counties, opposed the party's first choice from Dubuque, Judge Thomas Wilson. With Muscatine and Des Moines counties casting the deciding ballots, Lincoln Clark emerged as the "compromise" candidate of the convention.¹⁴ Nevertheless, several bitterly disappointed delegates from central Iowa delivered hostile speeches to the convention, condemning the Dubuque party leadership.¹⁵ Clark's selection, however, was a popular one in the District as a whole.

Lincoln Clark, a native of Massachusetts, had made something of a name for himself in Alabama before moving to Iowa in 1848.¹⁶ It was, perhaps, his residence in that slaveholding state which prompted one of the leading Whig papers in the state to brand Clark as a man "too deeply tainted with a love for the music of the lash, the clanking chains, and the heavy sighs and groans of slavery, to receive the aid and comfort of a freeman's vote."¹⁷

The resolutions adopted by the Democratic Second District convention followed the lead of the state party platform in warmly approving the compromise measures pending before Congress. A plank likewise condemned Interior Secretary Ewing's decision concerning the Des Moines River Land Grant. Finally, the platform called for future donations of land to the state for use in internal improvements.¹⁸ The latter was a cry that would become very popular in Iowa during the coming years, especially in connection with railroad construction.

A third party to enter the field was the small but vocal Free Soil party, officially known as the Free Democracy, which campaigned chiefly upon an antislavery platform and had little else to offer to the voters. Formed in 1848 in time to run candidates in the elections of that year, the Iowa Free Soilers, practically all of whom were abolitionists, included among their numbers remnants of the old Liberty party and some antislavery Democrats,

¹³ Burlington *Gazette*, May 15, June 12, 1850.

¹⁴ James Grant to Laurel Summers, June 15, 1850, *Laurel Summers Correspondence* (Iowa State Dept. of History and Archives, Des Moines).

¹⁵ Davenport *Gazette*, June 13, 1850.

¹⁶ *Biographical Directory of Congress*, 982.

¹⁷ Iowa City *Republican*, July 31, 1850.

¹⁸ Burlington *Gazette*, June 12, 1850.

but chiefly men with Whig antecedents. Leaders of the Free Soil group included William Penn Clarke, Jonathan W. Cattell, George Shedd, and Samuel A. Howe who edited the organ of the party, the *Iowa True Democrat*, at Mount Pleasant. Later Reverend Asa Turner and George Magoun assumed positions of leadership in the organization.¹⁹

Since the Whigs, too, cherished known antislavery sympathies and, indeed, counted among their supporters many who would have done better to wear the label of the Free Soilers, there was some talk of a union or coalition between the two parties. No fusion occurred, for the Whigs demanded as their price for cooperation, let alone union or coalition, unqualified support from the Free Soilers. The latter, however, did not intend to drop its own slate of candidates.²⁰

The Free Soil party entered candidates for all of the state offices as well as for the congressional seats. William Penn Clarke carried his party's banner in the gubernatorial contest. Born in Maryland, Clarke had emigrated to Iowa in 1844 by way of Pennsylvania and Ohio. A former Whig, he aided the cause of that party until he formally joined the Free Soilers in 1848. He was an appropriate choice, particularly in view of his later efforts on behalf of John Brown and the Free State men in Kansas during the middle of the decade of the 1850's. No more ardent antislavery advocate could be found in Iowa than Clarke.²¹ To run for the congressional seats, the Free Soilers picked George Shedd for the Second District and John H. Dayton for the First District. Neither individual ever rose to any position of political prominence in Iowa.

The voters in the First Congressional District were also asked in 1850 to select a Representative at a special election to be held in September to fill out the term of William Thompson, who had lost his seat by the ruling of a special investigating committee in the House of Representatives.²² The controversy over Thompson's seat dated back to 1848, when he had won a narrow victory over his Whig opponent, Daniel F. Miller. The latter immediately protested the election. The original quarrel involved the legality

¹⁹ Theodore C. Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (New York, 1897), 157, 216-19, 266, 321.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 218; *Davenport Gazette*, Feb. 14, 1850.

²¹ Benjamin F. Gue, *History of Iowa . . .* (4 vols., New York, 1903), 4:53; Erik McKinley Eriksson, "William Penn Clarke," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 25:4-9, 38 (January, 1927).

²² *Iowa City Republican*, Sept. 18, 1850.

of certain electoral returns in Pottawattamie County, the right of the Mormons to vote, and charges concerning stolen election ledgers.²³ The House of Representatives, unable or unwilling to decide the argument on the merits of the evidence presented, had merely declared the seat vacant after procrastinating over the issue for more than a year. Both Thompson and Miller again opposed each other for the short term of Congress that remained.²⁴

One Delazon Smith, however, complicated the Democratic side by refusing to accept the verdict of the special convention which had nominated Thompson again. Smith decided to run as an independent candidate for the post. Whether he really believed he could win is, of course, unknown, but his candidacy caused the Democrats no little concern. He was a man of good speaking ability and possessed of a fine political personality. That the Democrats worried about Smith is best evidenced in the virulence of the attacks which appeared in the Democratic press, one such organ christening him "Delusion" Smith.²⁵

Once the various contesting parties had selected their candidates and published their platforms, they began to campaign in earnest. The Democrats had only one issue to carry to the voters of Iowa. This they proceeded to do with energy and efficiency. The leaders of the party believed that the people were very much alarmed over the growing bitterness which had been increasing between the sections during the past several years. They believed, too, that Iowans desired nothing more than to preserve the Union and to restore harmony to the nation as a whole. Finally, they believed that virtually everyone in the state, save the most fanatic, was enthusiastic over the compromise measures designed to allay the erupting passions which threatened to destroy the Union. Hence, when the Democrats determined to stake their bid for office almost exclusively on the single issue of the Compromise of 1850, they felt quite certain that such a maneuver would be a popular one with the voters and nonvoters alike.²⁶

While the extremists in the North and South raged and fumed, the mod-

²³ *Muscatine Journal*, July 20, 1850, quoted in Louis B. Schmidt, "The Miller-Thompson Election Contest," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 12:121 (January, 1914).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 121-3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 124; *Burlington Gazette*, Aug. 28, 1850.

²⁶ David S. Sparks, "The Decline of the Democratic Party in Iowa, 1850-1860," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY*, 53:9-10 (January, 1955); *New York Daily Times*, Oct. 23, 1851.

erate leaders from both sections struggled to discover the formula which might resolve the controversial issues to the mutual satisfaction of both sides. The press in Iowa sincerely prayed that some "master spirit" would cool hostile tempers so that harmony once again could be restored to the councils of the government. One journal called upon the "Great West" to settle the quarrel which the other sections seemed incapable of deciding.²⁷

An editorial which appeared in the columns of the influential Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer* best expressed the position of the Iowa Democracy on the Compromise. In a note of careful restraint, the editor advised his readers that,

Every good citizen should overlook the little of evil that may result, and be satisfied with the vast amount of good to flow from a definite and permanent adjustment of questions which have always proved too much for American equanimity.²⁸

The "little of evil" undoubtedly referred to one of the measures drawn up to placate the interests of the South, a bill which became the Fugitive Slave Act. This law provided that slaveowners pursuing their fleeing charges into the free states could demand and expect to receive aid from the local federal and state authorities in the redemption of their fugitive property. Another section stipulated that anyone aiding and abetting a fugitive slave would be liable to fine and imprisonment.²⁹ The law was drafted to eliminate one of the chief sources of grievance which the South harbored against the North, for Northern collusion with the escaping Negroes was causing serious financial losses to Southern slave masters.

Nevertheless, the Fugitive Slave Act provoked most of the opposition to the compromise measures. Of the other acts, those dealing with the admission of California into the Union as a free state, the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia, the organization of Utah and New Mexico as territories, the settlement of the financial and boundary claims of Texas — these acts Iowans accepted with little or no animosity. Indeed, many had long clamored for California's admission as a free state. Still, at least one journal charged that a coalition of Northern and Southern Senators had deliberately impeded the admission of California by introducing

²⁷ Council Bluffs *Frontier Guardian*, Mar. 6, 1850; Iowa City *Republican*, May 15, 1850.

²⁸ Muscatine *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, May 30, 1850.

²⁹ 9 *U. S. Statutes at Large*, 462-5.

other issues, or by granting needless concessions to the South.³⁰ Apparently the Fugitive Slave Act was one of these "needless concessions" to slavery.

Newspaper opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law was not, however, unanimous. While one editor raged about a "scheme of infamy," others found nothing wrong with the act, and announced themselves as "utterly opposed to open, organized resistance" to the measure. They cautioned the North against advocating contravention to a lawful enactment, lest the Union be destroyed and the states subjected to a bath "in American Blood."³¹

In the United States Senate, Iowa's Democratic Senators, Augustus Caesar Dodge and George Wallace Jones, worked indefatigably to secure the passage of all five of the compromise resolutions originally introduced by Henry Clay. Jones, declaring his opposition to slavery in principle, nevertheless defended the right of the institution to exist where "the constitutions and laws of my country have placed it." Still, he would strive with all his power "to give quietus to this distracting question." Thus, since "the bill now before us will effect that object . . . I shall record my vote for it with unmixed pleasure."³²

Dodge likewise took his place beside the supporters of all the compromise measures including the Fugitive Slave Act. Concerning the latter, Dodge declared without hesitation or equivocation that "the southern states and people have a right to the enjoyment of their property, and to the security and protection guaranteed to it and to them under the Federal Constitution; and neither my State nor its Representatives seek to interfere with either." While he could not state without reservation that the laws would be "destined to effect the good results which those who voted for them intended," he believed that "they have done good, are doing good, and should be religiously lived up to and carried out in good faith."³³

Both Dodge and Jones blamed a few fanatics for trying to obstruct the beneficial operation of the Compromise, in general, and of the Fugitive Slave Act, in particular. Jones attributed the so-called evils of slavery more to the fanaticism of the Free Soilers and abolitionists than to any actual suffering endured by the slaves themselves. Dodge severely took to task those

³⁰ *Iowa City Republican*, May 15, 1850.

³¹ *Ibid.*, May 15, Nov. 6, 1850; *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Nov. 14, 1850.

³² *Congressional Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 1716.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 2 sess., Appendix, 310.

who sought to induce slaves to flee from their bondage and then ceased to care for the fugitive Negroes.³⁴

The actual voting in the Senate on the various compromise proposals clearly demonstrated that the Democrats more consistently and more faithfully backed the measures than did the Whigs. Moreover, Iowa's Senators favored all the bills on every ballot. Only Sam Houston of Texas and Daniel Sturgeon of Pennsylvania, Democrats, and John Wales of Delaware, Whig, could boast of similar voting records. Eight other Senators cast ballots approving of four of the acts and abstained from voting for a fifth. Thus only thirteen Senators gave what could be termed full support to the Compromise of 1850.³⁵

While Whig opposition nationally was more pronounced than that of the Democrats, in Iowa the Whigs could do nothing but express general approval of the legislation or remain silent. The Whig party organ in Burlington, for example, averred:

We wish to express no opposition to the general features of Mr. Clay's plan. It is our wish as much as his to put an end to all causes of future disquiet among our people. Perhaps there are some portions that we might not entirely agree to — but as a whole, we would be willing to see them adopted rather than matters should remain in their present condition.³⁶

This same journal even went so far as to praise the work of Senator Dodge on behalf of the Compromise. Indeed, the paper included all of Dodge's congressional colleagues from Iowa, all Democrats, in its general commendation of their labors.³⁷

Other Whig papers also applauded the compromise bills, for with their passage "all fears of a dissolution of the Union or of a hostile coalition between any of its members will doubtless cease, and, we trust, peace, harmony, and fraternal feelings will again be the order of the day."³⁸ Actually the Whig press had little choice but to accept the Compromise, for it was,

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 1716; *ibid.*, 31 Cong., 2 sess., Appendix, 311.

³⁵ Holman Hamilton, "Democratic Senate Leadership and the Compromise of 1850," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 41:407-409 (December, 1954); Roy F. Nichols, *The Democratic Machine, 1850-1854* (New York, 1923), 82; *Cong. Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, 382.

³⁶ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, June 13, 1850.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Mar. 14, 1850.

³⁸ *Iowa City Republican*, Sept. 25, 1850.

perhaps, one of the most popular issues ever introduced into Iowa politics, at least up to that time.³⁹ Nor did the Democrats refrain from accepting the plaudits of the public for the measures, regardless of the fact that they had originated in the fertile mind of Henry Clay.

While the Democrats sought to achieve victory by promoting the Compromise, the Whigs vainly attempted to remind Iowans that they ought to consider other issues during the campaign. For one thing, as the Whigs pointed out, the Democrats had been in control of the national government for the better part of twenty years and of the machinery of the state government since its existence as a territory.⁴⁰ The state of Iowa ought to be "redeemed from that thralldom under which she has groaned ever since her existence," wrote one editor.⁴¹ Furthermore, Whig government would be safer than Democratic government: the latter "exhibits a recklessness of character, tending to unwarrantable extremes that endanger the peace and prosperity of the nation," was the opinion of another.⁴²

Other Whig papers rehashed the old issue of internal improvements or demanded an amendment to the state constitution. After all, these editors asserted, the Whigs had long advocated the use of federal funds to clear away the barriers obstructing internal commerce throughout the nation and in Iowa. Yet the Democrats continued to vote down such proposals, either through congressional action or by presidential veto.⁴³

The Whigs also attacked Iowa's congressional delegation in an attempt to demonstrate that Iowans in Congress were too prone to accept the position of the South on the question of slavery.⁴⁴ Here, clearly, was a maneuver to capture the votes of the Free Soilers as well as of Democrats who opposed the "peculiar institution" on moral grounds.

But the efforts of the Whigs to inject their favorite issues into the campaign, to divert attention from the popular Compromise, and to malign

³⁹ David S. Sparks, "The Birth of the Republican Party in Iowa, 1848 to 1860" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1951), 52.

⁴⁰ *Iowa City Republican*, July 3, 1850.

⁴¹ *Dubuque Telegraph*, quoted in *ibid.*, Feb. 6, 1850.

⁴² *Council Bluffs Frontier Guardian*, May 29, 1850.

⁴³ *Cincinnati Gazette*, quoted in *Iowa City Republican*, Jan. 16, 1850. Iowa's Democratic congressional delegation labored zealously to procure federal funds to aid projects of internal improvements, especially river and harbor improvements. *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 sess., 210.

⁴⁴ *Burlington Hawk-Eye*, Feb. 7, July 25, Nov. 21, 1850.

Iowa's Democratic officials proved useless in comparison with the great national crisis which the Compromise seemed destined to resolve. The cry of internal improvements, of amending the state constitution simply could not compete effectively with the impregnable Compromise as a campaign issue. In the end the polls told the story.

The fifth day of August, 1850, was the day of reckoning for the various candidates. Some 25,500 voters went to the polls to cast their ballots. Once again, as in previous elections in Iowa, the Democrats carried the day. Their success, however, could by no means be termed overwhelming, for the margins of victory received by the successful candidates were relatively narrow in virtually all instances. Nevertheless, the Democratic sweep of the offices at stake was complete.⁴⁵

In the gubernatorial contest Stephen Hempstead defeated his substitute Whig rival, James L. Thompson, by a vote of 13,486 to 11,452. Free Soiler William Penn Clarke ran a poor third with but 570 votes, more than 300 of which came in the three southeastern counties of Lee, Henry, and Washington. Hempstead's final tally represented 52.85 per cent of the total votes cast, while Thompson received 44.88 per cent and Clarke a mere 2.23 per cent.⁴⁶

In the congressional race in the First District, which contained a somewhat larger voting population than that of the Second District, Bernhart Henn eked out a narrow victory over his Whig opponent George G. Wright. The former received 7,437 votes to the latter's 6,985 votes. George Shedd brought up the rear with 301 votes, most of which he won in Henry and Lee counties. Henn's percentage was a slim 50.51 per cent of the total votes recorded. Wright attracted 47.44 per cent, and Shedd's total netted him 2.04 per cent. A shift of less than 230 votes from Henn to Wright would have cost the former the victory.⁴⁷

In the contest held in the Second Congressional District the picture was far more favorable for the Democratic aspirant Lincoln Clark. Clark polled 5,745 votes, while his Whig rival, William H. Henderson, received 4,775 votes. John Day, the Free Soil entry, scraped together 107 votes in his

⁴⁵ The election returns from which the percentage statistics were compiled are on file in the office of the Secretary of State in the Capitol Building in Des Moines, and are entered in a ledger entitled *Election Records, 1848-1860*. A microfilm copy of these returns is on file at the library of the State University of Iowa at Iowa City.

⁴⁶ *Idem*.

⁴⁷ *Idem*.

hopeless quest for office. Clark's 53.73 per cent of the total votes was the highest for his party in the important races. Henderson attracted 44.66 per cent of the total, but Dayton had to console himself with but 1 per cent.⁴⁸

The extent of the Democratic sweep, albeit on the basis of slender margins, is best illustrated in the returns of the races for the General Assembly. Here the Democratic achievement was no less than overwhelming. Of the nineteen Senate vacancies, the Democrats captured thirteen, while in the balloting for Iowa's lower house, the Democrats took thirty-five of the thirty-nine seats in that branch of the legislature.⁴⁹

In the election contests for the other state offices, the Democrats attracted totals very much in keeping with that won by Hempstead. The honor of heading the Democratic list with the most votes fell to the newly elected Auditor of State, William Pattie, who received 13,529 ballots.⁵⁰

The following month, September 24, witnessed the run-off election between William Thompson, Daniel Miller, and Delazon Smith. Although only a few months remained in the unexpired term, and although the Democrats had already captured the seat for the coming full term, interest in the election was surprisingly strong. Nevertheless, for what it may have been worth to him as a moral victory if nothing else, Miller defeated his Democratic opponent by a vote of 5,463 to 4,801. Smith received 365 votes. Since more than 2,600 voters had remained away from the polls, Miller's task was somewhat lightened and his success somewhat tarnished.⁵¹

On a county-by-county basis, Hempstead carried all but ten of the forty-two counties which returned votes. His party's congressional candidates fared almost as well, taking twenty-nine of the forty-two counties. The only two counties in western Iowa that went to the Whigs were Fremont and Pottawattamie, both of which shifted to the Democratic ranks in later elections.

The Free Soil party, while failing to carry a single county in any of the contests, rolled up its largest totals in Henry, Washington, Lee, Louisa,

⁴⁸ *Idem.* Running independently, one Alex McEad received 63 votes from Washington County and two votes from Johnson County.

⁴⁹ Louis Pelzer, "The History and Principles of the Democratic Party of Iowa, 1846-1857," *IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, 6:192 (April, 1908).

⁵⁰ *Election Records.*

⁵¹ *Idem.* A comparison of the results of the regular election with the returns of the special election reveals that the Democratic totals decreased by 2,636 at the special election. Whig totals declined only 1,529 for the same contest.

Linn, and Jones counties. In Henry and Washington counties especially, the Free Soilers attracted more than 10 per cent of the votes recorded there. These counties contained not only large settlements of southern-born Whigs, but also sizable communities of Quakers whose antislavery impulse was exceedingly strong. Many of the latter were already beginning to make local reputations for themselves as operators of the Underground Railroad. Hence, Free Soil sympathy could be expected to be intense in this region of the state.

For the state as a whole, it is difficult to discern any significant voting patterns, for the Democrats in 1850 displayed considerable strength in all sections of Iowa. Areas exhibiting heaviest Democratic voting returns were concentrated in the central counties bordering on the Mississippi River, along the western fringes of settlement inland from the Missouri River, and along the Iowa border counties just north of Missouri. Generally speaking, the Democrats averaged about 53 to 55 per cent of the total votes in most of the counties.

The Compromise of 1850, more than any other issue or combination of issues, enabled the Democratic party of Iowa to retain its power in the state. Astute Democratic politicians, correctly analyzing the pre-election sentiment of the voters, had parlayed the popular compromise measures to another Iowa party triumph. In 1850 the people of Iowa were not especially aroused by moral arguments directed against the existence of slavery in the United States, although most would have opposed any further geographic extension of the "peculiar institution." But they were deeply and immediately concerned about the preservation of a harmonious Federal Union which extremists in the North and South threatened. The compromise measures, and the Democratic party which had so resolutely supported them, held out the promise of restoring peace again to the nation. On these grounds, then, Iowa voters gave Democratic candidates their support in 1850, as they would also in 1851, 1852, and 1853 for similar reasons. Not until 1854, following the furor created by the Kansas-Nebraska legislation, did Iowans, feeling a sense of betrayal by the Democrats, begin to shift their allegiance to another political party in a state-wide election.