

HISTORY OF CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS IN IOWA

THE ELECTION OF 1848

In proceeding with the history of congressional elections in Iowa,¹ three facts should be noted: (1) the General Assembly of Iowa had, in accordance with the act of Congress of June 25, 1842, requiring the States to elect Representatives by districts, divided the State into two congressional districts; (2) the General Assembly of Iowa had fulfilled the requirements imposed upon the State legislatures by the Constitution of the United States by prescribing the times, the places, and the manner of holding congressional elections; (3) Representatives are regularly chosen in the year preceding the assembling of the Congress in which they take their seats.

It will be remembered that the Congressmen elected in 1846 were chosen for the second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress which expired on March 4, 1847, and that the congressional election of 1847 was held for the selection of Congressmen to represent Iowa in the Thirtieth Congress which convened the following December. In the normal course of events, however, the Representatives elected in 1847 would have been chosen in 1846. But this would have necessitated the election of two sets of Congressmen in the same year: one to represent Iowa in the second session of the Twenty-ninth Congress and the other to represent the State in the Thirtieth Congress. The

¹ For an account of congressional elections in Iowa prior to 1848 see the writer's article in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. X, pp. 463-502.

election of 1847 avoided two simultaneous elections. The terms of the Congressmen elected in 1847 expired on March 4, 1849. The congressional election of 1848 was therefore held in accordance with the rule which has prevailed in all of the States down to the present time of electing Congressmen in the even years — that is, in the year preceding the assembling of the Congress in which the Representatives elect are to take their seats.

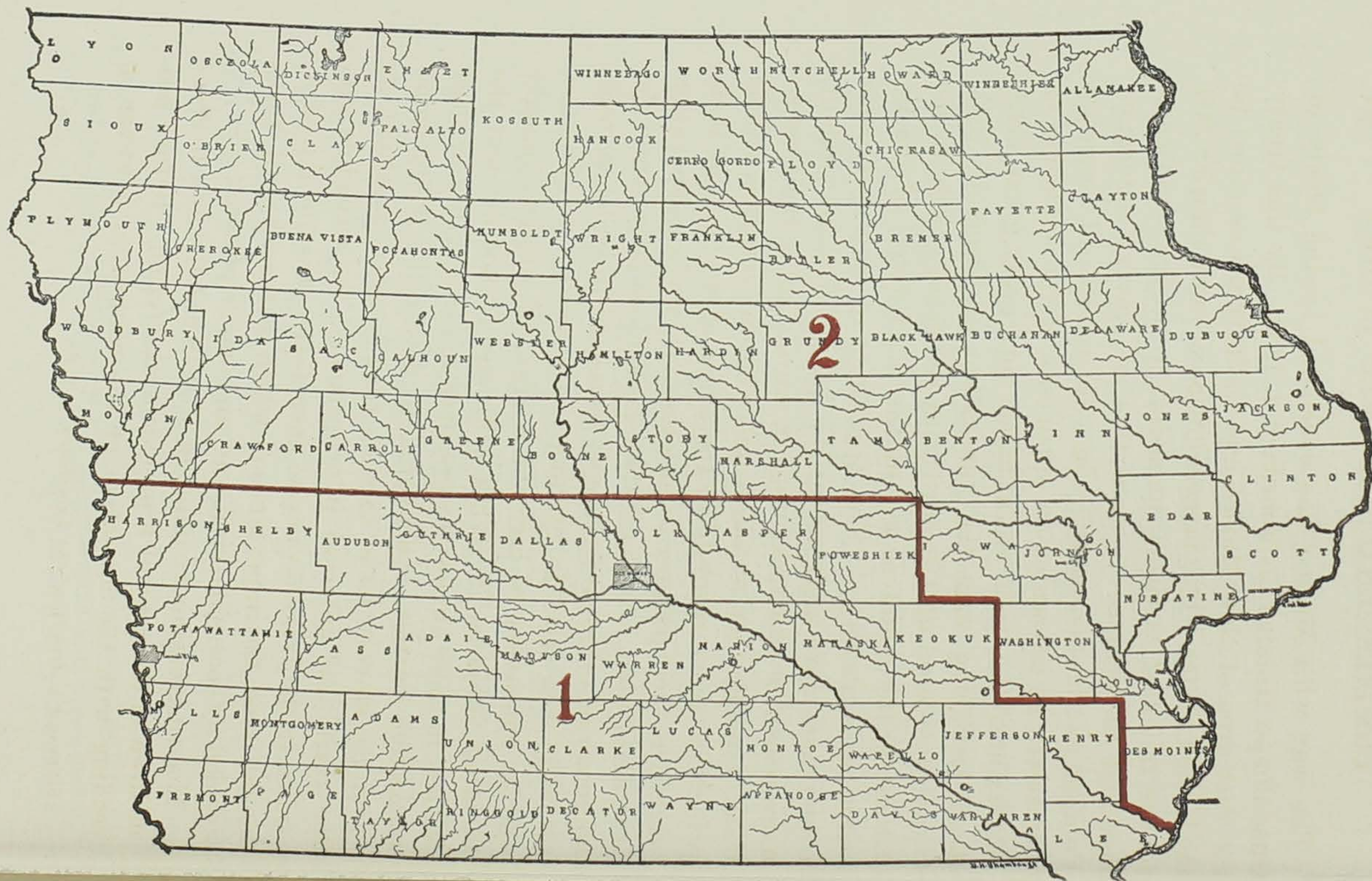
On January 24, 1848, the General Assembly of Iowa in extra session passed an act altering the boundary line between the First and Second Congressional districts. It provided that the act of February 22, 1847, dividing the State into two districts, be "so amended, that the county of Poweshiek shall be attached to, and made a part of the first Congressional District, instead of the second, as provided for by said act."² The reasons for this transfer are not clear. It could not have been made to equalize the population of the two districts for the reason that the inhabitants of the First District outnumbered those of the Second District by several thousand, as shown by the census returns of 1847, 1848, and 1849.³ Nor could the transfer have been made for political reasons. The election returns do, indeed, indicate a decreasing Democratic majority in the First District and an increasing Democratic majority in the Second District. But the small Whig majority of five in Poweshiek County in the election of 1848⁴ was not sufficient to make any material difference in the political strength of the two districts. "The chief merit of the law seems to have been that it tended to straighten the dividing line and so make the form of the districts more regular."⁵ (See Map.)

² *Laws of Iowa*, Extra Session, 1848, pp. 34, 35.

³ Hull's *Historical and Comparative Census*, pp. 196, 198.

⁴ Election returns as found in the Archives in Des Moines.

⁵ Peirce's *Congressional Districting in Iowa* in *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS*, Vol. I, pp. 337, 338.



The war with Mexico was concluded by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848. By this treaty the vast area of New Mexico and California was ceded to the United States. This large addition of more than 500,000 square miles of territory immediately brought into commanding importance the question of slavery extension. Political parties and party leaders did not, indeed, announce themselves as advocates or opponents of the extension of slavery until the crisis was at hand; but "every great measure", beginning with the annexation of Texas in 1845, "was considered and decided with reference chiefly to the extension, the maintenance, or the overthrow" of the institution of slavery. "The opponents of slavery became bolder and more aggressive; its defenders more vigilant, more resentful of attacks upon it, more rigid in their ostracism of public men at the North who did not accept their principles, more resolute in the event of a denial of their 'rights' in their purpose to seek those rights by a separation from the Union. As the feeling grew more intense and the language of extreme partisans increased in violence, well-meaning men tried to prolong the peace by compromises and by endeavors to turn the current of political thought to other subjects."⁶ While both the Democrats and the Whigs, in their anxiety to preserve the nationality of their respective parties, endeavored to divert the public mind from the slavery issue to such time-honored questions as the tariff and internal improvements, the principle embodied in the Wilmot proviso nevertheless became the paramount issue, the importance of which increased until it was decided by secession, civil war, and emancipation.

The congressional campaign of 1848 was the first to occur in Iowa in the year of a presidential election. Before proceeding with the narrative of the campaign, however, it

⁶ Stanwood's *History of the Presidency*, p. 226.

should be pointed out that three important considerations should be kept in mind in the study of congressional elections occurring in presidential years: (1) the two contests are almost synchronous⁷—both occurring at the same time; (2) both are dominated largely by the same political issues; (3) they have to do with determining the complexion of coordinate branches of the national government: the legislative and the administrative. It is obvious, therefore, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to disconnect entirely the two contests and that a discussion of the one involves in part also a consideration of the other. Nevertheless, congressional elections in Iowa constitute the theme of this dis-

⁷ While the time, the places, and the manner of holding congressional elections are determined by the various States, the time of holding presidential elections is determined by the United States Congress. Prior to 1792 no regulation was prescribed, but in that year Congress passed an act providing that "electors shall be appointed in each State for the election of a President and Vice-President of the United States, within thirty-four days preceding the first Wednesday in December, 1792, and within thirty-four days preceding the first Wednesday in December in every fourth year succeeding the last election". This law was finally superseded by the act of Congress of 1845, which is still in force, providing "That the electors for President and Vice-President shall be appointed in each State on the Tuesday next after the first Monday in the month of November of the year in which they are to be appointed."—See Stanwood's *History of the Presidency*, pp. 36, 242.

The General Assembly of Iowa, on the other hand, had, by the Act of January 24, 1848, provided that Representatives to Congress should be elected "at the general election in the year one thousand eight hundred and forty-eight, and every two years thereafter." The Constitution of 1846 provided that the general election should be held on the first Monday in August. Iowa Congressmen were, therefore, under this Constitution chosen in August. The Constitution of 1857 changed the date of the general election to "the second Tuesday in October, except the years of the presidential election, when the election shall be on the Tuesday next after the first Monday in November". The law of January 24, 1848, remaining in force under this Constitution the date of the election of Congressmen was changed accordingly. In 1884 an amendment to the Constitution of 1857 was adopted providing that the general election shall be held uniformly in November. It will be observed, therefore, that congressional and presidential elections in Iowa have been held on the same date since 1857.—See the Constitutions of Iowa of 1846 and 1857, on the subject of general elections.

cussion and so the features of the presidential campaign will be referred to only in so far as they affected the congressional campaign.

Preparations for the nomination of candidates for Congress began early. On February 9, 1848, *The Iowa Standard* advised the Whigs "that not a day should be lost in taking the preliminary steps to open the campaign. Our candidates for Congress should be upon the stump by the first day of May. . . . The whigs have in many counties a majority against them to overcome, and they should have ample time to endeavor to do it, by reason, argument and the dissemination of whig principles. The candidates for Congress will have heavy duties to perform, if they visit every neighborhood in their respective districts, which they should do, if they wish faithfully to discharge their duty to the whigs of the State. We are therefore in favor of immediate action in every county in the State."⁸

But comparatively little interest was taken in the coming congressional election until April, for two reasons: (1) it was too early to inaugurate the congressional campaign; and (2) the public mind was occupied with James Harlan's spirited contest for the office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

The Whigs of the First District were the first to become active in the campaign for the election of Congressmen. On April 20th, the Whig Congressional Committee of that district issued a call for a convention to meet at Fairfield on May 17th for the purpose of nominating a candidate for Congress to represent the First District. The basis of representation in the convention was to be "two delegates for each Senator and Representative, in each county or

⁸ *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), New Series, Vol. II, No. 25, February 9, 1848.

district." The call was signed by Arthur Bridgman, C. W. Slagle, and George W. Wright.⁹

The convention met accordingly. A temporary organization was effected by the appointment of Daniel E. Brainard of Van Buren County as chairman, and Richard Irwin of Jefferson County as secretary. Resolutions were passed directing the chairman to appoint committees on credentials and on permanent organization. The committees being duly appointed, the convention adjourned until afternoon.

The convention met pursuant to adjournment and the committee on permanent organization presented the following report: President, George Wilson of Wapello County; Vice Presidents, Col. W. M. Stewart of Lee County and A. L. Nichols of Mahaska County; Secretaries, C. Baldwin of Jefferson County and George W. Garnes of Van Buren County. The report was adopted unanimously and the permanent officers of the convention took their respective places.

The report of the committee on credentials being adopted, the convention proceeded to ballot on a congressional nominee. George G. Wright of Van Buren County and Daniel F. Miller of Lee County were presented as the candidates for the nomination. While the convention was balloting on a candidate for Congress, the Van Buren delegation withdrew and after consultation returned to the convention and through J. B. Howell asked leave to withdraw the name of George G. Wright from the consideration of the convention. Leave was granted, whereupon Daniel F. Miller was nominated by acclamation as the Whig candidate for Congress from the First District.

The committee on resolutions which was now appointed by the president of the convention consisted of the following members: W. H. Wallace of Henry County, C. W. Slagle of

⁹ *Keokuk Register*, Vol. I, No. 48, April 20, 1848.

Jefferson County, and J. B. Howell of Van Buren County. Mr. Miller thanked the convention for his nomination and made a few remarks on "general politics". While the committee on resolutions was drafting the platform, speeches were made by Viele of Lee, Street of Wapello, Jay of Henry, and Shelladay of Mahaska. The resolutions prepared by the committee were then presented to the convention and adopted unanimously by that body as the platform of the Whig party in the First District.

The platform, consisting of a preamble and eight resolutions, arraigned the administration of James K. Polk and extolled the principles of the Whig party, but carefully avoided any reference to the slavery issue. It condemned "the misrule of the party in power", commended the Whig party as a worthy descendant of "that great party, who in revolutionary days bid defiance to the British Crown", and emphasized the leading principle of this party to be "opposition to executive power and unconstitutional prerogative." James K. Polk was denounced for "basely bowing the knee to the power of England on the Oregon controversy" and for "the creation of an unnecessary war with Mexico". These considerations, including Polk's "opposition to the improvement of our Western Harbours and rivers", continued one resolution, "leave us without confidence in either his ability or his honesty and require that the administration of the Government should be entrusted to abler hands."

The platform also accused "the leaders of the Locofoco party in Iowa" with having "universally sacrificed the interests and the welfare of the people to their own selfish aggrandizement" and argued "that a continuance of such men in office, will only tend to increase the burdens of taxation and involve the people in still deeper difficulties than those already surrounding them."

Another resolution pledged the support of the Whig party in the respective counties to the nominee of this convention and also to the nominees of the Whig National Convention. Finally, the action of the State Convention held at Iowa City on May 11th was endorsed with the observation "that the energy and unanimity of the whig party affords us cheering hopes of approaching victory."¹⁰

The nomination of Daniel F. Miller for Congress by the Whigs of the First District was commended enthusiastically by the leading Whig journals. *The Bloomington Herald* observed that "Mr. Miller is an old resident of the State and is well versed in the crooks which locofocoism takes to deceive the real Democracy of the country. He will give the spoils party trouble before he gets through with them."¹¹ *The Iowa Standard* remarked: "We have every reason to believe that the nomination of Daniel F. Miller was the most judicious that could have been made. He is one of the early settlers in Iowa, is a Lawyer of acknowledged abilities and extensive practice, and what is of some consideration in a tight political contest, he can run up to his party strength in the empire county and a little over."¹² *The Keokuk Register* added that Miller's "nomination . . . by acclamation, is a sufficient guarantee to this district, of his devotion to the principles of the Whig faith. Indifference only can bring defeat."¹³

Daniel F. Miller was, indeed, one of the most widely known pioneers and lawmakers of Iowa. Born in Maryland in 1814, he removed in his youth to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he studied and practiced law until 1839

¹⁰ For the proceedings of the Whig Convention of the First District see the *Keokuk Register*, Vol. II, No. 1, May 25, 1848.

¹¹ *The Bloomington Herald*, New Series, Vol. III, No. 106, May 27, 1848.

¹² *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), New Series, Vol. II, No. 34, May 31, 1848.

¹³ *Keokuk Register*, Vol. II, No. 1, May 25, 1848.

when he emigrated to the Territory of Iowa, locating at Fort Madison. Elected a Representative to the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa in 1840, he held that office for one term. His appearance in politics in 1848, as the Whig candidate for Congress from the First District, was of unusual interest, for out of the ensuing August election developed the first contested congressional election case in the history of Iowa. Mr. Miller was one of the founders of the Republican party in Iowa and was one of the presidential electors in 1856 when the vote of the State was cast for the Republican candidate for the presidency. In 1860 Mr. Miller was an independent candidate for Judge of the Supreme Court of Iowa, but was defeated by Judge Wright, the Republican candidate. Fifty-three years after his election as Representative to the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Iowa, Mr. Miller was elected in 1893 to the General Assembly of Iowa. Mr. Miller practiced law in Iowa for fifty-four years and was known as the "Nestor" of the Iowa bar. He died in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1895.¹⁴

The Democrats of the First District met in convention at the Court House in Fairfield on June 15th. The temporary organization was composed of David Hendershott of Henry County, chairman, and George May of Wapello County, secretary. Committees on credentials, on permanent organization, and on resolutions were appointed by the chairman, and then the convention adjourned until one o'clock. In the interval, Delazon Smith, upon invitation addressed the delegates "in an able and powerful address, showing up the inconsistencies of the Whigs."

When the convention reassembled in the afternoon, the committee on permanent organization made the following recommendations: President, Uriah Briggs; Vice Presidents, Robert Brown and William M. Morrow; Secretaries,

¹⁴ Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. IV, p. 191.

Guy Wells and James Craig. The recommendations were accepted and the permanent organization duly effected. The report of the committee on credentials was then presented and adopted, whereupon a motion was made to require a two-thirds vote in the nomination of a candidate for Congress, but the motion was lost.

The candidates for the nomination were William Thompson and Delazon Smith. The result of the first ballot showed that William Thompson had received 43 votes and Delazon Smith 14 votes, whereupon Augustus Hall moved that Mr. Thompson be declared the unanimous choice of the convention as the Democratic candidate for Congress in the First District.¹⁵ The motion was carried.

The report of the committee on resolutions was presented by S. J. Bayard, Chairman, the other members of the committee being Col. C. J. Crocker, George May, J. B. Hamilton, and J. D. Spalding. It consisted of eleven resolutions which were adopted unanimously by the convention as the platform of the Democratic party in the First District. Cautiously avoiding, as did the Whig platform of this district, any reference to the real issue, the resolutions are interesting chiefly as a lengthy pronouncement of patriotic encomiums on Lewis Cass and General Butler — the nominees of the Democratic National Convention. "Resolved That in Lewis Cass", ran one resolution, "we realize the statesman — the wise and discreet senator — the able diplomatist — the accomplished scholar — the patriot in war and peace — the soldier whose sword always glittered in the van of danger — the Democrat, ever in favor of the cause of liberty and the widest spread of free principles." Another resolution recognized General W. O. Butler as "the gallant soldier of 1812 — one of the heroes of Monterey —

¹⁵ For a biographical sketch of William Thompson see THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. X, p. 491.

an enlightened statesman, a sound Democrat, and a patriot without guile."

The platform did "not approve of electing a President whose only recommendation is his military achievements", arguing that "*some service in civil station is necessary to qualify any one to discharge satisfactorily the duties of chief magistrate of this United States.*" This was intended as a reproach to General Taylor, whose only public service which commended him for the presidency was his military record in the Mexican war. Again, it was contended, "That as the South has had the President for forty-eight out of sixty years we think it time to elect another from the North."

Finally, the resolutions approved "the Baltimore platform",¹⁶ commended "the course of our present member of Congress, W. Thompson," who "is entitled to the confidence and support of his constituents", congratulated James K. Polk "for the fidelity with which he has carried out" the "principles" of the Democratic party and "for the prudence, skill, and success with which he has conducted the Mexican war to its close", and pledged "the use of all honorable efforts to secure the election of the nominee of this convention."

A resolution proposing that in the election of United States Senators one Senator ought to be chosen from the First Congressional District was rejected. The proceedings of the convention were concluded by the appointment of a "Congressional Central Committee of Correspondence for the First District" consisting of the following members: S. J. Bayard of Jefferson County, Guy Wells of Lee County,

¹⁶ For a statement of the resolutions adopted by the Democratic National Convention in 1848 see Stanwood's *History of the Presidency*, pp. 199-201; 215, 216; 234-236. The Whig National Convention adopted no platform in 1848.

H. B. Hendershott of Wapello County, A. Hall of Van Buren County, and T. Baker of Polk County.¹⁷

In the meantime, the party organs began to urge the importance of selecting candidates for Congress from the Second District. *The Iowa Standard* on May 24th admonished "our whig friends in this district to begin to think seriously about a suitable nominee. . . . The whigs in the counties south of the Iowa, are *wide awake* to this nomination. Will those in the northern counties *sleep* upon their *local* and *party* rights?"¹⁸

On May 27th, the Whig Congressional Committee of the Second District issued a call for a convention to be held at Bloomington on June 15th. The call specified the ratio of representation in the convention to be "one delegate for every one hundred voters (of all parties) in each county." Counties casting less than one hundred votes and not less than fifty were to be entitled to two delegates and those casting less than fifty votes were to be entitled to one delegate. "A full and general attendance, from all parts of the district" was requested. The call was signed by N. L. Stout, Isaac Leffler, William Penn Clark, E. H. Thomas, and John P. Cook.¹⁹

The Iowa Standard expressed the fear, however, that "there will be scarcely time to circulate the notice to the counties and townships, so as to ensure a general appointment of delegates . . . and if there should not be some *extra* exertions, not half of them will be represented in the convention. We therefore earnestly entreat the leading whigs in the several county towns, to circulate the no-

¹⁷ For the proceedings of the Democratic Convention of the First District see the *Keokuk Dispatch*, Vol. I, No. 5, June 22, 1848.

¹⁸ *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), New Series, Vol. II, No. 33, May 24, 1848.

¹⁹ *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), New Series, Vol. II, No. 34, May 31, 1848.

tices by special messengers, in every township in their respective counties, without an *hours delay*; that there may be a *real* and not a *nominal* convention of the *people's* representatives, as is too often the case. A full delegation is absolutely necessary, in order to insure a cordial acquiescence in the nomination, and without this, we cannot hope for success." In another editorial of the same issue, this organ observed hopefully that "if ever the whigs had a chance to carry this district, it is now. There are entirely too many *great* men in the locofoco ranks to get on harmoniously, and we have only to make a judicious selection in order to give 'em a real Buena Vista." Finally, this journal urged the farmers "to let go the plow-handle for a week, and prepare for the battle. And we venture to predict, that if the whig corps are properly organized and drilled, we shall 'lam 'em like blazes.' We ought to do it, we can do it, we must do it."²⁰

The convention which met pursuant to the call effected a temporary organization by the appointment of J. P. De Forrest, chairman, and S. A. Hudson, secretary. After the appointment of the usual committees on credentials, on permanent organization, and on resolutions by the chairman, the convention adjourned until two o'clock in the afternoon.

When the convention met pursuant to adjournment L. Ely presented the report of the committee on credentials, which was adopted. Ebenezer Cook presented the report of the committee on permanent organization, which made the following recommendations: President, Isaac Leffler of Des Moines County; Vice Presidents, N. P. Cooper of Washington County and W. E. Jennings of Jackson County; Secretaries, Edward H. Thomas of Louisa County and

²⁰ *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), New Series, Vol. II, No. 34, May 31, 1848.

James H. Leech of Cedar County. The recommendations were adopted unanimously and the officers took their seats.

The question of counting the votes of counties not fully represented was settled by the adoption of a resolution providing "that the delegates from those counties which are not fully represented, cast the full number of votes to which said counties are respectively entitled, and that if the delegates cannot agree in their vote, that they vote individually." The convention then proceeded to ballot for a candidate for Congress, N. Everson and J. S. Richman being appointed as tellers. The result recorded by the first ballot stood as follows: Timothy Davis, 43; Major McKean, 34; Isaac Leffler, 6; and Col. Henderson, 1. Mr. Davis was thereupon nominated unanimously as the Whig candidate for Congress from the Second District.

The committee on resolutions, composed of Stout, Clark, and Patterson, presented the report consisting of a preamble and twelve resolutions which was adopted unanimously as the platform of the Whig party in this district. More direct and dignified than the platform of either the Whigs or the Democrats of the First District, this document assumed a more definite attitude on the questions engaging the attention of the public mind. The preamble emphasized the following considerations: (1) "a change in the national administration" was "necessary . . . in order to secure a just and equitable administration of public affairs"; (2) the election of the nominee of the Baltimore Convention "would not effect such change"; (3) "such change can only be brought about by the elevation of men to power who have been in no wise connected with the present corrupt administration of affairs"; (4) "the necessity of the representative branch of the Government being composed of the friends of Western and National interests." The following resolutions were then presented:—

1st. Resolved, That the first and most important labor to be performed by the representatives, of the people, from the West in Congress, is to secure an appropriation from the General Government for the improvement of rivers and harbors; and we shall support no man for that trust who shall, in any way, be committed to the present administration.

2d. Resolved, That the Executive has no moral or constitutional right to trifle with the interests of the people by capriciously using the veto power for the mere indulgence of his private piques or opinions — and to do so, is a wanton violation of the practice of the early administrations of the government, and a usurpation of power not granted by the spirit, letter, or intent of the national constitution.

3d. Resolved, That we will use our best endeavors to secure the election of a man to represent this district in Congress, who shall be untrammelled by the power and patronage of government; one who shall be a free man, and not an Executive Slave.

4th. Resolved, That we view the nomination of General ZACHARY TAYLOR as giving an opportunity to the people to elect a man, who will be the President of the whole people, and not of a faction of official sycophants and lacqueys.

5th. Resolved, That in MILLARD FILLMORE we recognize a staunch patriot; a statesman of tried ability and profound political knowledge, and with him and the noble TAYLOR, as our standard bearers, we expect an easy and triumphant VICTORY of the people over the Candidate of the present corrupt and unscrupulous administration — for in Lewis Cass we recognize only a continuation of the present dynasty.

6th. Resolved, That the veto power has, by its wanton abuse, become obnoxious to liberty and dangerous to the perpetuity of our institutions and that it is high time that this power was restricted so that it cannot interfere with the will of the people, as expressed through their representatives in Congress.

7th. Resolved, That the opinion of General TAYLOR upon this subject meets with the entire approbation of this convention, to wit: "The known opinions and wishes of the Executive have exercised undue and injurious influences upon the Legislative department of the Government; and for this cause I have thought our system was in danger of undergoing a great change from its true theory."

8th. Resolved, That Lewis Cass owes all that he is, and all that he possesses, to the growth of the Great West; and that in his recreancy to her dearest interests, he has proved himself alike destitute of gratitude and public virtue:— and we mutually pledge ourselves to see that he shall find his proper level in the defeat which awaits him before the great tribunal of the American people.

9th. Resolved, That the difference between Democracy and Locofocoism is, that the first contemplates the rule of popular will; while the latter has no motives of action but the public spoils— and to secure these, it has sustained the arm of tyranny in the support of the will of one man for the defeat of important public measures

10th. Resolved, That we, as Whigs, will guard the will of the people against the fashionable usurpation of Locofocoism, as developed in the course of Polk's policy.

This platform having been accepted by the convention, the following resolutions were presented and adopted:—

1. Resolved, That in Timothy Davis, this convention presents a candidate to the Whigs of this District, who is regarded as eminently qualified for their support for Representative in Congress, and we here pledge ourselves to use all honorable exertions to promote his election.

2. Resolved, That we are in favor of the Wilmot Proviso, so called, and that duty and patriotism require us to declare that we are opposed to the extension of slavery over any territory now possessed, or which may be hereafter acquired by the United States.²¹

Timothy Davis was an old and respected citizen of Dubuque. He was born in New Jersey in 1794. After receiving a common school education, he emigrated to Kentucky where he studied law in 1816. Upon removing to Missouri in the same year, he practiced law in that State for twenty years. At the end of that period he came to Iowa and located at Dubuque. Mr. Davis was a staunch Whig, but upon the dissolution of the Whig party he affiliated with the

²¹ For the proceedings of the Whig Convention of the Second District see *The Bloomington Herald*, New Series, Vol. III, No. 108, July 1, 1848.

Republicans. Elected to Congress in 1856, he retired from public life at the end of his term.²²

The Democrats of the Second District met in convention at Davenport on June 15th.²³ Complete records of the proceedings of this convention have not been found.²⁴ Some important facts, however, have been gathered from the newspapers of the time, which throw considerable light on the convention. *The Iowa Standard*, on May 31st, observed that "There are lots of aspirants," for the Democratic nomination for Congressman from the Second District, "and they are as bees in drilling their men; in a locofoco convention, the nomination is the real election, and the balloting in August, is merely for the purpose of enabling the nominee to obtain a certificate, if the whigs fall below in counting noses."²⁵ Shepherd Leffler was a candidate for re-nomination, but the names of no other candidates are given in the records examined. It must be concluded, therefore, that Mr. Leffler was the only candidate seriously considered for the nomination.

Again, the *Keokuk Dispatch* informed its readers that strenuous efforts were made in the Second District to prevent Leffler's nomination, based mainly upon the ground that he had neglected the interests of that district in failing to procure a donation of land to aid in the construction of a railroad from Dubuque to Keokuk. In reply to this charge, the *Keokuk Dispatch* published a letter which had appeared

²² Gue's *History of Iowa*, Vol. IV, p. 68.

²³ It will be observed that the Democratic conventions of both congressional districts and the Whig convention of the Second District assembled on the same date.

²⁴ The failure to find any record of the proceedings of this convention is due to the fact that gaps occur in the files of several Democratic newspapers of the time. Again, other Democratic organs, the files of which are complete, give no report of this convention.

²⁵ *The Iowa Standard* (Iowa City), New Series, Vol. II, No. 34, May 31, 1848.

in the *Miner's Express* (Dubuque) showing that Leffler had in fact labored in behalf of the Dubuque and Keokuk railway project. This letter was written by Mr. Leffler to Mr. Collamer, Chairman of the Committee on Public Lands in the House of Representatives. Mr. Leffler stated that a memorial had been passed by the last General Assembly of Iowa, by unanimous vote, asking for a grant of land for the construction of the Dubuque and Keokuk Railroad and that this memorial had been forwarded to him. Four arguments were then presented in favor of this project: (1) the Government would receive remuneration for this grant in the enhanced value of unsold lands; (2) the railroad would pass through a rich agricultural area; (3) it would afford cheap markets; and (4) the land would lie unoccupied longer without the railroad. Mr. Collamer was then quoted as replying that the committee was disposed to favor the project, but that nothing could be done until "official information", which would authorize them to report the memorial for the favorable consideration of Congress, should be received.²⁶

It is evident, therefore, that Leffler defended himself successfully against the charge of neglecting the interests of his constituents, for the attempted opposition to his nomination culminated in failure and he was recommended by the convention for reelection to Congress and was well supported by the Democrats of the Second District in the ensuing campaign.²⁷

Finally, while no record has been found of the resolutions passed by this convention, *The Bloomington Herald* states

²⁶ *Keokuk Dispatch*, Vol. I, No. 10, July 27, 1848.

See also the *Weekly Miner's Express* (Dubuque), Vol. VIII, No. 10, November 3, 1848, which contains a long editorial concerning Leffler's candidacy for Congress. This editorial quotes a letter signed by "Justice", which contends that Leffler labored for "the North" in the matter of securing a public land grant for the construction of the Dubuque and Keokuk Railroad.

²⁷ For a biographical sketch of Shepherd Leffler see THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS, Vol. X, pp. 475, 476.

that "The locofoco Congressional Convention, which met at Davenport on the 15th of June, swallowed the entire resolution of the Baltimore convention, prohibiting internal improvements."²⁸ This resolution reads as follows: "Resolved, That the Constitution does not confer upon the general government the power to commence and carry on a general system of internal improvements."²⁹ The adoption of this resolution was antagonistic to the first provision of the Whig platform of the Second District, which stated that "the most important labor to be performed by the representatives of the people from the West in Congress is to secure an appropriation from the General Government for the improvement of rivers and harbors." It was to be expected, therefore, that the Whigs would ridicule and denounce the Democrats in the coming campaign for taking a position hostile to the interests of the people of Iowa. Judging from the tone of the press, the Democrats of the Second District in general approved the Baltimore platform. It is evident, too, that they were careful to avoid any reference to the issue of slavery extension.

The congressional platforms of the respective parties of the two districts having been announced and the candidates for Congress presented, the campaign opened with great earnestness and enthusiasm. As early as the month of May the *Keokuk Register* observed that "the calm which usually precedes a political campaign, already gives indications of a stormy season. In a government, constituted as the American Republic, that clashings should not unfrequently arise between the people and those in power, is to be expected, and in an examination of the causes which provoke differences, the usurpations of the latter will be found to present the most fruitful source. Such is the con-

²⁸ *The Bloomington Herald*, New Series, Vol. III, No. 108, July 1, 1848.

²⁹ Stanwood's *History of the Presidency*, p. 200.

test upon which the people of this country are now about to enter. . . . The question has become one of ascendancy between the ruler and the governed. It is therefore of the utmost importance, that harmony shall prevail. Personal predilections and personal enmities should all be surrendered, in order to secure the important result. . . . Without unanimity, irrevocable defeat stares us in the face. This unanimity is perhaps more general, than has hitherto ever existed."³⁰ Following these observations, the nomination of Daniel F. Miller for Congress was approved with the remark that his devotion to the principles of the Whig party was a sufficient guarantee to the people of the First District.

A week later this same journal predicted that "The policy for which the Whigs have so long been contending, in regard to National and State policy, must be adopted, whichever party be in power. Necessity will enforce it, and the chameleon, 'progressive democracy', can easily change color, to suit the emergency. But other questions of the first magnitude," remarked this organ, "are presented". These questions are summed up as follows: (1) "the encroachments of the Executive upon the other departments of the Government"; (2) "the utter disregard of western interests"; and (3) "the grasping after additional slave territory." These considerations, concluded the *Keokuk Register*, "should, independently of any other consideration, sink the administration in the estimation of the American people, into utter annihilation."³¹

But the respective candidates for Congress were also to receive their full measure of praise and censure. Thompson and Leffler were charged in particular with having neglected and disregarded the interests of Iowa in their failure to

³⁰ *Keokuk Register*, Vol. II, No. 1, May 25, 1848.

³¹ *Keokuk Register*, Vol. II, No. 2, June 1, 1848.

secure congressional appropriations for the improvement of the navigation of the Mississippi River and a public land grant for the construction of the Dubuque and Keokuk Railroad. Mr. Leffler's defense of himself against this charge has already been mentioned. In further justification of these two candidates for reëlection to Congress, the *Keokuk Dispatch* published an editorial which is presented in full, as follows:—

The nomination of Messrs. Thompson and Leffler, by the Democracy of the respective districts, is but a matter of sheer justice to these gentlemen. To have refused again to place their names before the people for re-election, would have implied a lack of confidence in their fidelity and ability, which, in our opinion, the circumstances of the case will not warrant. We know that there are many fault finders, grumblers, who think that our Representatives have not accomplished as much for the State as they were led to suppose would be in their power; but when we give due consideration to the adverse circumstances under which they have labored ever since taking their seats, truly generous hearts can, we think, cast no censure upon them for a failure to accomplish more for their constituents.

In the first place, let it be borne in mind that, ever since they took their seats in Congress, our country has been engaged in a war with a foreign power, and the whole country has been in commotion, a strong party trying to tarnish the fair reputation of our country by charging that the war, instead of being one in which a patriot might enlist with honor, was unholy, cruel, unjust and "God abhorred", the other striving with might and main to defend the government from this charge, little legitimate business of any kind, whatever, has yet been done. Those who are quietly at home, anxiously awaiting the passage of some favorite bill, have but a faint idea of the obstacles that present themselves in the way of obtaining the attention of Congress; but which are very apparent to an eye witness on the floor.

As a general thing, the western people look for too much from their representatives, and failing to receive all they anticipated, attribute the failure to a lack of zeal or ability in their immediate representatives, while perhaps, the matter was beyond the possi-

bility of man; consequently we find that few western members are able long to retain their seats, while in the east, members no more successful, are frequently retained for many years.

Indeed, fault-finding, without cause, has become so common that we find ministers of the gospel have become addicted to it. We do not recollect ever to have heard complaint made that, in the order of things, a certain mischievous imp, known as His Satanic Majesty, was created, but from every desk we hear the old customer abused, in no unmeasured terms, for the faithful manner in which he discharges his duty. Since we find that grumbling is the order of the day, we take it that Messrs. Leffler and Thompson, instead of meriting censure, deserve well at the hands of the people.³²

The campaign in July was characterized by great earnestness and numerous dramatic incidents. Campaign clubs were formed; public celebrations were held, accompanied by political speech-making and frontier merriment; and various "Railroad Meetings" were called and well attended. Party organs indulged in vigorous personalities and in violent attacks on opposing party platforms and candidates. Thus the campaign progressed until the congressional elections in August and continued until the presidential election in November.

On July 1st, *The Bloomington Herald*, in referring to the action of the Democratic convention of the Second District in adopting the resolution of the Baltimore platform prohibiting internal improvements at national expense, made the following caustic comments:—

Now it will be remembered, that, one year ago, these locofoco folks pretended to be in favor of the improvement of harbors and rivers. . . . Well, Polk's veto message came out, and the pack wheeled into line — that is, the office seekers and executive slaves. They swallowed the veto message whole. They now swallow the Baltimore resolution, because their candidate has endorsed it as good "democracy".

It remains to be seen whether the yeomanry of Iowa, and the

³² *Keokuk Dispatch*, Vol. I, No. 5, June 22, 1848.

Union, will wheel into line, as readily — whether they will be willing to forego the advantage of a long established construction of the constitution, upon this vital subject, and swallow the dogmas of Polk and Cass.

After reviewing the fact that Jackson had signed bills, making appropriations for internal improvements, “for more than *ten millions* of dollars during the eight years of his administration”, and calling in question the democracy of “the Baltimore Convention folks”, this journal called attention to Democratic inconsistency in the following terms:—

Be it known that to improve the rapids of the Mississippi river, is, according to modern “Democracy”, unconstitutional! but the constitution, according to the same high authority, confers power to fit out a ship of war, and men, to explore the Dead Sea. It also gives power to dig a canal across the isthmus of Tehuantepec. Is there any honesty or candor in these men? If these things are all right, then is the most absurd thing become rational. How is it, farmers of Iowa.³³

In reply to the attacks of their opponents, the Democrats charged that the Whigs were guilty “of manufacturing and circulating charges against our party, our principles, and the conduct of our public men” which were “of such aggravated malignity” that they were “utterly without foundation in truth.” It was intimated, too, that “no misrepresentation” was “too glaring, no accusation too preposterous, to find a greedy market among the orators and press of the Federal party.” Finally, “every Democrat” was counselled to be “on his guard”, to “watch his opponents closely and meet fearlessly every attack of the wily enemy with truth.”³⁴

But the Democrats did not confine themselves wholly to a defense of their party principles and candidates. They

³³ *The Bloomington Herald*, New Series, Vol. III, No. 108, July 1, 1848.

³⁴ *Iowa Democratic Enquirer* (Bloomington), Vol. I, No. 2, July 15, 1848.

reminded the Whigs of the unwelcome truth that their party was divided in its counsels and that it was composed of two irreconcilable factions based on sectional lines. This divergence of views between the northern and southern wings of the Whig party was reviewed by the *Iowa Democratic Enquirer* (Bloomington), as follows:—

WHIG PRINCIPLES

NORTH	SOUTH
1. All men have certain inalienable rights.	1. Two hundred years of legislation have sanctified it.
2. No more territory.	2. "Absorption of Mexico!"
3. Wilmot Proviso.	3. All territory adapted to slave labor!
4. Protective tariff.	4. Sufficient for revenue.
5. United States Bank.	5. Obsolete idea!
6. Rivers and harbors.	6. Economical administration of the government!
7. Rights of the North.	7. Our "peculiar institution"!
8. No more foreigners.	8. No objection to foreign emigration!
9. Damnable, God abhorred war!	9. "I might slay a Mexican!" — Clay.
10. Pirates, robbers & murderers.	10. Our gallant army!
11. Our Fillmore.	11. Old Zach!
12. Distribution of the proceeds of public lands.	12. Not expedient under existing circumstances.
13. State responsibility.	13. Assumption State debts!
14. Guard the public domain.	14. Pre-emption and graduation!
15. Manufacturers.	15. Agriculture! ³⁵

Thus did a leading Democratic journal of Iowa analyze the position of the Whig party in 1848. From this analysis two conclusions are to be drawn: (1) slavery was the ulti-

³⁵ *Iowa Democratic Enquirer* (Bloomington), Vol. I, No. 2, July 15, 1848.

mate basis of the division of the party into northern and southern wings; and (2) this division was a source of weakness to the Whig party in Iowa. As long as the Whig party was preserved intact as a national organization, the party in Iowa was united, but when the national organization was finally rent asunder, the Whigs of Iowa were among the first to dissolve, the major portion of them joining with the Free Soilers in the formation of the Republican party. In the meantime the Whigs of Iowa were taunted with the fact that their party was divided and that it would avail them nothing to elect Representatives to Congress for they could accomplish little in opposition to Southern wishes.

The Whigs, on the other hand, endeavored to neutralize the effect of this contention by the countercharge that the Democratic leaders were trying "to rise to place and power by falsehood and misrepresentation of the course marked out by the candidates of the Baltimore nomination" observing that "Notwithstanding the fact exists, that the convention which nominated Gen. Cass repudiated the doctrines of river and harbor improvement, and the conventions, in this State, have endorsed the position of the Baltimore nomination, still in the face of such glaring facts, the leaders of the party here undertake to say that they are in favor of these improvements, and contend that Cass is also. Yet they freely endorsed the doctrines of the veto of the river and harbor bill, by Mr. Polk, which declared that Congress had no power to improve the rivers and harbors." It was "upon such as volunteer these contradictions and untruths," concluded the Whigs, "that we war! — and we ask the people to consider."³⁶

In the meantime, the respective candidates for Congress were actively engaged in the canvass. A number of speeches were delivered, but none of them were printed in the

³⁶ *The Bloomington Herald*, New Series, Vol. III, No. 110, July 15, 1848.

newspapers of the time. On the other hand, the candidates came in for their full share of commendation and denunciation, which, however, so far as can be judged from the records, had no appreciable effect in determining the result of the election.

Interest now shifted, in particular, to the First District where Daniel F. Miller had a fighting chance against his opponent, William Thompson.³⁷ On July 27th, the *Keokuk Dispatch* copied the following editorial from the *Fairfield Sentinel* summarizing Thompson's chances for reëlection:—

We are pleased to hear, from all quarters of the district, that the prospect of the re-election of Mr. THOMPSON is of the most auspicious character. His industry and devotion to the interests of his constituents have been constant, and most conducive to the public welfare. In adding to the mail facilities of his constituents, he has been assiduous and most successful. In obtaining from the proper department a speedy and liberal construction of the Des Moines River Grant, he evinced much tact, and most commendable zeal. The improvement of the Mississippi rapids . . . the railroad from Keokuk via Iowa City to Dubuque, and the railroad from Davenport to Council Bluffs, which, if constructed, will pass through the heart of our district, have all received his support, and will continue to be sustained by him. His opponent is actively engaged in canvassing the district. We are told that he assails Mr. Thompson, but are uninformed of the ground he takes against him. . . . If he should address the people here before the election, we invite him to renew his attacks . . . and he will find that his assaults on the course and votes of Mr. Thompson will be most frankly and specifically met.³⁸

On the same day, the *Keokuk Register* came out in a long editorial addressed "To the Voters of the First Congressional District." After reviewing at length the administration of James K. Polk and denouncing especially the

³⁷ The outcome of this campaign was the first contested congressional election case in the history of Iowa. This case will be discussed in the next article.

³⁸ *Keokuk Dispatch*, Vol. I, No. 10, July 27, 1848.

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annexation of Texas and the conduct of the Mexican War, it went on to make the following observations relative to the congressional campaign in the First District:—

It is fair to presume that Mr. Thompson gives his blind adherence to the actions of the administration as it has received the sanction of a portion of the party that nominated him, and will sustain Gen. Cass in similar assumptions, as the course of the President has received his hearty approval. On the other hand, Mr. Miller is a zealous advocate for a strict construction of the constitution; an advocate of that fundamental principle of Government that the will of the people should be superior to that of a man; is devoted to the extension of western instead of the South or Eastern Seaboard exclusively; is in favor of raising the tariff to gradually liquidate the heavy national debt, without taxing tea and coffee, the luxuries of the poor, or resorting to direct taxation; does not question the power of Congress to legislate over territory, which has been or may be acquired, and recognizing the existence of slavery as admitted by the Constitution, to be an inviolable right opposite to extension over other territory.

Mr. Thompson nor his friends have expressed, so far as we are informed, his opinions of public policy. We are then compelled to assume the principles promulgated by the Baltimore Convention as declaratory of his views. That manifesto regards the acts of President Polk as great reforms. It is opposed to a National Bank; circumstances render a bank unnecessary if not inexpedient, and the Whigs, in no place have raised it as a question.—It is opposed to the distribution of the public lands. How could it be otherwise since Congress has already pledged them to the volunteers?—It is opposed to the Wilmot Proviso. The Whigs are in favor of free soil and free labor, in the new territory.—It is opposed to altering the Tariff of 1846. Our country is a hundred millions in debt with interest continually increasing, our government must then either repudiate or resort to direct taxation.—The Whig doctrine is to let the tariff meet this exigency of the Government.—It is opposed to a general system of internal improvements. The Whigs are in favor of benefiting our countrymen by increasing facilities for transportation to market by judicious appropriations on the great commercial thorough fares of the nation.

These are the principal points of difference and these you will be called to decide upon, on the 7th day of August next. Never, perhaps, since the origin of our Government have more momentous questions been presented. The preservation of the great principles of constitutional liberty are now placed in your hands. Will you show yourself worthy of the trust? Then use your voices, your influence and your vote in securing the right, and while every man does his duty there is no such word as fail.³⁹

In concluding this account of the congressional campaign and election of 1848, reference should be made to the entrance of a third party in Iowa politics at this time: the Free Soilers. Although a negligible factor in the campaign of 1848, the Free Soil Party is nevertheless of great significance in the light of later developments. Led by men who were dissatisfied with the compromising position of the Whigs and Democrats on the question of slavery extension, this party formed the basis on which the various anti-slavery extension elements united in the formation of the Republican party.⁴⁰ The discussion of the Free Soil movement in Iowa will, however, be deferred to a future paper. It is sufficient to state in this connection that Iowa furnished two Free Soil candidates for Congress in 1848. In the First District, Samuel L. Howe announced himself as the Free Soil candidate; while in the Second District, James Dawson appeared as the congressional nominee. The one issue on which these two gentlemen based their candidacy was "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men", but there is no evidence that the candidates displayed any activity in the congressional campaign. Nor did their candidacy attract much attention.

The election took place on Monday, August 7th. The official returns showed that the Democratic nominees in both congressional districts had won by safe margins. In

³⁹ *Keokuk Register*, Vol. II, No. 10, July 27, 1848.

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the Free Soil party see Woodburn's *Political Parties and Party Problems in the United States*, Chapter VI.

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the First District, William Thompson received 6477 votes, Daniel F. Miller 6091, and Samuel L. Howe 310. Thompson, therefore, had the lead over Miller by 386 votes. If the votes received by Miller and Howe are combined, Thompson's majority is cut down to 76 votes. In the Second District the vote stood as follows: Shepherd Leffler, 5789; Timothy Davis, 5398; James Dawson, 178; and scattering, 8. Thus Leffler had the lead over Davis by 391 votes, and a majority of 205 votes over all the other candidates combined.

An analysis of the official returns by counties shows that in the First District the Whigs carried the counties of Dallas, Henry, Jasper, Mahaska, and Poweshiek; while in the Second District they carried the counties of Delaware, Jones, Linn, Muscatine, Washington, and Louisa. The Democrats carried all the other counties except Johnson County in the Second District which cast 347 votes each for Leffler and Davis. The Free Soil vote was cast as follows: In the First District, Henry County gave Howe 135 votes; Jefferson County, 9; Lee County, 110; Van Buren County, 55; and Wapello County, 1. In the Second District, Dawson polled 4 votes in Clayton County, 1 vote in Iowa County, 95 votes in Washington County, 14 votes in Louisa County, and 64 votes in Des Moines County.⁴¹

On December 3, 1849, Shepherd Leffler and William Thompson presented their certificates of election duly authenticated by the Governor of Iowa, and were admitted to their respective seats in the House.⁴² But the election of William Thompson was to be contested by Daniel F. Miller, as the sequel will show.

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⁴¹ Election returns as found in the Archives in Des Moines.

⁴² *Congressional Globe*, 1st Session, 31st Congress, 1849-1850, p. 2.