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## The Decline of Whiggery

And the Formation of the Republican Party  
in Rochester: 1848-1856

By AIDA DiPACE DONALD

Rochester in mid-nineteenth century was a child of the Puritan conscience and the Erie Canal. Its politics reflected the ethical backgrounds of the Yorkers and Yankees who first settled there and the social changes accruing from its rise as a commercial and manufacturing center. The period 1848-1856 is a particularly rich one in the city's history. It was a time of ethnic and religious proliferation, of emotional upheaval, and of political disintegration and reintegration — a time when old patterns of society and ways of thinking were re-assessed. The result of the pre-Civil War travail was a more democratic outlook.

Because politics channels and expresses the sum of many forces at work in a society, a study of the decline of Whiggery and the formation of the Republican party reveals the dynamics behind the making of modern Rochester. The nine-year time span can be divided into three distinct yet related periods. By 1856 lineaments for the future were set.

### The Whigs 1848-1853

In state and national politics Rochester was decidedly Whiggish from 1848-1853, and the party represented, generally, the wealthier classes of the community.<sup>1</sup> Whigs also drew support from other segments of society in an alliance which held firm until 1854. Rochesterians supported the party because they considered it the guardian of

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their economic position and the spokesman for their no-extension-of-slavery principle. Fulfilling the desires of the members of the party, Whiggery adhered to a basic threepoint program of tariffs, internal improvements, and free soil in western territories. On this platform it returned four Whig majorities and two pluralities in six state elections.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE I  
*Rochester Election Returns—Percentages of Total Vote By Parties*

	LIBERTY	WHIG	FREE SOIL	DEMOCRATIC		
1844*	2%	54%		44%		
1848		50%	35%	15%		
1849		54+		45+		
1850		54%		46%		
1851		55%	.9%	44%		
1852		50+	3%	46+		
					HARD	SOFT
1853		41%	2%	31%		26%

The Whig preference for free soil was formulated during the 1840's when the issue of slavery's extension re-entered politics. The question of whether the peculiar institution should be allowed to expand was hotly debated, and Whigs in New York formed their position of containment in 1847. They supported the Wilmot Proviso and Rochesterians went along with the party's stand. The platform on extension was clear, straightforward, and well supported in the city. It was conservative in preserving the status quo on the domestic institutions of states, and progressive in delineating future social relations.

In the economic world Rochester Whigs contended that society rested, ideally, on an alliance between two basic and interdependent factors—the farmer and the small manufacturer. They believed that when possible economic power should be decentralized, that small units were preferred and that consolidation could be condoned only for responsibility and efficiency. This view, on surface examination, seems not far from the Jacksonian concept of rural democracy, but Whigs held broader concepts on money, banking, and internal improvements. They used government to break restraints, or to foster areas of development, depending upon which was most efficacious. In their theory, governmental power, as it related to economics, was always a positive instrument.<sup>3</sup>

The Whigs in Rochester, usually united on principle and action in 1848 and 1849, were more fortunate than their antagonists whose party split open at this time. The Democratic division was to prove important in later political events, specifically in the formation of the Republican party. It is worthwhile, then, to look closely at the schism.

The Democratic rupture of 1848 renewed two early splits, one over the financing of the Erie Canal enlargement, and the other over free soil. A radical group, subsequently called the Barnburners, had favored strict economy in state expenditures and a "pay as you go" policy in enlarging the canal. Their rivals advocated the mortgaging of future revenue to speed canal improvements. The Radicals, who won that struggle, again collided with their brethren by insisting in 1847 that the state party indorse the Wilmot Proviso. The Conservatives triumphed this time and, pressing their victory at the National Democratic Convention the next year, rode the Barnburners out of the party.

New York's conservative Democrats (also called Hunkers) stood in 1848 with the Polk Administration in Washington. They helped to block the Wilmot Proviso and to substitute for it the doctrine of popular sovereignty permitting settlers to decide whether they wanted slavery in their territory. They also denied the presidential nomination to Martin Van Buren, leader of the Radicals. Barnburners took their revenge by joining with a few Whigs and Liberty men to form the Free Soil party. The new organization accepted the Van Buren candidacy and the free-soil platform.

Rochester Democrats reacted variously to these political happenings. Some of the oldest and best-known among them followed the radical parade — Judge Addison Gardner, General Jacob Gould, Mayor Joseph Field, and former sheriff Hiram Sibley among others. These leaders, men of affairs in the business world and recipients of Democratic patronage, dared to risk their political fortunes in a new party. Their eminence helped to carry with them the editors of the influential *Rochester Advertiser* and the *Rochester Republican*. In contrast, the loyal Democratic contingent numbered among its adherents Erasmus D. Smith, who ran unsuccessfully for Congress that year, Samuel S. Bowne, and M. G. Warner. At election time the Free Soilers in Rochester pulled ahead of the Hunkers in every ward. The victory (within

Democratic ranks) was complete for the insurgents. And the pattern held true in the state.

Having bested the Hunkers, Barnburners looked to the general state of affairs in New York where the divided party lost the election. Since a continuance of the split would mean self-destruction, when practical Hunkers, like Horatio Seymour, asked for renewed unity, Barnburners agreed. Harmony was restored in 1849 and Rochester Radicals, like others, returned home. The Democratic rapprochement broke the back of the Free Soil party in the canal city. The remaining Liberty men, led by reformer Samuel D. Porter and a former Quaker schoolteacher, Silas Cornell, failed to run a ticket that year and probably voted Whig.<sup>4</sup> (See Table I.) Thereafter, Barnburners were more or less quiescent within the Democratic fold.

The Whigs, who had benefitted from Democratic division, saw their hopes of capturing another gubernatorial victory in 1850 almost disappear when a split occurred in their own ranks. The schisms had historic antecedents. The traditionally progressive wing of the party rallied around U. S. Senator William S. Seward; it opposed Henry Clay's Compromise of 1850 which conciliated on the free-soil question and included a stringent fugitive-slave law. The conservative faction supported Buffalo's Millard Fillmore, a backer of the Clay proposals, who acceded to the presidency that year. When Seward lost in the Compromise struggle, his followers refused to countenance defeat and carried his fight to the Whig State Convention. They urged commendation of his course of action. Their demands antagonized Fillmore's friends, who wanted the Compromise affirmed. In the ensuing battle Seward men won. Conceiving the rebuke as one against the President, Conservatives bolted the conclave, taking with them Rochester's James R. Thompson. The schismatics, given the appellation, "Silver Greys," subsequently drew up their own platform at Utica but were prevailed upon to support the regular ticket. In a tug-of-war for control of the Whig party and its standards the Conservatives set up their own state organization and looked to Fillmore for succour.<sup>5</sup>

Rochester Whigs and journalists responded immediately to the party division and arrayed themselves in opposing camps. The publisher of the *Rochester Democrat*, Alvah Strong, became a spokesman of the Seward men and urged a speedy amendment of the Fugitive

Slave Act. The editor, politically ambitious Samuel P. Allen, claimed that the Act was unconstitutional as it denied trial by jury, long guaranteed in federal and state law. Full of indignation, Allen exclaimed that the Act

shocks the moral sense. It is mere license for kidnapping, under the protection and at the expense of the Federal Government. The persons for whose benefit it is to be executed are not those whose bondmen escape from them, but the infamous traders, abhorred by God and man — scoundrels capable of any crime, and guilty every day of barbarities that rouse the benumbed sensibilities of men to whom the slave system had made outrage familiar.

The Act was a bad law, whether constitutional or not, said the *Democrat*, which prophesied that it could not be enforced in the North.<sup>6</sup>

The *Rochester American* took the opposite tack and defended President Fillmore who had signed the Compromise bills. It levelled its main attack on Seward, calling him an abolitionist. The *American's* editor, the wily Alexander Mann, proclaimed that the Whig party, if led by the Senator, would become an instrument for the "dismemberment of the Confederacy." Mann asserted that laws must be obeyed even if their constitutionality was questioned; he maintained that the question of legality was a matter for settlement by the Supreme Court and not by public sentiment.<sup>7</sup>

Three mass meetings assembled that fall to support rival political views. The first meeting, chaired by Henry Wright, passed resolutions more radical than the *Democrat* ever espoused. "We regard this [Fugitive Slave] law as not binding and void [they stated], and hold ourselves bound, not only not to obey but positively to disobey it."<sup>8</sup> This view, that the Fugitive Slave Law was immoral and unconstitutional because it abrogated civil rights, held a familiar ring, but since the meeting was labelled an abolitionist gathering it was disclaimed by all.

A second convention was called by the Silver Greys to send delegates to the Utica State Convention of Whig seceders. The resolutions of this group, penned in part by Mann, followed the *American's* line. They extolled the national policy of Fillmore and declared Seward's principles to be alien to the Whig credo, yet the delegates approved the conduct of those legislators who had voted against the

passage of the unpopular Fugitive Slave Act.<sup>9</sup> The necessity for respect for law was emphasized.

The last meeting on the controversial Fugitive Slave Act, held after the election, brought together all Whigs to express a consensus of opinion. The carefully worded resolutions were legalistic propositions delineating why the Act invited opposition. The Bill was held "unjust and oppressive" in many particulars, but the crux of the objections was that free Negroes could be denied their liberty without trial. The convention favored Daniel Webster's suggestion of a jury trial for fugitive slaves. The group did not encourage disobedience of the law but deemed acquiescence to a law for fear of stirring controversy unworthy of a self-governing nation. Written in part by Rochester scholar and Radical, E. Peshine Smith, the propositions were not intended as a threat to Fillmore but as an expression of sound sentiment; it is noteworthy that the views were kin to those of moderate Washington Hunt, Whig gubernatorial victor in 1850.<sup>10</sup>

The election of 1850 in Rochester and Monroe county was clearly a Silver Grey triumph, but the Whig gubernatorial victory in the state was ambiguous. Locally, the Conservatives controlled the county convention and selected their own candidates; they witnessed Whig success in the city and even re-elected Abraham Schermerhorn, a Silver Grey to Congress. State-wide, the Whig capture of the governor's chair was indecisive, for Hunt had catered neither to Radicals nor Conservatives and was claimed by both factions.<sup>11</sup>

A year later Rochester Whigs were again victorious at the polls. A pro-canal amendment on the ballot lent support, as did the harmonizing Albany Platform nailed together by Boss Thurlow Weed. This was the last time, however, that the party would obtain a good majority, and the results in the state were disastrous. It was suspected that Conservatives throughout the state cut the ticket, and loyal Whigs despaired of the party's future. Hamilton Fish, junior Whig Senator, bemoaned to Weed that "a noble, gallant, glorious party had been betrayed and defeated by its own trusted leaders. What is to become of us? 'Where shall we go?'"<sup>12</sup> The question was as yet unanswerable, for only time or events could enable Whigs to rechart a political course. Weed, certain of this, took a holiday in Europe and left the factions to mull over past follies.

On the Albany editor's return, he and others assessed the party's strength and concluded that the coming presidential race could infuse spirit and fidelity into the organization. In planning for victory New Yorkers led Northerners in sponsoring the candidacy of heroic and allegedly anti-slavery General Winfield Scott. They suffered a strategic defeat when the convention accepted the Compromise of 1850, but they salvaged their principles by overwhelmingly voting against the platform.

Although Whig unity was unobtainable at the national level, the party in New York did succeed in presenting a solid front. The conciliatory Governor Hunt was renominated, and Rochesterians were among those who accepted the proposition of "acquiescing" in all Whig decisions. Mann and Allen joined in appealing to citizens to vote the straight Whig ticket. The tactics of harmony were rewarded as the party won a slight majority in the city. The results in the nation and state were not so successful as Democrats smashed the Whig party.

That the Whigs were able to hold together in New York after 1852 was due only to the reckless splitting of their opponents the following year. The new division was related to the 1848 schism. The immediate causes of the trouble were twofold. Old Hunkers were reluctant to share the spoils of office with the "traitorous" Barnburners. However, both President Pierce and Governor Seymour favored a non-proscriptive policy in distributing patronage. The irreconcilables became incensed over the placement of William L. Marcy, a conciliatory Hunker, in the cabinet overlooking their leader, Daniel S. Dickinson. Thus aroused, they seceded from the state organization and were thereafter denoted as Hardshells (Hards), while the regular Democrats, numbering among their ranks Barnburners and conciliatory Hunkers, took the name of Softshells (Softs).

Although the Democratic split may have been prompted by considerations of revenge and pride, certain ideological differences are also visible. Hards abjured all sectional controversy over the slavery issue and placed the integrity of the Union above other national issues. Softs stressed the importance of containing slavery and labored to orient the party in that direction.

When the New York Democrats broke apart, their Monroe counterparts also divided. Hunkers had controlled the party's politics in the area after the peace of 1849 and had pushed their own stalwarts for

office. After the new schism they attempted to continue their mastery over the Barnburners by forging an alliance with Whig conservatives. They supported Dr. Frederick F. Backus for Congress as an Independent to attract Silver Grey votes and trafficked with their former antagonists. The Backus candidacy did not succeed in its purpose, however, as Whigs swept the county elections.

The story of the Democratic loss was repeated at the state level where the Whigs easily won another crucial victory on opposition errors. The outcome was not a surprise; what did startle politicians was the large Hard vote. In the state, as in Rochester, Hards bested Softs. The canal city provides a good opportunity to see why they did. Analysis indicates that the 1853 division was a continuation of the earlier rift of 1848. The Soft faction drew its strength from wards which had supported the Free Soil ticket.<sup>13</sup> Also, ethnic feelings as well as anti-slavery principles seem to have been involved, for the new German voters showed a preference first for Free Soil, then for Soft candidates.<sup>14</sup>

The Hard vote in 1853 bore a similar relationship to the Hunker support five years earlier. And, in both cases, Rochester's Irish immigrants tended to back these conservative tickets.<sup>15</sup> But the Hard vote in 1853 drew not merely from traditionally Democratic wards; the ticket made a strong showing in others which were regularly Whig. Many of the latter doubtless voted Hard because such candidates held conservative views on slavery; probably more did so in order to embarrass the angry President Pierce who threw his lot with the Softs as punishment to the seceders.<sup>16</sup>

The Democratic rift prolonged the life of Whiggery in New York until a national issue again impinged on state politics. The new issue, the territorial organization of Kansas-Nebraska in 1854, tended to shape politics for the next few years. It helped to keep Democrats divided until 1856 and spelled the final doom of Whiggery. The issue was used by dissident Whigs to break from the party and join with nativists to form the Know Nothing organization. At first the nativists held sway and the party's major plank asked for the restriction of foreign immigration and the governing of the nation by the American born. But the Kansas question proved too important to be ignored and Know Nothings, like other political groups, were drawn into the territorial melee.



## The Know Nothings 1854-1855

An understanding of the character of the Know Nothing party in Rochester and the state-at-large requires a discussion of the course of the Kansas Bill in Congress. The new bill caused havoc within the Whig party, and only in the ensuing chaos was it possible for a politically proscriptive organization to take hold in the North. The Bill, which repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820 and opened vast regions of the West to popular sovereignty (a revival of the 1848 Hunker idea), was bitterly fought by Northern Whigs. Rochester joined in the public cry; its Whig journals declaimed against the breaking of the generation-old compact and the stirring of unnecessary political agitation. Nevertheless, in coping with the situation and in suggesting future action, Whigs in the canal city, as everywhere, disagreed. Their sectional split was reflected in miniature in New York as Whig conservatives looked kindly at the Southern position, while the Radicals maintained a strict Northern attitude of no compromise.

The Rochester Radicals lashed out both at Southern Whigs who entertained the Bill and at Democrats who sponsored it. They all had broken pledges, implicit in the 1852 national platforms, to end slavery agitation. The Southern Whig desertion was particularly deplored, and the *Democrat* declared that a Northern party of freedom was now mandatory to "rescue the territories."<sup>17</sup> Though reluctant to give up the traditional party, Allen believed that only a political realignment could insure free soil in the West. A meeting of men irrespective of party was subsequently held to consult on the Bill and its consequences. The large polyglot group adopted resolutions, penned in part by Radical E. Peshine Smith, which attacked the repeal of the Compromise, but the meeting seemed cautious on a reformation of parties.<sup>18</sup>

Whig conservatives, doubtless under the strong influence of another of the *American's* editors, Dr. Daniel Lee, an agriculturist as well as an observer of political happenings, met the Radical challenge by declaring that population, climate, and soil would make Kansas a free state. The paper rejected the proposal to create a sectional political party; it argued that a geographic faction would "loosen the bonds of the Union, alienate our people, and pave the way to the destruction of the Republic." The Whig party was the instrument to settle the territorial dispute, Mann and Lee wrote, and it could successfully sustain

itself. Slavery, if left alone, would be condemned, ultimately, by sound Southern public opinion.

Yet the Conservatives, who publicly declared that Whiggery had a future, were disheartened by radical propaganda and secretly conspired with Know Nothings. After the Whig State Convention that fall, they bowed out of their traditional party on the pretext that the platform was unacceptable and a call to war. The convention had discharged Whigs from the obligation to support compromises on slavery (except those in the Constitution) and released them from any commitment to admit a new slave state into the Union.<sup>19</sup> The advanced political position, Conservatives felt, precluded their adherence to the party.

Little more than a month later, the Know Nothings experienced their first test at the Rochester and state polls. They won nearly a third of the city's vote in 1854 and did well in the state. Many Whigs in Rochester appear to have followed the course of the *American*, for figures indicate that Know Nothings drew the bulk of their support from that group. Indeed, that older party received only slightly more than a fourth of the total vote — a sharp drop from its average in the state elections since 1849. The Democrats fell only 5% below their four-year average. Since the total losses by the two major parties approached the actual vote the Know Nothings received, it is presumed that the nativist vote was originally composed of five times as many Whigs as Democrats.

TABLE II

*Rochester Election Returns — Percentages of Total Vote By Parties*

AV. VOTE	WHIG	DEMOCRATIC	FREE SOIL	KNOW NOTHING (AMERICAN)	REPUBLICAN
('49-'52)	53+ %	46+ %			
		HARD	SOFT		
1853	41 %	31 %	26 %	2 %	
1854	27 %	5 %	36 %		32 %
1855		8 %	30 %		30 %
1856			37 %		21 %
					42 %

If many Whigs thus joined the ranks of the Know Nothings, it can be reasoned from other data that it was the conservative or Silver Grey portion of the party that crossed over.<sup>20</sup> The journalists of the *Ameri-*

*can*, although circumspect in 1854 about their change of politics, publicly expounded Know Nothing doctrine within a year. Their credo was little more than a restatement of conservative Whig dogma slightly tinged with nativism. For instance, the "American Principles" to which the party gave allegiance were stated in the newspaper as

a fraternal Union of the States . . . regard for the Constitution and the Laws . . . purification of the franchise . . . [a] reforming of naturalization, that American citizenship may not be a thing to be bought and sold on the market, the sport of a demagogue and the derision of the priest . . . education for all . . . [and] unending hostility to Papal Assumptions and conspiracies against the liberties and rights of our people.<sup>21</sup>

The political ideal of these Americans was an emanation from Old Whig principles evident within the party for a generation. It was a conservatism bordering on aristocracy. These New Englanders,<sup>22</sup> who represented some of the first families of Rochester, held that the majority is often ignorant and perverse, that gentlemen are best equipped to run the government, and that a political party is not the broker of morality. First in the Whig and then in the American party, these conservative and wealthy citizens asserted the old values of deference in society and purity in politics.<sup>23</sup>

The movement of conservative Whigs into the American party appeared to be a state-wide phenomenon. The content of the resolutions passed at the 1855 American State Convention testifies to it. The party, opening its doors to the public for the first time, advocated the purification of the electoral system and the containment of slavery. It condemned the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and thus overthrew the platform of its national counterpart. New York Americans effected a separate organization.<sup>24</sup>

All evidence seems to point to the fact that in Rochester and in the state old Whigs directed the new party and used the nativist upsurge for the reassertion of their political and social beliefs. Their aristocratic temperament, as it related to politics, had its affinities with the more vulgar nativist doctrine preached by lesser men in the past generation. But their concern was for the creation of a party of conservative gentlemen fit by birth and talent to rule.

How such a party would fare against the divided Democrats and the newly forming Republican party would depend on the attractiveness

of contending programs and the organizational strength of opponents. Americans had handicaps of proscription, social exclusiveness, and ambiguous ties to a pro-slavery national party,<sup>25</sup> Their strengths were in their newly professed anti-slavery declarations and their condemnation of the Missouri Compromise repeal.

### **The Formation of the Republican Party 1855-1856**

Because the history of the beginning of the Republican party in New York is a long one, suffice to say that the Kansas Act controversy brought together Northern men of all parties to consult on a common course. These liberal elements met in convention at Saratoga in 1854 to exchange sentiments and protest against the Kansas Bill. They adjourned, then reconvened at Auburn where they set up a Republican State Committee but supported the Whig ticket. The following year a skeletal Republican party fused with the Whig remnant to form the modern Republican party.

Republican organization in Monroe county was like that in other areas of the state. A convention to select delegates to the Saratoga meeting contained men of varied political backgrounds — E. Peshine Smith, Samuel P. Allen, Samuel D. Porter and Samuel Miller among others. Indeed, Allen, a radical Whig journalist, played a key role in the county's and the state's formulation of Republicanism. He served on both the Whig State Central Committee and the Republican State Committee in 1855 and was rewarded with a seat on the Republican State Committee in 1856. Allen's political leadership facilitated a smooth transition in the county from radical Whiggery to Republicanism; as will be shown, his journalistic talents were invaluable in directing Whig support to the new party.

Another important figure in the Rochester transition was Henry R. Selden, Barnburner and former "war horse of the Democracy" in the city and county. Selden became a Republican in 1856 bringing both prestige to the group and former Democrats to the poll lists. His importance and popularity, it should be added, also transcended local lines for he was nominated for Lieutenant Governor at the 1856 convention.

The Republican fusion of 1855 was officially aided from Albany where the last Whig Governor, Myron H. Clark, gave it his blessing

and the power of his office. Commenting on the turn of events, the Governor wrote to Seward:

We have turned over a new leaf, in the political history of our State; and not only so, have commenced a new chapter. This point has been reached sooner than was anticipated a year ago. The Kansas and kindred outrages, together with the Know Nothing furor has had the effect to break up and scatter into fragments all the old political parties, while the same influences will effect a union of the honest and true men of all parties in opposition to both. The commencement in that direction in this State, was made at Saratoga last fall, [the Anti-Nebraska Convention] it has now been formerly ratified at Syracuse [the fusion of the Whig and Republican parties by their respective conventions] and will be consummated in November. . . . The Empire State will this fall not only 'wheel into line' in this great Republican party of the Union but will come round with such force as to enable us to take the van in the great National contest of 1856. . . .<sup>26</sup>

The Governor was over-optimistic about Republican power in 1855 for the better organized Americans won the state. His party, however, did make an auspicious beginning at the polls, and later indications of strength were encouraging.

The 1855 election in the canal city was most promising for the Republicans. The party polled 32% of the total vote for a plurality victory. An analysis of the political composition of the group indicates that five-sixths of the Republican voters were former Whigs (based on the total Whig vote of 1854) and one-sixth were former Soft Democrats (the greater portion of the Softs' losses between 1854 and 1855). The total Whig vote of 1854 is here given to the Republicans since the new party's strength came from wards which returned heavy Whig majorities in 1854. It is assumed that scores of Soft Democrats joined the Republican ranks because Softs were outspoken anti-extension men (this was the major Republican plank) and had given leaders to the new group in the city, moreover, the remaining Soft Democrats suffered losses in nine of the ten city wards. On the other side, the Americans and Hard Democrats had affinities. The small differences in their vote can be presumed to be vote-trading.

Since it has been deduced that conservative Whigs abandoned their party in 1854 it can be reasoned that it was the radical portion of Whiggery that remained and fused with the Republican organization.<sup>27</sup>

Along with the evidence of leadership and ward analysis, a survey of political events in Rochester previous to the 1855 election upholds the contention. The first convention of Republicans was held on October 16; radical Whigs controlled it and successfully nominated their own friends and free-soil Democrats for office. No further attempt to determine the origins of the local Republican movement seems necessary. They were apparent to the *American* which declared that the Republican party was an extension of the "old, well-drilled, thoroughly organized Seward Whig Party."<sup>28</sup> Progressive Whiggery staffed the Republican party in the canal city with minimum aid from the Barnburners.

It can be seen that the breakup of Whiggery in Rochester throws light on the composition of the party and suggests the components of the Know Nothing and Republican organizations. The Whig party was composed both of political conservatives who held the wealth of the community and of political progressives who came from a variety of classes, most probably of middling and laboring groups. The Conservatives and Radicals were harmonious within the party for a generation because they shared similar ideological and political objectives. These aims — the fostering of anti-slavery sentiment and the championing of positive government to aid economic growth and protect economic gain — benefited all Whig classes; they particularly exhibited a respect for white labor (broadly conceived) and a faith in social mobility.<sup>29</sup> This alliance was not seriously threatened until 1854. Then the potentially massive extension of slavery impinged on the social aspirations of many Whigs and was interpreted as a downgrading of white labor.

It was the conservative group within the Whig party which entertained the doctrine of popular sovereignty. When this threatened and then broke the unifying ties, that faction exposed itself to the charge that it was politically as well as socially aristocratic. The Conservatives completed their estrangement by joining a proscriptive party which championed their illiberal views.

The departure of the conservatives from the Whig party marked a political and social schism. When these men went nativist they took with them a body of political ideas which harked back to Federalism and had lived within Whiggery as a minority view. They were also a distinct social group and their entrance into the American party gave

it a formerly distinguishing hallmark of Whiggery — its gentlemen of wealth.

The remnant of the Whig party in 1854, which consisted of progressives, continued to espouse the liberal aims of the party. The faction defended free soil and recognized the strivings of the less-than-wealthy citizens. As a social group it was more indistinct than the Americans for it contained men of all classes. This political group, drawn from a mixed background, formed the Republican party.<sup>30</sup>

A reading of the *Democrat*, the official Republican organ in Rochester, substantiates these deductions about the nature of Whiggery and early Republicanism. The *Democrat* was keen to the desires of the Whig remnant and pledged the Republican party to the principles of positive government, free society, and anti-slavery. It claimed the West as the heritage of the laboring man and promised him that the Republican party would rescue it. Thus Allen devoted the new organization to the historic Whig ideology. It was the body of ideas that had won in party councils in the pre-1853 era and which was maintained by Whigs after the schism. The transference of these ideas to the Republican party required no mental adjustment for adherents. Logically, Allen merely claimed an historic or preservative quality for the new group and made it the recipient of the "True Conservatism." Explaining the aims of Republicanism he wrote:

The Republican movement is not *abolition* or *radical* movement but a *conservative* one. Modern usage defines a Conservative to be 'one who aims to preserve from ruin, innovation, injury, or radical change,' one who wishes to maintain an institution or government in its original shape—to carry out the original object, and prevent its perversion to new, and especially wrong purposes. This is precisely the conservatism of the Republican party. By this principle its action will be governed. It will seek to arrest the legislation of Congress which opens the domain of Freedom to the polluting foot of slavery. . . .<sup>31</sup>

To combat the Republican onslaught, the nativists' organ, the *American*, ranted against the new party which it viewed in the simplest political terms. The journal's editors never understood the social disturbances caused by the Kansas issue or the psychological degradation felt by urban labor over slavery extension. Mann saw the Republican party as the product of a single, ephemeral issue, Kansas, and believed that when the area entered the Union as a free state the party

would die for lack of a *raison d'être*. He set the date of expiration in 1856 when he wrote, "That agglomeration of piebald politicians will be disbanded by next fall. Its abolition fires must go out for lack of fuel." 32

But Kansas remained a live issue in 1856 and the Americans were confounded; their prediction turned to irony, as New York Republicans grew fat at their expense in the presidential year. They elected their first Governor, John A. King, painfully proving to their former cohorts that they were in politics to stay. In winning the governorship they displayed superior strength against a re-united Democratic party and an American party which ran on the coat-tails of a former president, Fillmore, who once again sought that high post.

Republicanism was also on the march in Rochester for the party won a plurality there. After 1856 the party continued to grow in the city and state by attracting new voters and some Old Whigs. Republicanism, therefore, was quickly crowned with the success of its political forbear, Whiggery. It housed the progressive Whig ideology and was strengthened by a broad social base. Democratic thought and purpose, as revealed to pre-Civil War society, were institutionalized by the formation of the Republican party.

## FOOTNOTES

1. I have constructed an index of economic status by dividing the value of dwellings per ward by the population in the ward. (Figures are taken from the *Census of the State of New York for 1855*.) This economic index of wards was then compared with the Whig vote of 1852 (a median year) by wards to determine whether there was any relationship between high "rent" value per capita and a Whig preference at the polls. Using the Pearson formula (the product moment correlation coefficient), the statistical correlation between the economic index and the voting record is +.61. This indicates a strong tendency among wealthy wards to vote Whig.

The succeeding correlations in this paper will use a different formula—the Spearman formula. This is a simpler rank-order correlation of various indexes and votes. The formula is 
$$r = 1 - \frac{6\sum D^2}{N(N^2-1)}$$

In this and the following statistical computations a coefficient of 1.00 would indicate a perfect positive correlation; a 0.00 result would indicate a complete absence of correlation. Thus any correlation above +.60 would indicate a good relationship between things compared.

Cf. Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York*, p. 447.



2. All voting figures used are for the head of the state ticket. The percentages given in the tables are computed to the nearest whole number. Figures are from the "Official Canvass of Monroe County" as published in various Rochester newspapers.

\*This is the presidential vote for 1844. Since national and state balloting varied very little in Rochester, a comparison of presidential with state voting is a fair one. The vote provides a good comparison of free-soil strength as represented in the Liberty and Free Soil parties.

Note the similarity in percentages between the 1844 Liberty vote and the 1852 Free Soil vote. These totals probably represent the true core of Liberty men in the city throughout the period

3. Whig press opinion on slavery, free soil, and economics is recorded in the *Rochester Daily Democrat* and the *Rochester Daily American*.
4. The original Liberty party men were reputed to have come from the Whig party and generally returned to it when they had no ticket of their own. See the *Democrat*, September 7, 1848.
5. Harry J Carman and Reinhard H. Luthin, "The Seward-Fillmore Feud and the Crisis of 1850" *New York History*, Vol. XXIV, April 1943, pp. 163 - 184.
6. *The Democrat*, April 19, October 5, and 10, 1850.
7. *The American*, September 30, October 1 and 9, 1850.
8. *Ibid.*, October 8, 1850.
9. *Ibid.*, October 16, 1850.
10. *The Democrat*, November 10, 1850; Washington Hunt to Samuel B. Ruggles, October 25, 1850, Hunt-Ruggles MSS., New York Public Library; Alexander Mann to Millard Fillmore, November 6, 1850, Millard Fillmore Papers, Buffalo Historical Society.
11. *The American*, September 30, October 9 and 18, 1850; Alexander Mann to Millard Fillmore, August 23 and September 16, 1850, Washington Hunt to Millard Fillmore, September 18, 1850, Fillmore Papers, BHS.
12. Hamilton Fish to Thurlow Weed, November 15, 1851, Thurlow Weed MSS. University of Rochester.
13. The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank order formula) of the 1853 Soft vote and the 1848 Barnburner vote is  $+ .87$ .
14. The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank-order formula, of the German population and the 1853 Soft vote is  $+ .66$ .
15. The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank-order formula) of the Irish population and the 1853 Hard vote is  $+ .70$ .
16. Stewart Mitchell, *Horatio Seymour*, p. 152.

The election of 1853 was characterized in Rochester by an unusual stay-at-home vote of 31% and an enlarged total Democratic vote. Since Whig votes in every ward dropped from between 38% and 60% and Democratic votes dropped less, in percentages, it is fair to presume that most errant Whigs stayed home but a fraction voted Hard. The *Democrat* on November 18 and 21, 1853, estimated that 200 Silver Greys voted Hard in the county.

It is also interesting to note that in distributing the patronage in Monroe county the White House favored the Hunker (Hard) faction over the Barnburner (Soft) faction by a 2-1 margin. This was a reversal of state policy and the special consideration accorded the area may have aided the Hards in the balloting. The patronage report was copied from the *Rochester Daily Union*, a Soft paper, by the *Democrat* on July 11, 1853.

17. The *Democrat*, February 20, 1854.
18. E. Peshine Smith to Henry C. Carey, February 22, 1854, Edward C. Gardner MSS., Historical Society of Pennsylvania; the *American*, February 20, 1854
19. The *American*, January 17, March 4, May 24, July 13 and 19, September 22 and 23, 1854.
20. Thurlow Weed to George W. Patterson, September 23, 1854, George W. Patterson MSS., UR; Millard Fillmore to Alexander H. H. Stuart, January 15, 1855, (photostat of an original letter in Alderman Library, University of Virginia), Fillmore Misc. MSS., BHS; the *Democrat*, November 17, 1854 and the *American*, July 25, 1855; Harry J. Carman and Reinhard H. Luthin, "Some Aspects of the Know Nothing Movement Reconsidered," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. XXXIX, April 1940, pp. 213-234.

Note that the temperance issue intruded into politics in 1853 and was an issue in the 1854 elections. The question cut across party lines. See John A. Krout, "The Maine Law in New York Politics," *New York History*, Vol. XVII, July 1936, pp. 260-272; the *Democrat*, November 25, 1854.

The issue dropped out of politics in 1855.

21. The *American*, June 22, 1855; The *Democrat*, September 8, 1855, observed that Silver Greys were the managers of the American party.
22. The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank-order formula) of the Know Nothing vote of 1854 and the New England place of birth figures is +.73. (Place of birth figures are found in the *Census of the State of New York for 1855*.)
23. The *Democrat*, November 17, 1854, claimed that Rochester's "First Families" voted for the Know Nothing candidate for governor in 1854. The reason for this group's desertion of the Whig ticket was ascribed to the belief that it "hold[s] that no man who pursues a common calling and makes no claim to aristocratic descent, ought to be honored with a higher office than member of Assembly. Congressional and Gubernatorial distinctions are held to be the sole right of the aristocratic and wealthy without regard to fitness or merit. . . ."

For conservative Whig ideas on government see the *American* for the period.

The Know Nothing party, within a year of its formation, truly represented the substantial citizens of Rochester who had formerly voted Whig (see footnote 1). The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank order formula) of the 1855 Know Nothing vote and the wards of high "rent" value per capita is +.66.

24. The *American*, June 2, 5, 18, 19, 25 and 26, 1855.
25. It should be noted that the *American's* leadership was not always acceptable to members of the Know Nothing party. Council No. 56 of the Rochester organization, for example, adopted resolutions on July 2, 1855 which endorsed the national convention's pro-slavery stand. See the *American*, July 4, 1855
26. Myron H. Clark to William H. Seward, October 1, 1855, Seward MSS., UR.
27. The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank-order formula) of the Republican vote in 1855 and the Whig vote in 1854 is +.67. Ward eight showed the greatest Republican gain over Whiggery. If this ward is eliminated the rank order correlation is increased to +.85.
28. The *American*, October 16, 18 and November 10, 1855.

29. For the social and political views of Rochester's Whig laboring classes see a report and resolutions of Whig mechanics in the *American*, November 6, 1848.
30. The coefficient of correlation (using the Spearman rank order formula) of the 1855 Republican vote and the wards of high "rent" value per capita is  $+0.18$ . As noted earlier (footnote 23) it was the Know Nothing party that attracted the votes of the wealthy wards.
31. The *Democrat*, August 24, 1855.
32. The *American*, November 9 and 10, 1855.