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## Kalamazoo, Michigan, and the Formation of the Republican Party of Michigan

James M. Rigterink  
*Western Michigan University*

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KALAMAZOO, MICHIGAN, AND  
THE FORMATION OF THE REPUBLICAN  
PARTY OF MICHIGAN

by

James M. Rigterink

A thesis presented to the  
Faculty of the School of Graduate  
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of the

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James M. Rigterink

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## INTRODUCTION

When Judge Levi Baxter rapped for order in the afternoon of July 6, 1854, at Jackson, Michigan, his gavel echoed the discontent gripping the Old Northwest. "Fellow citizens of Michigan . . .," he said, "let us bow our heads and pray for success in the great enterprise which has brought us here."<sup>1</sup> In the oak grove the heads of 4,000 people of conviction bowed in agreement.<sup>2</sup> By evening of that day the Republican party of Michigan was an accomplished fact.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the background of the Jackson convention of July 6, 1854, with particular attention to the role of Kalamazoo County. It will examine the contribution of the Free Soil convention in Kalamazoo on June 21, 1854, and will attempt to show that without this convention, the formation of the state party would have been seriously delayed.

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<sup>1</sup>Under the Oaks Centennial, Inc., Official Souvenir History and Program Book (Jackson, Michigan: Jackson Printing Company, 1954), p. 28.

<sup>2</sup>William Livingstone, Livingstone's History of the Republican Party (Detroit: Wm. Livingstone, 1900), I, 35. "There were between 4,000 and 5,000 . . ." William Stocking, Under the Oaks (Detroit: Detroit Tribune, 1904), p. 43. "The number present being variously estimated at from 3,000 to 5,000."

## CHAPTER I

### THE ANTI-SLAVERY AND ANTI-ABOLITIONIST SENTIMENT OF KALAMAZOO COUNTY

The attitude of the people of Michigan toward slavery was the product of their origin and social position. Farmers, along with merchants, tradesmen, and professional people, migrated into Michigan and Kalamazoo chiefly from the northeastern states, Ohio, and Canada. By 1850 New York had contributed the greatest number, with Ohio, Canada, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey following in that order.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Michigan's settlers were opposed to slavery. With their meager physical possessions, little money, and their hope for a better life, they brought to Michigan, directly or indirectly, the values and habits of New England. Foremost among these were intolerance of slavery, an intense belief that each man was his brother's keeper, and the rejection of artificial barriers of class. They were men of religious conviction, and they revered the gospel of equal opportunity for all.

The Democratic organ in Kalamazoo during the 1850's was the Kalamazoo Gazette, edited by Volney Hascall. This weekly and the local Whig Telegraph, edited by George A. Fitch, persistently expounded anti-

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<sup>3</sup>Andrew D. Perejda, "Sources and Dispersal of Michigan's Population," Michigan History, XXXII (December, 1948), 355. New York contributed the greatest number, 133,756, which was 33% of Michigan's total population in 1850 of 397,654. Ohio contributed 14,677 and Canada 14,008. The eastern states contributing included Vermont with 11,113; Pennsylvania, 9,452; Massachusetts, 8,167; Connecticut, 6,751; and New Jersey, 5,572.

slavery views. "Slavery," said the Gazette in 1851, "is a transgression of a law founded deeply in man's moral nature, the penalty for which will . . . come."<sup>4</sup> In an address before the Kalamazoo County Agricultural Society on October 11, 1849, Joseph R. Williams, echoing Kalamazoo's strong anti-slavery sentiment, praised the farmer's "intelligent labor," and berated "mere stupid mechanical work." He concluded that while "freedom and intelligence animate labor and multiply its results [ , ] . . . slavery and ignorance paralyze it and lessen its fruits."<sup>5</sup>

But the hatred of slavery which pervaded southwestern Michigan rarely bred abolitionism.<sup>6</sup> Abolitionists were a distinct sect, united by strong emotional bonds. Their fundamental conviction was that slavery was a sin, in the eradication of which all men should join. They rejected the authority of the federal government insofar as it condoned slavery, and they refused to obey any laws recognizing that detested institution. During the forty years from 1820 to 1860, when slavery became an emotional symbol frequently unrelated to its realities, southwestern Michigan usually remembered the dangers implicit in abolitionism. Late in 1839, when some Kalamazoo residents prevented an abolitionist from delivering a lecture, they very likely represented

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<sup>4</sup>Kalamazoo Gazette, August 21, 1851.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph R. Williams, Address Delivered Before the Agricultural Society of Kalamazoo County, October 11, 1849 (Kalamazoo Gazette Print, n.d.), p. 13. See also the Kalamazoo Gazette, October 26, 1849.

<sup>6</sup>George N. Fuller (ed.), Michigan: a Centennial History (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co., 1939), I, 304.

the substantial anti-abolitionist sentiment at the village.<sup>7</sup>

In 1854, after the Kansas-Nebraska bill had been introduced by Senator Douglas, the Gazette probably expressed the predominant opinion of its readers:

We do not mean to deny that among the warmest friends of the Union, are thousands who earnestly desire the country freed from the evil of human bondage; but with the class to which we now refer, the rampant abolitionist . . ., can claim no kindred, nor have we any sympathies in common. [They] deprecate the existence of this lamentable institution in our midst, [but] regard it as an evil of far less magnitude than an alienated and frenzied people, a weakened and hateful government, a dissevered Union, with dissevered and rival interests, or any other calamity which shall endanger the glorious fruits which we are enjoying as a united and happy people.<sup>8</sup>

An important exception to this less-than-abolitionist attitude in Kalamazoo County was Dr. Nathan Macy Thomas at Schoolcraft. Born in 1803 of Quaker parents in Jefferson County, Ohio, he was influenced by those staunch abolitionists, Benjamin Lundy and Charles Osborn, and studied at the Medical College of Ohio.<sup>9</sup> He engaged in anti-slavery activities after moving to Schoolcraft in Kalamazoo County in 1830. He was the first physician in Kalamazoo County and the second in

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<sup>7</sup>Kalamazoo Gazette, November 30, 1839. The speaker was a Mr. Cochran, who was an agent of the State Anti-Slavery Society. Local citizens, the Gazette said, did not physically abuse the speaker, but did prevent him from delivering his lecture.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., January 24, 1851.

<sup>9</sup>Avery Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (2nd ed.; Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 120. Osborn established the first periodical in the United States primarily devoted to a discussion of slavery in southern Ohio. Lundy began work with the first of Osborn's publications in Ohio, and was editor of the third, which had on its staff after moving to Baltimore in 1824, William Lloyd Garrison.



southwestern Michigan.<sup>10</sup>

In 1837, Dr. Thomas joined in the first of several petitions to Congress protesting the spread of slavery. This petition, addressed to Michigan's Senator Lucius Lyon, opposed the annexation of Texas. Later petitions demanded the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and objected to admission of more slave territory.<sup>11</sup> In 1837 he also joined three other men in publishing an anti-slavery and abolitionist newspaper. A man of iron character and unshakable purpose, never uncertain of anything, and quick to press his opinions upon others, he seemed to grow increasingly intolerant of anything short of the immediate abolition of slavery. Even before 1840 he had asserted that "Slavery can not continue to exist under our government. If it is not put down by the ballot, it will go down in the blood."<sup>12</sup>

In 1840, the year he was married, he took part in the organization of a local Liberty party.<sup>13</sup> In 1843 he wrote:

Recent developments in Congress give evidence that the parties as at present constituted can not exist but a brief period before they will be merged into two great divisions which will be known as the advocates of Liberty on one side and the supporters of Slavery on the other. Let that day arrive when . . . the friends of freedom and equality of rights will then meet their opponents with firmness and . . . strength . . . and . . . force of argument sweep every obstacle that impend [sic] progress and Slavery will then

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<sup>10</sup>Nathan M. Thomas, Nathan M. Thomas (Cassopolis, Michigan: Staton B. Thomas, 1925), pp. 41-50.

<sup>11</sup>Samuel W. Durant, History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1880), p. 122.

<sup>12</sup>Thomas, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup>Nathan Macy Thomas Papers, Michigan Historical Collections, The University of Michigan.

be banished from the land.<sup>14</sup>

Three years after the Liberty party died in 1845, Dr. Thomas changed his allegiance to the Free Soilers. Nine years later, he helped to organize the Republican party of Michigan.

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER II

### SLAVERY IN MICHIGAN POLITICS FROM 1844 TO 1854

The first important issue which introduced the slavery question into Michigan politics was the annexation of Texas. The second was the organization of the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. In both instances, new parties opposed to the extension of slavery into the territories were formed in Michigan.

When the question of adding slave territory was raised by the debate over Texas in 1844, the anti-slavery elements in Michigan found a home chiefly in the radical wing of the Whig party. In that year a split developed between conservative Whigs who feared a strong southern secession movement that might destroy the Union, and radicals who demanded either the abolition or limitation of slavery. The radicals widened the breach in 1846 when the acquisition of Mexican territory was assured, and Congress faced the necessity of deciding the status of slavery therein. When the conservatives regained control of the party in 1848 many of the radicals deserted and joined radical Democrats in organizing the Free Soil party in Michigan. Loyal Whig radicals continued to bicker with the conservatives for six more years, and formed statewide coalitions with the Free Soilers when they controlled the party. Finally in 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska bill caused these radicals to bolt the Whig ranks and to help in forming the Republican party.

The same issues caused radical anti-slavery Democrats in Michigan to leave their party. In 1844 the Texas controversy created a gap between the radicals and the rest of the party, and four years later many radical Democrats followed Kinsley S. Bingham into the Free Soil party. In 1854 the Kansas-Nebraska question persuaded the remaining radicals to abandon their party and join in organizing the Republican party. Thus the radicals of both parties had found their opposition to the extension of slavery stronger than party loyalty.

The Republican party in Michigan was formed in 1854 by a fusion of discontented radical factions from the old-line parties. But in 1854 fusion was not new to state politics. Radical Whigs and Free Soilers had experimented with local fusion tickets when conservatives controlled the Whig party in 1848, 1851, and from 1853 to 1854, and with statewide fusion tickets in 1849, 1850, and in 1852, when the radical Whigs were in control.

The Republican party was created through a statewide fusion similar to those of 1849 and 1850. While in no year had a fusion ticket been elected, nevertheless the attempts had suggested that political survival of minority anti-slavery groups probably depended on their fusion. Equally important was the failure of the conservative Whigs to support the radical coalitions. For example, when radical Whigs in 1849 nominated the Free Soil candidate, Flavius J. Littlejohn, for governor, conservative Whigs bolted the convention and declared themselves for the Democratic nominee.<sup>15</sup> In the following year radical

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<sup>15</sup>Floyd B. Streeter, Political Parties in Michigan 1837-1860 (Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission, 1918), p. 93. Whig conservatives led by John P. Kellogg of Allegan County objected to Littlejohn

Whigs bitterly opposed the fugitive slave law while the conservative faction, fearing a southern secession movement, acquiesced in the compromise measures.<sup>16</sup> Again, in 1852 radical Whigs attempted to coalesce with the Free Soilers on the state ticket as they had in 1849 and 1850. But the radicals failed in 1852 just as they had in 1851, and for the same reason. The anti-slavery sentiment was as strong as ever, but they exhausted themselves in factional warfare.

Thus, in each year following 1848, increasing agitation of the slavery question brought the radical elements closer together, until only a critical issue concerning slavery was necessary to effect their permanent merger.<sup>17</sup>

Because Michigan's political climate in the 1852 campaign seemed to indicate a decided Democratic preference, the press speculated whether the campaign would produce a coalition ticket similar to that which opposed the Democrats in 1849.<sup>18</sup> But coalition never materialized. The Free Soilers nominated Isaac P. Christy for governor, while the Whigs presented Zachariah Chandler. The Democrats nominated Robert McClelland. Although aligned with the conservative faction of his party, McClelland spoke for the large anti-slavery constituency in his district<sup>19</sup>

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as being too agrarian and radical and promised support to John S. Barry, the conservative Democratic nominee. In November Barry gathered 27,837 votes for governor and Littlejohn 23,540. Streeter also points out that Littlejohn returned to the Democratic party he had left in 1848 during the conservative Whig reaction in 1851.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. The coalition nominees for Congress in the first and third districts were elected with majorities of 1,832 and 196 respectively.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-11.

<sup>18</sup>Detroit Daily Free Press, August 21, 1852.

<sup>19</sup>Streeter, p. 70.

But the 1852 contest in Michigan was between national parties headed by Scott, Pierce, and Hale, rather than state parties headed by Chandler, McClelland, and Christiancy.

The professed lack of national issues produced at the state level a campaign of trivialities, personalities, canards, and appeals to prejudice.<sup>20</sup> Since the Whigs offered no vital issues to attract Democratic votes, the traditionally Democratic state of Michigan remained so in the election of 1852. The defeat of the Whigs could not be attributed to the Free Soilers, for the Democrats had a majority over the combined Whig and Free Soil vote.<sup>21</sup> The Democrats were jubilant over their "glorious triumph," and repeated boasts made in 1851 that in Michigan the party was supreme, that Whig opposition offered no challenge.<sup>22</sup>

The election of 1852 initiated the final decline of the Whig party in national and state politics. Nothing appeared more hopeless than the chances of that party after the disastrous campaign of 1852. The Democratic Kalamazoo Gazette claimed:

It is conceded by all intelligent men that the Whig party is defunct. That once great and powerful organization without a Clay and a Webster for its champions, is now prostrate

<sup>20</sup>Theodore C. Smith, The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest (New York: Longmans, Gree & Co., 1897), p. 37. See also: William C. Harris, Public Life of Zachariah Chandler (Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission, 1917), pp. 14-17. Detroit Daily Free Press, September 27, 1852. Detroit Daily Advertiser, October 14, 1852. Kalamazoo Gazette, August 20, 1852.

<sup>21</sup>The vote in Michigan for President: Pierce received 41,842; Scott 33,860; and Hale 7,237. Vote for Governor: McClelland 42,798; Chandler 34,660; and Christiancy 5,850.

<sup>22</sup>Detroit Daily Free Press, September 18, 1851 and November 3, 1852.

and lifeless, without even a hope of resurrection.

The Whigs have no<sup>23</sup> leaders, no embodiment, no incarnation, . . . no code.

And even Horace Greeley, the reigning champion of Whiggery, confirmed what all but the die-hards knew:

We consider the whig party not only defeated but undone. Yes, we are beaten - routed, annihilated, if you please - so that we are no longer a whig party, but simply American citizens, each acting on his personal convictions and ready to unite in any new political organization whereby we believe public good will be promoted.<sup>24</sup>

For the Democrats, best strategy seemed to be to let the apparently sleeping dog of slavery lie. Why allow the slavery issue to threaten their secure position? Events soon made this policy impossible.

In January, 1854, Stephen A. Douglas introduced a bill in the Senate providing for the organization of the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. Leaving to the inhabitants of the territories to decide the status of slavery therein, that part of the Missouri Compromise which prohibited slavery north of 36° 30' was specifically repealed by an amendment to his bill. Reaction to the bill was immediate and violent, and provided what had been lacking for permanent fusion of the Free Soilers with the radical elements of both Whigs and Democrats. Whig and Free Soil presses, charged with new life, violently condemned the bill. The Detroit Daily Democrat declared that:

Such a bill as this once adopted, the Missouri Compromise would be virtually repealed, and the territory over which it extends exposed to the introduction of slavery . . . . Will the North quietly submit to be tricked and wheedled

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<sup>23</sup>Kalamazoo Gazette, June 10, 1852.

<sup>24</sup>Quoted in Detroit Daily Free Press, May 10, 1853.

out of this free territory? Are the compromises only to be regarded when they advance the interests of slavery? We will see whether the miserable subserviencies of the present administration will seek to signalize itself by a support of this infamous bill.<sup>25</sup>

While a majority of Michigan voters had endorsed the Democratic party in 1852, the national party's pro-slavery stand had been unpopular in Michigan. Conservative Michigan Democrats feared the state party would split over the Kansas-Nebraska issue, and the party press tried to calm their fears. The Detroit Daily Free Press claimed the bill represented nothing new, that it was:

The doctrine of General Cass's Nicholson letter . . . .  
It is simply the recognizing of the great principle of  
the right of the people, every where, to self-government . . . . 26

The doctrine of popular sovereignty . . . is a test of  
fidelity to the democratic party. It is . . . the doctrine  
upon which the democratic party has stood for eight years  
and upon which it must continue to stand. Such is the test.  
We have presented no other. This we shall abide by. No  
democrat, if he be a democrat at heart, will find any diffi-  
culty in abiding by the test.<sup>27</sup>

The Kalamazoo Gazette asserted that popular sovereignty was the only democratic means of organizing the territories:

The people where the slaves are owned have exclusive juris-  
diction over the subject. The people in Nebraska, are as  
wise, as independent, as capable of appreciating their wants  
and necessities, and providing for them, as a Congress of  
strangers, two thousand miles away. Says my free soil friend -  
"but [the] Bill comes in collision with the Missouri Compro-  
mise and virtually annuls it, opening the Territory to  
Slavery." [The answer to this is that] Congress possesses no  
power either to establish or prohibit Slavery in any portion  
of the country. The Missouri Compromise was, therefore an  
improper act of legislation. The people are almost sure to  
exclude Slavery when they form their State Constitution.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Detroit Daily Democrat, January 14, 1854.

<sup>26</sup>Detroit Daily Free Press, January 15, 1854.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., April 23, 1854. See also January 27, 1854.

<sup>28</sup>Kalamazoo Gazette, February 17, 1854.



This was the Democratic party line. The fact remained, however, that while the Kansas-Nebraska bill was not bad reasoning, it was bad politics. This the Gazette realized, but it believed the best solution to a poor situation was to pass the bill as quickly as possible:

The measure may be ill timed (we think it is) yet, . . . let it be adopted, and forever after keep slavery agitation out of Congress, for it has no business there. If the Bill be defeated now, the question will remain open for future agitation. Demagogues, both North and South, will drag it forth whenever they imagine they can subserve personal ends by it.<sup>29</sup>

But in spite of Democratic reassurances many public meetings throughout the state protested the bill. On February 13 an anti-Nebraska meeting in Schoolcraft was attended by people "irrespective of party."<sup>30</sup> The same day a larger meeting in Albion resolved that any attempt to permit slavery north of 36° 30' "violated a solemn compact." Later that month a call for a meeting in Pontiac, signed by persons "irrespective of party," appeared in the Pontiac Gazette. The Pontiac meeting denounced as "traitors to freedom" those members of Congress who had voted for the bill, accepted the southern "challenge," and declared they would "wage unceasing war against slavery, in all climes, in all forms, without respect to the color of its victims." Similar meetings were held at Leoni, Kalamazoo, and Detroit. The Democratic Coldwater Sentinel, a Democratic caucus at Otisco, a county convention at Marshall, and the Free Soil convention in Kent County, all protested the repeal of the Missouri Compromise.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., February 24, 1854.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Streeter, pp. 185-86.

Typical was a first non-partisan meeting in Detroit on February 18, where Free Soilers and Whigs served as officers and drafted strong anti-slavery resolutions.<sup>32</sup> Zachariah Chandler and local Free Soil leaders spoke from the same platform and said the same things. Conservative Whigs sought to use the meeting to strengthen the party, but the radicals, led by Joseph Warren, Zachariah Chandler, and Horace Greeley, refused to stand by the old Whig name, and demanded a new party opposed to the further extension of slavery.<sup>33</sup> In his Detroit Tribune Warren was urging Michigan conservatives to join the radical Whigs, and since May, 1853, Greeley had urged that a new anti-slavery party be formed.<sup>34</sup> Conservative Whigs, though no less opposed morally to slavery than the radicals, stood firm for the old Whig name, arguing that the ties of sentiment and interest which bound men to the old party would be lost in a reorganization. They conceded the party was in some ways deteriorated, but they reminded the discontented it still possessed an experienced organization, loyal workers, newspapers devoted to its cause, and a tradition of glorious leadership. They believed the Whig party had lost in 1852 because it had not taken a firm stand against expansion of slavery. Therefore, by steadfastly opposing the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the Whigs could restore their

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 185. One resolution declared that the Missouri Compromise had "all the solemnity of a national compact, second only to the Constitution," and therefore protested against the "measure pending in Congress."

<sup>33</sup>Ronald E. Seavoy, "Isaac P. Christiancy and the Formation of the Republican Party in Michigan." (unpublished Master's dissertation, Michigan Historical Collections, The University of Michigan), p. 37.

<sup>34</sup>Supra., p. 12.

party to power.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Harris, p. 22.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FREE SOIL STATE CONVENTION

The Free Soil State Central Committee sent out a call for their state convention to meet on February 22, at Jackson, "to effect a complete organization of the Free Democracy in this State, and to nominate candidates for State officers, to be supported at the next general election."<sup>36</sup>

The purpose of this convention was opposed by the party's 1852 candidate for governor, Isaac P. Christiancy.<sup>37</sup> He contended the primary reason for the meeting should be to propose a union of all anti-slavery elements and not to continue the Free Soil party. Anti-slavery elements from the other parties would not accept the Free Soil label; and while the party might gain converts, it could not collect enough votes to win the election. Christiancy wanted to wait until events favored fusion. This, he believed, would happen as soon as the Kansas-Nebraska bill was enacted.<sup>38</sup> An issue to strike fire within the Free Soil ranks was desperately needed. Most of the rank and file and many of the leaders were discouraged. The party vote in 1852 had been disastrously low and prospects for 1854 appeared worse. According to the Free Soil State Central Committee Chairman, the purpose of the convention was to nominate a ticket, make public an

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<sup>36</sup>Stocking, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup>Michigan Historical Collections, XVII, 262.

<sup>38</sup>Seavoy, p. 37.

anti-slavery platform, and "go through the motions" of voting in November.<sup>39</sup> But Christiancy's advice was ignored and the convention met as planned.

Nevertheless, several Whig and Free Soil leaders attempted to stop the Free Soil convention from nominating a state ticket. Charles V. DeLand, editor of the Jackson Citizen, called a conference of Whig editors at Jackson to meet on the day before the convention. This conference was proposed by Joseph Warren and Austin Blair, who felt DeLand was the natural person to suggest such a meeting. DeLand was the editor of a Whig paper in a predominantly Whig county, and the out-state editors, especially from the western portion of the state, distrusted the Detroiters. DeLand's function was to ease this distrust by acting as a go-between.<sup>40</sup> These men hoped to form a new party to oppose the extension of slavery, but they agreed with Christiancy that discontents would not gather under the Free Soil name, and a Free Soil ticket would therefore split the anti-slavery vote. Six of the eight invited editors attended the conference at the Marion House.<sup>41</sup> They elected Henry Barnes of Detroit president of the

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<sup>39</sup>Letter from Hovey K. Clarke to the editor of the Detroit Post and Tribune, July 6, 1879; quoted in Streeter, p. 159.

<sup>40</sup>Seavoy, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup>Charles V. DeLand, DeLand's History of Jackson County, Michigan (Logansport, Indiana [?] B. F. Bowen, 1903), p. 167. Those invited to attend this conference were: Henry Barnes, Detroit Tribune; George A. Fitch, Kalamazoo Telegraph; Charles V. DeLand, Jackson Citizen; Harvey B. Rowison, Hillsdale Standard; Seth Lewis, Marshall Statesman; Cortland B. Stebben, Adrian Expositor; Aaron B. Turner, Grand Rapids Eagle; Zephaniah B. Knight, Pontiac Gazette.

meeting and George A. Fitch of Kalamazoo secretary, and adopted a resolution favoring the consolidation of all anti-slavery elements into a new party. Barnes, Fitch, and Zephaniah Knight were appointed to submit this proposal to the Free Soil leaders later in the evening, and try to dissuade the party managers from nominating a slate the next day.

The evening meeting was held in the law offices of Austin Blair, the Jackson County Free Soil Whig leader.<sup>42</sup> Attending were the Whig committee and other Whig leaders, and Isaac Christiency, Kinsley Bingham, Hovey Clarke, and several other Free Soilers. The Free Soilers rejected the Whig proposal; the convention would be held and candidates would be nominated. But three important concessions were made: the slate would include three Whigs, two of the Whig leaders<sup>43</sup> present that evening would be allowed to address the convention, and the Free Soil State Central Committee would be authorized to call a second convention. If this second convention believed coalition feasible, it would withdraw the Free Soil nominees and join the movement to organize a new party. The Whig editors accepted this Free Soil proposal and agreed to form a joint committee of correspondence among anti-Nebraska editors to advocate a fusion party convention irrespective of former party preferences.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Jean Joy L. Fennimore, "Austin Blair: Pioneer Lawyer 1818-1844" Michigan History, XLVIII (March, 1964), 1-17. See for background on Blair.

<sup>43</sup>The Whig leaders were Halmer H. Emmons and Henry Barnes.

<sup>44</sup>DeLand, p. 167.

The Free Soil State Convention met on February 22 and adopted a strong resolution opposing slavery extension:

We regard the institution of domestic slavery . . . not only as a foe to the domestic tranquility . . . but as subversive of the plainest principles of justice and liberty. As an institution, we are compelled to abhor it . . . . We will never cease to war against it so long as the purpose of the Constitution shall remain unaccomplished, to secure the blessings of liberty to all within its power.

That in following in the footsteps of the republic, who regarded FREEDOM the National and slavery the sectional sentiment, we [must] . . . be considered loyal supporters of the government they established; and that opposition to any extension of slavery . . . is clearly the duty of all who respect the doctrine or the practice of the wisest and ablest of the framers of the Constitution.

That the attempt now pending in Congress to repeal . . . the Missouri Compromise . . . is an outrage upon justice, humanity and good faith . . . . Traitorous ambition . . . is seeking to inflict upon the nation a deep and indelible disgrace. We denounce the scheme as infamous . . . .<sup>45</sup>

Another resolution authorized the State Central Committee to call a subsequent meeting to act upon fusion, and to "withdraw the ticket this day nominated, and act with any new organization they may designate or deem advisable."<sup>46</sup>

The convention nominated a full ticket headed by Kinsley Bingham, and then heard the two Whigs designated as spokesmen for the radical Whig editors. While Halmer H. Emmons could not address those assembled as "my fellow Free Soilers," he hoped there would be only two parties in the fall contest which would be won by the anti-slavery elements if they united against the Democrats.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Livingstone, pp. 23-24.

<sup>46</sup>DeLand, p. 168.

<sup>47</sup>Detroit Post and Tribune, July 6, 1879; quoted in Livingstone, p. 25.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE KALAMAZOO CONVENTION OF JUNE 21, 1854

Soon after the convention, Kinsley Bingham expressed his willingness to resign from the ticket to further a coalition of Free Soilers, Whigs, and anti-Nebraska Democrats, and suggested to Charles DeLand that a meeting of anti-Nebraska newspapermen be held to prepare the way for a convention to consider fusion. But the editors and Whig leaders who attended the resulting conference in Detroit made little progress.<sup>48</sup> Bingham suggested the editors meet again, and shortly after the Senate passed the Kansas-Nebraska bill on March 3, Joseph Warren sent a circular calling for another Detroit conference.

Barnes, DeLand, Fitch, Rowson, and Warren attended this meeting in the Detroit Tribune offices. Warren, the leading Whig advocate of a new party, was disappointed by the editors lack of enthusiasm. They apparently agreed to confer again near the end of May.<sup>49</sup>

But George A. Fitch, editor of the Kalamazoo Telegraph, was converted to total support of a new anti-slavery party at the Detroit meeting, and on April 26 he became the first Whig editor in the state to advocate a new party and a new convention.<sup>50</sup> Fitch contended that

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<sup>48</sup>Stocking, p. 28.

<sup>49</sup>Livingstone, p. 26.

<sup>50</sup>Stocking, p. 29. At least two Whig editors, Joseph Warren and Seth Lewis, preceded Fitch in urging that a coalition be formed, but neither had proposed a convention. A fourth editor to advocate



the old parties were obsolete, and that existing circumstances required a new party based solely on opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories. Specifically, he wrote:

We cannot look to any other movement of the old parties in these matters that brings any promise of success, nor to any class of old broken-winded, broken down politicians; but we may look with a strong hope of success to see these measures consummated by the HONORABLE and ACTIVE YOUNG MEN of the State - those who have not trimmed their sails to catch every breeze which has swept across every political sea; those . . . active and untiring young men, who shall enter with assurance and vigor into the field . . . a little after the "young America" order, . . . . We therefore advise the holding of a YOUNG MEN'S INDEPENDENT STATE CONVENTION, irrespective of party, at an early period, to express their opinions upon the leading questions which now agitate the masses of the people of this and other States, to advise and consult together and to adopt such plans for future action as their consultation would give rise to.<sup>51</sup>

The coalition movement was encouraged by local fusion victories in 1854 and 1853 which suggested that merger on the state level might defeat the Democrats in the fall. In Grand Rapids, Aaron Turner of the Eagle headed a local fusion of Whigs, Free Soilers, and anti-Nebraska Democrats which had elected their candidate for Mayor in the spring of 1854 although the city had regularly returned Democratic majorities.<sup>52</sup> In the 1853 municipal election in Detroit, the Democrats had been defeated by a fusion ticket, partly because of defections from their own ranks. When the Democrats formally read out of

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coalition was Aaron B. Turner of the Grand Rapids Eagle. This former Whig had supported the Free Soilers before the February convention, but at the same time urged a new party.

<sup>51</sup>Kalamazoo Telegraph, April 27, 1854; quoted in ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Livingstone, pp. 27-28.

the party 118 who had supported the successful ticket, several of these then joined the coalition movement.<sup>53</sup>

The state's Democratic press, now well aware of which way the political winds were blowing, increased its pleas for party loyalty.<sup>54</sup>

The Kalamazoo Gazette predicted a coalition and warned:

The Whig press of Michigan, seem willing to surrender their ancient party organization and fall in to the Free Soil ranks. This shows that they have drawn their inspiration from the present leaders of the abolition party. History is full of warnings to men who build up parties on a single idea. Such a party cannot stand . . . .<sup>55</sup>

The Detroit Daily Free Press recalled the coalition precedent of 1849:

No partyism is not a new expedient with Whiggery. It was once done in this State, when the whigs and free soldiers coalesced upon a ticket headed by Mr. Littlejohn as the candidate for Governor. Mr. Littlejohn had never been a whig, and did not hold one sentiment in sympathy with whiggery, but the whigs swallowed him for the poor prospect of enjoying a portion of the spoils. They were disappointed and . . . taught a lesson that ought not soon to be forgotten.

But we are not so sure but it is forgotten. We see some indications of another coalition of some sort.<sup>56</sup>

By mid-May, when it appeared the Kansas-Nebraska bill would be passed by the House, the five-month-old movement for a permanent fusion had made no great progress. True, grassroots sentiment for coalition had grown, generations of party loyalty had been shaken by a principle, and a fusion press had been organized. The crux of the trouble was the Free Soil state ticket which no Whig or anti-Nebraska

<sup>53</sup>Stocking, pp. 33-34.

<sup>54</sup>Detroit Daily Free Press, July 16, 1854.

<sup>55</sup>Kalamazoo Gazette, May 12, 1854.

<sup>56</sup>Detroit Daily Free Press, April 29, 1854.

Democrat had the slightest intention of supporting. The Battle Creek Weekly Journal said:

[The Free Soilers] must abandon their party attachments to the same extent others are required to do, and not ask more than they are willing to give. No sacrifice of principle is thought of; but to compel men of the other two parties to concede everything and they nothing, will not promote union. Such action would result only in defeat and mortification.<sup>57</sup>

All the Whig newspapers in the state except the Detroit Daily Advertiser repeated Joseph Warren's question in the Tribune, "will the Free Soilers permit us to unite with them upon fair and honorable terms?"<sup>58</sup>

When the Kansas-Nebraska bill received House approval on May 22, the necessity of a merger formula became critical. Many Democrats now alienated by the bill were as determined as the Whigs not to unite with any existing party. Either the Free Soilers must abandon their slate or there would be no coalition. The February convention had provided for withdrawing the Free Soil ticket if fusion seemed possible, and if the state committee approved. Hovey Clarke, Free Soil State Central Committee Chairman, concluded the only way union could be effected was by means of a mass convention where the ticket could be withdrawn.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Battle Creek Weekly Journal, June 9, 1854; Detroit Daily Democrat, July 2, 1854; quoted in Stocking, pp. 30-31. Shortly after this, Samuel Baker and James F. Conover, editors of the Democrat, assumed a position favoring a new party, and the state's Free Soil press was unanimous for fusion.

<sup>58</sup>Detroit Tribune, June 1, 1854; quoted in Stocking, p. 30.

<sup>59</sup>Streeter, p. 189.

On May 20, the Free Soil nominees and several party leaders, assembled at Detroit, decided to call a convention to withdraw the ticket and participate in an effort to consolidate all anti-Nebraska elements.<sup>60</sup> On the following day the Whig party managers were invited in and were told the Free Soil nominees would resign at a mass convention.<sup>61</sup> On May 25, the Free Soil State Committee in Detroit announced a convention in Kalamazoo on June 21, and invited all those opposed to the extension of slavery into the territories, regardless of party affiliation, to attend it:

**FELLOW CITIZENS--**A fearfully momentous question is agitating the American people: It is whether within the forms of the Constitution (which were designed to establish and extend the blessing of liberty), the scope and intent of that instrument shall be subverted and its whole power exerted to promote and extend the system which prevails in some of the states of the Union.

Step by step within a third of a century have the enemies of freedom advanced, at first cautiously, but with increasing boldness - and step by step have its friends been driven back, until, by the crowning perfidy of the Nebraska bill, the Constitution is subverted, and that system which, at the organization of our government, begged for a temporary existence, has become the great controlling power of the Nation. **SLAVERY IS RAMPANT IN THE CAPITAL.** It makes and unmakes Presidents, and its Presidential tools buy and sell the representatives of the people like chattels in market. There is no lower depth that the Nation can reach but one; and that is that the people, by adopting the act of their representatives in Congress, shall voluntarily consent to share this degradation. **PEOPLE OF MICHIGAN!** Can it be that the immense region about to be organized as the Nebraska and Kansas Territories, in which **FREE** institutions ought to be allowed an unquestioned right, which right, moreover, has been bought and paid for by concessions which have introduced three slave states in the Union; can it be that **Freemen** after they have bought their own domain shall be compelled to submit to the robbery of that which was their own by nature and purchase? Shall they submit then without complaint? Will

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<sup>60</sup>DeLand, p. 171.

<sup>61</sup>Harris, p. 23.

they raise a voice of remonstrance? Is the spirit of liberty -- the spirit of the fathers of the Revolution, the haters of oppression in every form -- "crushed out" at the impudent command of a demagogue, and crushed out forever? PEOPLE OF MICHIGAN. Look at your representatives in Congress. Are you satisfied with their conduct? How recently have most, if not all of them, when seeking your favor, committed themselves fully against the extension of slavery into free territory? Is that their position now? Give all the credit you can to the two who voted, at the passage of the bill, against it. How much are they still justly answerable for in smoothing the way of the dominant majority to this most shameful success; and you will retain them? Are you willing to share their degradation by approving their conduct -- by which the passage of the bill was finally accomplished?

The undersigned, representing the only political party in this State, which, as a party, adopts as a principle in its political creed opposition to the extension of slavery, believe that the time has come when the people who regard slavery as a sectional and not a National institution, should rally to vindicate this principle, take the liberty to invite a

#### MASS CONVENTION

of all who would restore the government to its original position on the slavery question, of all who are opposed to the consummation of the Nebraska fraud, to assemble at

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on the 21st of June Next,

at noon, there to concentrate their opposition to the rapid strides of the slave power, in such a manner as shall be deemed most practical and efficient, and to protect their own cherished rights as citizens of free states. In taking the initiative in this call they intend no disrespect to any party or body of their fellow citizens who may sympathize with them in its object. They could not, without seeming to neglect the interests which they are especially appointed to promote, decline to act at this juncture, and they believe it their duty to act promptly. They desire it, however, to be understood that all who approve the objects of this call, as above expressed, are earnestly invited by their presence and participation in the Convention to show that the PEOPLE ARE AROUSED, and that the day of retribution to their betrayers is at hand.<sup>62</sup>

Isaac P. Christiancy was in full sympathy with the Kalamazoo convention but was dead against the convention being held under Free

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<sup>62</sup>Livingstone, pp. 28-29.

Soil auspices.

I felt that cordial union of this kind could never be effected under a call issued by any party organization as such; that, though we might thus obtain larger accessions to our party, we should not obtain enough to carry the State, the prejudice of party and attachment to party organizations being too strong.

But I also felt sure that if a movement for a mass convention should be initiated by individuals of all parties agreeing in the object, the pride of party associations would be overcome and all charge of having gone over to the free-soilers, or "woolly heads," and that all who might take part in such a movement would feel that they entered the new organization exactly on equal terms.<sup>63</sup>

Most Whig and all Free Soil papers throughout the state supported the Kalamazoo convention, and encouraged "men of all parties who are willing to lay aside all merely partisan predilections," to attend and "unite against the common enemy."<sup>64</sup> At Battle Creek on June 9, a large and enthusiastic meeting resolved "that we recommend to the State Mass Convention, to be held in Kalamazoo, . . . to take such course as will result in the nomination of an Independent State Ticket . . ."<sup>65</sup> One paper, however, warned the Free Soil men not to try to impose their ticket.

The convention at Kalamazoo will no doubt be largely attended, and it will depend altogether on the feeling of natural concession which may govern the men who attend it, the amount of good it will accomplish. There is already a ticket in the field and what is to be done with it? No other can be adopted, that will result in a perfect union, but its withdrawal, and the selection, by the Convention of an entire now [sic] one. If the Free Soil party expect to force upon that Convention, that ticket, and manifest a determination to accept of no other, they had better stay home,

<sup>63</sup>Michigan Historical Collections, XVII, 263.

<sup>64</sup>Battle Creek Weekly Journal, June 9, 1854.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., June 16, 1854.

for no union can be had on such basis.<sup>66</sup>

Kalamazoo was chosen as the site of the convention for several sound political reasons. The village was a center of anti-slavery sentiment in southwestern Michigan.<sup>67</sup> Kalamazoo County regularly gave Whig majorities in contrast to the Democratic tendencies of the rest of the state. Taylor in 1848, and Scott in 1852, had both carried the county.<sup>68</sup> A strong Free Soil organization since 1848 had acted in coalition with the Whigs in opposing the Democrats whenever possible. The village was the home of U.S. Senator Charles E. Stuart and U.S. Representative Samuel Clark, who had alienated area Democrats and other constituents by voting for the Nebraska bill, despite their prior protestations and promises to the contrary.<sup>69</sup> Senate approval of the bill on March 4 precipitated an anti-Nebraska meeting in the Kalamazoo Court House on March 11. The call for this meeting had been signed by local Democrats, including Samuel H. Ransom, brother of former Governor Epaphroditus Ransom, and George W. Winslow, who had been active in the party until the Nebraska crisis.

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., June 9, 1854.

<sup>67</sup>Supra, pp. 2-6.

<sup>68</sup>Samuel W. Durant, History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1880), p. 173. In Kalamazoo County the vote in 1848 was: Taylor, Whig, 1,010; Cass, Democrat, 880; Van Buren, Free Soil, 411. Detroit Daily Free Press, December 3, 1852. The county vote in 1852 was: Scott, Whig, 2,418; Pierce, Democrat, 1,257; Hale, Free Soil, 142.

<sup>69</sup>Battle Creek Weekly Journal, June 16, 1854. The June 9 meeting in Battle Creek resolved: "Whereas Sam'l Clark, . . . has not only failed to represent, but has misrepresented his constituents therefore - Resolved, That he not only be requested but required to resign the seat he now wrongfully holds, that it may be filled by a man who despises treason and hates traitors."

The day before the meeting the Gazette printed the names of other signers of the call: Frederick W. Curtenius, W. C. Dennison, Luther H. Trask, L. Kendall, Jonathan M. Edwards, F. K. Woodward, Stephen S. Cobb, David S. Walbridge, Alexander Cameron, Richard S. Gage, David B. Webster, Silas Hubbard, Abraham Cahill, Hezekiah G. Wells, Allen Potter, Enoch Hopkins, Elisha Landon, and Jonathan P. Marsh.<sup>70</sup> Despite notices in the Telegraph and the posting of large handbills, only about sixty attended the meeting, which by resolution instructed the Michigan Senators that they "had acted basely and had brought eternal infamy upon their names."<sup>71</sup> The Gazette's severe denunciation of these defecting Democrats and Senate passage of the Nebraska bill three days before the call for the convention was issued, sharply intensified local sentiment.

The morning of the Kalamazoo convention on June 21 was rainy and unpleasant, but by noon the weather had cleared.<sup>72</sup> The morning's poor weather and the quarter-centennial celebration of the village's settlement reduced attendance at the meeting below the anticipated figure. Charles DeLand reported more than one thousand were present, brought by a special train of five passenger cars from the east on the Michigan Central Railroad, and by teams from Grand Rapids and

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<sup>70</sup>Kalamazoo Gazette, March 10, 1854. "We are sorry to see the names of democrats appended to this call, for we believe the day will come when they will regret the steps they have taken. We publish the card for future reference."

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., March 17, 1854.

<sup>72</sup>DeLand, p. 172. Durant, p. 231.



other towns north and south.<sup>73</sup> But other sources indicate a more accurate figure would be about 200.<sup>74</sup> The convention, held in the court house, represented all the anti-slavery elements and was well attended by Whigs. Four of the candidates on the Free Soil state ticket were there, Kinsley S. Bingham, Silas M. Holmes, Hovey Clarke, and Samuel B. Treadwell. Two of the editors who had urged coalition, James F. Conover and Aaron B. Turner, were elected secretaries, and Dr. Moses A. McNaughton of Jackson was elected president. McNaughton's election may have resulted from a bargain he might have made with Christiancy at a May 28 meeting in Detroit as part of the price of merger; but Jackson County had more delegates than any other county, and probably a Jackson man could have been elected without such a bargain. The four vice-presidents chosen included Delamore Duncan of Kalamazoo. The committee on resolutions, headed by Hovey Clarke, included Samuel Ransom, the anti-Nebraska Democrat from Kalamazoo, U. Tracy Howe, E. W. Dale, Chester Gurney, Roswell B. Rexford, and Charles V. DeLand. This committee drafted and submitted an uncompromising preamble and six resolutions:

WHEREAS, This convention, called to aid in concentrating the popular sentiment of this State to resist the aggressions of the slave power, are deeply impressed with the importance of the crisis in our national affairs; we are compelled to contemplate a strife in the councils of the nation, participated in to some extent by the people,

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<sup>73</sup>DeLand, p. 172.

<sup>74</sup>Streeter, p. 190. "Between one hundred and two hundred persons assembled in this city."

Kalamazoo Gazette, June 23, 1854. "Not over a hundred persons from abroad being present."

Battle Creek Weekly Journal, June 30, 1854. The convention was ". . . not largely attended."

in which the elemental principles of wrong and injustice are varring against the interests of justice and liberty. We have seen this strife carried to a degree of success shameful to its authors, and which excites the most alarming apprehensions for the peace and prosperity of the country; we have seen our national government sinking from the position of the freest nation on earth to that of a mere Presidential Despotism, and that too controlled by a system of iniquity which is the disgrace of our country and the scorn of mankind; therefore,

1. **RESOLVED**, That the Constitution of the United States established a Government of Freemen for a free people; that in so far as the Government has been perverted from its original purpose it is the duty of every lover of his country to seek its restoration to the original purpose of its authors.

2. **RESOLVED**, That the Institution of Slavery which existed in some of the States at the formation of the Constitution and was then regarded as exceptional and local in its character, and was to be limited and restricted until it should finally disappear.

3. **RESOLVED**, That in the recent passage of the bill for the organization of the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas, we see the crowning act of a series of aggressions by which the sectional and exceptional character of slavery had been gradually changed until it has become the great National interest of the Country for the protection of which every other interest must be sacrificed, and its power has become so potent that from the President to the Postmaster, all the functionaries of the Executive Government are twisted and corrupted by it into absolute subjection to its insulting demands.

4. **RESOLVED**, That evils so great as these demand a remedy; and that if that remedy cannot be found in the virtue of the people, a people who are yet true to the instincts of liberty, to the immortal principles proposed by the Fathers of the Constitution, a people who enjoy the blessings of the government they establish, and a people who are yet willing to display some of the energy and perseverance, and if need be, sacrifice, which moved the patriots of seventy-six to the accomplishment of their great work, then the days of the republic are numbered, and it must soon become what its laws will make it, a nation of slaves.

5. **RESOLVED**, That we do not and will not despair; that we believe the people of this State are ready to respond to the call of their country in this emergency; that they are ready irrespective of all past political preferences to declare in an unmistakable tone, their will; and that will is that slavery aggression upon their rights shall go no further - that there shall be no compromise with Slavery - that there shall be no more Slave States - that there shall

be no more Slave Territory - that the Fugitive Slave Law shall be repealed - that the abominations of Slavery shall no longer be perpetrated under the sanctions of the Federal Constitution - and that they will make their will effective by driving from every place of official power the public servants who have so shamelessly betrayed their trust and by putting in their places men who are honest and capable; men who will be faithful to the Constitution and the great claims of humanity.

6. RESOLVED, That the Free Democracy<sup>75</sup> of Michigan rejoice to behold the indications of popular sentiment furnished by this Convention. They are conscious that the deeply aroused feeling of the masses in the State will seek a suitable expression in a Convention springing from themselves, irrespective of any political organization; and that if such a movement shall be animated and guided by the principles expressed in the resolutions of this Convention and shall contemplate an efficient organization to give effect to our principles in this state, we shall willingly surrender our distinctive organizations, and with it the ticket for state officers nominated at Jackson on the 22nd of February last; and that we commit the execution of this purpose to a committee of 16 - two persons from each district, to be appointed by this Convention.<sup>76</sup>

The final resolution represented the purpose and importance of the Kalamazoo convention. In the discussion on this resolution Alanson St. Clair, an anti-spirits clergyman, sought to incorporate a resolution favoring the re-adoption of the state's Maine Law, which had been declared unconstitutional by the Michigan Supreme Court in April.<sup>77</sup> The February 22 Free Soil platform had included a plank

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<sup>75</sup>The terms Free Soil and Free Democracy are used interchangeably.

<sup>76</sup>Stocking, pp. 36-38. The first, second and third resolutions were approved by the convention without debate; the fourth, and fifth, were adopted after discussion.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 42. The Maine Law lobby was probably the most important special interest in the state. They had held a state convention at Jackson on June 20 to protest the Supreme Court's decision and St. Clair's request for a temperance resolution at Kalamazoo probably was decided then. The lobby intended to nominate a ticket of their own to re-establish the Maine Law, and the coalitionists at Kalamazoo were anxious not to offend them because the anti-spirits

endorsing the law, and the anti-spirits lobby was up in arms over its repeal. But J. R. Mansell of Kalamazoo, and U. Tracy Howe, members of the Free Soil state committee, argued that the basis of a union was opposition to the Nebraska bill, and this must be the single issue, since the convention could not agree upon others. If they undertook too much all could be lost. The convention rejected the anti-spirits resolution and adopted one for the repeal of the fugitive slave law.<sup>78</sup>

In the evening the convention heard speeches by U. Tracy Howe, Kinsley Bingham, and Hovey Clarke, and then the announcement of the committee of sixteen provided for in the sixth resolution. Isaac P. Christiancy, although he was not present, was chairman of the committee, and Dr. Nathan Macy Thomas of Schoolcraft was the Fifth Judicial District representative.<sup>79</sup>

After the convention adjourned, a private conference of Free Soil leaders was held at the home of Rev. Dr. James A. B. Stone. Dr. Stone was a well-known educator and a veteran Free Soiler with passionate anti-slavery convictions shared by his equally prominent wife, Lucinda Hinsdale Stone.<sup>80</sup> He was then principal of the

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people constituted an important block of anti-Nebraska votes. Kalamazoo Gazette, March 17, 1854. Kalamazoo had a meeting on April 7 for those favoring a prohibitory liquor law. "The Maine Law principle," the Gazette commented, "is as yet an experiment of doubtful issue."

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>79</sup>The other committee member from the Fifth District was Erastus Russey from Calhoun County.

<sup>80</sup>Evidence of Mrs. Stone's anti-slavery convictions is the Detroit Daily Free Press, September 9, 1854, which quotes her in an

Kalamazoo Literary Institute and minister of the local Baptist

Church.<sup>81</sup> The conference in his home was attended by most of the former candidates on the Free Soil slate, and by Moses A. McNaughton, Jabez Fox, and Charles V. DeLand. The Free Soil leaders readily agreed to withdraw the state ticket and they promised their support and that of their friends in bringing together a mass convention to produce a permanent union of Free Soilers, Whigs, and anti-Nebraska Democrats.<sup>82</sup>

The progress made at the Kalamazoo convention prompted this comment from the Detroit Free Democrat:

Now when the exigencies of the times demand that a permanent party of freemen in this State, with enlarged facilities for action, should be formed, a party which shall be but a single section of that great freedom organization which is to restore our government to its once proud position, and wrest it from the control of the slave oligarchy, the members of the Convention felt called upon, by all that is hallowed in love of country and sacred in humanity, to surrender, as they offer to do, everything but principle. No ordinary emergency could have secured such entire unanimity of consent to so great a surrender. The seductions of a temporary triumph would not have moved them to such action, but now that the avowed sentiment of the country demanded the organization of a party that should be entirely efficient to the maintenance of those principles upon which our government was established, "a government of freemen for free people," they

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address to the New York Anti-Slavery Society on September 4, 1853, saying: "We mean to have a new Northern Republic - We go for the abolition of slavery or the dissolution of the Union. The South must abolish slavery or stand alone. The Union must be dissolved, or slavery abolished.

<sup>81</sup>Willis F. Dunbar, Kalamazoo and How It Grew (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Western Michigan University, 1959) pp. 79-80. In 1855 the State Legislature amended the charter of the Kalamazoo Literary Institute, giving it the right to grant degrees, and changed the name to Kalamazoo College. Dr. Stone became the institution's first president.

<sup>82</sup>Stocking, p. 39.

have unhesitatingly taken the action their resolutions record.<sup>83</sup>

Newspaper support of a permanent union was now practically complete. It included all Democratic opposition papers except the Detroit Daily Advertiser.<sup>84</sup>

With the removal of the Free Soil ticket the last serious obstacle to a permanent union of all elements opposed to the extension of slavery disappeared, and the way was cleared for an independent convention which all factions could enter as equals. The groundwork for such a convention had been laid by Isaac Christiancy at the Detroit meetings of May 20 and 21. At that time the majority of the Central Committee of the Free Soil party and its nominees had not agreed with him because they smelled the possibility of public office; but in several meetings in late May and early June at the offices of the Detroit Daily Democrat and the Detroit Tribune, Christiancy had persuaded most of these men to join his position. He had done this by inviting in leading Whig politicians and editors and having them explain again to the reluctant Free Soilers that the only differences separating them was the matter of a voice in the nominations, and a generation of voting habits.<sup>85</sup> It was essential,

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<sup>83</sup>Detroit Free Democrat, June 23, 1854; quoted in Livingstone, p. 32.

<sup>84</sup>Battle Creek Weekly Journal, June 16, 1854. "Almost every number of the Detroit Daily Advertiser, issued in the last ten days, is the bearer to the freemen of Michigan of arguments in favor of maintaining old party organizations, and against a union of the friends of Freedom and Progress to resist the further encroachments of the Slave Power . . . . We beg to differ with it entirely. Those who cling to old party names are fast disappearing, and the super-nauated [sic] tenets of old organizations should be abandoned."

<sup>85</sup>Seavoy, p. 38.

the Whigs said, that the November elections be between two parties, so that conservative Whigs led by Edwin A. Wales, editor of the Detroit Daily Advertiser, would be forced to vote for a fusion ticket.<sup>86</sup> The last of these meetings, held on the evening of June 2, had laid final plans for coalition. A mass convention would select new nominees; it would resolve that no more slave states should be admitted; that the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the fugitive slave law must both be repealed; and that slavery must be abolished in the District of Columbia.<sup>87</sup> Chandler called this proposed platform good "Whig doctrine," thought that the coalition would be cordial, and that Bingham would make as good a candidate for governor as any.<sup>88</sup>

Bingham and most of the Free Soil leaders finally came over to this position, but with the proviso that the Free Soil party should not formally disband nor its slate be withdrawn until the fusion convention had met and adopted a platform compatible with Free Soil principles.<sup>89</sup> This satisfied both the old Liberty party elements and such Free Soilers as still distrusted the Whigs for their machinations

<sup>86</sup>For months the Advertiser had opposed merger. While the fusion conferences were going on Wales editorially said that now was not the expedient time to dissolve the Whig party and form a new anti-slavery extension party.

<sup>87</sup>Frank Flowers, History of the Republican Party (Springfield, Illinois: Union Publishing Company, 1884), p. 170. This was the program adopted at the Kalamazoo convention with the addition of withdrawing the Free Soil ticket and providing for the committee of sixteen.

<sup>88</sup>Seavoy, p. 39.

<sup>89</sup>Michigan Historical Collections, XVII, 263-64.

in 1849. Bingham felt his proviso was not unreasonable, since his February nomination had been supported by Halmer H. Emmons and other Whigs, and he had no enemies in either party. After the agreement on June 2 the Detroit Tribune no longer supported the Whigs and advocated instead a fusion party ticket.<sup>90</sup>

Christiancy submitted a draft for a permanent coalition convention at the Detroit meeting of May 28. His draft, with slight alterations by Jacob Howard and Samuel Barstow, was accepted.<sup>91</sup> At this time a plan of action for the November election had also been offered by Christiancy. He proposed to ruin the discipline of the Democrats by a blitz campaign.<sup>92</sup> His plan required a call for a fusion convention immediately after the Kalamazoo convention in the form of petitions signed by persons opposed to the Nebraska Act and published in local papers. The idea was that once a Democrat's name was made public, he would be trapped outside the bounds of party discipline. The signed petitions were to be returned to Charles DeLand for tabulation.<sup>93</sup> Christiancy's plan was adopted, and the

<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Seavoy, p. 38.

<sup>92</sup>Michigan Historical Collections, XVII, 264.

<sup>93</sup>DeLand, p. 174. "This call was published the next day . . . in the Detroit Tribune, and the Detroit Advertiser, the Michigan Free Democrat, and other papers, the Detroit Free Press alone refusing to copy it. The secretary of the committee was authorized to have one thousand copies printed in circular form to be mailed to the parties in the State and a circular letter was printed and sent with it." The circular letter was as follows: "Jackson Michigan, June 1, 1854. Dear Sir: Enclosed find call for a public mass meeting in this city July 6th next, with the attached sheet for signatures. Please have the same circulated and signed, and published (names included) in your local paper, and send copy to the secretary of the committee."



editors at the Detroit meeting received copies of the call to print in their respective papers. Most of the petitions were printed in Detroit and sent in bundles to men of anti-slavery convictions in every county and almost every township in the state. Before the first of July over nine thousand signatures had been returned to the secretary, and most of these had been published.<sup>94</sup> The convention would be held in Jackson on July 6.

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When not so printed, mail petition to us with as little delay as possible. [signed] Isaac P. Christiancy, Chairman; C. V. DeLand, Secretary." The petition stated: We, the undersigned, citizens of \_\_\_\_\_ who are in full sympathy with the sentiment and objectives set forth in the above call, hereby endorse the same, and will use our influence to promote the same and pledge ourselves to do all in our power to carry it into effect and promote its success."

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FORMATION OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY OF MICHIGAN

On July 6 about 4,000 people gathered in Jackson. As the largest hall in town, where the morning session was held, could hold only 600, the afternoon session of the convention adjourned to an oak grove called "Morgan's forty," situated between the village and the race course.<sup>95</sup> Kalamazoo County was well represented by delegates who would have been as politically incompatible in former times as those from the rest of the state. Among them were: Alexander Cameron, N. Cameron, Frederick W. Curtenius, Delamore Duncan, Orrin N. Giddings, Marsh Giddings, Jonathan W. Edwards, A. G. Hopkins, Ebenezer L. Knapp, Jonathan Parsons, E. H. Porter, Allen Potter, Samuel H. Ransom, William Shakespeare, Thomas C. Sheldon, Jonathan Sleeper, Luther H. Trask, Nathan M. Thomas, and David S. Walbridge. Despite the spirit of harmony and enthusiasm, care was necessary not to offend the state-wide incongruous elements. The first need for concession arose in the committee on permanent organization when Free Soil members wanted Isaac Christiency to be named permanent chairman. The majority of the committee disagreed, arguing that because the temporary chairman, Levi Baxter of Hillsdale, was a Free Soiler, the permanent chairman must come from another party. So David S.

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<sup>95</sup>Stocking, p. 44.

Walbridge, a Whig from Kalamazoo, was selected. Walbridge had been a popular member of the state legislature where he had often urged coalition of anti-slavery forces. With no enemies among the Free Soilers and acceptable to anti-Nebraska Democrats, as chairman he would encourage reluctant Whigs to support the fusion.<sup>96</sup> When the choice of Walbridge was announced to the convention by the committee:

The mention of his name was greeted with a great applause, which at once marked the harmonious feeling of the gathering. He returned his thanks in a brief but singularly felicitous speech, in which he said he was a Whig, not out of place, but in a new place, because the duty to his country demanded it, and he appealed to all his hearers to forget their former [antagonisms], and join hands to rescue the virgin soil of a new and great America from the despoiling hands of the slave power. "We must," he said, "unite as did our fathers, to resist fraud, deception and tyranny, and show, like them, that we are giants in the defense of our rights and constitutional liberties. While we do not make any aggressive war upon the institutions of our sister states, the time has come when we must insist upon their observance of the sacred compromises of the past and demand unqualifiedly, protection for the future." Mr. Walbridge's speech was cheered to the echo.<sup>97</sup>

When the committee on resolutions endorsed and reported Jacob Howard's proposals as a platform for a fusionist party, Walbridge read them to the convention. When he came to the resolution which named the new party "Republican" the crowd interrupted the proceedings

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<sup>96</sup>Walbridge was born in Vermont in 1802 and came to Michigan from Buffalo, New York, in 1841 to supply wheat for eastern markets. He was a prominent businessman, a one-time lawyer, a Whig who had several times interrupted his business affairs to serve in the state legislature. He read with amazement that the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed by the House on May 22, and then hurriedly took a train to Detroit for a conference with the powerful industrialist James F. Joy.

<sup>97</sup>DeLand, p. 176.

with profuse demonstrations of approval.<sup>98</sup> When the convention had quieted, Walbridge said:

I am going to withdraw the Free Soil ticket as adopted at the Kalamazoo convention . . . . I am going to disband it, and throw all its resources behind this glorious new party. We here relegated back to the people the power and right to select a ticket as they desire to represent the Republican Party next November . . . [to] nominate tried and true men . . . honest men . . . whom the people can honor and trust . . . . With such a ticket and such a platform, the party will certainly be endorsed by the people and elected . . . . May the Republican Party of Michigan, founded here today, become the National Republican Party of the whole country.<sup>99</sup>

Thus the Republican party in Michigan was born to prevent the extension of slavery into the territories. It was created by anti-slavery elements from the state's political parties on the occasion of the Kansas-Nebraska bill. The eventual permanent fusion in Michigan was hampered at first by the refusal of these elements to unite under an existing party name. A new party, which all could enter as equals, regardless of past political affiliations, was the only solution. But the Free Soil ticket nominated in February prevented this, for neither Whigs nor anti-Nebraska Democrats were willing to merge under the Free Soil label. The Democrats knew this, and believed the Free Soil slate would either prevent merger, or render it ineffective by splitting the anti-slavery vote.

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<sup>98</sup>The ninth resolution declared: ". . . we will cooperate and be known as REPUBLICANS until the contest is terminated." The question of who should be credited for supplying the name has been a subject of dispute, though Horace Greeley is most often mentioned. Friends of George A. Fitch claimed he possessed a written compact made between Free Soilers and Whigs which declared themselves Republicans. This was never found and the story was never substantiated.

<sup>99</sup>Official Souvenir History and Program Book, p. 32.

The sixth resolution adopted at the Kalamazoo convention on June 21, 1854, removed this obstacle to fusion. The withdrawal of the Free Soil ticket permitted the permanent coalition to be formed at Jackson on July 6, 1854. Thus without the action of the Kalamazoo convention the formation of the Republican party in Michigan would have seriously delayed.

The contribution of Kalamazoo men in the formation of the Republican party in Michigan was in proportion to the role of the Kalamazoo convention. David S. Walbridge, George A. Fitch, Dr. Nathan Macy Thomas, Rev. Dr. James A. B. Stone, George Washington Winslow, and Samuel H. Ransom, represented the politically incongruous elements attempting permanent coalition. The selection of David S. Walbridge as permanent chairman in Jackson, while a concession to the Whigs, was also a tribute to his qualities of leadership and his ability to unify the convention. George A. Fitch was the first Whig editor in Michigan to advocate a new convention and a new party. He tried to prevent the Free Soil convention from nominating a state ticket in Jackson February 22, and he attended most of the Free Soil Whig conferences which paved the way for eventual merger. Abolitionist Dr. Nathan Macy Thomas typified the old Liberty party-Free Soil element which had no place to go after 1852. But more characteristic of the Michigan anti-slavery and anti-abolition sentiment was Rev. Dr. James A. B. Stone. The conference at his home following the Kalamazoo convention showed the Free Soilers' lack of resentment in having abandoned their ticket and their spirit of compromise. George Washington Winslow and Samuel H. Ransom represented Michigan Democrats alienated from their party by reason of the

**Kansas-Nebraska bill.**

Thus, the role of Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo men in the formation of the Republican party in Michigan is best seen in the Kalamazoo convention of June 21, 1854, and in the role of men like Walbridge, Fitch, Thomas, Stone, Winslow, and Ransom.

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