

PAPERS FROM THE HISTORY SEMINAR OF
KALAMAZOO COLLEGE # 83

The Political History of Kalamazoo County from 1860-1880.

by

James H. Smith

January, 1949

To the city of Kalamazoo,
for having such an interesting history,
and to the many research workers
in the field of history.

Table of Contents

- I. The National Election of 1860 in Kalamazoo.
- II. Secession to the Seventies.
- III. The National and County Elections of the Seventies.

The National Election of 1860 in Kalamazoo

The National Election of 1860 was a very important election. It was to have repercussions that would effect the lives and future of all Americans. It was the election that brought to the White House a relatively unknown candidate from a newly formed party. It was an election in which the opposition to the new party were unable to select a candidate that suited both factions in their party. It was necessary for them to hold a separate conventions after the first one adjourned before a candidate could be chosen and a platform approved.

This election of 1860 was to be the cause of the southern state's secession, as a result of the election of Abraham Lincoln. The secession in turn lead to the firing on Fort Sumter and Lincoln's decision to try to keep the United States united.

The Kalamazoo County Convention was held March 1, 1860. Kalamazoo County was to be represented in the State Democratic Convention by 15 delegates, three times the usual number. The convention was called to order by President Guyon Fisher and G. W. Lyon was Secretary. The delegates were H. W. Cronkite, William Blass, Stephen Eldred,

C. E. Stuart, N. A. Balch, G. W. Lyon, V. Hascall, William Price, Gould Richardson, Gilbert Wilson, E. B. Dykeman, W. S. Logan, Alanson Labar, Frederick Dale, and J. K. Ward.¹ These were some of the more prominent men of the county in various fields of occupation.

The state convention in turn selected delegates to travel to Charleston. It was unfortunate both for the Northern Democrats and the Union that at this critical juncture the national convention should meet at Charleston, the hot-bed of disunion. The place had been selected four years previously, when harmony prevailed in the party and Douglas was a favorite of the South. Although having a population of but forty thousand, Charleston was marked by wealth and refinement, and tinged with more of the aristocratic spirit than any other city of the country. Its citizens were generous and hospitable, but their entertainment was for people of their own way of thinking; it does not appear that they opened their houses to Northern delegates who came to advocate the cause of Douglas. The appearance and conduct of the Tammany delegation excited disgust in the minds of the elegant residents, who had only known by hearsay their Northern

1. The Kalamazoo Gazette, March 7, 1860.

allies; while to Northern Democrats the haughty bearing they encountered seemed little in keeping with the character of their party, which they regarded essentially as the party of the people. ²

At the Charleston Convention the antagonism between the delegates from the cotton States and those from the west was the main feature of the situation. It proclaimed in an emphatic manner the schism in the party. The sections divided on a man, Douglas being the pivot on which the convention turned. As he stood for a principle, the minute the making of a platform began, the radical difference was obvious. The West, from personal loyalty and enthusiasm, determined to have Douglas, and they carried nearly the whole North with them, for it was patent that he could poll more votes in the free States than any other candidate. Stephen A. Douglas was also the choice of the Kalamazoo delegates, as expressed in the local Gazette.³ His nomination implied a certain platform and meant resistance to the domination of Southern extremists in the party. On the other hand the delegates from the slave States thought Douglas as bad as Seward,

2. James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States, New York, 1902, Vol. II, pp. 440-441.

3. The Kalamazoo Gazette, April 20, 1860.

and popular sovereignty as hateful as Sewardism, and, in their demand for a plain statement of principles and not one facing both ways, they asked for a platform on which Douglas could not possibly stand, and which would render his nomination impossible. These differences came to the surface before the convention met, and were prominent in the first day's proceedings. 4

The question was, could the problems be ironed out? It was evident from the beginning that unless the delegates from the cotton States could frame the platform or name the candidate, they would secede from the convention, and it was just as apparent to the North that the Douglas men could concede neither. Thus the situation stood, the south for Davis and against the platform and the north for Douglas and in favor of the platform. The platform issues involved the stand for and against slavery and if it were or if it were not constitutional to prohibit slavery. On May 3, 1860, the tenth day of the convention, the delegates, seeing that it was impossible to reach any agreement on a platform and a candidate, adjourned to meet at Baltimore on June 18, 1860.

4. J. F. Rhodes, History of the United States, pp. 443-44.

The Republicans held their convention at Chicago. It was fitting that the party, which had its origin in the Northwest, should now meet in the typical city, which, with a population of little more than one hundred thousand, had already made the word Chicago synonymous with that of progress. The Kalamazoo County delegates to the State Convention were the Hon. D. S. Walbridge, E. R. Miller, S. F. Brown, and E. C. Adams. Hon. D. S. Walbridge was chosen President of the State Convention. From this convention the National delegates were chosen. Hon. D. S. Walbridge was a delegate from Kalamazoo in the National Republican Convention.⁵ This convention had Seward slated as the favorite candidate, but the prospective Governors of Pennsylvania and Indiana (Andrew Curtin and Henry S. Lane) felt that they could not carry their states in the elections if Seward were the National Candidate for President. So through the efforts of H. Greeley, a delegate from Oregon, and Halstead of the Cincinnati Commercial, Lincoln, a relatively unknown candidate, except for the Copper Institute Speech, was given the Republican Nomination for President in 1860.⁶

5. The Kalamazoo Gazette, May 11, 1860.

6. J. F. Rhodes, History of the United States, pp. 465-66.

The platform was prepared with care. The aim of the platform had been to allow the greatest liberty of sentiment consistent with an emphatic assertion of the cardinal Republican doctrine. The platform paid a tribute to the Union; asserted that the rights of the States should be maintained inviolate; censured the attempt of the Buchanan administration to force the Lecompton Constitution upon Kansas; denounced the new dogma that the Constitution of its own force carries slavery into the territories; declared the Democratic doctrine of popular sovereignty a "deception and fraud"; denied "the authority of Congress, of a territorial legislature, or of any individual to give legal existence to slavery in any territory"; asserted that sound policy requires the adjustment of duties upon imports so as "to encourage the development of the industrial interests of the whole country"; demanded a homestead bill; and opposed any change in the naturalization laws. The authors of the platform, by steering clear of disputed questions, gave it throughout an aggressive tone. ⁷ The feelings of Kalamazoo Republicans were expressed in the Telegraph: "we are pleased with the progress of our party since 1856". ⁸

7. Ibid., p. 464.

8. The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, May 27, 1860.

In Baltimore on June 18th, the adjourned Charleston convention met. Many of the delegates who had seceded from the Charleston Convention were at the Baltimore gathering to request admission, probably because of the success of the Republican Convention. They felt the election slipping away from under them. Douglas was selected as the candidate. The seceders met separately and selected their own candidates, after once again being dissatisfied with Douglas.

The election went in favor of Lincoln, over Douglas. His election set off steps that eventually lead to the Civil War. The Kalamazoo County voting went in favor of Lincoln, Republican, 3230 votes; and Douglas, Democrat, 2031.⁹ The local elections went to a large portion of the Democratic Ticket. The state also went to a majority of the Democratic Ticket, with the exception of the Governor's post.¹⁰ In the latter race, Blair a Republican, was elected over Barry a Democrat, by a 3193 to 2123 vote.¹¹

-
9. History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, Philadelphia, Everts and Abbott, 1880, p. 173.
 10. The Kalamazoo Gazette, November 7, 1860.
 11. History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, p. 173.

Secession to the Seventies in Kalamazoo

After the election of Lincoln, a number of the Southern States seceded from the Union. The assault of the Southern seceders on Fort Sumter, which was defended by Union troops, and the decision of Lincoln to attempt to preserve the Union, lead to the great Civil War, 1861-65.

The Lincoln Administration adopted a war program, which consisted of various measures. The expense of the war was chiefly financed by loans, but the government resorted also to far heavier taxation than the people of the United States had ever been asked to pay. In 1862 many excises were levied upon a remarkable variety of articles, businesses, occupations and activities. This tax law hit just about everybody and everything. Even lawyers, physicians, and dentists were required to buy licenses, and such articles as liquor and tobacco, carried heavy duties. Manufacturers were required to pay a tax for the right of manufacturing, and the articles they manufactured were also taxed. Railroads, steamboats, toll-bridges, savings banks, insurance companies, and the like paid a three percent duty on their gross receipts. As numerous and varied

as these taxes were, they did not produce a great revenue. An income tax, which began as a three percent tax on all incomes above \$800, was later so modified as to tax incomes between \$600-\$5000 at the rate of five percent. The total amount received from both taxes was \$355,000,000.¹² Even though this amount was only a small portion of total cost of the war, it still was a large sum of money to a people quite unused to federal taxation. According to the Gazette, "the Era of Taxation was under way for the people of the United States."¹³ But the people of Kalamazoo were behind the President and the war policy, so little dissatisfaction was expressed otherwise in the county.

The Civil War taxed the nation in much more than dollar terms. The President called for volunteers to fill the ranks of the armies. Opponents of the Lincoln administration were quick to charge the President with indulgence in unconstitutional practices that made him little less than a dictator, because of his orders to increase the regular army. In the North any attempts or

12. John D. Hicks, The Federal Union, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1952, p. 603.

13. The Kalamazoo Gazette, August 8, 1862.

moves toward conscription met forcible resistance. Many "draft riots" occurred, but most of these acts of resistance were ineffective. The states all adopted the machinery to draft, but it was not used until late in the war. The Gazette said, "this draft law is the harshest of government measures to date." 14

The quota requested by the President was filled willingly by volunteers. Not until the later parts of the war did it become necessary to offer bounties for recruits. When this became necessary the draft was promptly put into use. The men of Kalamazoo County who opened recruiting offices were: Charles A. Thompson, Esq., a lawyer, H. A. Ford of the Gazette, and Felix Duffie, keeper of the "College Hall"; it was reported by the Gazette that "some of the town's finest young men had enlisted". 15

In the end, however, it became necessary to rely upon the draft to fill the quota. The draft system was bitterly opposed in the beginning, but as time passed and enlistments did not supply the men needed, it was realized that the draft was necessary for the welfare of the Union.

14. Ibid., July 18, 1862.

15. Ibid., July 25, 1862.

While the war was being waged, growing sentiment for the emancipation of slavery was expressed by various factions. Ultimately the time came when Lincoln had either to emancipate the slaves or alienate the majority of his own party. Thus the Emancipation document was issued in 1863 by Lincoln. The Kalamazoo feeling towards the Negro was one of acceptance but not the wholehearted support of the race's emancipation. 16

The gloomy days of 1864, with their long casualty lists and their infrequent victories, led the critics of Lincoln's administration to redouble their efforts to remove him from the White House in the next election. Among them were the radicals within his own party, who had always objected to his moderation, and now plotted to deprive him of a renomination. The opposition nominated John C. Fremont, but Fremont's candidacy failed to develop and Fremont presently withdrew. Lincoln and Andrew Johnson were the Union Party candidates. General Mc Clellan was the Democratic candidate. Lincoln had little hope of victory; he admitted this himself. But Union victories changed the situation and the Union ticket won.

16. Patricia Schillinger, Social and Political Reactions to the Slavery question in Kalamazoo, (From Kalamazoo College History Seminar Papers), January, 1949, p. 11

After Lincoln's assassination, Johnson took over. He was very unpopular with Congress because of his reconstruction program. The impeachment proceedings against Johnson were still in progress when the Republicans met in convention at Chicago to make General Grant the candidate for 1868. Schuyler Colfax was named his running mate.

The Democratic Convention, meeting in July at Tammany Hall in New York City, nominated Horatio Seymour, the Democratic governor of New York, after President Johnson was passed over. The vice-presidency was given to Francis P. Blair, Jr., of Missouri, undoubtedly the most violent critic of Radical reconstruction in the party.

So it was that the Democrats made the chief issue the congressional plan of reconstruction. There was a definite undercurrent of interest in the money question. The Republicans protected the interests of the bond holders, but the Democrats felt the bond issues should be paid off in greenbacks instead of gold. The campaign was more vigorous than the one-sided result would seem to indicate. In a total popular vote of nearly six millions, Grant's majority was only about three hundred thousand. The electoral returns gave Grant 214 votes to Seymour's 80.

National and County Elections of the Seventies

In the mid-term elections of 1870, the political scene was very quiet. In the local county elections the Democrats had a list of prominent business and professional men as candidates.

The Gazette strongly anticipated the support of the people. If these candidates were elected, it argued, the feeling was that they would discharge the duties bestowed upon them very effectively and efficiently. They were highly respected and intelligent men, it asserted, with the combined elements of moral and political integrity that go to make the useful citizen. ¹⁷

The feeling of the Gazette was that "the fitness and character of a candidate is overlooked in the eager desire to put men with the loudest and most extreme pretensions in office. The result had been corrupt, unstable, and extravagant legislation". ¹⁸

The Republican caucus met and selected its candidates. The Republicans had a huge rally on October 28, 1870. The speakers were Senator Chandler and Baldwin, the Republican Nomination for Governor. The Telegraph felt this rally was something no Republican should miss. ¹⁹

17. The Kalamazoo Gazette, Sept, 27, 1870.

18. Ibid., October 15, 1870.

19. The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, Oct. 28, 1870.

The day of election was approaching and the lack of interest and concern by the people of Kalamazoo was evident in many ways. The Gazette expressed much dissatisfaction because of the Republican corruption, but were also asking the question "can we trust the Democrats?" 20

On election day the Telegraph had this to say: 21

"Republicans! give this day to the business of re-affirming your principles, and making a choice of your officers and representatives--the people's servants--for the next two years. This is your business don't neglect it. There is not a candidate on the catalogue of candidates for office, state or county, who is not worthy of the best support of all Republicans."

The skies were murky, on election day, but the rain was not enough to hinder a respectable gathering at the polls. The election passed off quietly, and wholly with out enthusiasm. Kalamazoo polled by no means a full vote, but the majority of the Republican electors turned out.

The final returns of the elections were very flattering to the Democrats. The Gazette stated: "We are also much satisfied over the people returning from political fanaticism, to a degree of reason and clearer views of wrongs that have been inflicted by the Republicans." 22

20. The Kalamazoo Gazette, October 28, 1870.

21. Ibid., October 15, 1870.

22. The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, November 8, 1870.

In the national election of 1872 the Republican party was split by the Liberal faction, which bitterly opposed the southern policy of the Grant administration as well as the administration of the civil service, and the excesses of the spoils system. Grant was also denounced for the tariff reforms increases of the Radicals. When the Radicals, in spite of this growing volume of criticism, made known their determination to bring about the renomination of Grant, a split in the party became inevitable.

The Liberals held their convention in Cincinnati. They selected Horace Greeley as the candidate for President and B. Gratz Brown for vice-president. The platform condemned the administration's southern policy and demanded civil service reform, but the tariff issue was unsettled, for the Liberals favored a low tariff and Greeley stood for a high tariff. The Democrats met and approved the platform and ticket.

In the campaign that followed, the Liberal-Democratic coalition proved to be no competition for the Radicals. Grant and Wilson, who were selected for the Radical ticket in a scene of unparalleled enthusiasm at the Republican convention in Philadelphia, won easily over Greeley and Brown.

In the local county elections of 1872 the Telegraph said, "The Republicans opened the campaign auspiciously last night at their meeting in the court house. The attendance and the spirit were gratifying and highly encouraging. The Republicans of Kalamazoo will not fail in their duty, but will render a good account of themselves at the polls next November." 23

The Kalamazoo County Republican ticket was composed of some of the outstanding citizens from the county, as was the County Democratic ticket.

The local campaign centered around the graft and corruption issues that existed on the national scene. The Telegraph defended Grant and his administration against the charges that were made against him. It said, "There are not less than five investigating committees at work, under appointment by congress--two inquiring into the sale of arms to France, one into Seneca stone, one into the affairs of the District of Columbia, and one into the New York Custom House. Except in the latter case, though official corruption may be exposed, it is not found chargeable upon the administration." 24

23. Ibid., August 20, 1872.

24. Ibid., March 12, 1872.

The Gazette on the other hand was making accusations: 25

"Mr. Boutwell asks Congress to appropriate \$19,468, 562 for public buildings. It is high time the people were looking after such extravagances."

Another article in the Gazette said this: 26

"All those moral natures that regard 'a lie well stuck to, as good as the truth' will be gratified to know that the Telegraph continues to "stick" to its policy of abusing a poor but honest man."

Each one of these newspapers got in its share of licks at one time or another during this exciting campaign.

On election day the Telegraph said, "Republicans! Give one day to your country, to the maintenance of the principles of the Republican part, which affords one of the brightest episodes in the history of the Republic--to the re-election of Gen. Grant, the greatest General and leader this land has ever produced and Henry Wilson." 27

The Gazette called "the White House a Den of Thieves." Also it stated "The Republican party has a history. Its history is one continued black and seething stream of corruption, in both local and national affairs. Let's do something about it". 28

25. The Kalamazoo Gazette, March 28, 1872.

26. Ibid., April 5, 1872.

27. The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, November 4, 1872.

28. The Kalamazoo Gazette, April 5, 1872.

When the final votes were counted the Republicans had made a clean sweep of all offices. The past trend was once again followed. The Republicans remained in control of local politics.

In the off-year election of 1874, the Telegraph printed its usual number of articles and editorials. It said this, "Before any voter casts his ballot in favor of the Democratic ticket, he should take into consideration what sort of a party he is helping to vote into power." also it said, "There are less Democrats in Kalamazoo in proportion to the voters, at this time, than ever before, yet they hope to elect a portion of their county and representative ticket. They can only do so by dividing the Republican vote. Don't let them find you discordant or apathetic." 29

The simple question presented to the voters in this election was which party, Republican or Democratic could be trusted the most. It seems some of the corruption had trickled down to the local level.

The alleged corruption of the Republicans in the county perhaps was the cause of the election

29. The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, October, 28 & 31, 1874.

of a Democratic Sheriff and County Clerk. This would seem to be the only reason for electing Democrats in a strong Republican county like Kalamazoo.

In the election of 1876, the nervousness of the Republicans was intense. They feared very much losing control of the Presidency. Not daring to select anyone who was even slightly tainted with scandal, the Republican National Convention turned for its nominee to the spotless but relatively unknown Rutherford B. Hayes, an able volunteer officer in the Civil War, and three times governor of Ohio. William A. Wheeler was selected as the vice-president nominee.

The Democrats, also interested in avoiding corruption charges, nominated Samuel J. Tilden, who played a major role in overthrowing the Tweed Ring. The vice-presidential candidate was Thomas A. Hendricks.

The election was much disputed, due to confusion in the counting of the electoral votes. The final decision was made by an electoral commission, which selected Rutherford B. Hayes as President.

In the Kalamazoo County elections, the Republican ticket was one of the best ever presented for the suffrages of Kalamazoo County, but needed the hearty and clear support of the people according to the Telegraph.³⁰

The Telegraph stated: "Higher duty has never devolved upon you than now, It is to see that the wheels of national progress do not go back. By your voice and vote, by your presence, example, influence, and personal hand-to-hand work with men who may yet be convinced, be equal to the great duty of the morrow." ³¹

Many enthusiastic Republican meetings were held in various parts of the county, at Portage, Cooper and in Kalamazoo.³² The full vote of the Republicans was being sought after the defeat of two of their candidates tow years previously.

The Gazette said, "Republicanism, in its latest phases, is so saturated, and permeated with corruption and abuses, through and through, that it smells to high Heaven."³³ The Democratic ticket selected was the finest and best qualified, it contended. The general feeling of the people of Kalamazoo must have been in sympathy with the

30. Ibid., November 4, 1876.

31. Ibid., October 10, 1876.

32. Ibid., October 11, 1876.

33. The Kalamazoo Gazette, October 24, 1876.

Republicans because only one office went to the Democrats in this election. The result of Grantism according to the Gazette was extravagance, corruption and mis-rule.³⁴ But the Kalamazoo opinion was contrary to this view, because the people still continued to elect Republicans to their county offices. The county voted Republican in the national and state elections as well, which reaffirms the statement that Kalamazoo opinion was contrary to the Gazette's.

In the rallies held in Kalamazoo County in 1878 the Republican speakers always favored honest administration, a good greenback circulation redeemable in coin, and the maintenance of the honor of the nation at home and abroad.

An appeal to Republicans from the Telegraph said, "Now that the last days of the campaign are nearly over and the duties of the day of election at hand, let every republican citizen see that his vote is used to the best possible advantage."³⁵

The Democrats in this election campaigned as the party of Economy. The Republican campaigners were saying there is no difference between Republican and Democratic parties. The Gazette said, "If this is so than each Republican voter should

34. Ibid., November 4, 1876.

35. The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph, October 25, 1878.

vote for the best man." It strongly implied that the Democratic candidate was the best man.

After the votes were counted the Republicans held control of the county offices. The Democrats had been entirely forgotten. The Republican control of the county offices was the rule rather than the exception in this period.

The bases for the long period of Republican domination in Kalamazoo County can be attributed to several facts. One is that Kalamazoo was a growing community in terms of commerce and manufacturing. Another big reason, of course, was the false that Republicans had won the war and Democrats were secessionists. Also the fact that the Republican party was formed and met just a short distance from Kalamazoo, in Jackson in 1856. The sentiments of the people were strongly tied to the Republican party and any changes were not possible until the political philosophy of the people changed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Sources

Printed Materials

The Kalamazoo Gazette (1859 to 1862) (1870 to 1880)

The Kalamazoo Daily Telegraph (1870 to 1880)

Secondary References

Histories

James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States,
Vol. II, New York, 1902.

John D. Hicks, The Federal Union, Cambridge, Mass.,
1952.

John D. Hicks, The American Nation, Cambridge, Mass.,
1955.

History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, Philadelphia,
Everts & Abbott, 1880.

Patricia Schillinger, Social and Political Reactions
to the Slavery Question in Kalamazoo, (Papers from the
History Seminar of Kalamazoo College), January, 1949.