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IN THE
1848 ELECTION CAMPAIGN**

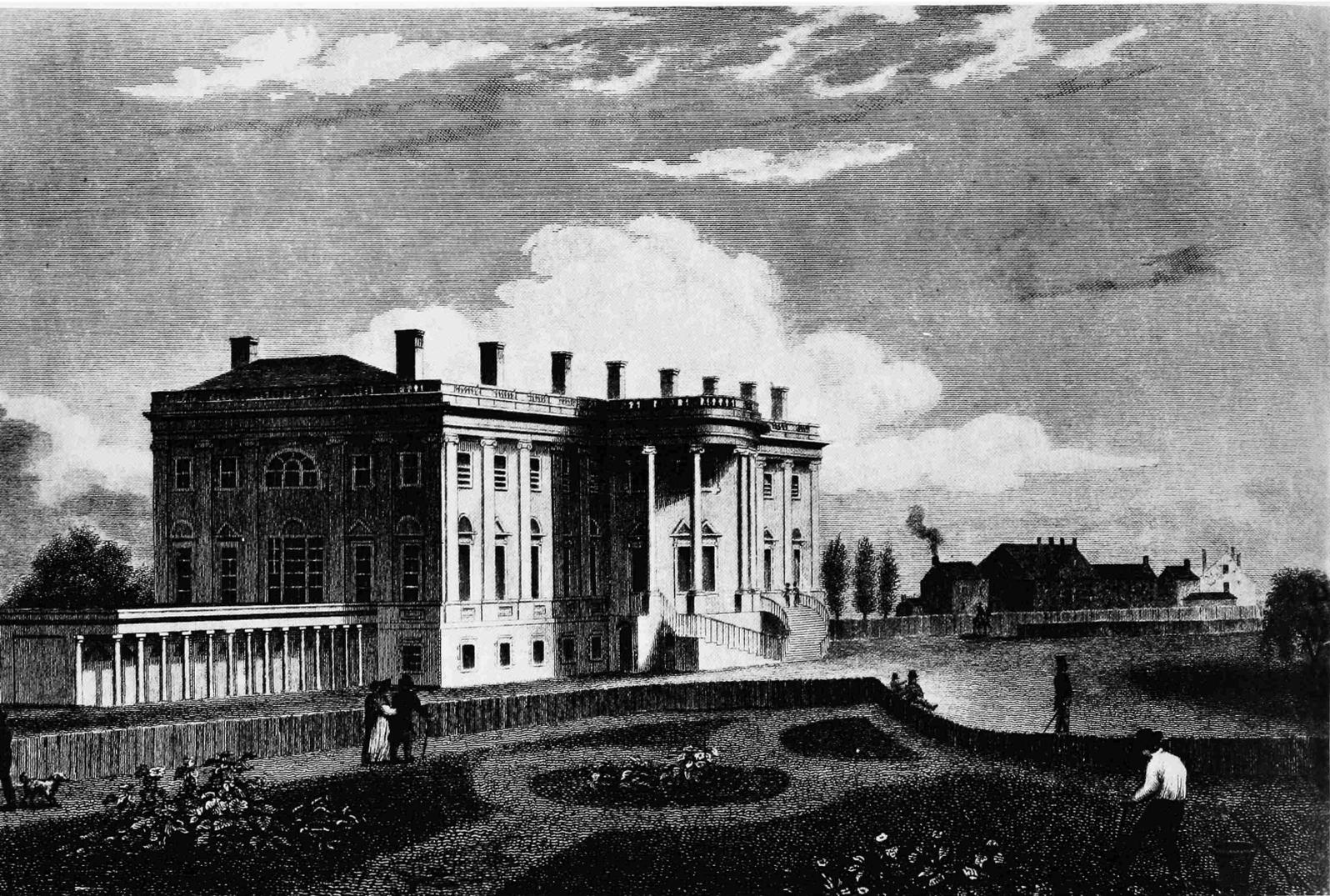
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The White House or "President's House," a symbol of the prize for which the candidates were contending, is depicted in this engraving of about 1831. The print was published by Carter, Andrews & Company of Lancaster, Massachusetts, and is in the Smithsonian Institution's Harry T. Peters "America On Stone" Collection. (Smithsonian negative 56108.)

POLITICAL CARTOONS IN THE 1848 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The Harry T. Peters "America On Stone" Lithography Collection in the Smithsonian Institution contains over 150 lithographed election cartoons and caricatures. These cartoons, dating from the mid-nineteenth century before newspapers carried editorial cartoons, are directly tied to the events of the time and reflect the opinions of the general public as well as of those who drew and published them. Nine of these cartoons were issued during the election of 1848. This study discusses these cartoons and their inter-relationship with the personalities and issues of the campaign. These cartoons add a further dimension to the history of the election.

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Editorial comment in American newspapers has never been known for its coyness or restraint. An editor will express his reasoned opinion on most topics in as forthright a manner as he feels proper. No less pointed, the political cartoonists satirize high and low with usually witty and sometimes provocative results. A cartoonist feels no qualms in aiming his wit at first one side of the fence and then the other. This was as true of the nineteenth century as it is today.

Commentary and cartoons pointed some of their best nineteenth-century barbs at the attempts of dissident Democrats and Whigs to organize a third party in 1848. In early August of that year an incongruous group of factions—splinters from the major parties as well as members of various third parties—gathered in Buffalo, New York,

with the high-minded purpose of banding together in a new party based solely on their opposition to the extension of slavery. These people left Buffalo under the banner of Free Soil, singing the praises of Martin Van Buren. They had erected a platform and agreed on a candidate. That they were able to accomplish this and to do so with apparent harmony was a surprise to many, as can be seen in the comment of the day.

At this period in American history political cartoons were, for the most part, separately issued lithographs which were probably distributed by the parties themselves as campaign material, the surplus being sold in the same manner as other prints.¹ Before the appearance in 1829 of what is considered the first cartoon lithographed in the United States, caricatures were engraved, etched

or cut on copper, steel, or wood.² Lithographed cartoons were plentiful, inexpensive, and expressive of the current views. They were popular, undoubtedly controversial, and inseparable from the political events of the period.

There are nine cartoons in the Harry T. Peters "America On Stone" Lithography Collection at the Smithsonian Institution which were issued during the 1848 election campaign. The cartoons are closely tied to the events of the day and have a direct bearing on a history of the campaign. Political cartoons were the earliest lithographs to receive wide circulation with people gaining a large share of their political knowledge and education from them. In considering them along with editorial comment and the usual written documents, a further dimension is added to our knowledge of the campaign.

Cartoons mirror the personalities and issues of the times. They are, by nature, either exaggerations or simplifications—or both—of the facts as viewed by the cartoonist. The artist makes his point by emphasis; he presents personalities and issues in a form quickly and easily grasped by his audience, using objects and concepts which are familiar to the people. Thus, the election campaign is often pictured as a contest, such as a fishing match or a turkey shoot, with the presidency as the prize. An even more common election cartoon is that depicting a horse race between the various contenders for office. Reflecting the rural character of mid-nineteenth-century America, the cartoonists make repeated use of animals. In the cartoons to be considered here, for example, one candidate is depicted milking a cow and riding a buffalo to victory. In each case, the animal represents the issue which he is supposedly using to gain his own ends. In another caricature, a sow carries three men down Salt River Lane, a symbol of defeat. It is interesting to speculate on why the artist drew a sow rather than a horse. Was it perhaps to make the Democrats appear more ludicrous in their predicament? Furthermore, in the turkey shoot, Martin Van Buren is depicted as a fox, emphasizing the sly, crafty nature attributed to him in the nickname "The Red Fox of Kinderhook."

In many of these early election cartoons, the individuals are depicted almost photographically. They look much the same in each cartoon even

though the artists and publishers differ. This may very well be attributable to the recent popularization of photography which was a new phenomenon at that time. The artists most likely copied their portraits of the political contenders from photographs to which they had ready access and satirized the situations rather than the appearance of the individuals.

To set the scene for 1848, one must examine the events which brought forth the issues of that year.³ The question of slavery had long lain smoldering beneath the surface of the American political scene. Abolitionists had been at work for many years appealing to the moral sense of the people in their attempt to correct the problem. Politicians, for the most part, refused to make slavery an issue because it was much too explosive. The annexation of Texas in 1845 and the subsequent war with Mexico brought the issue to the surface.

Because of its nearness to the South and its suitability for growing cotton and sugarcane, Texas had been settled to a large extent by Southerners who insisted on bringing their slaves with them. Although slavery had been abolished by the Mexican government in 1831, the Southern slaveholders who moved to Texas managed to ignore this fact. Following their secession from Mexico, the Texans legalized slavery. This was the way the matter stood in 1836 when an envoy from Texas arrived in Washington to seek either annexation or recognition as an independent republic.

The annexation of Texas would affect the delicate issue of the balance of power between the North and the South. Texas was large enough that several slave states might be carved from its territory; thus, the North was not prone to regard the addition of this territory to the Union with favor. Andrew Jackson, with the approval of Congress, recognized the Republic of Texas shortly before he left office in 1837. Martin Van Buren, his successor, had no desire to see the slavery issue brought up and felt that annexation would involve a war with Mexico. As a result, the issue was successfully avoided for a short time. Texans, however, continued to press for annexation, while at the same time negotiating with Britain and France for a guarantee of their independence. Texans rightly feared that as a very small republic, they might at any time be faced

with an attempt by Mexico—who had never recognized their independence—to repossess the territory. Southerners, aware of the moves of Texans to guarantee their independence, feared that Texas might abolish slavery in return for a British promise of protection. This would leave the South with an extremely large refuge for runaway slaves right at its doorstep. Thus, the South viewed the annexation of Texas as a matter of importance.

John Tyler, who defeated Van Buren in his bid for reelection in 1840, was not as reluctant as his predecessor to broach the issue of annexation. After much negotiating, Tyler's secretary of state, John C. Calhoun, concluded a treaty of annexation.

This treaty played a major role in the election of 1844. Martin Van Buren lost the Democratic presidential nomination that year over the issue. It was shortly before the nominating conventions were to meet that Calhoun concluded the treaty with the Republic of Texas which was submitted to Congress for ratification. Both Van Buren and Henry Clay, who at this point were virtually assured of their respective parties' nominations, were forced to express their views on the subject. Each wrote a letter which was published in their party newspapers on the same day. Their positions were similar—both were opposed to annexation. Annexation at that time would lead to war, a war in which the United States would be in the wrong. Neither man ruled out the possibility of annexation at a later date. Clay received the Whig nomination in spite of his unpopular stand, but it was to cost him the election. Van Buren did not make it even that far. His position was contrary to that of the mass of the Democratic Party, and completely unacceptable to the Southern wing of the party. Many of his strongest supporters deserted him with the result that he was unable to secure a majority in the Democratic convention. To break the deadlock which ensued between Van Buren and Lewis Cass, James K. Polk was nominated and subsequently elected.

The annexation treaty was not ratified but Tyler, while still in office following the election of 1844, recommended that Texas be annexed by a joint resolution of Congress which did not require a two-thirds vote. This was done, and Texas was admitted to the Union in December 1845.

Mexico, having warned on various occasions that she would regard the annexation of Texas as a cause for war, broke diplomatic relations with the United States shortly after Tyler's successor, James K. Polk, took office. War with Mexico could very likely have been avoided if the issue had been merely the annexation of Texas and the dispute over its boundary; however, the United States, and Polk in particular, had its eye on the Mexican territory of California. Americans had fallen under the spell of "manifest destiny," the notion that the United States was destined to expand across the continent. Polk made repeated attempts to acquire California through purchase and even by encouraging a revolt in the territory.

Polk tried negotiating for the purchase of both New Mexico and California, but his envoys met with no success as the Mexican government refused to discuss anything except the Texas boundary. It was at this point that General Zachary Taylor was ordered to the mouth of the Rio Grande to strengthen the American bargaining position. Polk's envoys finally gave up and returned home after the Mexican government was overthrown in January 1846 by a military regime determined to resist every American demand. Polk began to draft a request to Congress for a declaration of war. Before this was submitted, word was received that Taylor's forces had been attacked north of the Rio Grande. The attack occurred outside the boundary of the former Mexican state of Texas, but within that claimed by the Republic of Texas. In his revised war message, Polk stated that American blood had been shed on American soil. The issue was the annexation of Texas, but the prize was California.

On August 8, 1846, about three months after the outbreak of war, Polk asked Congress for an appropriation of two million dollars to be used as a down payment to bribe the Mexican dictator, Santa Anna, into ceding California. David Wilmot, a Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania, proposed an amendment to the bill for the appropriation stating that in any territory so acquired "neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist. . . ." This amendment became known as the Wilmot Proviso. The bill with the amendment passed in the House and was sent to the Senate which adjourned before voting on it. A new bill was introduced at the next session of

Congress, the amendment was added again, and the bill was sent to the Senate. The Senate refused to consider the amended bill, passing one of its own which the House finally concurred in approving. Although the Wilmot Proviso never became law, it opened the door for the subsequent debates on the question of slavery extension.

The issue of slavery extension polarized the views of the proponents. The anti-slave forces felt that Congress had the right and the moral duty to prohibit slavery wherever its jurisdiction extended. This was the position expressed in the Wilmot Proviso and held by the Free Soil Party. The South maintained that Congress did not have the power to prohibit slavery in the territories; on the contrary, it had the duty to protect Southern property (slaves) wherever they were taken by their owners. It would be easy to simplify the issues and place each proponent in one camp or the other. To some extent this can be done, but at the same time it must be remembered that there were many differences of opinion on each side. Anti-slavery men were not necessarily abolitionists. Abolitionists were completely opposed to slavery, and they wished to prohibit it entirely in the states where it already existed as well as in the territories. Anti-slavery men, although they may have hated slavery as much as the abolitionists, were merely trying to halt its spread and to keep it out of the territories. The pro-slavery faction included many who felt that slavery was a moral evil, but were forced to defend the system out of economic necessity.

The Wilmot Proviso and resultant arguments were the major issues in the split between the radical (Barnburner) and the conservative (Hunker) forces in the New York State Democratic Party which led to the Barnburners joining in the formation of the Free Soil Party. Martin Van Buren and his supporters had built up a strong Democratic organization in New York. The Albany Regency, as this group was known, controlled the party in the state at the time Van Buren entered the United States Senate in 1821. The party had been constructed of men holding widely differing opinions, and in the following years splits occurred in the unity of the party on numerous occasions. The factions divided over the issues of hard money, monopolies, and financing of public works among others,

but the final blow was the issue of slavery extension.⁴ The two factions dubbed each other with names thought to represent their qualities. The radicals became known as Barnburners from the legendary tale of the Dutch farmer who supposedly burned his barn to destroy the rats in it. Thus, the enemies of the radicals expressed their feeling that the radicals would destroy the Democratic Party to rid themselves of the conservatives. The name Hunker is apparently a corruption of the verb "to hunger" or "to hanker." It was applied to the conservatives by their enemies who insisted that the conservatives were always "hunkering" for office. In advancing the Barnburners claim to be the true representatives of the New York Democratic Party at the national convention in 1848, J. C. Smith stated that "those with whom he was politically associated had burned the barn to drive these rats [Hunkers] from the public granary. . . . The Hunkers 'hunkered' after office, and hence their name."⁵

The issue between the two forces was control of the Democratic Party in the state of New York. This control became a matter of expressing opposition to the extension of slavery. The matter came to a head when the state Democratic convention which convened in September 1847 refused to consider a resolution expressing opposition to the extension of slavery into the territories. Consequently, the Barnburners bolted and called a mass meeting to meet at Herkimer, New York, on October 26 of that year. The split was almost complete.

"The Modern Gilpins. Love's Labor Lost" (Figure 1) depicts the split in the Democratic Party. The anecdote alluded to in this cartoon concerns John Gilpin, a London linen draper and militia captain. Gilpin agreed, at his wife's suggestion, to have dinner at a place in Edmonton. Mrs. Gilpin, her sister, and four children went ahead in the chaise. John was to follow on horseback. The horse was in high spirits and broke into a trot and then a gallop. John was a poor rider and he immediately seized the horse's mane with both hands. The horse continued to gallop, John lost his cloak, wig and hat; dogs barked; children screamed; and the turnpike men, thinking he was riding for a bet, opened their gates for him. The horse continued through Edmonton without pausing. When he finally managed to stop the horse,

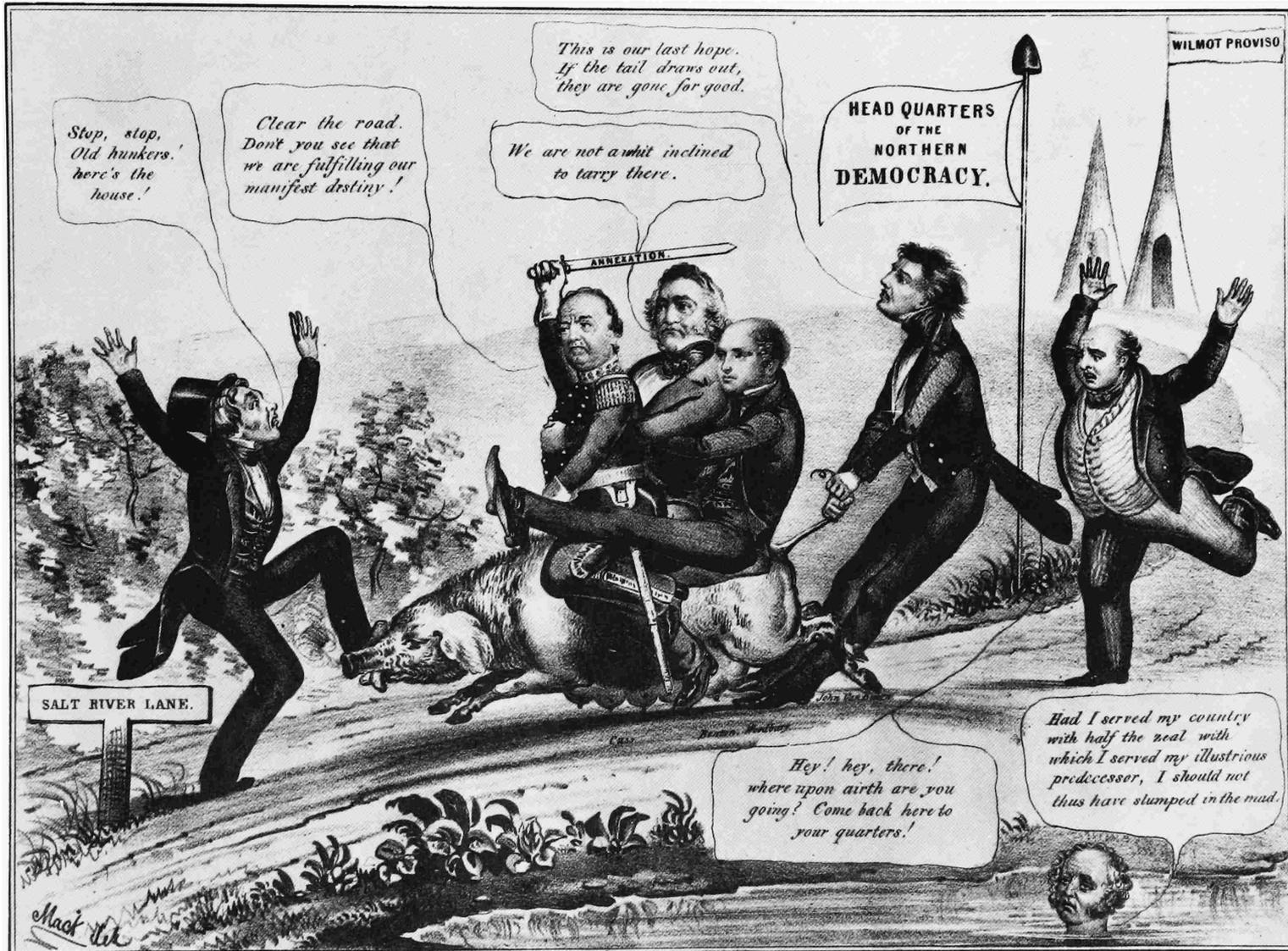


FIGURE 1.—“The Modern Gilpins. Loves Labor Lost” shows disruption in the Democratic Party caused by the issue of the annexation of Texas and of the Wilmot Proviso. This cartoon was published by J. Baillie of New York City. (Smithsonian negative 53934.)

John borrowed a wig and hat from a friend and started back to Edmonton. The same situation occurred and the horse failed to stop until he had reached home in London.⁶ In the cartoon a sow is depicted running down “Salt River Lane.” On her back, she bears Lewis Cass, the United States senator from Michigan, an annexationist and opponent of the Wilmot Proviso; Thomas Hart Benton, senator from Missouri; and Levi Woodbury of New Hampshire. Benton, who was a

close friend of Van Buren, and Woodbury ultimately supported Cass. Woodbury had been a contender for the nomination himself. Salt River is a symbol of political defeat. Its derivation is not known, but to row someone up Salt River—meaning to defeat or triumph over him—was a common expression at this time. The sow with her three riders is leaving behind the “Headquarters of the Northern Democracy,” two wigwags over which floats the banner of the Wilmot Proviso.

John Van Buren, Martin's son, is trying to hold them back by pulling the sow's tail. Two other men also try to stop the "Hunkers." Martin Van Buren is "slumped in the mud" and conjectures that had he served his country with half the zeal with which he served his illustrious predecessor, Andrew Jackson, he would not be in that position. Van Buren and the New York Barnburners stand firmly committed to the Wilmot Proviso. This, they maintain is the true position of the Northern Democrats. On the opposite side of the issue stand the old annexationists, represented here by Cass, Woodbury, and Benton who are being carried away from the Barnburners' position.

The rift widened further when the two factions sent conflicting delegations to the Democratic National Convention at Baltimore in May 1848. Prior to the convention, John Van Buren had written to his father asking permission to present his name as the Barnburners' presidential candidate if the need arose. The former president advised his son to make every effort to gain acceptance of the Barnburners' delegates as the sole New York delegation. If the convention accepted them, they should attempt to make their views felt and to express their objections to the various candidates whom they would find difficult to support. In any case, if admitted, they were to accept any candidate nominated by the convention unless it was Polk. Polk had stated that he would serve only one term. If he should be nominated at Baltimore and accept the nomination, he would be violating his word and the Barnburners could not support him. Only if the Barnburners' delegates were refused admittance as New York's sole representatives at the Democratic National Convention were they to bolt. In this case, Van Buren suggested that the Barnburners put forth their own candidate and mentioned Taylor as a possibility.⁷ That Taylor could be considered by the Barnburners as an anti-slavery candidate is a clear indication of his lack of any known convictions on this issue.

The convention officials, after much debate, compromised and granted each delegation—the Hunkers and the Barnburners—one-half vote, but only on the condition that they pledge to support the nominees of the convention before being admitted. The Barnburners refused this arrangement and left Baltimore determined to act inde-

pendently. They convened at Utica on June 22 to nominate their own candidates. By this time, Taylor had been selected by the Whigs as their presidential candidate. The Barnburners turned to their old leader, nominating Martin Van Buren for president and Henry Dodge for vice-president. Van Buren accepted the nomination, but Dodge declined.

The Democrats nominated Lewis Cass and William O. Butler with a platform heartily endorsing the Polk administration. Polk, ill and weary, was true to his word and declined a second term. Cass's position on slavery extension made him more acceptable to the majority of Democrats than any candidate who supported the position expressed in the Wilmot Proviso. He advocated the doctrine which was to become known as popular sovereignty. He felt that the settlers in each new territory should decide the issue of slavery for themselves. This was a local matter best handled by those most closely involved and without the interference of Congress. This, in the opinion of Cass, was the most reasonable solution to the problem.⁸

The Barnburners would not support Cass, whom they held responsible for Van Buren's loss of the presidential nomination in 1844. Polk, who was not particularly offensive to the Barnburners in '44, had quickly alienated them by trying to placate both the Hunkers and the Barnburners. He offered cabinet positions to Van Buren's close friends and supporters, Silas Wright and Benjamin F. Butler. Both men declined the positions. Polk then gave the position of secretary of war, which Butler had declined, to William L. Marcy, a leading Hunker and an enemy of Van Buren.⁹

The Barnburners had an additional grievance against the Polk administration. In 1844 the Democrats had persuaded Silas Wright, senator from New York and the idol of the Barnburners, to run for governor of New York. They felt that with Wright on the ticket in New York, the Barnburners would be appeased for Van Buren's loss and would stick with the entire Democratic ticket, Polk included. Wright ran, against his desire, and was elected. In 1846, however, he was defeated in his bid for reelection because the Hunkers refused to support him. The Barnburners held the Polk administration as well as the

Hunkers responsible for this defeat and for Wright's death shortly thereafter. They believed that Polk and the Hunkers deliberately drove Wright out of public life, because they knew that he would be a leading contender for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1848. This feel-

ing is evident in the cartoon captioned with a quotation from a speech given at the Utica convention (Figure 2). The setting is a cemetery near Silas Wright's coffin. The hostility between the two forces and its causes are apparent in this cartoon.

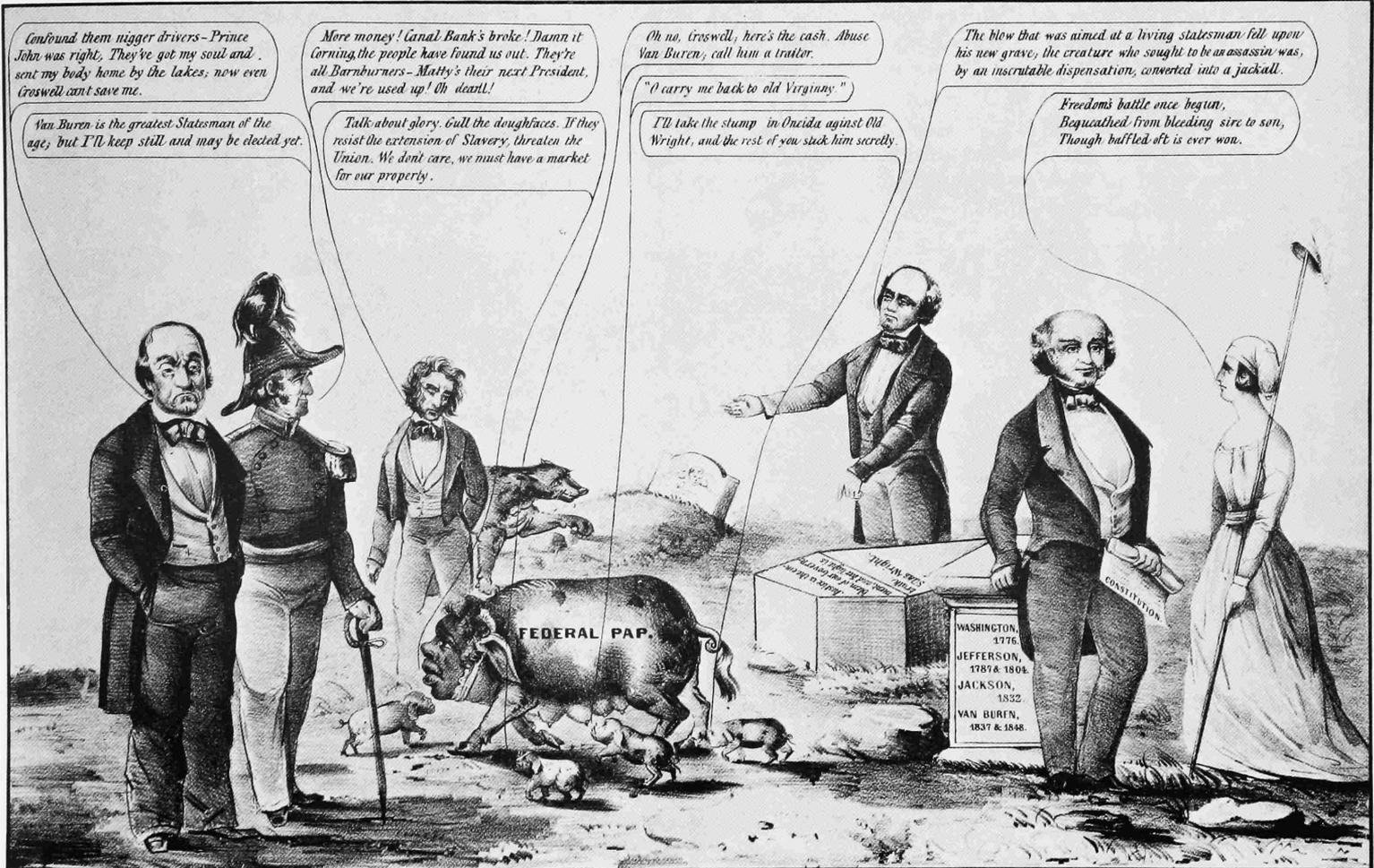


FIGURE 2.—This untitled cartoon published by Peter Smith of New York City portrays the belief of the Barnburners that the Hunkers were responsible for the defeat of Silas Wright in his bid for reelection as governor of New York and his subsequent death. Edwin Croswell, editor of the Albany Argus, had been a member of the Albany Regency and state printer during Van Buren's presidency. He became a leading voice of the Hunkers. Erastus Corning, Daniel S. Dickinson, and Henry A. Foster were prominent Hunkers. In this cartoon, they are depicted "hunkering" after "Federal Pap," drawn as a sow with the face of a Negro woman probably to express their willingness to accept the extension of slavery. Corning, Dickinson, Croswell, and Foster are planning the defeat of Wright and Van Buren. Cass and Taylor express fears that Van Buren will defeat them. Van Buren, to whom "Freedom's battle" is bequeathed, rests his hand on a marker bearing his name beneath that of Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson. The dates 1837 and 1848 appear under Van Buren's name. (Smithsonian negative 53777.)

In "Fording Salt River" (Figure 3) Martin Van Buren is carried "dry shod" over the raging river at the foot of a hill on which sits the White House. It is the long legs of his son John that make this possible. John Van Buren was the leading figure in the Barnburner-Free Soil merger. Taylor, Henry Clay, and Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Tribune*, flounder in the river. Cassius M. Clay sits calmly on the bank of the river while Greeley calls to him for help. Clay

says that he risked his life in Mexico, and he doesn't "like to do it again."

The colorful Kentuckian, Cassius Clay, was an outspoken opponent of slavery. Not one to sit by in the heat of controversy, he had been involved in numerous fracas as a result of his expression of anti-slavery opinions in the heart of a slaveholding area. Cassius had campaigned vigorously for his cousin, Henry Clay, in 1844. In Henry's eyes, Cassius was too outspoken in his condemna-

FIGURE 3.—"Fording Salt River" depicts Taylor, Greeley, and Clay floundering in the river of defeat, while Van Buren is carried across to the White House by his son, John Van Buren. This cartoon was published by J. Baillie of New York City. (Smithsonian negative 53947.)



tion of slavery, which forced Henry to disavow some of his cousin's statements during the campaign. Cassius Clay's opposition to annexation and a war with Mexico did not prevent him from volunteering to serve after the war commenced. His motives appear to have been a combination of allegiance to his country—his stated reason for the action which was in apparent contradiction to his views—and a desire to improve his relations with his Kentucky neighbors. The latter had suffered after his publication of an inflammatory anti-slavery piece in his newspaper, *The True American*, the previous year. Cassius Clay supported Taylor in 1848; indeed, he was instrumental in Taylor's selection over Henry Clay as the Whig candidate. He did not, however, take an active role in the campaign.

Henry Clay, still reaching for the presidency, hoped to be his party's candidate once again. Although basically opposed to slavery, he would not openly support the Wilmot Proviso. He was desperately trying to set a middle course between North and South without completely supporting or alienating either side. Because of the divisive effect of the slavery question, the Whigs preferred a candidate entirely uncommitted on the issue. As a result, they selected Taylor who not only had no stand at all, but had never shown any interest in politics—not even so much as to vote. In addition, many Whig leaders felt that the war-hero general had an excellent chance of winning, something they felt Clay could not do. This is the basis of the charge repeatedly heard during the campaign that the Whigs chose Taylor out of mere availability.

Horace Greeley, though a Whig, did not favor the nomination of Taylor, whom he felt had no experience as a statesman in addition to having no expressed views on any of the issues. Greeley had actually supported Clay, although not with any great enthusiasm. Later, Greeley was to express the opinion that Taylor's nomination and subsequent election demoralized the Whig Party. He believed the election was a triumph for Taylor rather than of Whig principles. While, as Greeley says, he "ultimately supported and voted for him, I did not hurry myself to secure his election."¹⁰ When the Whigs refused to consider supporting the Wilmot Proviso, Greeley lost his enthusiasm for their cause. He vacillated throughout the sum-

mer of 1848 between supporting Taylor as the lesser of two evils or joining the Free Soilers. It was not until September that he finally gave his support to Taylor and added the names of the Whig candidates to the masthead of the *Tribune*. He inclined towards the Free Soilers, but supported Taylor because he had little faith in third-party movements. Furthermore, he felt that the Free Soilers had no chance of winning. The Whigs insured his loyalty by nominating him for Congress to fill a three-month vacancy.¹¹

Cass, the Democratic nominee, is not pictured in the "Fording Salt River" cartoon. It would appear to have been published prior to the nominating conventions, at a time when Van Buren was being considered as the possible Democratic nominee with Taylor and Clay as Whig contenders. The cartoonist feels that only Van Buren, with the assistance of his son, can make it across Salt River.

By 1848 the forces opposed to slavery, including the Liberty Party which had been formed in 1833 to fight for the abolition of slavery, as well as Conscience Whigs—so-called because of their opposition to slavery—and Democrats were becoming more numerous and more vociferous. In October 1847, the Liberty Party had convened in Buffalo and nominated Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire, an anti-slavery Democrat, for the presidency. Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, one of the party's most capable leaders, had opposed this move, favoring a wait-and-see attitude because of his realization of the increasing sentiment for the restriction of slavery. Chase felt that only by joining forces with the factions from the major parties who opposed slavery extension could the Liberty Party attain success. He wished to remain uncommitted until he could ascertain the developments in the major parties.¹²

The Whigs met in Philadelphia on June 7, 1848, to select their candidates for the forthcoming election. On the fourth ballot, they chose General Taylor, popular hero of the Mexican War, to be their candidate for president. He had no views on any of the issues, and there was no platform. The delegates nominated Millard Fillmore, a friend of Henry Clay who leaned toward anti-slavery, as their vice-presidential candidate. The Whigs thus attempted to ignore the issue of slavery extension and win the election by using Taylor's popularity as a hero.

After Taylor's nomination by the Whigs in convention at Philadelphia, a meeting of dissatisfied Whigs was held in a committee room.¹³ Following a period of protracted discussion, the dissidents decided to hold a Free Soil convention in Buffalo. The Ohio Free Territory convention was to issue the call to insure its being an impressive non-partisan one. On June 21, the People's convention met at Columbus with one-thousand delegates including prominent Whigs, Democrats, and Liberty men in attendance. The meeting resolved that a national convention should be convened at Buffalo in August. A simultaneous call for such a meeting was issued by the Barnburners' convention at Utica, and a third group in Massachusetts concurred in the summons.¹⁴

Throughout the Northern states, local conventions and meetings were held to elect delegates to the Buffalo meeting. The men who eventually convened at Buffalo were not inexperienced idealists, but practical, and in many cases, well-known politicians. Richard Henry Dana who had made his political debut as chairman of a Free Soil meeting in July was selected as a delegate by the Boston Conscience Whigs. Charles Sumner, who lost the position of delegate to Dana, attended the meeting on his own. Charles Francis Adams was elected a delegate from his father's old district. Adams assumed a major role in the convention, becoming its chairman and ultimately the nominee for vice-president on the Free Soil ticket. The Barnburners were represented by such men as John Van Buren, Benjamin F. Butler, Preston King, David Dudley Field, and Samuel J. Tilden.

Among the prominent Liberty Party men in attendance was Salmon P. Chase. It was Chase who was largely responsible for the Liberty Party joining the Free Soilers. Chase was a leading spirit of the convention, serving as chairman of the committee which chose the nominees. He also drafted strong resolutions and added planks to the Free Soil platform advocating national improvements, homestead land grants, and a tariff for revenue. He summed up the situation at Buffalo by stating that he had always regarded the Liberty Party as a means to an end—the halt to slavery—and was ready “to give up the Liberty organization at any time when I see that the great object can be accomplished without the sacrifice of principles in less time by another

agency.”¹⁵

Thus, the situation depicted in “The Marriage of the Free Soil and Liberty Parties” (Figure 4) is not so surprising. As the proceedings of the convention got under way, it became obvious that a bargain had been made. The Barnburners selected the presidential candidate, the Liberty men wrote the platform, and the Conscience Whigs, playing the smallest role in the proceedings, selected the vice-president.

In the cartoon, Martin Van Buren (Matty) is united to a Negress representing the Liberty Party. The ceremony is performed by B.F.B. (Benjamin F. Butler), Van Buren's right-hand man. Butler who had been Van Buren's law partner and served as attorney general and secretary of war under Jackson was very active at the Buffalo convention. John Van Barnburner stands to the side encouraging his father—“Walk up, dad. You can hold your breath till the ceremony is over; and after that you can do what you please.” Van Buren muses, “I find that politics, as well as poverty, make one acquainted with strange bed-fellows.” Horace Greeley is pushing Van Buren forward saying “Go, Matty, and kiss the bride/ That is an indispensable part of the ceremony.” This is rather interesting in light of the previously mentioned fact that Greeley, although he opposed slavery, ultimately supported Taylor. It is an indication of the fact that Greeley leaned towards the Free Soil position and that this leaning was generally known. The Negress to whom Van Buren is being wedded welcomes him with outstretched arms, “Come here, my flower. You is a great stranger, and I want to get acquainted with you.” Three other Negroes view the proceedings from a distance; one says “I nebber hab berry good pinion ob the gemman; but if he ax pardon for all he hab done and said agin us, I will shake hands wid de gemman.” Another exclaims, “Mercy on me! How bashful he is!” These remarks reflect Van Buren's earlier lack of interest in attempts to abolish or restrict slavery and his avoidance of the issue. He had been distinctly tolerant of slavery in his efforts to form an alliance between Northern Democrats and the slaveholders of the South, earning the reputation of a Northern man with Southern principles.

In the ballot of the conferees for the presi-

Liberty Party witnessed a narrowing of the anti-slavery cause. The Free Soil Party was committed to the issue expressed in the Wilmot Proviso—a halt to the extension of slavery—rather than all-out abolition. A series of resolutions adopted by the Buffalo Convention expressed their stand concisely:

Resolved, That slavery, in the several states of this Union which recognise its existence depends upon state laws alone, which cannot be repealed or modified by the federal government and for which laws, that government is not responsible. We, therefore, propose no interference by Congress with slavery within the limits of any state.

Resolved, That in the judgment of this Convention Congress has no more power to make a slave than to make a king—no more power to institute or establish slavery, than to institute or establish a monarchy—no such power can be found among those specifically conferred by the constitution, or derived by just implications from them.

Resolved, That the true, and in the judgment of this Convention the only safe means of preventing extension of slavery into territory now free, is to prohibit its existence in all such territory by an act of Congress.

Resolved, That we inscribe on our banner, “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men,” and under it will fight on, and fight ever until a Triumphant victory shall reward our exertions.¹⁸

These resolutions were prefaced by a denunciation of the Baltimore and Philadelphia conventions, “The one stifling the voice of a great constituency [New York], entitled to be heard in its deliberations, and the other abandoning its distinctive principles for mere availability.”¹⁹

The convention was a gathering of as strange a collection of political bedfellows as ever convened under a single name and perhaps the most striking feature of the meeting was the vast divergence of opinion held by those in attendance. An imaginary dialogue at the convention excerpted by the Buffalo *Morning Express* from the New York *Express* lampooned the “one-legged party.”²⁰ In this dialogue, every proposal ad-

vanced by one segment is hissed by another. Thus, the statement of one man that he is in favor of a protective tariff is greeted by John Van Buren with hisses and “none of your Wiggery here.” Van Buren’s praise of the sub-treasury is in turn greeted by hisses. The statement of an “ex-Clay man” pinpoints what many felt was the true sentiment of many Free Soilers: “I don’t care for the ‘niggers’ (Hisses from the Abolitionists, and groans from the Van Buren men). I’m here for revenge, ‘revenge,’ ‘REVENGE.’”²¹

Henry B. Stanton, an abolitionist and supporter of the Liberty Party, was a member of the committee that drafted the Free Soil platform. His assessment, at a later date, of the convention at Buffalo sums up the general feeling towards the event: “It was a motley assembly. Pro-slavery Democrats were there to avenge the wrongs of Martin Van Buren. Free Soil Democrats were there to punish the [political] assassins of Silas Wright. Pro-slavery Whigs were there to strike down General Taylor because he had dethroned their idol, Henry Clay, in the Philadelphia Convention. Anti-slavery Whigs were there, breathing the spirit of the departed John Quincy Adams. Abolitionists of all shades of opinion were present, from the darkest type to those of a milder hue, who shared the views of Salmon P. Chase.”²²

Word of the developments at Buffalo was received with varying amounts of dismay by loyal Whigs, Democrats, and Liberty men alike. Democrats were horrified to find the most well-known and distinguished member of their party at the head of the Free Soil ticket. Accusations of treason appeared in the Democratic press and political ranks. Representative Thomas F. Flournoy of Virginia in a speech reported in the *Congressional Globe* predicted “the treason of Arnold will be forgotten in view of the greater baseness and treachery of Martin Van Buren.”²³ This same charge is expressed in “The Little Magician & the Modern Witch of Endor” (Figure 5). Benedict Arnold’s ghost addresses Matty Van Buren and Abby Fulsome—“Why has thou disquieted me, to bring me up? Behold the Government is rent from thee, & is given to thy neighbor, even to Cass. The Buffaloes will be delivered into the hand of thine enemies, & thou and thy Son shall be with me.” The quotation is a paraphrasing of



FIGURE 5.—“The Little Magician & the Modern Witch of Endor” shows Abby Fulsome calling up the ghost of Benedict Arnold, who predicts defeat for Martin Van Buren. This is another cartoon published by J. Baillie of New York City. (Smithsonian negative 54028.)

a passage in the Old Testament (I Samuel 28:7–19) wherein Saul has the witch of Endor call up the spirit of Samuel to advise him. The witch (Abby Fulsome) in the caricature is apparently Abby Folsom, an Englishwoman who came to the United States in 1837 and became a prominent advocate of anti-slavery issues.

Editorial comment in the nation’s newspapers was also critical of Van Buren and the Barnburners. They were accused of hiding their true purposes behind the humanitarian motive which

they managed to keep foremost in the minds of the mass of Free Soilers. The *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, a Whig organ, charged that “From the first it was apparent, whatever fine, high sounding names were used, that the convention was nothing more than a mere political gathering desired by those who had control of it to subserve very commonplace and paltry schemes of revenge for real or supposed injuries, and to promote views of ulterior political aggrandisement wholly independent of the principles of free soil.”²⁴ The

great mass of honest Free Soilers was “literally humbugged, bamboozled, traded off and, sold out to Martin Van Buren and the Barnburners.”²⁵ Many Liberty men felt cheated by the Barnburners’ takeover of their issue. Van Buren’s nomination had been adopted unanimously, but many delegates had left the convention when they realized what was happening.

Whigs and Democrats alike had harsh words for Van Buren and his followers. William L. Yancey, an Alabama Democrat, declared the Barnburners had shown themselves to be “Whigs in

disguise and abolitionists, who made the Wilmot Proviso the corner stone of their political edifice.”²⁶ A pamphlet entitled “The Van Buren Platform, or Facts for the Present Supporters of Martin Van Buren” wondered if it was “within the range of even possibility that any true Whig, or any man opposed to the institution of slavery, or any friend of the right of petition, or of the policy of protection of American industry, or of internal improvements, or of an honest and well ordered administration of public affairs, could for a moment countenance such a nomination.”²⁷



FIGURE 6.—“The Buffalo Hunt” shows Martin Van Buren’s use of the slavery issue, represented here by the buffalo which he is riding, to defeat Cass and Taylor. This cartoon was published by H. R. Robinson of New York City. (Smithsonian negative 54035.)

The author of the pamphlet attempted to persuade Whigs that Van Buren was not worthy of their support and that voting for him would merely increase the chances of a Cass victory. The Whigs had been complacent about the Free Soil ticket until they realized that the Democrats were not to be, as they had believed, the only ones to lose votes to the new party.

The fear on the part of both Whigs and Democrats that they would lose votes to Van Buren and the Free Soilers is exemplified in the cartoons. In four of the cartoons, Van Buren is portrayed as splitting either the Whig or the Democratic vote. Two of these were published by H. R.

Robinson, a lithographer who worked in New York City from about 1830 to 1851, and was one of the more prolific publishers of political cartoons. Robinson's cartoons were most often critical of Van Buren, which makes one wonder if his prediction of a Van Buren victory in "The Buffalo Hunt" (Figure 6) and "The Strife between an Old Hunker, a Barnburner and a No Party Man" (Figure 7) is actually a warning to Whigs and Democrats rather than an indication of support for Van Buren. In "The Buffalo Hunt" Van Buren is pictured riding a buffalo over Salt River thumbing his nose at Cass and Taylor whom he has knocked into the river. Van

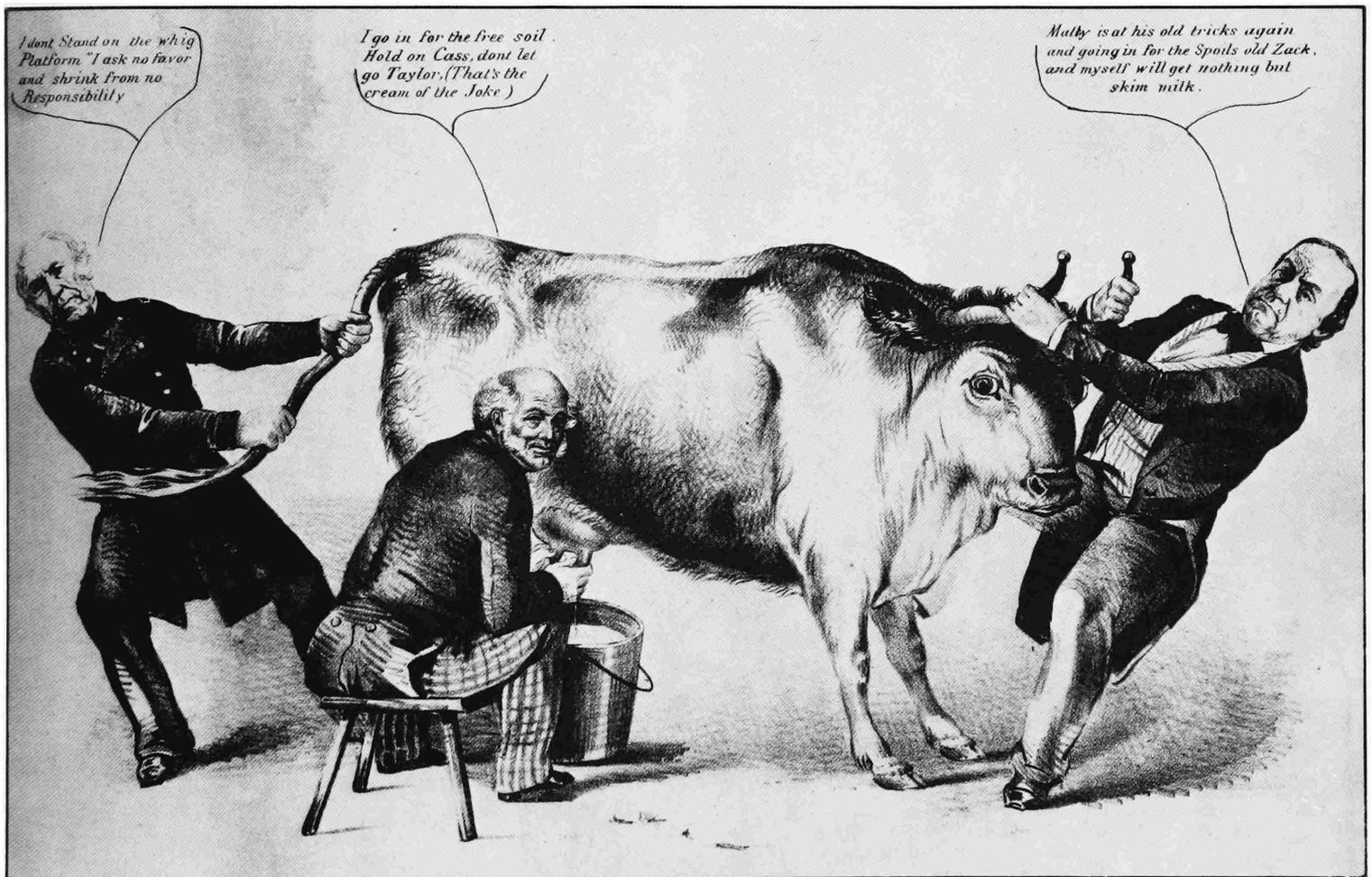


FIGURE 7.—"The Strife Between an Old Hunker, A Barnburner, and a No Party Man" has Van Buren milking the cow (slavery issue), while Cass and Taylor hold it still for him. This cartoon also was published by H. R. Robinson of New York City. (Smithsonian negative 53748.)

Buren has captured the Free Soil nomination and Taylor says "If I had stood on the Whig platform firmly, this would not have happened," while Cass blames the Wilmot Proviso for his predicament, "Confound this Wilmot Proviso, I'm afraid it will lead to something bad."

"The Strife between an old Hunker [Cass], a Barnburner [Van Buren], and a No Party Man [Taylor]" shows Van Buren milking a cow which Cass and Taylor are holding still for him. The cow represents the slavery issue which Cass and

Taylor are attempting to hold back, while Van Buren, on the other hand, is "milking" the issue for support. Van Buren is saying "I go in for the free soil. Hold on Cass, dont let go Taylor, (That's the cream of the Joke)." Taylor says "I dont Stand on the whig Platform. I ask no favor and shrink from no Responsibility," while Cass insists that "Matty is at his old tricks again and going in for the Spoils old Zack, and myself will get nothing but skim milk."

These cartoons demonstrate clearly the fear of

FIGURE 8.—"Shooting the Christmas Turkey" shows Van Buren making off with the prize—the presidency—while Cass and Taylor argue. This was published by J. Baillie of New York City. (Smithsonian negative 53953.)



the Democrats and the Whigs that Van Buren would divide their strength, and that this was his intention. "Shooting the Christmas Turkey" (Figure 8) published by James Baillie makes the same point. While Cass and Taylor are busy "disputing about the preliminaries," the fox (Van Buren) makes off with the turkey (the presidency). Cass insists on long shots while Taylor says he prefers "coming to close quarters." It is Millard Fillmore, vice-presidential nominee on the Whig ticket, who observes that the "infernal fox" carried off the prize. A young man (David Wilmot?) stands behind Van Buren waving the Wilmot Proviso and cheering, "Huzza! Huzza! Victory! victory!" Horace Greeley sits near the turkey post with a tally sheet with the names of Cass and Taylor on it. He is thumbing his nose at Cass and Taylor, an indication of his contempt for both men. Since Van Buren has captured the prize, Greeley no longer has to bother with either of them.

Baillie, a New York lithographer, who at one time did coloring for Nathaniel Currier, also published "Fording Salt River," "The Modern Gilpins . . .," and "The Little Magician & the Modern Witch of Endor."

Baillie issued many prints during the 1840s aimed at popular consumption and for wide distribution. His activities in this line were similar to those of Currier and Ives.²⁸ "Fording Salt River" and "Shooting the Christmas Turkey" predict a Van Buren victory, while "The Little Magician & the Modern Witch of Endor" brings up the traitor charge and indicates a Cass victory in the prediction that "the Government is rent from thee, & is given to thy neighbor, even to Cass." "The Modern Gilpins . . ." finds Van Buren slumped in the mud and the Democratic Party falling apart. Baillie obviously did not let partisan feelings prevent him from issuing prints acceptable to either side; he also seems to have had a bent towards allegory. The only allegorical prints in the group ("Modern Gilpins . . ." and "The Little Magician . . .") were published by him. The biblical scene which Baillie used in his "Little Magician & the Modern Witch of Endor" was evidently a familiar one to his audience. In 1777, Benjamin West painted this scene as did William Sydney Mount in 1828. Baillie's depiction is a satire of the

episode, but it belongs to the same stream of inspiration.

There is one cartoon in the collection which provides a nearly accurate picture of the actual result of the election. "The Presidential Fishing Party of 1848" (Figure 9) shows Taylor, standing on the bank marked "Constitution," catching all the fish. He states that he knows of "no better Rock than this to stand upon, for I have always noticed, that though the fish may wander off now and then, they are sure to come back to this spot, knowing that here they will find the most wholesome food." Van Buren, standing on the opposite bank, "Free Soil," laments that the fish "are not quite so fond of this side of the stream as I had expected, and my hook and line has been used so often it has grown too old and rusty to hold anything." This is apparently a reference to Van Buren's age and past experience. Van Buren's line is broken, and the fish labeled New York is swimming toward Taylor's line with a hook and broken line in its mouth. John P. Hale decides he "may as well pull up, and go home, Matty's got my bait, and I stand no chance." Cass stands farther downstream not getting a bite and wishing he had "advocated the power of Congress to make improvements in Rivers and Harbors," because the "confounded river is so filled with weeds, that my line gets caught every time I throw in." One of the objections many Democrats, especially the Northwest Free Soil ones, had to Cass was his supposed opposition to internal improvements and aid to interstate commerce which were so important to the economy of their constituencies.

Taylor was the winner of the presidential fishing derby, but he did not catch all the fish. In fact, if the pivotal state of New York had gone to Cass rather than Taylor, Cass would have been the victor. Martin Van Buren and the Free Soil Party for this reason can be said to have given the election to Taylor. Both the Whigs and the Democrats lost votes to Van Buren. The Whigs, indeed, were the heavier losers in terms of numbers. The Democrats, however, lost votes in New York which caused them to lose that state and, as a result, the election. This development is not foreseen in the "Fishing Party." The publisher of this cartoon as well as of "The Marriage of the Free Soil and Liberty Parties" and the "Utica

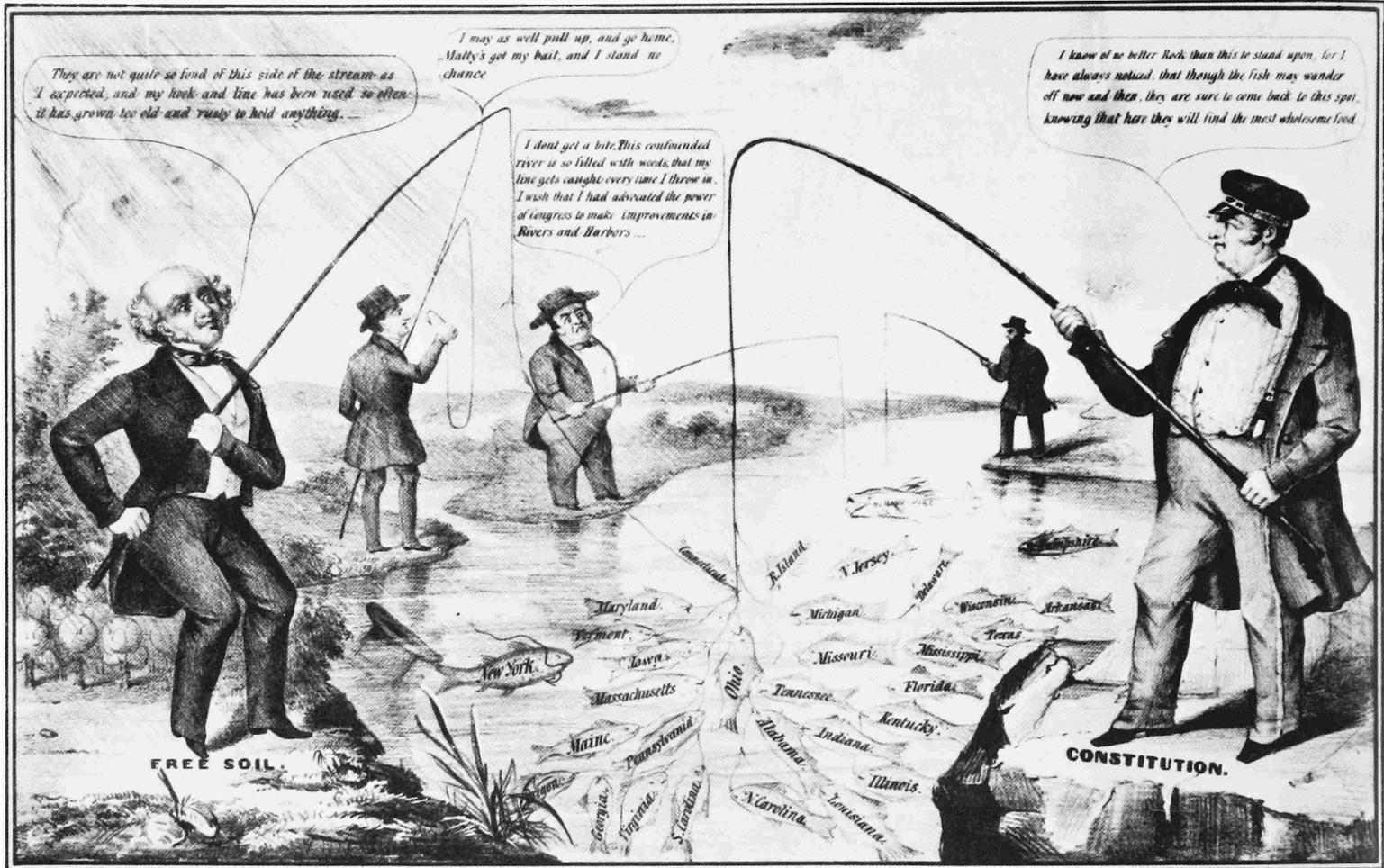


FIGURE 9.—“The Presidential Fishing Party of 1848” portrays Taylor catching all the fish—state electoral votes—while Van Buren, Cass, and Hale express various reasons for their misfortune. The fish marked “N. Hampshire” on Cass’s line and the line leading from the broken end of Van Buren’s line to the fish are not part of the original cartoon. They were drawn in by someone at a later date. There are also pencil additions below the title: “Flying Dutchman” beneath Van Buren, “alias Cass/Salt River/Nov. 7th 1848” under Cass, and “President March 4th 1849” under Taylor. The original print was published by Peter Smith in New York City. (Smithsonian negative 54019.)

Convention” was Peter Smith. Harry T. Peters in his book on *Currier and Ives* maintains that Peter Smith was a pseudonym for Nathaniel Currier. It was a common practice to issue political cartoons anonymously, probably to avoid any retaliation on business. The address of No. 2 Spruce Street printed on the Smith cartoons is the same as that of the premises occupied by Currier. In addition, many Peter Smith cartoons were sold in the final remainder sale of Currier and Ives.²⁹ As in the case of the Baillie cartoons,

Smith’s cartoons represent more than one point of view. The “Fishing Party” could very well have been a Whig campaign item. Either the Whigs or the Democrats could make use of the “Marriage” cartoon because of its criticism of Van Buren’s motives. On the other hand, the “Utica Convention” is rather critical of the Democrats.

This paper has dealt in detail with only nine cartoons from the campaign. There are additional surviving ones in other collections which bear out the evidence of those treated here. Occasionally,

a more subtle or local issue may be introduced, but the main points are the same. Taken as a whole, the 1848 cartoons clearly indicate the importance of the Free Soil issue in the election campaign. The split in the Democratic Party, the formation of the Free Soil Party, the attempts of the Whigs and the Democrats to avoid the slavery issue, and the effect of all this on the election are the issues mirrored in the cartoons.

The Free Soilers lost the election and were soon to disappear as a political force, but their views would not disappear. The major parties were never the same after the election of 1848. The Democratic Party emerged with a decided Southern sympathy, since the majority of those opposed to slavery had left its ranks. The Whig

Party had begun the process of disintegration which ended with the formation of the Republican Party. The Republican uprising of 1856 was clearly foreshadowed in the events of 1848.³⁰ During the years from 1848 to 1856 some Free Soilers drifted back to their old party allegiances, just as the Barnburners returned to the Democratic ranks. Others remained outside the fold of either party and, in some cases, provided the balance of power between them—in the 1848 balloting the Free Soilers had managed to elect thirteen members to Congress. In 1856, Free Soilers became Republicans and continued their battle under a slightly modified slogan, "Free Soil, Free Speech, and Frémont." These events, too, can be traced in the cartoons of that period.

Notes

1. Harry T. Peters, *American on Stone: The Other Printmakers to the American People*, p. 46.

2. Allan Nevins and Frank Weitenkampf, *A Century of Political Cartoons; Caricature in the United States from 1800 to 1900*, p. 34. "A new map of the United States with the additional territories" printed by Anthony Imbert, 1829, is supposedly the first cartoon lithographed in America.

3. A detailed analysis of the personalities and issues preceding and involved in the election of 1848 is given in Joseph G. Rayback's recently published monograph *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*.

4. De Alva Stanwood Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York*, vol. 2: 1833-1861; and Herbert D. A. Donovan, *The Barnburners* contain full accounts of the differences between the two factions of the New York Democratic Party. For a general background of the political situation of the period, consult Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era: 1828-1848* or Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson*.

5. *Niles' National Register* 74: p. 325.

6. E. Cobham Brewer, *The Reader's Handbook of Famous Names in Fiction, Allusion, References, Proverbs, Plots, Stories, and Poem*, p. 424.

7. Joseph G. Raybeck, editor. "Martin Van Buren's Desire for Revenge in the Campaign of 1848," pp. 707-716.

8. The position held by Cass is stated in the so-called Nicholson letter. See Frank B. Woodford, *Lewis Cass, The Last Jeffersonian*, pp. 251-252.

9. See Rayback, *Free Soil*, pp. 62-68, for a discussion of Polk's cabinet appointments.

10. Horace Greeley, *Recollections of a Busy Life*, p. 215.

11. Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *Horace Greeley: Nineteenth Century Crusader*. See pp. 120ff for an account of Greeley's feelings regarding the election and his reasons for finally supporting Taylor.

12. *Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase*, pp. 116-117.

13. Theodore C. Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest*, p. 129.

14. Salmon P. Chase, *The Radical Democracy of New York and the Independent Democracy*. Page 2.

15. *Diary and Correspondence of Chase*, p. 119.

16. Charles Francis Adams, *Richard Henry Dana: A Biography*, vol. 1, pp. 141-142.

17. Oliver Dyer, *Phonographic Report of the proceedings of the National Free Soil Convention at Buffalo, New York*, p. 31.

18. *Official Proceedings of the National Free Soil Convention*, p. 2.

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Buffalo Morning Express*, August 9, 1848.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Henry B. Stanton, *Random Recollections*, pp. 162-163.

23. Alto Lee Whitehurst, *Martin Van Buren and the Free Soil Movement*, p. 156, quoting from the *Appendix to Congressional Globe*, 1st Session, 30th Congress, vol. 19, p. 847.

24. *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, August 13, 1848. The *Commercial Advertiser* devoted a great deal of space to the convention in an attempt to disparage it.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Niles' National Register* 74: p. 325.

27. *The Van Buren Platform; or Facts for the Present Supporters of Martin Van Buren*, p. 1. Similar views were expressed in another pamphlet, *Inconsistencies and Hypocrisy of Martin Van Buren on the Question of Slavery*.

28. Peters, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 84.

29. Harry T. Peters, *Currier & Ives: Printmakers to the American People*, pp. 75-76.

30. Adams, *op. cit.* (note 16), p. 131.

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