



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: North of “Bleeding Kansas”: The 1850s Political Crisis in Nebraska Territory

Full Citation: James B Potts, “North of ‘Bleeding Kansas’: The 1850s Political Crisis in Nebraska Territory,” *Nebraska History* 73 (1992): 110-118.

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1992Politics1850s.pdf>

Date: 1/20/2015

Article Summary: The creation of Kansas and Nebraska in 1854 climaxed a decade-long effort by Senator Stephen A Douglas and other expansionists to open the area west of Missouri and Iowa for settlement and railroad expansion. However, this evolved into a debate over the extension of slavery.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Stephen A Douglas, Thomas B Cuming, Mark Izard, J Sterling Morton, William Richardson, James Buchanan, Robert W Furnas, Fenner Ferguson, Bird B Chapman, Benjamin P Rankin, Samuel W Black, Samuel G Daily, Experience Estabrook, James Craig

Keywords: Kansas-Nebraska Act; Missouri Compromise; “Bleeding Kansas”; Nebraska Act of 1854; Omaha Land Company; “Florence Legislature”; Florence Secession; Lecompton Constitution

Photographs / Images: Broadside issued by the “rump” legislature at Florence, Nebraska Territory, January 9, 1858; Robert W Furnas, 1854; Anti-Morton diatribe for supporting land sales in Nebraska Territory, 1860; Samuel W Black; Samuel G Daily; Experience Estabrook

NORTH OF "BLEEDING KANSAS": THE 1850s POLITICAL CRISIS IN NEBRASKA TERRITORY

By James B. Potts

The creation of Kansas and Nebraska territories by act of Congress in 1854 climaxed a decade-long effort by Senator Stephen A. Douglas and other western expansionists to open the area west of Missouri and Iowa for settlement and railroad development. Although born of western politics and railroad promotion, the territorial issue evolved into a debate over the extension of slavery. Ordinarily, the Kansas-Nebraska Act might not have aroused much contention. As pressures for organization of the trans-Missouri region mounted, most restless Americans at mid-century regarded the opening of this vast area to settlement as long overdue.¹ But Senator Douglas, the measure's primary author, included in the territorial bill a section that provided for self-determination for the territories — commonly called popular sovereignty — not only as a concession to settlers, but also as a national solution to the slavery problem. In order to make popular sovereignty meaningful (and also to ensure southern support for the measure), Douglas's bill also provided for the repeal of the Missouri Compromise's restriction of slavery north of the line, 36° 30' — in effect, opening both Kansas and Nebraska territories to the expansion of slavery.

Contrary to Douglas's hopes for diminished tension, the Kansas-

Nebraska Act kindled new fires of sectional discord marked by intense congressional debate and eventually the shattering of the existing national party alignment. The Democratic party lost its ascendancy in the non-slaveholding "free" states (as anti-Nebraska Democrats withdrew in protest), while the new northern-based Republican party triumphed with a commitment to federal aid for economic development and a halt to the western extension of slavery.²

Application of the act also created the well known historical memory of "Bleeding Kansas" as popular sovereignty became a pawn in the national contest over slavery. The stipulation by Congress that the residents of the newly organized territories could decide for themselves whether or not to legislate slavery invited pro- and anti-slavery parties in Kansas to engage in what became a viciously fought struggle for political control. Kansas Territory soon became, in the public mind at least, a bloody battleground for slavery and freedom, and "Bleeding Kansas" itself a cause of national controversy — and for a time, the dominating issue in American politics.³

By contrast, slavery differences did not disrupt the frontier territory to the north and there was, of course, no "Bleeding Nebraska." That territory, which lacked a real party system until 1859, experienced political conflict over such local issues as the location of the capital and schemes to join its

southern section to Kansas. After 1858, local political parties did become more involved in national concerns. Still, Nebraskans stopped short of joining the mainstream of American political activity that was increasingly dominated by the crisis of slavery and disunion.

Within the cloudy meaning of party labels during the 1850s, Nebraska was a Democratic territory: Party regulars occupied the territorial offices until 1861, and most residents professed loyalty to the national Democratic administrations that controlled the federal patronage and the federal purse. Still, party lines were not well drawn in the territory, and national issues rarely intruded into election campaigns before 1858. Political competition involved local and personal interests, and electoral contests were essentially struggles over issues of governmental control and economic development. A major difference stemmed from a bitter controversy over the location of the territorial capital, an issue that dominated political discussions for several years, and was exacerbated and prolonged by personal rivalries, factional disputes, and sectional divisions within the territory.

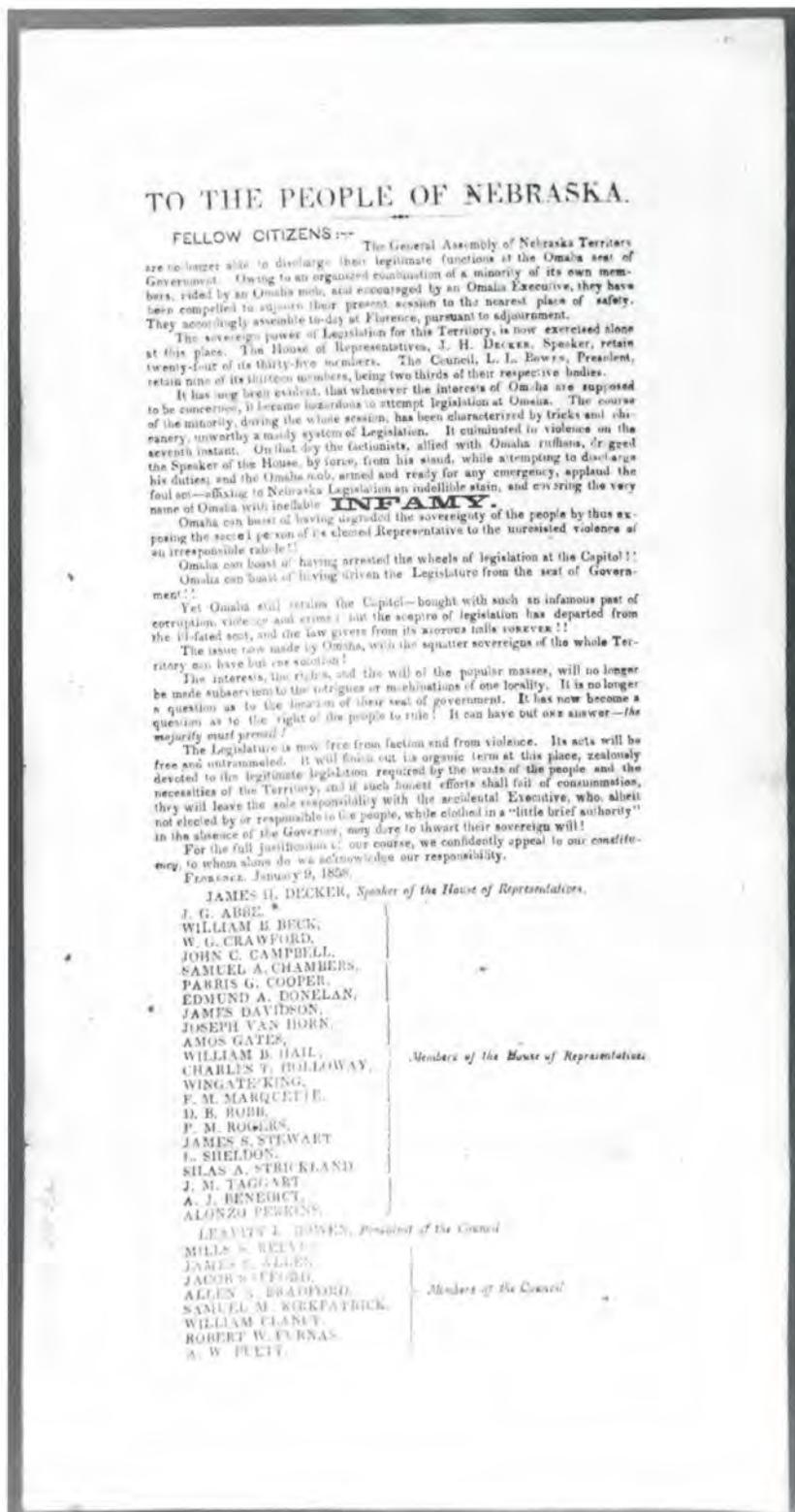
The Nebraska Act of 1854 permitted the governor to designate the meeting place of the first assembly and provided that thereafter the site was to be determined by the legislature. In December 1854 Territorial Secretary Thomas B. Cuming (then acting governor and also a member of the Omaha

James B. Potts is associate professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-LaCrosse.

Land Company) named Omaha City the first capital. The first legislature, stacked by Cuming to do his bidding, approved the secretary's choice on February 22, 1855. However, Omaha's status as capital was never secure. Representatives of Bellevue, Florence, and the South Platte towns refused to let the issue die, and after 1855 made repeated attempts to move the government elsewhere. In 1856 "removalist" members of the second legislature attempted without success to relocate the capital at a place called Chester. In 1857 Governor Mark Izard, who like Cuming was linked with Omaha townsite promoters, vetoed a bill passed by the third assembly to move the capital to Douglas City — "a floating town," presumably located in Lancaster County. Another removal effort by the fourth assembly culminated in the complete breakdown of legislative organization. During the 1857-58 session, after a brawl that witnessed "the brandishing of dirks and threats of shooting," the anti-Omaha majority (composed mostly of South Platte members) bolted the capital and adjourned to nearby Florence. The "Florence Legislature" then voted to change the government site to Neapolis, but the new governor, William Richardson, refused to recognize the action.⁴

The Florence Secession, for all its excitement, produced little in the way of legislation. It did, however, reawaken interest in the South Platte region for annexation of southern Nebraska to Kansas. In 1855 J. Sterling Morton, then a member of the assembly from Nebraska City, had introduced a bill memorializing Congress to move the boundary of Kansas Territory northward to the Platte River. Opponents killed the resolution, and the matter slumbered until 1858.

Broadside issued by the "rump" legislature at Florence, Nebraska Territory, January 9, 1858. (NSHS-D637-131)





Florence, Nebraska Territory. Leslie's Illustrated Weekly, December 4, 1858.

After the Florence affair, however, South Platte politicians revived the idea and — perhaps encouraged by Democrats from Kansas and Missouri, who promoted annexation as “the means of settling the vexed Kansas question” — designed a series of petitions, resolutions, and mass meetings during the early months of 1858 affirming the plan. Although Republican opposition in Kansas and in Congress forestalled its success, the movement for annexation attracted large support in the southern Nebraska counties.⁵

Ironically, factional politics began to give way to a new partisanship, increasingly defined by national political developments, at a time when physical division of the territory was being argued as a possible solution to resolve the sectional infighting. Local issues continued to be familiar ones concerning federal aid and economic development, but after the Florence fiasco, the capital issue no longer

dominated political activity as it had previously. After 1858, in fact, political activity was steadily rechanneled along party lines and although important distinctions existed between local and national issues, political divisions in Nebraska began to conform more closely to the national party pattern.

Indeed, on January 8, 1858 — the very day that riot dissolved the assembly — party leaders met in Omaha and issued a call for a Democratic territorial convention.⁶ On June 8, 1858, Nebraska Democrats gathered at Plattsmouth, endorsed James Buchanan and the Democratic Cincinnati Platform of 1856, and affirmed the principle of popular sovereignty. Two days later Walker Wyman, editor of the *Omaha City Times*, publicly proclaimed the demise of “local, sectional and personal influences” in Nebraska politics. “We are now likely to be bound together,” he forecasted, “by the closer and more rational ties of a political organization wherein mere local interest or sectional strife or personal emolument shall be lost sight of in [the] combined action for the sake of principles.”⁷

Despite the prediction that the Nebraska Democracy was “approaching a new era,” Democratic power was on the decline by 1858.⁸ The combined activities of local and national representatives of the party had already begun to undermine Democratic hegemony within the territory. Local disaffection towards the Democratic administration of Nebraska was rife. Residents particularly complained of the exploitive activities and the low quality of the federally appointed officials. The people of Nebraska “want no more adventurers sent amongst them, who has a fortune, political or otherwise, to repair, and who would regard the territory as a fat goose, to be plucked,” declared one critic of the Izard administration.⁹ “No territory since the organization of this government,” proclaimed *The Nebraska Republican* in 1860, “ever had a worse set of officials saddled on it than has Nebraska. . . . Those even of Kansas, infamous and lost to every sentiment of honor, as they were, were no worse.”¹⁰ Official meddling in what many residents held to be purely local affairs, especially the identification of

Cuming and Izard with Omaha and north-of-the-Platte interests, offended many and, however exaggerated, gave support to the later Republican charge that sectional animus was due mainly to the "corruption and ineptitude" of Democratic administration.¹¹

Whether or not federal maladministration was the main factor in undermining Democratic control in the territory, the party was troubled from the start by ineffective leadership, sectional partisanship, and the legacy of the capital feud. In the spring of 1858, when organization of local politics along party lines was imminent, the editor of the *Bellevue Gazette* declared the move premature because of pressing local issues. Until the "vexed capital question" was disposed of, he surmised, "No party organization will be of avail to secure harmony."¹²

The prediction was borne out immediately. The endorsement of the South Platte annexation by numerous party leaders in 1858 and 1859, coincidental to the efforts of the Democrats to organize on a territory-wide basis, indicated that the Nebraska Democracy still divided along sectional lines. Intrigue over place and power, especially after the death of Secretary Cuming in the spring and the resignation of Governor Richardson in the fall of 1858, intensified party divisions. J. Sterling Morton, who determined since 1857 to become Cuming's successor as territorial secretary, deserted his South Platte colleagues during the Florence Secession of January 1858 and supported the Omaha minority in an apparent attempt to win official backing for his candidacy. Ambition for office eventually led him to break with delegate Fenner Ferguson, also a Southern partisan and a former political ally. Angered by Ferguson's failure to push his candidacy in Washington, Morton turned against the delegate, declaring that he "had done and should do all [he] could to help [Omaha stalwart, Bird B.] Chapman and damn Ferguson for having proved false to [him] in [his] contest for the sec-



Robert W. Furnas, 1854. (NSHS-P853)... (below) Furnas was editor of the *Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville), which on October 4, 1860, published a diatribe against Morton for supporting land sales in Nebraska Territory.

From the *Nebraska City Press*.

Squatters of Nebraska Read
! ! ! ! !
WHO IS RESPONSIBLE

J. Sterling Morton petitioned the President to force your Lands into Market!

He Refused to Sign A Remonstrance Against the Sales!

THE CHARGE PROVEN!

Because the Testimony of an Unimpeachable Witness!

Squatters of Nebraska! You who are not suffering under a heavy burden of debt, from your Lands being forced into Market, read the Evidence, and judge for yourselves!

retaryship." Morton's activities were paralleled by machinations of other would-be leaders who maneuvered politically to advance personal, local, and sectional causes.¹³

The designation of a territorial printer during the 1858 legislative session widened the rift within the Democratic organization. Two days prior to adjournment, a joint session of the Council and House selected Councilman Robert W. Furnas, editor of the *Brownville Nebraska Advertiser* and a bitter personal enemy of Morton, as the territorial printer. Morton, who had won the appointment as territorial secretary and who was soon to be acting territorial governor, had already informed the national administration that the practice of allowing the lawmakers to select the public printer was "full of evils," particularly because the party had only recently organized in the territory. As "the legislature about to convene has a Republican and Know Nothing majority in the lower house . . . the matter of the public printing should be taken out of their hands entirely."¹⁴ Morton accordingly rejected Furnas's claims, and awarded the printing to the *Omaha Nebraskian* and the *Nebraska City News*, two "reliable" Democratic journals.¹⁵

Morton's handling of the printing question provoked a storm of protest. The legislative opposition, led by Furnas and Benjamin P. Rankin, charged Morton with trampling underfoot the sovereign rights of the people merely to allocate the printing to his own enterprise, the *Nebraska City News*.¹⁶ Throughout the spring of 1859, complaints poured into the Treasury Department, charging Morton with incompetence, graft, and abuse of office. The secretary's defenders countered these missives by denouncing his critics as "the worst possible enemies of the democracy, and the democratic organization — bolters, disaffected soreheads, sleepy, Janus-faced Democrats, consistent in nothing but their persistent and diabolical opposition to the organization and success of the



Samuel W. Black. (NSHS-P853)

democratic party."¹⁷

Democratic unity and party prestige were further damaged by the actions of national party officials. The extreme pro-southern, pro-slavery attitude of the Buchanan administration alienated many Nebraska Democrats, and caused an open breach between the president and Senator Stephen A. Douglas, particularly over the administration's endorsement of the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution adopted in Kansas. National Democratic opposition to land grants and appropriations for homesteads, railroads and other internal improve-

ments, and Buchanan's decision to begin public land sales in Nebraska in September 1858, also troubled local Democrats, who found it increasingly difficult to support administration policies in the face of mounting hostility from within the territory.¹⁸

In Nebraska, still feeling the pinch of depression, news of the pending land sales aroused intense anger, particularly in the South Platte counties. There, mass meetings and petitions demanded postponement of the sales. Honest squatters and "land poor" speculators denounced the sales as a fraud to divest the "honest settler" of his possessions; the sales could only benefit speculators and land jobbers "who are now hovering around the land offices and who will speedily monop-

lize all the desired unsold lands . . . by entire sections and townships."¹⁹

The land sales not only weakened Democratic influence in the territory, but also disclosed the continuing North Platte-South Platte cleavage within the party. For while the sales were loudly condemned in the southern counties, opposition north of the Platte was less pronounced. Many North Platte denizens, particularly around Omaha, approved. The *Omaha Nebraskian*, still speaking for the town company crowd, denounced South Platte critics of the land sales as speculators, less concerned with the plight of the squatter than with potential wealth to be derived from railroad development. Opposition leaders, charged the *Nebraskian*, "figuring to control the location of railroads in case grants of land should be given for their construction, opposed the sale of Nebraska lands at least until the routes of railroads were known."²⁰

Given the importance of the patronage and funds that flowed from Washington, and the likelihood of major party change, the national party crisis predictably affected local politics. Increasingly after the Buchanan-Douglas split, epithets like "Lecompton," "Anti-Lecompton," and "Black Republican" found their way into the local political dialogue for the purpose of discrediting political rivals either at home or in Washington.²¹ During the printing controversy in 1858, Morton had defended his position in Washington by assailing his critics as "our political enemies." "If the Department refuses to sustain me in the position which I have taken," he informed his superiors, "I shall always be governed by an irresponsible, Black Republican, nigger-loving legislature."²² Furnas retaliated by declaring that the national administration had determined to withhold the benefits of the patronage from all except "the few who profess to be Lecompton Democrats and . . . worship at the shrine of Mr. Buchanan."²³

National divisions produced a

damaging upsurge of local voter discontent. In local elections during the summer of 1858, dissident Democrats joined other malcontents — “mostly new men, but a short time in the territory” — in county “Opposition” or “Independent” movements against the Democratic establishment.²⁴ Denounced as “Republicans, Know-Nothings, and Soreheads,” Independents captured every county and legislative post in Otoe County, and gained partial victories in several other counties.²⁵

The indifference of Democratic party leaders to local needs and requests, the influx of new settlers bringing with them free soil inclinations, and growing discontent with local administration, reflected in the electoral defeats of 1858, pointed toward the collapsing Democratic hegemony by early 1859. Local and national disruptions had irrevocably split the Nebraska Democrats into two wings, the regular and anti-administration factions. The former comprised generally the territorial bureaucracy, supported by those enjoying federal patronage. In the latter could be found Rankin, Furnas, and others opposed to the administration in matters of national party policy, personality, and patronage disposal.

The new governor, Samuel Black, led the party regulars. A Pennsylvania Democrat and a longtime Buchanan man, Black sided with the president and worked to purge the party of dissenters. Within a short time his zealous support of unpopular national policies effectively alienated a large segment of the territorial population. Equally disconcerting to the governor was the opposition he encountered within his own party. A majority of local Democrats attacked the chief executive for his insensitivity toward local demands, his strong pro-administration stance on divisive national issues, and his alleged opposition to local self-determination.²⁶

A major intraparty threat to Black arose from the dominant position



Samuel G. Daily. (NSHS-P853)

which the Rankin-Furnas forces assumed within the Democracy by August 1859. At convention time the anti-Black group was in control and nominated Experience Estabrook as the party's delegate candidate over the protests of the administration men.²⁷ Adopting a platform calculated to conciliate both factions, the Democrats endorsed the administration of James Buchanan, the doctrine of state's rights, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act. They also urged federal appropriations for internal improvements and passage of a national homestead act.²⁸

Nebraska Democrats faced serious external opposition, however, since the Republicans had not remained idle in the face of party setbacks. Encouraged by the struggle between the anti-administration and regular Democrats, Republicans — still calling themselves Independents — assembled at Bellevue in August 1859 to nominate a delegate. The convention, according to party leaders, represented “those citizens who disapprove the policy of the National Government during the last six years . . . who deplore the convulsions occasioned by the . . . wicked

repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and by the outrages perpetrated and permitted in the territory of Kansas; [and] who hold that the decision . . . in the case of Dred Scott is erroneous and ought to be reversed.”²⁹

The Independents' convention selected Samuel G. Daily, a Peru lawyer, as its candidate for delegate. A member of the legislature who had been an active free soiler in Indiana before emigrating to Nebraska, Daily was a shrewd campaigner and an effective stump speaker.³⁰ Moreover, as a South Platte resident, he attracted important support in the southern counties as a sectional candidate. The Independents also disclaimed “Republican” affiliation and ignored the national Republican party's stand on congressional intervention and the nonextension of slavery, declaring that territorial residents “should be allowed to elect their own officers, and regulate their own domestic institutions.” Otherwise, aside from a general endorsement of the national Republican party, Daily entered the canvass on a platform remarkably similar to that of the Democrats.³¹

While both parties argued the merits of Buchanan, slavery, and free homesteads, the political canvass of 1859 turned largely on local issues. In a pre-election prognosis, one commentator noted: “The one [Estabrook] is a friend of the people and the counties north of the Reserve, and the other is a friend of the South Platte country and of Nemaha county in particular.”³² Campaign rhetoric subsequently confirmed this judgment.

During the campaign Estabrook and his supporters attacked Daily for his supposed participation in the South Platte separatist movement and dubbed him a “local” and “sectional” politician. Daily's campaign tactics were also attacked; he allegedly campaigned as a Republican north of the Platte while appealing to sectional prejudices in the South Platte counties.³³ Similarly, while Daily's friends boosted him as “the first man who had ever

humbled the pride of Omaha," they assailed Estabrook as an Omaha man.³⁴ "If General Estabrook is elected," declared Furnas, "good-bye to any South Platte appropriations." Furnas, like many South Platte Democrats, had switched his support to Daily as a local candidate "in the absence of any political issue."³⁵

A member of the House Committee on Elections described the contest as "one of the grossest instances of fraudulent voting that has ever come to knowledge."³⁶ When the vote was counted, Estabrook had seemingly defeated Daily by 300 votes. But Daily contested the election and took his fight to Congress. There he persuaded the Republican-dominated House of Representatives that he, not Estabrook, was the legally elected delegate.³⁷

While resident Democrats generally interpreted Estabrook's showing as a party victory, the campaign added to party difficulties in Nebraska. The seating of a Republican delegate in Congress ended the Democrat stranglehold on federal funds. Moreover, the breach in party ranks had not ended, for both pro- and anti-Samuel Black factions appeared in the territorial assembly along with a sizable Independent-Republican group. The Rankin Democrats, still looking to discredit the governor, joined Republican members to pass a bill outlawing slavery in the territory. Governor Black, confronted with the dilemma of going against the local will or of opposing the administration in Washington, subsequently vetoed the measure.³⁸

Governor Black's veto invited attack, and his assertion that slavery was "a lawful and constitutional thing in a territory" provided valuable grist for the Republican mill.³⁹ The disruption of the national Democracy at its Charleston convention in the spring of 1860 also damaged the party, for it widened the cleavage within the local ranks as leading Democrats, including the influential J. Sterling Morton, deserted the administration banner. President Buchanan's rejection of a

homestead bill enacted by Congress in the fall of 1860 further dimmed Democratic prospects.⁴⁰ By mid-summer the Republican press could boast that "the bogus Democracy are disbanded — broken . . . their influence is departing."⁴¹

Heartened by Democrat troubles, the Republicans, wearing the party label for the first time in the territory, assembled at Plattsmouth on August 1 and renominated Samuel G. Daily. Their platform, again shaped to appeal to local interests, advocated federal aid to construct a Pacific railroad along the Platte River Road and a national homestead act. The Republicans also requested government funds to build a penitentiary, to bridge the Platte, and to complete the territorial capitol. Finally, the convention declared opposition to the policy of appointing "nonresident" officials to govern the territory.⁴²

Democratic prospects were less bright. Their convention at Omaha selected J. Sterling Morton, the territorial secretary, to oppose Daily on a platform that also emphasized local issues. Morton, whose political loyalties fluctuated with his ambitions, had migrated to Nebraska in 1854, where he initially attached himself politically to Bellevue. When Bellevue's capital prospects collapsed in 1855, Morton shifted his interests, and his allegiance, to Nebraska City. There, as editor of the *Nebraska City News*, he became a leading South Platte sectional. Always flexible and unprincipled, he broke with his southern friends in 1858 during his quest for the secretaryship. A pronounced administration man until 1860, Morton was also prepared to repudiate Buchanan to advance his political career. Consequently, during the spring of 1860, Morton silently maneuvered to shed the administration label. After the Charleston convention split the national party, the secretary, convinced that Stephen A. Douglas was "the coming man," broke with Governor Black and the president

and declared openly for the Illinois senator.⁴³

The election of 1860 was as bitter and reckless as any fought in the territory. Every local newspaper became zealously partisan. *The Nebraskian* and the *Nebraska City News* spearheaded the Morton campaign, while the *Omaha Republican*, the *People's Press*, and the *Nebraska Advertiser* supported Daily. "J. Stealing Morton's" irregularities as secretary were broadcast in every issue of the pro-Daily press. Morton was accused of mishandling the patronage and was condemned for his participation in the so-called "election fraud of 1859," which had kept Daily from his seat until the end of the term, thus depriving the territory of its congressional representation.⁴⁴ South of the Platte Morton's opponents assailed him as a sectional candidate backed by Omaha interests; north of the Platte they labeled him an annexationist, opposed to northern railroad projects.⁴⁵ Generally, the Republicans dubbed the Democrats as the party of hard times and castigated its leaders for their failure to tap the federal pork barrel. Moreover, "the corruption of Gov. Izard, Sec. Cuming, . . . and the clique," declared Republican spokesmen, "are justly charged with all the sectional jealousy and strife which existed and still exists."⁴⁶

The Nebraskian was equally violent in its assaults on Daily, castigating him for his inability to secure appropriations for territorial improvements. The Morton press charged Daily with sabotaging territorial appropriations for his personal benefit. "He, Daily, was opposed to all appropriations (penitentiary and all) on the grounds that Democratic Government officials would waste the funds."⁴⁷ Representative James Craig of Missouri, in a letter to the *Nebraskian*, accused Daily of blocking the passage of a railroad land grant bill for the territory. Moreover, Craig contended, the delegate had thwarted passage of a grant for the completion of the territorial capitol,

claiming "the people do not desire any more money to be spent in Omaha as the capitol was soon to be removed."⁴⁸

The delegate contest proved extremely close. Morton apparently won by fourteen votes — 2957 to 2943. Daily, as expected, contested the election. But Daily, taking advantage of the estrangement between Governor Black and Secretary Morton, prevailed on the governor to declare Morton's election a fraud and to issue a second certificate declaring Daily the victor.⁴⁹ Thus, when Morton arrived in Washington, he found himself, rather than Daily, as the contestant. After a prolonged investigation, which left Black vulnerable to charges of extortion or bribery, the House eventually recognized Daily as the legally elected delegate in the spring of 1862.⁵⁰

The 1860 election, which also produced a Republican territorial assembly and a Republican government in Washington, pointed up Democratic decline and Republican ascendancy in Nebraska. The replacement of Governor Black and other Democratic office holders with loyal Republican party men in early 1861 placed territorial government — and the patronage — firmly in Republican hands. The secession crisis and the Civil War further divided the demoralized Nebraska Democrats and strengthened the Republicans, who successfully identified with the cause of the Union.⁵¹

Republican control of the territory after 1860 established a pattern of party domination in Nebraska that continued almost unchallenged until the 1890s. True, the Democrats, aided by unfavorable local effects of the war and by factional division within the Republican ranks, remained competitive for a time. But though the party came close to success (in 1862 and 1866), it never captured a majority in a territory-wide election after 1860. After Nebraska's statehood in 1867 the Republican party, fortified by the prevalent Republicanism of a large post-war immigration and by the power and



Experience Estabrook. (NSHS-P853)

prestige of the national GOP, waxed clearly dominant.⁵²

NOTES

¹Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: 1973), 391-400.

²The number of published works on the Kansas-Nebraska issue is extensive. Among the more prominent: Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1973); Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York, 1987); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed by Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976); and James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1969).

³"Bleeding Kansas" was no simple struggle between slavery and freedom. The preponderance of settlers there (like those in Nebraska and elsewhere in the West) were typical frontier folk: homeseekers, entrepreneurs, land speculators and town builders whose concerns for personal advancement and material gain were probably greater than their feelings about slavery. Moreover, these concerns influenced their behavior, spawning disputes over land, townsites, and railroad advantages that contributed to the political turmoil there. Still, as James A. Rawley convincingly argues, differences over slavery aggravated these other disputes, and more than anything else promoted the violence that made the territorial struggle in Kansas a cause of national controversy. James A. Rawley, *Race and Politics*, 98-99.

⁴For a detailed discussion of the capital location controversy, see James B. Potts, "Nebraska Territory, 1854-1867: A Study of Frontier Politics" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1973), 110-76; and James B. Potts, "The Nebraska Capital Controversy, 1854-1859," *Great Plains Quarterly*, 8 (Summer, 1988), 172.

⁵Andrew Hopkins to J. Sterling Morton, Nov. 23, 1858. J. Sterling Morton Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter Morton Papers). See also "Annexation of a Part of the Territory of Nebraska to Kansas: Letter from the Governor of the Territory of Kansas, Feb. 2, 1859," *House Miscellaneous Document*, 50, 39 Congress, 2nd Session (1859); George W. Martin, "Kansas-Nebraska Boundary Line," Nebraska State Historical Society. *Collections*, XVI (1911), 118-24; Calvin W. Gower, "Kansas Territory and its Boundary Question: Big Kansas or Little Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring, 1967), 1-12.

⁶James F. Pedersen, Kenneth D. Wald, *Shall the People Rule? A History of the Democratic Party in Nebraska Politics* (Lincoln, 1972), 16.

⁷*Omaha City Times*, June 10, 1858.

⁸*Nebraska Advertiser* (Brownville), June 3, 1858.

⁹*Omaha Nebraskian*, Dec. 2, 1857.

¹⁰*Nebraska Republican* (Omaha), Feb. 22, 1860.

¹¹*People's Press* (Nebraska City), July 15, 1860.

¹²*Bellevue Gazette*, May 20, 1858; the *Nebraska Advertiser* also opposed party organization in the summer of 1858. Until the capital issue was settled, declared Furnas, "We want no party lines drawn." *Nebraska Advertiser*, July 8, 1858.

¹³Morton *Diary*, Feb. 3, 1859, Morton Papers; at least two other candidates besides Morton — William Moore, the "Omaha Candidate," and Norvel E. Welch, a Bellevue man, sought the secretaryship. And with the announced resignation of Richardson, two local aspirants, Samuel Black of Nebraska City and Hadley Johnson, were actively seeking the governorship. The contest for governor, in particular, took on a sectional appearance. In each case, the party factionalized, as individuals, localities, and sections pushed the candidacy of one or another of the aspirants. The intraparty feud is documented in J. J. Harding to Morton, Dec. 16, 1858; Morton to James Buchanan, Sept. 1, 1858; Fenner Ferguson to Morton, Jan. 15, 1858; Ferguson to Morton, Mar. 30, 1858; George Miller to Morton, Mar. 3, 1858; William E. Moore to Morton, Mar. 25, 1858; B. P. Rankin to Morton, Apr. 18, 1858; William Hale to Morton, Apr. 27, 1857. Morton Papers; *Bellevue Gazette*, Mar. 11, 1858.

¹⁴James C. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton* (Lincoln, 1942), 84-85.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶The publisher of the *Nebraska City News* was Thomas Morton, no relation to the secretary. J. S. Morton, however, had served as editor of the *News* for two years, 1855-57, and although he had quit the paper prior to assuming his appointment, the *News* continued to be regarded as "Morton's organ." Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 134.

¹⁷Bird B. Chapman wrote Morton from Washington: "I called upon the Comptroller and had a free talk with him about your affairs, particularly the printing and Furnas. I found he had

been much talked to by others and against you. He said it was said you only wanted the printing for your own paper the *News* and therefore a mere personal matter with you . . . [Rankin] filed a long argument . . . in favor of Furnas . . . [I] found letters for you only from Gov. Richardson, Judge Wakeley, Dr. Miller and Myself . . . And I also found myself the only one in this city taking your part in the matter." Chapman to Morton, Jan. 15, 1859, Morton Papers.

¹⁸James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln, 1955), 96, 125-26.

¹⁹J. Sterling Morton, Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska from the Earliest Explorations of the Trans-Missouri Region* [hereafter *Nebraska*] (Lincoln, 1918), I, 255-57.

²⁰*Omaha Nebraskian*, Sept. 8, 1858; Robert N. Manley, "Nebraska and the Federal Government, 1854-1916" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nebraska, 1962), 35-36. The land sales were subsequently postponed until 1859. Postponement, according to the *Nebraskian*, brought disappointment in the North, particularly in Omaha "where settlers had neither asked nor desired any such thing."

²¹As early as April 1858 — two months prior to Democratic party organization — the *Omaha Nebraskian* noted that "Lecompton and anti-Lecompton have become the dividing watchwords."

²²J. Sterling Morton to J. W. Denver, Nov. 2, 1858, Morton Papers.

²³*Nebraska Advertiser*, May 19, 1859.

²⁴*Omaha Nebraskian*, July 28, 1858; according to the *Nebraskian*, the local independent candidates were "men inexperienced in legislation, but a short time in the territory, and with little or no interest here." A survey of 165 politically active men in Otoe County indicates that the Republicans were relatively new men. For while the average residency for Democrats had been over four years, the average Otoe Republican resided in the territory 2.4 years before actively engaging in politics.

²⁵*Omaha Nebraskian*, Aug. 1, 1858; *Dakota City Herald*, July 28, Aug. 4, 1858.

²⁶By the summer of 1859, in an editorial in the *Advertiser*, Robert Furnas complained that "owing to dissension . . . we are without unanimity of action; almost each individual . . . drifting his own direction; advocating his own views; consulting his own interests, no consultation, no concert whatever." *Nebraska Advertiser*, June 4, 1859.

²⁷Morton and Watkins, *Nebraska*, 287, 293; *Omaha Nebraskian*, Aug. 20, 1859; Fenner Ferguson to Lewis Cass, Aug. 31, 1859, U.S.

Department of State Appointments Division, Letters of Application and Recommendation, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

²⁸WPA, *Nebraska Party Platforms, 1858-1940* (Lincoln, 1940), 7-9.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 9-10.

³⁰Olson, *Nebraska*, 126; J. Sterling Morton, Albert Watkins, *Illustrated History of Nebraska* [hereafter *Illustrated History*] (Lincoln, 1905), I, 405-6.

³¹*Nebraska Party Platforms*, 9-11; also Morton and Watkins, *Nebraska*, 187; *Nebraska Advertiser*, Sept. 15, 1859. The geographical analysis of the pro-Daily vote in 1859 indicates that Daily attracted larger percentages of the South Platte counties than in the north.

³²*Dakota City Herald*, Oct. 8, 1859.

³³*Ibid.*, Sept. 31, 1859; *Omaha Nebraskian*, Sept. 24, 1859; Oct. 1, 1859; John McConihe to J. S. Morton, Sept. 18, 1859, Morton Papers.

³⁴*Omaha Nebraskian*, Sept. 10, 1859.

³⁵*Nebraska Advertiser*, Sept. 29, 1859.

³⁶*Congressional Globe*, 36 Congress, 1st Session (1860), 2182.

³⁷Albert Watkins, "Contested Elections of Delegates to Congress from Nebraska," *NSHS Publications* XIX (1919), 313-28.

³⁸*People's Press*, Dec. 15, 1859; Dec. 22, 1859; *Nebraska Republican*, Dec. 14, 1859; Dec. 15, 1859; Dec. 21, 1859; Dec. 31, 1859; Morton and Watkins, *Nebraska*, 293, 451; of the thirty-nine Assembly seats, thirteen were Republican and twenty-six Democrat — the latter split evenly between the Black and Rankin factions. The Council was comprised of two GOP's, six administration Democrats and five Douglas men. Alfred R. Sorenson, *The Story of Omaha from the Pioneer Days to the Present Time*, 3rd ed. (Omaha, 1923), 163.

³⁹WPA, *Messages and Proclamations of the Governors of Nebraska, 1854-1941* (Lincoln: 1941-42), 130-35, 140.

⁴⁰Pedersen and Wald, *Shall the People Rule?*, 21-22.

⁴¹*Nebraska Republican*, June 27, 1860.

⁴²*Nebraska Party Platforms*, 12-14; *Nebraska Advertiser*, Aug. 16, 1860; Morton and Watkins, *Illustrated History*, I, 425-28.

⁴³The best biographical account of J. Sterling Morton is Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*; also *Nebraska Advertiser*, Sept. 6, 1860; Morton and Watkins, *Illustrated History*, I, 708-18. Morton's shift was purely an election gimmick, since privately he appeared to support Buchanan's course. Moreover he later supported the presidential ambitions of John C. Breckenridge in 1860. Sug-

gestive of the cynical use which many local Democrats made of national party questions is a letter to Morton from James Tufts in which the latter concluded: "I suppose you must stand on squatter sovereignty and fire away at the Republican forces generally and promiscuously. Please furnish me your programme that I may stand by your accord." Also for an account of Morton's activities during the pre-convention campaign see Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 98-100.

⁴⁴*People's Press*, Sept. 13, 1860; Aug. 23, 1860.

⁴⁵*Nebraska Advertiser*, Aug. 23, 1860.

⁴⁶*People's Press*, June 1, 1860; Sept. 13, 20, 1860; *Nebraska Republican*, June 27, 1860; Sept. 5, 1860.

⁴⁷*Daily Omaha Nebraskian*, Sept. 19, 1860.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, July 17, 1860.

⁴⁹Morton and Watkins, *Nebraska*, I, 308. By the winter of 1861, relations between Morton and Black had deteriorated markedly. Not only did they break politically, but the two men had become estranged over financial matters as well; Morton had brought legal proceedings against the governor to recover "several hundred dollars" he had previously lent to him. Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, 112.

⁵⁰Black's action was suspicious, for he issued the second certificate secretly without consulting the other members of the canvassing board. Moreover, evidence indicates that he might have issued the certificate to Daily after Black had been replaced by Governor Alvin Saunders. A. W. Pentland, who acted as Black's secretary, testified that the certificate (pre-dated) was drawn up at the governor's home in Nebraska City after Saunders's arrival. However, Pentland later changed his story, having secured a post in the land office, apparently on the recommendation of Daily, two days after Morton introduced him as a witness. Morton's friend charged that Daily "bought" the certificate for \$1500. Daily purchased Black's horse and buggy on the same day he received the certificate. For a detailed account of the Morton-Daily contest see Olson, *J. Sterling Morton*, Chapter 8; also *Congressional Globe*, 37 Congress, 2nd Session (1862), 1977-79; Reports No. 3, 4, and 9, House *Miscellaneous Document*, 37 Congress, 1st Session (1861); Report No. 69, House *Miscellaneous Document*, 37 Congress, 2nd Session (1862).

⁵¹Olson, *Nebraska*, 127-33; Pedersen and Wald, *Shall the People Rule?*, 26-41.

⁵²Pedersen and Wald, *Shall the People Rule?*, 43-77.