

BIRTH OF REPUBLICANISM

THE MICHIGAN CONVENTION OF 1854

TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FORMATION OF THE PARTY—THE EVENTS WHICH LED TO ITS ORGANIZATION—THE FIRST REPUBLICAN PLATFORM—HISTORICAL REMINISCENCES.

DETROIT, July 6.—The *Post and Tribune* of this city fills the greater part of the supplement of its issue of to-day with articles and communications appropriate to the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first State convention of the Republican Party, which met at Jackson, Mich., July 6, 1854. The principal article is historical in character, and occupies considerable space by reason of the detailed account which it gives of the events which preceded and attended the original formation of a State party, adopting an anti-slavery platform, nominating a full ticket, and formally assuming the Republican name. It begins with a brief allusion to the claims of other States to the honor of having been the scene of the birth and christening of Republicanism, and shows that the dates of all other conventions were subsequent to that of Michigan, as for instance: Ohio, July 13; Wisconsin, July 13; Massachusetts, July 19; Vermont, July 13. In this connection it quotes this passage from chapter 31 of Henry Wilson's "Rise and Fall of the Slave Power," as stating the essential and exact facts in the case:

"But whatever suggestions may have been made, or whatever action may have been taken elsewhere, to Michigan belongs the honor of being the first to form and christen the Republican Party. More than three months before the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill, the Free-soil Convention had adopted a mixed ticket, made of the Free Soilers and Whigs, in order that there might be a combination of the anti-slavery elements of the State. Immediately on the passage of the Nebraska bill, Joseph Warren, editor of the *Detroit Tribune*, entered upon a course of measures that resulted in bringing the Whig and Free Soil Parties together, not by a mere coalition of the two, but by a fusion of the elements of which the two were composed. In his own language, he 'took ground in favor of disbanding the Whig and Free Soil Parties, and of the organization of a new party, composed of all the opponents of slavery extension.' Among the first steps taken toward the accomplishment of this vitally important object was the withdrawal of the Free Soil ticket. This having been effected, a call for a mass convention was issued, signed by more than 10,000 names. The convention met on the 6th day of July, and was largely attended. A platform, drawn by the Hon. Jacob M. Howard, afterward United States Senator from Michigan, was adopted, not only opposing the extension of slavery, but declaring in favor of its abolition in the District of Columbia. The report also proposed 'Republican' as the name of the new party, which was adopted by the convention. Kinsley S. Bingham was nominated by the convention as the 'Republican' candidate for Governor, and was triumphantly elected, and Michigan, thus early to enter the ranks of the Republican Party, has remained steadfast to its then publicly-avowed principles of faith."

The *Post and Tribune* next gives a history of the political movements in Michigan in 1854 as they were influenced by the progress of the Kansas-Nebraska struggle. This it has prepared chiefly from its own files for that year, and in its researches it consulted alike the contemporaneous reports as printed in the *Free Democrat*, (Free Soil,) *Advertiser*. (Silver Gray Whig,) and *Free Press*, (Democratic.) All of these reports show, in brief, that the Free Soil Party put a State ticket in the field at Jackson, on Feb. 22, 1854, headed by Kinsley S. Bingham, Wilmot Proviso Democrat, for Governor. After the popular indignation over the Kansas-Nebraska act had made it plain that the Whigs were ready for an anti-slavery fusion, a second Free Soil Convention was held at Kalamazoo, on June 21, and a committee was there appointed to prepare for a fusion and clothed with authority to withdraw the Free Soil ticket if it should be found expedient. A call was also issued for a mass convention of all anti-slavery-extension men, and it met at Jackson on July 6. Upward of 3,000 people—some estimates say 5,000—were in attendance, and the convention assembled, from necessity, in the open air, in a grove of oaks. It was presided over, temporarily, by Levi Baxter, of Hillsdale, and permanently by Congressman D. S. Walbridge, of Kalamazoo, a Whig. Its first business was the appointment of a Committee on Resolutions, of which Jacob M. Howard, afterward United States Senator, was Chairman. He reported a long and emphatic anti-slavery platform, which was adopted, after which I. P. Christiancy, a United States Senator afterward, withdrew the Free Soil ticket, and a Nominating Committee of three from each Senatorial district was appointed to report a State ticket. Its work was ratified at once, the Free Soil candidate for Governor being retained. The anti-slavery Whigs were, as a rule, desirous of having placed at the head of the ticket, Zachariah Chandler, who was then a member of, and one of the prominent speakers before, the convention, but Mr. Bingham was retained as being the strongest with the Democrats. The *Post and Tribune* publishes in full the official minutes of the Jackson Convention, as printed in the *Free Democrat* on the following day. The tenth resolution, as written by Jacob M. Howard and adopted by the convention, was as follows:

Resolved, That in view of the necessity of battling for the first principles of republican government, and against the schemes of aristocracy, the most revolting and oppressive with which the earth was ever cursed or man debased, we will co-operate and be known as Republicans until the contest be terminated.

The great mass of the Whigs accepted the results of the convention, but an active minority denounced it, and procured the calling of a regular Whig Convention at Marshall on Oct. 4. This, however, proved to be under the control of the Republican element, and formally declined to make any State nominations. The Democrats put in nomination a ticket headed by John E. Barry. The Republican candidates were elected by a vote of 43,652 to 38,675. As illustrating the sweeping and durable character of this political revolution the *Post and Tribune* says:

"The State in which it [Republicanism] was founded is one of only two in which its successes from 1854 to the present time have been unbroken. Michigan and Iowa alone have chosen the Republican ticket at every election from and including that year. In Vermont the Democrats have been uniformly defeated but the opposition ticket in 1854 was not called Republican. In Maine a Democratic Governor is now in office; Massachusetts elected Gaston, a Democrat, in 1874; Rhode Island elected Sprague as a Democrat in 1860; and Wisconsin elected a Democratic Governor in 1875. Each of the other Northern States except Vermont, Michigan and Iowa has more than once given the Democrats a majority, but Michigan has been uniformly Republican in its general elections. * * * The Republican Party has also carried the State at every Spring election for Justices of the Supreme Court and Regents of the University. * * * Since the organization of the party the State has uniformly chosen Legislatures which have been Republican in both branches, and have sent 5 Republicans to the United States Senate. To the House of Representatives a total of 76 Republicans have been elected since 1854, to only 7 elected by the opposition. The State in which the Republican Party was founded of that party Republican in all branches of its State Government, and with a representation in Congress unambiguously Republican."

The letters accompanying the compilation of these facts are chiefly reminiscential in character and of only local interest. One from Joseph Warren, now of Washington, but who, in 1854, was the editor of the *Detroit Tribune* and among the prime movers for the anti-slavery fusion, contains this interesting statement, which is corroborated by others:

"The honor of having named and christened the party, the writer has always claimed, and now insists, belongs jointly to Jacob M. Howard, Horace Greeley, and himself. But the modesty, which is so striking a characteristic of editors, he might, as the originator of this whole movement, have appropriated the largest share of this honor. This Henry Wilson does for him after a thorough investigation

of the whole question for the purpose of embodying it in his "Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America." But, though with this exception and the frank and cordial admission of the late Senator Howard, hardly a man has been magnanimous enough to award him any credit in the matter, he is willing to divide the honor equally between the three to whom it all belongs. Soon after the writer began to advocate, through the columns of the *Tribune*, the organization of all opponents of slavery into a single party, Horace Greeley voluntarily opened a correspondence with him in regard to this movement, in which he frankly communicated his views and gave him many valuable suggestions as to the wisest course to be pursued. This correspondence was necessarily very short, as it began and ended in June, it being only five weeks from the repeal of the Compromise, May 30, to the Jackson Convention. In his last letter, received only a day or two before it was to assemble, Mr. Greeley suggested to him "Republican," according to his recollection, but, as Mr. Howard contended, "Democrat-Republican" as an appropriate name for the proposed new party. But this is of comparatively little consequence. The material fact is that this meeting the writer's cordial approval, he gave Mr. Greeley's letter containing the suggestions to Mr. Howard on the day of the convention after he had been appointed Chairman of the Committee on Resolutions, and strongly advised its adoption. This was done, the platform adopted, and the ticket nominated, as has already been stated, and the machinery of the new party—which, like the stone cut out of the mountain, has overspread the nation—put in operation.

The following is also one of the numerous letters published:

SOUTH BEND, Ind., July 1, 1879, *To the Editor of the Post and Tribune*:

Your letter brings vividly to my mind the political conflicts of a quarter of a century ago in Michigan, in which I participated; the closing campaign of the old Whig Party in 1852, in which I spoke at Kalamazoo, Marshall, &c., for Zach Chandler, then a Detroit merchant, just commencing political life—and the opening campaign of the Republican Party, when at Hillsdale and other points in Southern Michigan, I advocated the election of Kinsley S. Bingham. I remember, too, right well, how that harmonious and auspicious fusion of Free Democrats, Whigs, Abolitionists and Anti-Nebraska men, "under the oaks at Jackson," into a united Republican organization, inspired us in Indiana to such redoubled exertions as to change the Democratic majority of 15,000 in 1852, into a Republican majority of 12,000 in 1854. And your ringing platform of that day, as I realize its absolute necessity in the light of all that has since transpired, convinces me that what I announced in the dark days of our nation afterward as a principle is, in view of all that has occurred in later years, as axiomatic now as it was then—that "Loyalty should govern what loyalty preserved." Yours very truly,

SCHUYLER COLFAX.