
The political career of Alexander K. McClure followed a pattern typical of many of his contemporaries. He was a lawyer, a journalist, and a Whig politician. Rather from the lack than the weight of its collective convictions, the Whig Party collapsed in the mid-1850's. Like other Whigs looking for a new home and possessing a fair measure of conviction, McClure enlisted in the rapidly growing ranks of the Republican Party. Around the nation the Republican banner had become the rallying point for political arrivistes and the disenchanted from established political organizations. The Republican creed was sufficiently broad to attract those inspired by everything from opposition to the extension of slavery to merely being "out" and seeking a means of getting "in." But, whatever the motives of its individual members, the trademark of the party was opposition to slavery.¹ McClure's motives were as mixed as any Republican's. Like most of them, however, he took the trademark seriously.

In Pennsylvania the antislavery impulse was not strong enough to make the Republican Party a safe refuge for all.² Therefore, the shift in the political balance took a slightly different direction. During these years in the Keystone State—where venality in politics was apparently relieved by a sense of humor—political

¹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (London, 1970), 304. Perhaps Foner minimizes too much the economic and political motives of some Republicans, but he has drawn together some convincing evidence to support his conclusion that antislavery ideology was the welding alloy of Republicanism. It was the chief idea uniting the several factions of the party to its banner and of its opponents against it.

exigencies dictated a coalition of Republicans, unconvinced Whigs, free-soil Democrats, anti-Lecompton Democrats, and Know-Nothings, called the People's Party. If unimaginative, this name was also unoffending and, to pay it its due, not altogether inaccurate. Under this banner of political convenience McClure served in the state legislature after 1858. In 1860 he was elected chairman of the party's state committee and served as the campaign manager for Andrew Gregg Curtin, his close political associate and the gubernatorial candidate of the People's Party. In his capacity as chairman of the State Committee, McClure went to Chicago as a delegate to the Republican National Convention and was a participant in the negotiations leading to Lincoln's nomination.3

Years later, after the Civil War and his retirement from active politics, McClure recorded his recollection of these events and the place of the Pennsylvania delegation in them.4 In his several accounts, McClure constructed a thesis upon the solid foundation that Pennsylvania had a determinant voice in selecting the Republican presidential candidate in 1860. It was with good reason, after all, that Pennsylvania was called the Keystone State. Only twice between 1789 and 1860 had anyone been elected to the presidency without the electoral votes of Pennsylvania. The Republicans believed that unless they could add Pennsylvania and either Indiana, Illinois, or New Jersey to the states carried by Frémont in 1856 they could not win in 1860.5 They believed that if they nominated a candidate that could carry Pennsylvania, one or more of the others would surely follow. Among the doubtful states, Pennsylvania was the bellwether in two ways. First, it reflected the sentiments of the other doubtful states, especially on the issues giving rise to the debates over the extension of slavery to the territories. Secondly, the elections in Pennsylvania for state offices were held in October and the results would influence the outcome of the national elections held in November.6 If for no other reason than that the leadership

5 Luthin, 61.
of the Republican Party believed it, there can be little doubt that Pennsylvania played "an exceptionally decisive role" in the making of a president in 1860.\(^7\)

Building upon this valid assumption, McClure proceeded to some rather surprising conclusions. He contended that the efforts of Curtin and the Pennsylvania delegation and their allies in other doubtful states—principally Henry K. Lane, the Republican gubernatorial candidate in Indiana—prevented the nomination from falling to William H. Seward, easily the pre-convention favorite. Pennsylvania, McClure argued, could not have been carried by the Republican Party had Seward headed the national ticket. Seward was not "available," to use the contemporary idiom, because of the opposition of the Know-Nothings. In Pennsylvania, according to McClure's analysis, this particular brand of national paranoia was still potent enough in 1860 to swing the balance against the People's Party and the Know-Nothings would surely have deserted the coalition if Seward had become the party's presidential candidate.\(^8\) This would have resulted in defeat for the state ticket of the People's Party in October and, because it could not have carried Pennsylvania, the Republican national ticket in November.

All of this is summarized most categorically by McClure in *Abraham Lincoln and Men of War Times*, where he wrote:

> It is not true, as has been assumed by many, that the objection to Seward was because of his radical or advanced position in Republican faith. It was not Seward's "irrepressible conflict" or his "higher-law" declarations which made Curtin and Lane oppose him as the Republican candidate. . . . The single reason that compelled Curtin and Lane to make aggressive resistance to the nomination of Seward was his attitude on the school question, that was very offensive to the many thousands of voters . . . who either adhered to the American organization or cherished its strong prejudices . . . It was Seward's record on that single question when Governor of New York that made him an impossible candidate for President in 1860. . . .\(^9\)

Conscious of the importance of the Keystone State in the elections, the other delegates to the National Convention were receptive to

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\(^7\) Luthin, 61. See also McClure, *Notes on Pennsylvania*, I, 404-406.


the Pennsylvanians’ objections to Seward’s candidacy. Thus was it, according to McClure, that the favored Seward was denied the nomination and the dark-horse Lincoln was carried to the presidency.

On two points at least—that Seward was the pre-convention favorite and that he was opposed by the Know-Nothings—McClure is in good company. The story of Seward’s emergence as the leading Republican is well known. With his “higher law” speech opposing the Compromise of 1850, Seward, with a measure of conviction as well as calculation, stepped in to fill the vacuum of leadership created in the ranks of antislavery Whigs when Webster deserted them to support Henry Clay’s selfless inspiration. The “higher law” doctrine was publicized across the nation and the antislavery men and press of both parties praised Seward for it. By old and newly acquired enemies at the North and the South he was denounced as a revolutionary. In Albany, Thurlow Weed feared the political consequences of his friend’s show of zeal. Seward was undaunted and wrote to Weed in a vein revealing two of his many sides. His course had been dictated, he explained, by conviction and political calculation. He wrote:

The first element of political character is sincerity. In any event, this question is to continue through this year and longer. We know which class of opinion must gain and which must lose.

Seward had satisfied his conscience and had accurately assayed the drift of northern opinion on the questions growing out of the slavery controversy. During the years of struggle following the Compromise of 1850, he continued to lay the foundations of his political leadership upon the premise that an antislavery posture would avail him

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13 Frederick W. Seward, *Seward at Washington as Senator and Secretary of State, 1846–1861* (New York, 1891), 129.
of a dynamic and growing constituency. His speeches attracted national attention, although for a time after his exposition of the "higher law" doctrine he left the radical speech making to others.14

Seward left the Whig Party reluctantly and only when its collapse had become certain. When the new Republican Party emerged as the rallying point for antislavery sentiment in the North, Weed and Seward saw the need of placing the latter in its front ranks. If Seward's prominence and leadership were to be carried over to this new national constituency, he would have to perform some great service for it.15 This was accomplished at Albany in 1855 in an address entitled "The Advent of the Republican Party." In this speech Seward urged the forces opposed to the abuses of the "privileged class" of the South to cast off their allegiance to the "stained banners" of the Whig and Democratic Parties. The disaffected from both of the old parties were invited to unite into one organization, the Republican Party, which had "laid a new, sound and liberal platform, broad enough for both classes to stand upon." The Republican banner, Seward concluded, was "unsullied by past errors. That is the party for us."16

Yet, with all of this and the chords, pleasing to radical ears, struck by the "irrepressible conflict" speech of 1858, Seward was not quite believed by the righteous in antislavery circles. And, of course, the man who preached the "higher law" doctrine and denounced the abuses of a "privileged class" was anathema to conservatives.17 Significantly, the Republican Party commanded the support of an important contingent of each. Still, however qualified his status, on the eve of the Convention, by dint of long service, his national reputation, and the support of Lord Thurlow's magnificent political machine, well oiled with easy promises of swag and sinecure, Seward remained the favorite. Just before midnight, May 17, only hours before the delegates were to gather at the Wigwam to begin selecting their presidential candidate, Horace Greeley and Murat Halstead telegraphed to their respective newspapers that

14 Bancroft, I, 365.
15 Ibid., I, 387.
Seward would be nominated.\textsuperscript{18} Greeley was glum, Halstead pleased, at the prospect.

Less well understood perhaps is Seward's career-long opposition to secret societies—especially the Know-Nothings—and his advocacy of the rights of the foreign born. While governor of New York in 1840, Seward had incurred the wrath of latent nativist sentiment when he proposed that the children of immigrants in New York City, mostly Catholic, be provided with schools in which they would be instructed in their native tongue by teachers of their own faith. It was a generous and humanitarian measure designed to afford educational opportunities to an estimated 30,000 children whose families found the existing system—a semiprivate, semipublic corporation—unappealing by reason of their religion, or inaccessible by reason of their economic condition, or both.\textsuperscript{19} The matter was finally resolved by extending the state public school system to the city.\textsuperscript{20} By then, however, Seward had aroused from its restless slumber a prejudiced spirit that would hound him throughout his career. In 1840 it was too weak and disorganized to prevent Seward's re-election, but it did cut in half the 10,000 vote majority he had received in 1838. And 1840 was a Whig year. William Henry Harrison carried New York by 13,000 votes.\textsuperscript{21}

While not a force to be reckoned with in 1840, the Know-Nothing movement became one by the 1850's. Seward never regretted having invited nativist animosity. Rather, his public statements indicate that he relished it. In a speech opposing the Toucey "supplemental fugitive slave law" during the short session of Congress in 1854--1855, Seward digressed long enough to condemn the secret lodges of the Know-Nothings. Melodramatically, he wished a paralysis on himself if he were ever tempted to join those lodges that proscribed men because of their nativity. He concluded his remarks with withering sarcasm:


\textsuperscript{19} De Alva Stanwood Alexander, \textit{A Political History of the State of New York} (New York, 1906), 45. See also Bancroft, I, 96-97; Van Deusen, 67-70.

\textsuperscript{20} Van Deusen, 70.

\textsuperscript{21} Alexander, 45.
Why, sir, I do most earnestly and affectionately advise all persons hereafter to be born, that they be born in the United States... and thus avoid a great deal of trouble for themselves and for others.\textsuperscript{22}

Again, in the Albany speech cited above aimed primarily at uniting the antislavery forces behind the Republican Party banner, Seward included an attack on the Know-Nothings and their political arm, the American Party. He condemned the movement for “its false and prevaricating rituals, its unlawful and unchristian oaths, its clandestine councils and its dark conspiracies, its mobs and its murders...” Not content with these charges Seward ridiculed the Know-Nothings as a mere “Swiss auxiliary corps.”\textsuperscript{23} It must have pained the “Americans” grievously to be likened to the Swiss guard of the Pope.

Seward’s denunciations of the Know-Nothing phenomena were made at a time when the movement was at the peak of its popularity, and they adequately demonstrate his convictions. They explain, too, why Seward was the target for some of the choicest Know-Nothing aberrations and why the followers of that movement would be opposed to his elevation to any political office, let alone the presidency.

While later historical accounts agree with McClure that Seward was the clear favorite among Republican presidential hopefuls and that the Know-Nothings opposed him in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, they differ in their estimates of the degree to which the latter influenced the nomination proceedings at Chicago. Most historical studies conclude that the very factor that made Seward the leading contender, his militancy on the slavery question, finally proved his undoing, especially in states like Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{24} It will be recalled

\textsuperscript{22} Bancroft, I, 382; quotation cited from the \textit{Congressional Globe, 1854–1855}, Appendix, 240–243.

\textsuperscript{23} Baker, IV, 238.

\textsuperscript{24} A brief review of the historical literature on the topic would demonstrate this conclusively. See Bancroft, I, 524. Bancroft concludes with the apparent majority that Seward was passed over by the convention because of his radicalism on the slavery question. He recognizes other lesser reasons, including the opposition of the Know-Nothings in Pennsylvania, and cites McClure as his authority. See also Van Deusen, 220–221. Van Deusen attributes the opposition of middle westerners to Seward’s candidacy to his radicalism on the slavery issue. But he argues that opposition in the East generally, and specifically in Pennsyl-
that McClure rejected this conclusion categorically.\footnote{McClure, Lincoln and Men of War Times, 27–28 (see footnote 8).} At the same time, however, these studies, with three exceptions, also point to Know-Nothing strength in Pennsylvania as one of the influences at the Convention working against Seward.\footnote{The exceptions are William Baringer, Lincoln's Rise to Power (Boston, 1937), 189–245, and Luthin, First Lincoln Campaign, and The Real Lincoln. Baringer was the first to call attention to the role played by Lincoln's supporters at the convention. He argues that they persuaded the other delegates that Lincoln was the candidate who could win and pointed out why others, especially Seward, could not. Baringer's interpretation is reinforced by Luthin when he points out that Seward's radicalism on the slavery question gave Lincoln's lieutenants a good arsenal with which to attack.} McClure, directly or indirectly, is the authority for this view. In this connection, interestingly enough, no study citing McClure as authority for the assertion that opposition of the Pennsylvania Know-Nothings partially explains Seward's defeat evaluates McClure's interpretation critically. Nor do those studies ignoring McClure explain why. A critical assessment would be useful and is overdue, for McClure was a participant in the unfolding drama and knew personally most of the principal actors. And his memoirs, if sometimes innocent, are admirably candid on the whole and have about them a ring of

vania, resulted from the hostility of the Know-Nothings. Van Deusen's wide agreement with McClure is exceptional. An older work by Emerson David Fite, The Presidential Campaign of 1860 (New York, 1911), 119–120, takes the same view as Bancroft, although it emphasizes that Seward compromised his credit with the radicals in his speech on the John Brown raid in 1859 and at the same time failed to appease conservatives. Fite, too, argues that Seward was weakened in Pennsylvania because of Know-Nothing opposition. Allen Nevins, in The Emergence of Lincoln, II, 255, concurs in the view that Seward's reputation as a radical was the chief handicap to his candidacy. He argues that this especially injured Seward in conservative states like Pennsylvania. Nevins alludes to the opposition to the Know-Nothings in that state but doesn't credit it with much weight in the outcome. Finally, Luthin in an early work of his, "Pennsylvania and Lincoln," \footnote{Luthin, First Lincoln Campaign, 140ff, and in The Real Abraham Lincoln (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1960), 216–219. In these accounts, Luthin argues that it was Seward's radicalism on the slavery question and the cleverness with which Lincoln's lieutenants brought this to the attention of the delegates to the Convention that settled the issue. He does not intimate that any other consideration mattered and discounts the activities of the Pennsylvania delegates in the proceedings, although not the importance of Pennsylvania.} argues that Pennsylvanians were more alarmed by the "power" of Roman Catholicism than by the institution of slavery. Lincoln's nomination was welcomed in Pennsylvania, he wrote, by the "conservative, nativist groups . . . since he provided an escape from the radical, 'immigrant loving' Seward." Luthin's views on the subject changed during the ensuing years and appear in The First Lincoln Campaign, 140ff, and in The Real Abraham Lincoln (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., 1960), 216–219.
authenticity. They cannot be dismissed as idle gossip, mere boasting, or willful deception. If McClure erred in his account of the motives of the Pennsylvania delegates, as it is believed he did, then scholarship is obliged to explain. The explanation is to be found in the exigencies of state and national politics of the Civil War and post-Civil War era and in the national state of mind shaped by that ordeal. In the former, McClure was deeply immersed, and of the latter he was a fairly typical captive.

The conclusion reached by this study is that the lack of enthusiasm for Seward’s candidacy among the Pennsylvania delegates was motivated by considerations other than Know-Nothing strength in their state. The chief consideration making Seward unavailable in Pennsylvania was the determination of the leadership of the anti-Democratic coalition, mostly Republicans, to make the protective tariff the major issue during the campaign. They believed that if they could succeed in doing this they would be victorious. They further believed that with Seward at the head of the Republican ticket the slavery question would receive too much attention and the tariff issue would get lost in the ensuing mêlée. Finally, they believed that their Pennsylvania constituency was too conservative on the slavery question to make it a successful campaign theme. As for the opposition of the Know-Nothings and their political arm, the American Party, they were so weak in Pennsylvania by 1860 that they were incapable of influencing either the selection of a presidential candidate or the outcome of the election. To substantiate these conclusions is the remaining task of this study.

It has been pointed out that McClure flatly denied that Seward’s candidacy was jeopardized in Pennsylvania because of his reputation as a radical on the slavery issue.27 This assertion will not bear even a cursory examination of the evidence. To begin with, the old Whig Party in Pennsylvania had resented the rising importance of the slavery issue after the Mexican War. Its political successes in every election after 1846 had depended upon Democratic opposition to the protective tariff and Whig ability to make it the single most important issue. During the period of agricultural and industrial prosperity from 1850 to 1857, the protective tariff issue could not

turn a political profit. As a consequence, the only major Whig victory realized in those years came in 1854 when they captured the governorship. And this was achieved only because they aligned themselves with the American Party, that is, the Know-Nothings.28

This small success was not enough to stay the demoralization and decay of Whiggery. As a plausible alternative to the Democracy it collapsed the following year. Looking for a new home, most Whigs eventually drifted into the emerging Republican Party and carried protectionism with them. However, subsequent Republican advocacy of a protective tariff did not satisfy the more conservative Whigs, particularly those in Philadelphia who had trade connections in the South and who could not make the conversion because of the new party’s stand on slavery.29

The first important test for the Republican Party after it was formed came in a state election in 1857. The Republican leadership reckoned that it had little or no chance of winning the governorship in that year. The continuing prosperity negated the tariff as an issue. The strategy was, therefore, to run the campaign almost exclusively on issues growing out of the slavery controversy.30 To attract free-soil Democrats to the party, David Wilmot was selected as the gubernatorial candidate. Wilmot suffered the expected defeat, being outpolled by more than 40,000 votes by his Democratic opponent. The panic of 1857 broke three weeks before the election, too late to develop the tariff as an issue. In any case, Wilmot’s tariff record was indefensible from a Republican point of view.31

The financial crisis did provide the heirs of Whiggery with an opportunity to press the tariff issue in the congressional elections of 1858. As soon as the effects of the panic began to be felt, Republicans began to charge the “free trade” Democrats with responsibility. The effect was a telling one. In 1858 the Pennsylvania Democracy lost ten of its fifteen congressional seats. The Kansas policy of the Buchanan administration had little to do with these results, for the

31 Eiselen, 239–242. Although he does not mention the tariff issue, McClure, too, comments on the sacrificial nature of Wilmot’s candidacy. McClure, *Notes on Pennsylvania*, I, 301.
major Democratic losses came in the coal and iron regions of the state and not in the strong antislavery regions.\textsuperscript{32}

The twofold lesson in these elections was not lost on Republicans. In 1860 the gubernatorial candidate of the People’s Party was a Republican, Andrew Gregg Curtin. Curtin came from a family of ironmasters and was well known for his advocacy of a protective tariff. He was to lead the party in putting forward the tariff as the major issue during the campaign. Republicans and other members of the anti-Democratic coalition did, of course, pronounce on the slavery question. They denounced slavery in the territories and stood for the admission of Kansas as a free state. But, from the point of view of Republicans, “overshadowing all else, loomed the question of protection to domestic industry as the one great paramount issue of the struggle.”\textsuperscript{33} The Democracy charged that a Republican victory would endanger the Union. The Republicans ridiculed this idea and countercharged that the Democrats raised it only to divert attention from the real issue, the protective tariff.\textsuperscript{34}

To fortify this strategy, the Pennsylvania delegation pressed hard at the convention for including in the party platform a plank favoring a protective tariff. When they arrived in Chicago they became aware, if they had not been already, that the tariff issue was considered either unimportant or potentially too divisive by most of the convention delegates. Lincoln and his lieutenants at the convention felt that the question should be left alone for the sake of party harmony. Most of the other contenders felt the same. But the Pennsylvania delegates argued forcibly that if a protective tariff plank was not included in the platform their state could not be carried by the Republican Party. The importance of Pennsylvania to the Republican cause was recognized and a strongly worded though ambiguous resolution in favor of a tariff was adopted.\textsuperscript{35}

Given the strategy outlined above, it is not surprising that the Pennsylvania Republicans were opposed to William Seward becoming the party’s national standard bearer. Here was the man who in 1858 had said that a conflict between the North and the South was

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 249.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 259–260.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 261–263.
\textsuperscript{35} Nevins, \textit{Emergence of Lincoln}, II, 253.
“irrepressible.” Had the Democracy possessed this weapon the Republicans in Pennsylvania would have been hard pressed to counter successfully the charge that a Republican victory meant dissolution of the Union. Republican “principles” in Pennsylvania were not so firmly rooted and broadly based that the party could run that risk. They could not win, or at least they believed they could not win, if the slavery controversy became the chief issue. With Seward heading the ticket, however mighty the effort, Pennsylvania Republicans could not have diverted attention from that issue. This was understood and appreciated by the knowing delegates to the convention and could not be used on those of iron conviction on the slavery question. For the latter, who saw in Lincoln a satisfactory alternative to Seward, the Know-Nothing bogey served as a plausible objection.

This leads conveniently into the final consideration of this study, the strength of the Know-Nothings in Pennsylvania in 1860. Each of those accounts attributing any part of the opposition to Seward’s candidacy by the Pennsylvania delegates to Know-Nothing influence in their state is in error. As stated earlier, the Know-Nothings were so weak in Pennsylvania by 1860 that they could not have exerted an influence on the Republicans’ selection of a candidate. Ironically, McClure’s own testimony provides the chief support for this conclusion. At several points in his memoir, he celebrates the scornful indulgences that he and other leaders of his party enjoyed at the expense of the Know-Nothings. A sampling of these references will demonstrate the prevalence of this attitude beyond any reasonable doubt.

After the collapse of the Whig Party in the middle 1850’s, many former Whigs—presumably those without “conscience”—took temporary refuge in the American Party, the political extension of the Know-Nothing movement. Some political advantages accrued from this expedient, but it was an unnatural habitat for most Whigs. As Republicanism gained respectability and showed promise of political success, these Whigs began drifting to the real heir of their old party.36 To accelerate this process in Pennsylvania, the Republican leadership decided to break its uneasy alliance with the Know-

36 Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union (New York, 1947), II, 328–331.
Nothings. According to McClure's account of it, this consideration equalled in importance the hope of solidifying the antislavery vote when nominating Wilmot for the governorship in 1857. Republicans knew that they could not win the election under any circumstances. Wilmot's candidacy would attract free-soil Democrats to the Republican banner. At the same time, Wilmot had long shared a mutual hostility with the Know-Nothings and would be unacceptable to them. McClure states that his candidacy drove out of the party those who were Republicans for the sake of expediency only and, at the same time, those Know-Nothings who "would certainly prefer Republicanism to Democracy" remained in the fold. Wilmot was nominated, he argued, to show the Americans that "those who were not willing to accept the Republican faith on the question of slavery should sever their fellowship from the opposition combination."

According to McClure, the gubernatorial campaign of 1857 accomplished all that had been hoped for. The Know-Nothings had already declined in strength from the heights they had reached in 1854, and the Republican maneuver in 1857 hastened their political demise. "It practically eliminated the American organization as a political factor in the state beyond the hope of occasionally holding the balance of power."

This qualification referring to the "hope of occasionally holding the balance of power" would be bothersome were it not for two related events of the ensuing three years described by McClure. According to the chronicler, the Know-Nothings asserted themselves only in New York and Massachusetts in 1858. Even though more vigorous in these states than elsewhere, they suffered resounding losses. It is significant that the Republican delegations from both states supported Seward at the Chicago convention two years later. In fact, they were the heart and the backbone of his candidacy. In New York the Know-Nothings had never presented an insurmountable obstacle to Seward's career. In 1854, their peak year in that state, twelve avowed Know-Nothings and thirty-seven

37 McClure, Notes on Pennsylvania, I, 301.
38 Ibid., 304.
39 Ibid., 340–341.
secret members of the organization who were members of the state legislature voted to return Seward to the Senate.\textsuperscript{40}

By McClure’s own accounting, the Know-Nothings were so weakened in Pennsylvania by 1858 that they swallowed the insult of 1857 and “generally and cordially” accepted the call for a new united front against the Democracy. During the next two years they cooperated in the organization of the new party “with cheers.”\textsuperscript{41} All the while, Seward was regarded as its likely presidential nominee in 1860. If the American faction protested this, McClure did not record it. In his account of the state convention held in Pennsylvania in 1860, McClure includes no reference to any influence exerted by Know-Nothings. The absence of such references does not prove that they had no influence of course. But in light of the future importance that McClure imputes to them, it would seem that some act on their part would have been significant enough to warrant notice by him. There is none, however, and it is not until after he makes note of the editorials by Horace Greeley claiming that Seward could not win because of Know-Nothing opposition in key states that McClure points to the discontent that would arise in Pennsylvania on just such grounds.\textsuperscript{42}

Further evidence that Know-Nothing sensibilities were lightly regarded by Pennsylvania Republicans appears in McClure’s account of his election to the party chairmanship in 1860. The Republican Party was sharply divided into two factions, one championed by Andrew G. Curtin, the other by Simon Cameron. Each group had about equal strength in the party. Curtin wanted McClure in the useful office of state chairman and the Cameron faction wanted their own man. Curtin insisted, however, and, in that he was the gubernatorial candidate and the titular head of the party, his wishes were respected.\textsuperscript{43} It was a curious selection for Curtin to make if he thought that Know-Nothing votes counted for much. McClure had long been a hostile critic of the secret society. In 1855, although a Whig himself and presumably in bed with the nativists, McClure had taken to the stump in support of Democrats

\textsuperscript{40} Carleton Beals, \textit{Brass Knuckle Crusade} (New York, 1960), 245.
\textsuperscript{41} McClure, \textit{Notes on Pennsylvania}, I, 342.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, 403.
\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Ibid.}, 399–400.
in districts where they were opposed by Americans. He was also instrumental in humiliating the American Party in 1857 by working for Wilmot's candidacy. The Know-Nothings had good reason not to like McClure and we have his own word for that.\(^44\) Still, Curtin wanted him to manage a party that included Know-Nothings in a campaign where Know-Nothings were supposed to hold the balance. McClure was not a candidate for office but he was in a position of great influence and one that called for exertions on behalf of party harmony. The possibility that this might aggravate the Know-Nothings apparently did not disturb Curtin and entirely escaped McClure's attention.

There is one other episode that raises serious doubts about the political punch carried by the Know-Nothings in Pennsylvania in 1860. In September, one month before the state elections, the leadership of the American Party in Philadelphia repudiated Curtin's candidacy. In their party newsheet they charged that he secretly practiced Roman Catholicism. A short time later they contacted McClure and offered to retract the charge and return to the fold for the sum of $2,500. McClure spurned the offer.\(^45\) This minor incident is indicative of the corruption in Know-Nothing ranks. Evil indeed were the days upon which the nativist movement had fallen that would prompt them to sell their leading "principle" for the paltry sum of $2,500. This low state of political morality was not a matter that McClure had become aware of only in 1860. He had remarked on it in connection with events occurring as early as 1857.\(^46\) It is difficult to believe that he or any public man in Pennsylvania in 1860 would have entertained the notion that Know-Nothing fulminations could influence the outcome of statewide or national elections.

The consistent pattern of contempt revealed by these incidents makes it clear that Know-Nothing resistance to Seward's candidacy could not have been a significant factor in Pennsylvania. One is prompted to ask why, then, did McClure, honest and candid in other respects, argue so categorically that it was not only the chief

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 300-308.
\(^{45}\) Ibid., 421-422.
\(^{46}\) Ibid., 307-314.
but the only reason that Seward was "unavailable" in his state. The answer is to be found in the self-image that the Civil War experience had created in the minds of Republicans. Looking back on their party's history from the perspective of the post-war era, Republicans, the sincere as well as the opportunist "waving the bloody shirt," were reluctant to concede that a leading exponent of the party's principles could not win endorsement and that someone less well understood on these principles had to be chosen. Especially, most Republicans after 1865 were unwilling to admit that they or a large segment of their party had been conservative on the slavery question before 1860. McClure was no exception. Probably he did not deliberately attempt to deceive but fell into the habit to which memoirists, perhaps, are most susceptible. The inconvenient past, untrue to his nobler aspirations, gave way to what he wished had been true.

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