

## *“Seeing Sam”: The Know Nothing Episode in Harrisburg*

“SAM” FIRST CAME TO HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania, in June 1854, when six residents of the town organized an encampment of the “Guard of Liberty.”<sup>1</sup> The secret society stage of the nativist “Know Nothing” movement was peaking that summer all along the eastern seaboard, and newspapers reported that one community after another had “seen Sam.” The expression meant that people in those places had become aware of the alleged threat that immigrants and Catholics posed to “Uncle Sam.”<sup>2</sup> An uncoded minutes book of the Harrisburg group, that among other things lists members by name, has been preserved. Information from that source, supplemented with data from computerized federal manuscript census schedules for Harrisburg, town tax records, and extensive newspaper files for the community, offers a rare glimpse behind the scenes of the mysterious movement at the local level.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Most Know Nothing societies were organized as Councils of the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner. According to Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (New York, 1938), 434, the Guard of Liberty was “a minor nativistic military company having about 300 members.” Charles Stickney, *Know Nothingism in Rhode Island* (Providence, 1894), 9, notes that, in July 1854, the governor of Rhode Island issued arms and uniforms to two companies of wholly native-born Americans calling themselves Guards of Liberty. Critics said they were Know Nothings. Except for calling itself an “encampment,” its chief officer “Grand Commander,” and its members “volunteers,” the Harrisburg group appears to have been political rather than military and apparently functioned as part of the Dauphin County Know Nothing machine. Its minutes book mentions nothing of a military nature excepting a flag: no uniforms, arms, inspections, drills, or parades. On the political side, the Harrisburg Guard of Liberty nominated candidates to support for state, county, and municipal elections and sent delegates to “the County Convention.” It seems unlikely that so small a national organization as the Guard of Liberty could have mustered sufficient numbers in Dauphin County to hold conventions to nominate candidates for public office independently of the regular Know Nothings.

<sup>2</sup> Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans, The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 108-9. Although concentrating on Maryland, this work brings together much recent scholarship on the Know Nothing movement.

<sup>3</sup> The “Minutes Book” is in folder 98, box 4, MG 8, Pennsylvania Collection (State Archives Division of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission at Harrisburg [hereafter, State Archives, PHMC]). The computerized census data for 1850 and 1860 are

To the extent that the minutes book accurately reflects its activities, the Harrisburg group attracted remarkably apolitical members, had incredibly dull meetings, and devoted little time to political stratagems. Even so, for two years, candidates for public office backed by the Know Nothings, or who ran on the American party ticket, won in the traditionally Democratic stronghold of Harrisburg. A reconstruction of one municipal election, allegedly won by "Americans all," suggests how easily the movement could be manipulated to serve ends other than the wishes of its rank-and-file members. It also casts doubt on the view of recent scholars that Know Nothingism owed its phenomenal, but brief, success to a skillful exploitation of deep social and cultural divisions in American society. Similarly, the experience of both the movement in Harrisburg and of individual members of the Guard of Liberty suggests that Know Nothingism may have had less long-range political impact than is sometimes claimed.<sup>4</sup> Harrisburg might seem an unlikely place for an outbreak of nativism. The town, for example, had not attracted a proportionate share of immigrants during the late 1840s and early 1850s. Of the total population in the northeastern region of the United States, 15

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in my possession and are being used for a detailed study of the process and impact of industrialization on Harrisburg in the nineteenth century. Incomplete, but extensive files of Harrisburg newspapers have been microfilmed and are available at, among other places, the State Library in Harrisburg, and major university libraries in Pennsylvania. Tax records for Harrisburg, which at that time listed freeholders, tenants, and single male taxpayers separately, are in RG 47, Acc 1180, Dauphin County Tax Records, 1785-1899 (State Archives, PHMC).

Only a few studies of Know Nothing activities have been based on minutes books or membership lists. See, for example, George H. Haynes, "A Chapter from the Local History of Know Nothingism," *New England Magazine* 15 (Sept. 1896), 82-96. Haynes had access to the membership list of a Worcester, Mass., lodge, and in the 1890s corresponded with persons from that list. W.U. Hensel based his paper, "A Withered Twig," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 19 (1915), 174-81, on the "Minutes of Lodge 42, Native American Society of the city of Lancaster." The present location of the lists used by Haynes and Hensel is not known. Hendrik Booraem, V, refers to a membership list for a Know Nothing lodge in Norway, Herkimer County, New York, in *The Formation of the Republican Party in New York* (New York, 1983), 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973), 309-31. James L. Huston, "The Demise of the Pennsylvania American Party, 1854-1858," *PMHB* 109 (1985), 473-74, gives a good brief summary of the current state of scholarship on Know Nothingism. For "Americans all," see *Telegraph*, March 21, 1855.

percent were foreign-born in 1850, 19 percent by 1860; Philadelphia had nearly 30 percent foreign-born in both those census years. Harrisburg had only 10.5 percent and 11.5 percent, respectively. Of those, the Irish, the particular target of nativists, were a relatively small and proportionately declining group in Harrisburg. In 1850 they numbered 421 and constituted 5.4 percent of Harrisburg's population. A decade later, 567 were but 4.2 percent of the whole, and even all of those were not the potato-famine Irish Catholics so objected to by nativists. The census neither distinguished adherents of Rome from Irish Protestants (who for the most part shared the religious beliefs of the town's Scotch-Irish Presbyterian leadership) nor recent immigrants from those who migrated years or decades before. A review of the ages and birthplaces of the children of the town's 74 Irish families with children in 1850 shows that at least 45 Irish families came to America prior to 1845, and 29 of those families prior to 1840. Of 225 Irish not living in family units (164 males and 61 females), 121 males lived in five boarding houses. They evidently worked on railroad construction then underway in the area and left as their jobs moved on with the railroad. Only one of the 121 Irish-born male boarders can be identified as a resident of Harrisburg in 1860.<sup>5</sup>

Across the nation and in Pennsylvania, the Democratic party tended to attract the foreign born, in part by running slates with foreign-born candidates. In Harrisburg, Democrats, though predominant, rarely ran Irish- or German-born candidates for office. Similarly, Catholicism was not a local issue; the only parish was too small and poor to maintain a parochial school and its priest worked hard to maintain the respect of the whole community. But for an occasional Protestant clergyman delivering an anti-Catholic sermon, it would have been easy to forget that Catholics lived in Harrisburg.<sup>6</sup> Large

<sup>5</sup> The percentages for the Northeast and Philadelphia have been calculated from the published census returns for 1850 and 1860. The figures for Harrisburg and its Irish residents are based on an analysis of computerized federal manuscript census schedules for the town for 1850, 1860, and 1870, prepared by the author (hereafter, "Computerized Census Data").

<sup>6</sup> Based on newspaper reports of local elections between 1846 and 1862. Father Pierce Maher served the Harrisburg parish (St. Patrick's) between 1837 and 1868, when the membership reportedly grew from 500 to 2,000. *Diocese of Harrisburg, 1868-1968* (Harris-

foreign or Catholic populations, however, have never been required as preconditions for nativism. People could and did perceive these elements as threats to the nation and acted accordingly, even when they were not problems in the community where they lived. Nor was xenophobia new to Pennsylvania or Harrisburg in 1854. A Nativist party frequently ran slates of candidates for state and local office in the 1840s and an apolitical nativist labor organization, the Order of United American Mechanics, was active in the town in the early 1850s.<sup>7</sup>

Nativism, however, took on new life and form after 1853 when John J. Clyde and Stephen Miller joined forces, purchased Harrisburg's leading Whig newspaper, the bi-weekly *Pennsylvania Telegraph*, and began a new daily of their own, the *Morning Herald*. The journals, both edited by Miller, regularly exposed the evils of Catholicism, the efforts of Catholics to undermine the public schools, and the dangers posed to American "freedoms" by immigrants (especially Catholic immigrants) voting and holding office. If anyone could be charged with bringing Know Nothingism to Harrisburg, Clyde (co-owner of the papers and, in time, a member of the Guard of Liberty) and Miller (who coyly denied any first-hand information about the movement while whipping up a steady froth of nativist agitation) would seem the most likely suspects.

The two had much in common. Both were in their late thirties; both were natives of the immediate area (Clyde was born in Mechanicsburg, Miller in nearby Perry County) and products of the common schools; both professed strong temperance beliefs and were

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burg, 1969), 26. Harrisburg's total population grew at almost exactly the same rate between 1840 when it was 5,980 and 1870 when it was 23,104. Harrisburg newspapers, even in the 1850s, always treated Father Maher deferentially.

<sup>7</sup> Sister M. Theophane Geary, *A History of Third Parties in Pennsylvania, 1840-1860* (Washington, 1938), 56-68, 93-156. David Montgomery, in "The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the Kensington Riots of 1844," *Journal of Social History* 5 (1972), 411-46, analyzes nativism among workers in Philadelphia in the 1840s. Nativism in New York City in the 1840s raised most of the arguments used by Know Nothings in the 1850s. See Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York and Oxford, 1984), 315-25. For the Order of United American Mechanics, see Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 337; *Telegraph*, July 24, 1850, Jan. 20, 27, 1855; *Whig State Journal*, Jan. 29, 1852; *Boro Item*, Jan. 13, 1853; and *Morning Herald*, Jan. 24, 1855.

Methodists (Clyde a trustee of Harrisburg's Grace Church and Miller a licensed lay preacher); and both were Whig officials of Dauphin County (Miller was prothonotary from 1849 to 1855 and Clyde treasurer from 1850 to 1852). Clyde, a bookbinder by trade, had founded and edited a newspaper in Fayette County before settling permanently in Harrisburg in 1840. In 1851 Clyde became editor of the *Whig State Journal* and in 1853 started a short-lived temperance journal, *Crystal Fountain*. Miller, the grandson of German immigrants, began as a store clerk and by 1837 had become a forwarding merchant.<sup>8</sup>

Tilling the soil of Harrisburg for nativism began with the appearance of the *Whig State Journal* in January 1851 as a rival to the existing *Pennsylvania Telegraph*. Theophilus Fenn, founder and editor of the *Telegraph*, had set up his paper in 1831 to serve as the Whig party's voice in the state capital. After two decades of relative success, he had recently given offense by adopting an antislavery tone and opposing the Compromise of 1850. This put him at odds with the Millard Fillmore Administration in Washington which touted the compromise as the "final settlement" of the slavery issue. As a consequence, Clyde, supported by a number of other county officials of Whig persuasion (including Stephen Miller), founded the *Journal*. In return for vigorous support of the administration, the *Journal* received printing contracts and other official favors that previously had gone to the *Telegraph*. Fenn questioned Clyde's ability to write an editorial, charging that his only interest was in making money. Clyde's local backers merely sought to perpetuate themselves in office, Fenn declared, and warned that "the offices, emoluments, and business of Dauphin [county] may be considered as arranged for some years to come. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For Clyde, see William Henry Egle, *History of the Counties of Dauphin and Lebanon in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1883), 343, 567; for Miller, *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (63 vols. to date, New York, 1893-), 10:63. Miller's lay ministry is discussed in the *Telegraph*, May 24, 1854.

<sup>9</sup> Egle, *History of Dauphin County*, 352; *Telegraph*, Nov. 2, 9, 1853. For Fenn's split with the Fillmore Administration, see Gerald G. Eggert, "The Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg: A Case Study," *PMHB* 109 (1985), 553-56. The *Whig State Journal*, Sept. 16, 1851, spoke of its rival's "black cloven foot of negro-ism," and concluded, "The *Telegraph* is abolitionist." For Fenn's comments on Clyde and his supporters, see *Telegraph*, Dec. 11, 1851.

Unfortunately for the Whigs, things went badly after 1851. That year a Democrat, William Bigler, became governor of Pennsylvania, and in 1852 Franklin Pierce, also a Democrat, became President of the United States. With their party falling apart, some Whigs saw the rise of the Catholic issue as timely: it would attract wide interest among Protestant voters and, since Catholics overwhelmingly voted Democratic anyway, pushing the Catholic issue would cost little. Editor Clyde played up the issues of state support for parochial schools and opposition to reading the Bible in public schools as threats to the system of free public education. He charged that the appointment of James Campbell (a Roman Catholic who had lost a bid for election to a Pennsylvania judgeship) first to be attorney general of Pennsylvania and then Postmaster General of the United States, proved how the Democratic party catered to the Catholic vote in spite of public mandates to the contrary. Clyde portrayed the visit of a papal nuncio to the United States to resolve property disputes among Catholic churches as outside "meddling" in American affairs.<sup>10</sup> He made no pretense at objectivity: as he saw it, all three involved serious threats to American freedoms. Although Fenn of the *Telegraph* took similar stands on these issues, his tone was far less strident.

In a move aimed at reunifying the voice of Whiggery, John J. Patterson, a newly elected member of the state legislature from Juniata County, purchased both the *Telegraph* and *Whig State Journal* and combined them into a single paper in November 1853. Patterson gave the new *Telegraph* a moderate stance and tone. Three months later he sold one-third interest each to Clyde and Miller, and in May 1854, sold the remaining third to Stephen Miller & Company and moved to Pittsburgh to help edit a newspaper there.<sup>11</sup> Whether or not contemplated from the start, Patterson had done something Fenn would not likely have done: sold the *Telegraph* to Clyde and his associate, Stephen Miller.

Under Miller's editorship, both the *Morning Herald* and the *Telegraph* added "Americanism" and "Temperance" to the regular list

<sup>10</sup> Passim, *Whig State Journal*, spring 1853, especially Feb. 7, March 3, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Egle, *History of Dauphin County*, 352; *Telegraph*, Nov. 2, 1853; Apr. 29, May 3, June 28, 1854.

of Whig principles to be espoused.<sup>12</sup> Items on Know Nothingism immediately appeared in both papers. The first called attention to the rapid growth of the "mysterious order" in Pennsylvania and elsewhere, noted that it recently "entirely controlled" many local elections, and reported rumors that a unit was about to be set up in Harrisburg. The paper described the small squares of paper with "mysterious inscriptions" that the order posted on street corners to call its members to meetings.<sup>13</sup>

Thereafter neutral or sympathetic, never hostile or critical, items on Know Nothingism appeared in almost every issue. Miller often concluded such pieces, "but of course we don't belong to the order so 'know nothing.'" At least one story was an obvious come-on: it told of rumors of a coming midnight meeting of the society on an island in the Susquehanna River opposite Harrisburg. Armed guards would be watching for intruders.<sup>14</sup> It is not difficult to imagine the interest this aroused in young people of the area who craved excitement and adventure.

In contrast to the indulgent bits on Know Nothingism, Miller maintained a steady flow of squibs against immigrants and the Catholic church. He complained of German beer gardens and sabbath breaking. For example, a German named Augustus Liebtrue invited a number of his friends to a party at his "shanty" one Sunday and "'entertained' them with the 'lager.'" As the drinking progressed, the "whole party became very much excited, noisy and riotously disposed." To the annoyance of the "whole neighborhood," they played musical instruments, sang "dutch songs," and used "loud boistrous profane swearing, and all the usual accompaniments of a dutch lager beer spree." When asked to preserve order, these "better citizens," who were "merely exercising their 'republican rights,' . . . indignantly and forcibly ejected the intruders from the house."<sup>15</sup>

Any Irishman arrested for drunkenness or brawling was guaranteed notice in one or both of Miller's papers. Invariably, the references

<sup>12</sup> Under the *Telegraph's* banner, Miller added the subheading: "A Family Newspaper, Devoted to Americanism, Temperance, Moral Reform, Education, Art and Science, General Intelligence, Agriculture, Etc." See *Telegraph*, July 11, 1855.

<sup>13</sup> *Morning Herald*, Apr. 19, 1854; *Telegraph*, Apr. 22, 1854.

<sup>14</sup> *Telegraph*, May 3, June 3, 10, 1854.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, June 20, 1854.

were condescending: "a jolly son of 'Green Erin,' with a brogue as broad as his face," "an Irish woman having 'a little bit of a spree to herself,'" "an Irishman possessing a countenance which indicated that he took to Whiskey as natural as ducks take to water." One "son of the 'Emerald Isle,'" arrested for beating his wife, according to Miller, belonged "to that class of Irish reformers who go in for the 'largest liberty'" including "getting drunk and whipping their wives [*sic*]." On another occasion a former constable arrested "an Irishman . . . lying in the gutter . . . in a glorious state of intoxication." Lifted from his "muddy bed" by the "humane officer," the drunk couldn't "retain his centre of gravitation" and had to be carried. He was "committed to Prison under the name of Patrick O'Gutter." An Irish woman found drunk in the streets, Miller declared, "evidently belongs to the very lowest class of Irish paupers who are daily thrust upon our shores by the thousands, to subsist upon the bounty of American citizens." Irish wakes also drew the editor's scorn: "as is customary on such occasions, after the close of the burial rites a large number of the Irish in attendance became excessively inebriated. The whole affair was discreditable to the participants, an outrage to public morals, and disgusting to the community."<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, Miller reacted heatedly to Democratic and Catholic attacks on the growth of nativist secret societies. His most powerful editorial appeared in both of his papers only ten days before the founding of the Guard of Liberty in Harrisburg. He objected to politicians and newspaper editors who were "hurling their anathemas" at Know Nothings and all "purely *American* secret organizations" while remaining "silent as the grave" about such powerful secret orders as the Jesuits who were "sworn to wage a war of extermination against the Protestant Religion" and to "promote the interests, assumptions and pretensions of the Pope of Rome in this country, by all the means, good or bad." Warming to his subject, Miller declared that there was a Jesuit spy in nearly every Protestant household: those who teach "your children in school" may be Jesuits, the man "who controls the most important department of the United States Government [Postmaster General Campbell] is a Jesuit," and two-thirds

<sup>16</sup> *Morning Herald*, Dec. 24, 1853, May 19, Nov. 4, 1854; *Telegraph*, March 7, Nov. 7, 1855.



of all post offices in the nation "are under the *espionage* of members of the same secret order." Also in that organization were the "help in your kitchen," the "girl in your nursery," and the "fellow who blacks your boots." Even as they denounce "saycret societies" and Know Nothings, they are "peering into your private affairs" and "telling Bishops and Priests what you eat for breakfast, dinner and supper, how you do your business in which you are engaged, what your income is, and how you manage to live, &c . . . No American who employs an Irish servant," Miller warned, "is beyond the reach of *Jesuitical* spies."<sup>17</sup>

Over several months, Miller fed his readers a steady diet of anti-Catholic "news items": nuns and monks were either debauched and immoral or unwilling captives of the church; Irishmen in some communities, including Harrisburg, were said to be forming exclusively Irish militia companies ("What for?" Miller asked); Catholics in Maryland were storing guns in church-run institutions; a priest raped a teen-age girl at confession; another slapped a member of his parish who sent her children to public schools; priests were burning Protestant Scriptures; and Catholic storekeepers were using pages torn from Bibles to wrap peanuts and candy.<sup>18</sup> Miller reported numerous Irish-American confrontations, all of which he blamed on the Irish. Each ended with vindication of the alleged victims. A Fourth of July riot between Americans and Irish at Manchester, New Hampshire, resulted in the rout of the Irish, the gutting of a dozen or more of their houses, and the breaking out of windows in a Catholic church. That same day at Cincinnati an Irishman attacked an American for wearing a "supposed Know Nothing hat." Using "a pistol and bowie knife," the American killed him. Miller was pleased to report that at Dorchester, Massachusetts, Know Nothings had been wrongly accused of blowing up a Catholic church. Later information suggested that church members had deposited several kegs of powder in the building "for its protection," and the explosion was accidental. "That's a more likely story than the first," Miller declared, "for we cannot

<sup>17</sup> *Morning Herald*, June 7, 1854.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, June 13, July 24 and 31, 1854; *Telegraph*, May 27, June 28, 1854; Jan. 10, Apr. 4, Aug. 8, 1855.

believe that protestants, under any circumstances, will prove aggressors."

Miller's bias was nowhere clearer than in what he regarded as provocative. Rioting at Lawrence, Massachusetts, he charged, "as usual" grew out of Irish provocation, originating "in the *American flag* being carried in an Irish procession, *surmounted by the cross!*" Both sides were armed but an exchange of shots did little damage to anyone. The Americans, after putting the Irish to flight, gutted "many of their houses," and had to be dispersed by a company of militia. On the other hand, a large gathering of "American citizens" at Bath, Maine, listening to an anti-Catholic lecture, were "interfered" with by a group of Irishmen. The provoked Americans thereupon proceeded to the Catholic church, broke it open, rang the bell, displayed an American flag from the belfry, and afterwards burned the church. "All violent measures of this kind are certainly to be deprecated, and should not be tolerated," Miller editorialized, "But the fact is, that American citizens have been so repeatedly interfered with, in the exercise of the Republican right of free discussion, that forbearance has almost ceased to be a virtue. In every instance where disturbances have grown out of these street meetings, the Irish Catholics have been the aggressors. These minions of the Pope insult and abuse our people, and excite them to deeds of violence, and then turn upon them with the hypocritical cry of 'persecution.' Such is Roman Catholicism!"<sup>19</sup>

In the midst of Miller's tirades against foreigners and Catholics, the Guard of Liberty organized in Harrisburg. On June 24, 1854, "according to previous arrangement," six "Volunteers" (Samuel Ettla, George Martin, S. Stahler, James E. Harbaugh, J. H. Sheets, and George H. Morgan) met in the "Store of Volunteer \_\_\_\_\_," . . . took the prescribed oath," and "proceeded to organize Camp No. 1 of the \_\_\_\_\_." The objects of the society were set forth as:

The Repeal of all Naturalization Laws, None but Native Americans for Office; A pure American Common School System; War to the hilt, on Romanism; Opposition first and last, to the formation of Military Companies composed of Foreigners; The advocacy of a sound, healthy,

<sup>19</sup> *Morning Herald*, July 7, 10, 13, 14, 1854.

and safe Nationality; Hostility to all Papal Influences, in whatever form and under whatever name; American Institutions and American Sentiments; More Stringent and Effective Emigration Laws; The amplest Protection to Protestant Interests; The doctrines of the revered WASHINGTON and his compatriots; The sending back of all Foreign Paupers landed on our shores; The formation of Societies to protect all American Interests; Eternal enmity to all who attempt to carry out the principles of a foreign Church or State; Our Country, our whole Country, and nothing but our Country; And finally,—American Laws and American Legislation and Death to all Foreign Influences, whether in high places or low!<sup>20</sup>

Who made the “previous arrangements,” supplied the statement of principles, and administered the “prescribed oath” went unrecorded. It seems likely that a visiting official of the organization would have presided at the founding of a new chapter. In any event, the new volunteers proceeded to elect themselves officers of the camp (grand commander, first and second aides, secretary, and inside and outside sentinels), and to name a committee to draft a constitution and bylaws. After “other business,” the camp “deserted” to meet four days later at a hall belonging to the inside sentinel. At the second meeting the officers examined and swore in six new recruits and elected two additional officers, an orderly and a financial secretary. They also took steps to secure a flag and a suitable hall for future meetings. Before again “deserting,” “several motions were made and agreed to,” and a collection taken to “defray expenses.” At its meeting on July 12, the Guard adopted a constitution and bylaws but put a copy of neither in the minutes.

The Guard met weekly during July. By the middle of that month, the little band had swollen to forty-five and already included its four most prominent members: William Kline (Democrat), incumbent third-term chief burgess of Harrisburg; John Knepley (Democrat), until recently assistant burgess of Harrisburg; John Swiler (Democrat), a Chandler by trade who served as a member of borough council; and John J. Clyde (Whig). Unless we believe that Clyde maintained the order’s rule of absolute secrecy, his membership indicates that

<sup>20</sup> “Minutes Book.”

Miller was less than candid with his readers when he denied having any direct information about the secret society.

After July 17, the minutes regularly reported new members, but gave neither names nor number. Without that information, measuring the Guard's pace of growth is difficult. The membership list at the back of the book shows that another thirty-two individuals joined by the end of October (including two incumbent town constables, James Lewis and Henry Radabaugh, and John Stouffer, former high constable), and ten others became members in March 1855 (including the Guard's oldest and wealthiest member, Thomas C. Reed [Whig], a retired iron founder, one-term chief burgess, and onetime Nativist party activist). Because the minutes do not mention members who may have left the order, it is impossible to know whether the organization grew steadily or simply held its own as new recruits replaced others who left.

Apparently in accord with its new constitution, the Guard elected a slate of six officers in August. Of the seven who had filled eight offices since June 28, four won re-election. No subsequent mention of the others suggests they may have quit the order or left town. In the fall, the Guard drew up lists of nominees to support for state and county offices in the upcoming general election and chose "delegates to the County Convention" (presumably of the Know Nothing organization). The minutes indicate no meetings between October 24 and February 27. At a busy session on March 1, the Guard "reopened" its membership list, initiated ten new members, nominated new officers for the "ensuing term" (selecting only one of the original officers as a nominee), and drew up a slate of candidates for the coming borough elections. On March 6, those nominated at the previous meeting to be officers of the Guard were elected. There the minutes book ended abruptly. Evidently, the retiring secretary kept possession of the document and the new secretary, if the organization continued to meet, perhaps started a new book that has not come to light. It is not known, however, whether the Harrisburg Guard of Liberty persisted or passed out of existence after March 6.

Eighty-seven different names appear in the minutes book. Only seventy-three signed (two with an "X") the membership list at the back of the book. Possibly those not signing had been blackballed or withdrew after their first meeting. On the other hand, two members appear in the minutes (one making a motion and one being elected

an officer) who were not on the membership list. The signatures were followed by dues paid (usually 25 cents, but one paid 50 cents, five paid 12 ½ cents and four paid 6 ¼ cents). Two names, without dues paid, had lines drawn through them. Eleven others without dues payments were not crossed out.<sup>21</sup>

All 87 names in the minutes book were used in this study. Of that number, 64 (74 percent) can be identified in one or more of three sources: the federal census schedules of 1850, those for 1860, and Harrisburg Tax Assessment books for 1854 and 1855. The great majority appear in two or more sources and nearly two-fifths in all three. Four were found in one or more of the sources but could not be distinguished from fathers or other residents with the same name. Of the 19 not identified, at least 3 did not come from Harrisburg proper and so appear in none of the town records. The rest were probably transients who lived in the borough too short a time to have been detected even by tax assessors. Because the Guard of Liberty formed midway between the censuses of 1850 and 1860, 28 (32 percent) of the entire 87 and 10 (18 percent) of 57 listed on Harrisburg tax assessment rolls did not appear on either of the federal census schedules. There are no extant city directories for the 1850s.

What do these sources reveal about the founders, the leaders, and the membership of the Harrisburg Know Nothings? The five identified founders of the Guard (all of whom also were officers) had an average age of thirty-eight. (See Table 1.) Most were bachelors with unprepossessing occupations and low incomes. Of the four who were single, two were in their twenties, one was over forty, and the age of the fourth is not known. The younger two lived at home (one with his mother and siblings, one with his mother only), the oldest lived in a hotel, and the residence of the fourth is unknown. The married founder was in his fifties. The four whose occupations are recorded were a store clerk, a printer, a carpenter, and a laborer. Of those with recorded incomes, all earned \$200 or less per year. Two owned real estate. Only one had a known political affiliation, having participated in a local Whig caucus in 1851.

Of the 15 identified officers (including the founders of the orga-

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

TABLE 1  
 Characteristics of Identified Founders, Officers and Members  
 of the Harrisburg Guard of Liberty

Characteristic	Fndrs	Offs	Members	Characteristic	Fndrs	Offs	Members
Identification (a, b):				Annual Income (b):			
Total Number	6	17	87	Unknown	1	2	9
Number Identified	5	15	64		20%	13%	14%
	83%	88%	74%	\$ 00-99	-	-	1
							2%
Of the 64 identified:				\$100-199	3	8	33
In 1 source	2	2	16		60%	53%	52%
	40%	13%	25%	\$200-299	1	2	10
In 2 sources	-	7	23		20%	13%	16%
	-	47%	36%	\$300-399	-	2	8
In 3 sources	3	6	25		-	13%	13%
	60%	40%	39%	Over \$500	-	1	3
						7%	5%
Apparent Marital Status (a, b):				Owned Real Estate (a, b):			
Single	4	6	23	Yes	2	7	19
	80%	40%	36%		40%	47%	30%
Married	1	9	34	No	3	8	44
	20%	60%	53%		60%	53%	69%
Uncertain	-	-	7	Unknown	-	-	1
	-	-	11%				2%
Age (a):				Known Political Affiliation (c):			
Unknown	1	1	10	Before 1855:			
	20%	7%	16%	Whig	1	3	8
19-29 years	2	4	17	Democrat	-	-	6
	40%	27%	27%	Independent	-	-	1
30-34 years	-	2	15	Shifted	-	-	1
	-	13%	23%				
35-39 years	-	2	6	After 1858:			
	-	13%	9%	Republican	-	2	2
40-49 years	1	2	7	Anti-Democrat	-	2	3
	20%	13%	11%	Democrat	-	1	8
50-59 years	1	4	8				
	20%	27%	13%				
60-69 years	-	-	1				
	-	-	2%				
Average Age	38	39	35				

Sources:

- Computerized federal census schedules for Harrisburg, 1850, 1860
- Harrisburg Tax Assessments, Dauphin County Tax Records, 1854, 1855
- Newspaper reports of party caucuses, elections, 1846-1855

nization), 10 were unmarried. Their average age was thirty-nine years, four years more than that of rank-and-file members. Their occupations were diverse, including clerk, constable, cooper, laborer, machinist, merchant, publisher, printer, tailor, tobacconist, wagonmaker, and two carpenters. Two had taxable incomes but no occupation listed in the census or tax records. Over half earned between \$100 and \$200 per year, and five between \$200 and \$500. Nearly half (7) owned real estate. Only 4 of the 15 had known political affiliations, and they all were Whigs. One held a local public office (constable), and another had once been county treasurer.

As for the 64 of 87 Guard members (including founders and officers already discussed) who can be identified, the birthplaces of 54 are given in the census: 48 in Pennsylvania, 3 in other states, and 4 (contrary to Know Nothing rules) shown in 1850 as foreign born—three in Germany and one in Great Britain. The 1860 census lists three of the four as natives of Pennsylvania. Although their average age was thirty-five years and only 17 were still in their twenties, 23 (more than a third) appear to have been unmarried. Since those not identified were likely to have included more transient, younger, and unmarried persons, the average age of Guard members was probably lower than thirty-five and the percentage of bachelors higher. The residence of members can only be identified by ward, street addresses not being used in Harrisburg until the mid-1860s. Of the 46 appearing in the census of 1850 (between four and five years prior to joining the Guard of Liberty), 9 came from the East Ward, 13 from the West, 10 from the North, and 14 from the South. When Harrisburg became a city in 1860, its boundaries were enlarged, and the wards redefined, making comparisons with 1850 residence data virtually impossible.

Fifty-seven members of the Guard appeared on the local tax records for 1854-55. Their incomes, for taxing purposes, averaged \$180; 60 percent earned less than \$200 per year, 19 percent earned \$300 or more. Those same lists show that 19 (a third of the 57 on the rolls and 22 percent of all 87 members of the Guard) possessed real estate. Among the general population of Harrisburg, 16.2 percent of all males over twenty-one years of age held real estate in 1850. By 1860 the percentage increased to 34.2 percent, but the average value was lower. The holdings of most Guard members were modest; only two were valued at more than \$5,000, while seven were assessed at between \$160 and \$640. As might be expected, owning real estate tended to hold people in the community: 32 percent of land-owning members of the Guard appear in tax rolls of 1854-55 and in one of the federal census schedules; 58 percent appear on all three lists. By contrast, of the 45 who held no real estate in 1854-55, many were geographically highly mobile, not to say transient. A third (15) appeared only on one census or the 1854-55 tax list, another third appeared on two lists, and the final 15 on all three. Of the latter group, six had acquired real estate holdings by 1860. In other words, nearly 60 percent of Guard members who held real estate remained

in Harrisburg at least ten years; two-thirds of those without real estate left in less than a decade; and of the third of those who did remain a decade or more, 40 percent were in the process of acquiring real estate. The 23 who appeared on neither census nor tax schedules, it must be remembered, were probably transients who owned no real estate.

A detailed reading of Harrisburg newspapers for reports of party caucuses and local elections between 1846 and 1855 revealed the party affiliations of only 16 Guard members. Prior to 1854, 8 were Whigs, 6 were Democrats, one was an independent, and one shifted between parties. Seven of the 16 were office-holders or former office-holders. Since only a few Harrisburg churches have published congregational histories or allowed copies of marriage and baptismal records to be deposited in libraries, no systematic survey of the religious affiliations of Guard members has been possible. A history of Dauphin County Masonry reveals that five Guards were Masons.<sup>22</sup>

The occupations of only 56 of the 87 Guards could be determined. (See Table 2.) Although more than half of those (31) were skilled workers, their occupations were varied, the largest groupings being seven carpenters, five printers, and three tailors. Eight were clerks or sales persons, five common laborers, four merchants or grocers, two proprietors (an iron founder and a farmer), and one physician; four held miscellaneous jobs (artist, combmaker, constable, and courier); and one was chief burgess of Harrisburg. Tax records indicate eight others were employed, but listed no occupation. One was a student. Members of the Guard, when compared with the general population of Harrisburg, were more heavily concentrated in the merchant-proprietor class, in the skilled crafts, and in clerical work. Professionals and unskilled labor were underrepresented. None were identified as semi-skilled factory workers.

To summarize, the "typical" Harrisburg Know Nothing was probably a little less than thirty-five years old, with a high likelihood of being unmarried. By occupation he would most likely be a skilled

<sup>22</sup> Typewritten copies of records of several churches are on deposit in the Genealogical Room of the State Library, Harrisburg. William Henry Egle and James M. Lamberton, *History of Perseverance Lodge No. 21, F.&A.M., Penn'a. at Harrisburg* (Harrisburg, 1913), lists all members of all Masonic Lodges in the community through 1913.



TABLE 2  
Occupational Groupings of Guard of Liberty members and  
the General Population of Harrisburg

Occupational Classification	% general population		%Guard of Liberty
	1850 (n=2310)	1860 (n=4204)	
Unskilled/common labor	25 5	30 7	8 9
Semi-skilled/factory labor	3 1	9 0	0
Skilled craftsmen	46 2	39 0	55 4
Clerical/sales/services	8 9	7 2	14 3
Managerial	1 0	1 1	1 8
Merchants/proprietors	9 6	8 5	10 7
Professional	5 5	4 4	1 8
Miscellaneous			7 1

Sources

Computerized Federal Census Schedules for Harrisburg, 1850, 1860

Harrisburg Tax Assessments, Dauphin County Tax Records, 1854, 1855

worker or clerk with a taxable income of under \$200 per year. Although he might have been transient and propertyless, he had slightly higher than one chance in five of owning real estate. More than likely, he was a newcomer to politics. He may have voted, but he was not apt to have participated in a party caucus, much less run for or been elected to public office at even the local level. If he had a party affiliation, he was a little more likely to be a Whig than a Democrat.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The membership of the Guard of Liberty at Harrisburg was similar in character to that of the much larger Council #23 of Worcester, Mass., studied by George Haynes in the 1890s ("A Chapter from the Local History of Know Nothingism"). Tracing the 1,120 members there in city directories, Haynes found that between one-fourth and one-third were boarders, 52 were transients listed in no directory, and 21 of the first 150 names he traced remained in Worcester less than a year. "With Andrew Jackson," he observed (p. 87), "they seem to have 'had a very poor opinion of a man who cannot spell a word in more than one way.'" As to their wealth, "the bulk of this organization was made up of poll-tax payers or very small property holders, that is it was made up very largely of the 'unattached,' the 'boarding' class, which feels few responsibilities and little conservatism" (p. 88). "They were of all ages," he added (p. 90), "although the great majority were young men, making the average age rather under than over 35 years." By occupation, 773 of 1,120 worked in the iron industry, the building trades, shoemaking, or other industries, and 112 were mercantile employees (including clerks). Only eleven were professionals. Michael Holt, in "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," 309, found that early leaders of the Know Nothing movement were "new" men in politics, and younger and poorer than most political leaders. Holt's Pittsburgh sample revealed that more than half were under thirty-five years of age, 60% owned real estate worth less than \$5,000, and 48% were artisans or clerks by occupation.

While age, marital status, occupation, income, and holding or not holding real estate give an indication of who was more susceptible than others to the attractions of Know Nothingism, they do not explain why people joined what was at bottom a political movement. To be sure, everyone who joined the Guard did not necessarily have a political reason for doing so. The high percentage of bachelors, for example, suggests that some may have signed up for the camaraderie and an evening out. A few clearly were "joiners" who enrolled in many different organizations but probably were committed to none. One such married member with children, E.C. Williams, between 1850 and 1855 participated in a Whig party caucus, was in the temperance movement, the militia, a fire company, and the Masonic order as well as the Guard of Liberty.<sup>24</sup>

But what, beyond the prior political experience of a few members, drew people to this essentially political organization? Recent studies of Know Nothingism and of mid-nineteenth-century American politics suggest a wide range of factors undermining the existing political structure. These include native-born Americans' concern about the tidal wave of Irish and German immigrants after 1848, the growing membership and assertiveness of the Catholic church, a determination to limit or end the consumption of alcohol, nostalgia for the alleged simple "republicanism" of the past, disgust at the ineffectiveness and corruption of existing political machinery, the waning of both the Whig and Democratic parties, the intensifying conflict over slavery, the upheaval in economic relationships caused by the coming of railroads and the substitution of machine for hand labor, and the increasing urbanization of what had been an essentially rural society. These studies argue that the Know Nothing/American party movement (at least in the North) linked nativism and anti-Catholicism with political reform, temperance, and hostility to the spread of slavery.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> For Williams, see *Keystone*, March 3, 1852; *Telegraph*, Aug. 28, 1853, Feb. 15, 1854; Egle and Lamberton, *History of Perseverance Lodge*, 3; Egle, *History of Dauphin County*, 604.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, William E. Gienapp, "Nebraska, Nativism, and Rum: The Failure of Fusion in Pennsylvania, 1854," *PMHB* 109 (1985), 440-41; and Huston, "Demise of the Pennsylvania American Party," 473-75; Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a

To various degrees, those forces were at work in Harrisburg and contributed members to the Guard of Liberty. There were recent immigrants in Harrisburg, though relatively few, and a Catholic church, albeit one unlikely to stir up controversy. It may be assumed that most, if not all, of the members of the Guard had no affection for either. The temperance movement was very active in Harrisburg between 1852 and 1855. Temperance sermons, articles, conventions, and lectures, a temperance hotel, mass meetings to support a prohibitory liquor law in Pennsylvania similar to one recently adopted by Maine, and a variety of temperance societies (Friends of Temperance, Sons of Temperance, Friends of a Prohibitory Liquor Law, and Independent Order of Good Templars) were reported in the town's newspapers. No fewer than six members of the Guard of Liberty were active in the temperance movement.<sup>26</sup>

Because Harrisburg was capital of the state, most of the major political factions published newspapers in the town. As a consequence, residents were more exposed to political events, rumors, and points of view than people from other Pennsylvania communities, excepting possibly Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. As already noted, at least sixteen members of the Guard, both Whigs and Democrats, were active in politics. One of the Whigs, Thomas C. Reed, and the party switcher, John Till, in the 1840s were briefly members of the Nativist party.<sup>27</sup> Between 1850 and 1853, the divisive controversy over slavery also directly touched many Harrisburg residents. A series of incidents involving the capture and return of runaway slaves caused gatherings in the streets, at least one small riot, and pages of newspaper controversy. Disgusted citizens pressured the United States commissioner, believed to be overly zealous in remanding runaways to their owners, into resigning; they turned out the town's elected constables because they had been running down fugitive slaves for the commissioner; and they raised over \$600 to redeem a black who had worked in

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Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War," *Journal of American History* 72 (1985), 529-58, Holt, "The Politics of Impatience," 309-31, Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 1-23, and Booraem, *Formation of the Republican Party in New York*, 32-33

<sup>26</sup> Involvement in the temperance movement was determined from names of persons attending meetings as reported in Harrisburg newspapers

<sup>27</sup> *Telegraph*, March 25, 1846, *Keystone*, March 20, 1849

Harrisburg for fifteen years before being carried off as a runaway slave. Two of the town constables, elected because they opposed serving as slave hunters (James Lewis and Henry Radabaugh), and the high constable who was displaced because he did run slaves (John Stouffer) all joined the Guard of Liberty.<sup>28</sup>

Rapid changes in transportation and industrialization, and the resulting urbanization, profoundly affected Harrisburg. In the 1830s the town had become a canal center, with state-built lines running east, west, and north from the town. A decade later it became an important rail center, located on the nation's leading east-west trunk line, the Pennsylvania, and served by smaller lines to the north, northeast, south, and southwest. Large-scale manufacturing did not begin in Harrisburg until the 1850s, but it came with a surge. A cotton textile factory appeared in 1849, the town's first blast furnace began pouring in 1850, major furnaces and rolling mills were organized in 1853 and 1856, a railroad car manufactory opened in 1853, and a producer of machinery (the Hickok Eagle Works) built an enlarged new plant that year.<sup>29</sup> The town's population swelled accordingly, expanding by 30 percent to 44 percent each decade between 1810 and 1850 and by 71 percent in the 1850s alone.

Although these rapid changes may have set the stage for unrest and alienation, the Harrisburg press welcomed them as evidence of "progress." The town's Democratic papers were less enthusiastic than the Whig journals about a new state law to encourage corporations, but all welcomed the first factory and urged citizens to subscribe to stock in "Our Cotton Mill."<sup>30</sup> Editor Stephen Miller led the chorus. "Five years ago," he wrote in the *Morning Herald* on June 23, 1854, the day before the Guard of Liberty was founded, "Harrisburg was one of the dullest, drowsiest towns in the State, and we had reason to fear that our citizens would never awake from their Rip-Van-Winkle sleep." Once capitalists began investing and realizing "handsome profits," a "rapid and healthy" growth followed. "On every

<sup>28</sup> Eggert, "Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law on Harrisburg," 552-53, 563-67.

<sup>29</sup> Based on extensive research by the author for a study of the process of industrialization and its impact on Harrisburg in the nineteenth century.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, *Telegraph* [Whig], June 20, July 2, 1849; *Democratic Union*, June 20, 1849; *Keystone* [Democrat], Dec. 11, 1849; *Daily American* [Whig], Jan. 4, 1851; *Whig State Journal*, July 22, 1851.

side we hear the hum of busy industry, and the multiplication of factories and furnaces, rolling mills and forges, flour and lumber mills, railroad car and machine shops." Harrisburg could rightly take pride in its "unexampled progress and prosperity."

No Guard members were identified as factory employees, so it is difficult to see them as alienated victims of direct industrial exploitation. Nonetheless, industrial problems concerned some of them. The higher percentage of skilled craftsmen in the Guard compared to the general population (see Table 2) might indicate the Guard's concern for the impact of industry on its tradesmen. When the operatives of the cotton mill went on strike for shorter work hours in October 1853 (eight months before the founding of the Guard), George H. Morgan, a printer and founder-officer of the order, and Washington Barr, a wagon-maker and officer in the Guard, addressed a public rally of the strikers. The *Telegraph*, still edited by Theophilus Fenn, referred to the two as "self-seeking politicians." Clyde, editor of the *Whig State Journal*, and later an officer of the Guard, while sympathetic to the strikers, called for compromise based on the realities of the situation. The cotton mill was in debt, it operated at a loss, and it had paid its shareholders not one cent of dividends since opening. The choice, he pointed out, was between operating at a greater loss by meeting the strikers' demands or closing down.<sup>31</sup> Morgan and three others who later joined the Guard were directly involved in Harrisburg's small labor movement. Morgan and Robert S. Boyd, another journeymen printer, participated in a city-wide printers' strike in 1852, and John Till and Henry Radabaugh in 1853 were members of the Order of United American Mechanics.<sup>32</sup>

Because both friends and foes of slave running and both champions and enemies of capitalist employers equally found common cause in the Guard of Liberty, it appears unlikely that Know Nothingism in Harrisburg owed much to either factor. This is especially true since nothing in the order's statement of principles or minutes and nothing

<sup>31</sup> *Telegraph*, Oct. 26, 1853; *Whig State Journal*, Oct. 20, 1853. "The Minutes of the Cotton Mill Board of Directors" (Dauphin County Historical Society, Harrisburg) show that Clyde was right about no dividends or profits at this point.

<sup>32</sup> *Telegraph*, Apr. 14, 28, 1852; for United American Mechanics, see *Whig State Journal*, Jan. 29, 1852; *Boro Item*, Jan. 13, 1853.

in the newspaper that articulated its cause linked either with the movement. Indeed, excepting for anti-Catholicism and hostility to immigrants, it is difficult to conclude that any other factors weighed significantly in the rise of Know Nothingism in Harrisburg.

Possibly some of what the community knew of Know Nothingism came from out-of-town newspapers or from local papers other than those edited by Stephen Miller. Local clergymen perhaps discussed the subject in sermons. Visitors and newcomers to the town may have carried information with them. Most notably, legislators, coming from all parts of the Commonwealth, would have brought stories of Know Nothing activities in their communities to Harrisburg. Miller's papers, however, were the most accessible and persistent source for such information. By the end of 1854, he was widely recognized by friends and enemies of the movement as one of its most forceful supporters. And, until mid-1855, the Know Nothingism that Miller preached consisted almost entirely of attacks on unlimited immigration and political Roman Catholicism. From time to time he denounced the old political parties and their leaders and spoke of his personal support of temperance. In this early period, however, he had little to say on slavery or the protection of American industry from foreign competition. Nothing that he wrote gave any indication that Know Nothingism was aware of the problems that the transportation and industrial revolutions were bringing to society. It would not seem unreasonable to conclude that Miller's paper was the chief source of information on Know Nothingism for those who joined the Guard of Liberty, or that the features of the movement most attractive to them (other than its novelty and mystique of secrecy) were its stands on immigration and the Catholic church.

Once established, whether viewed as a social or a political organization, the Guard of Liberty must have been less than satisfying to its rank and file. The fifteen meetings between June 1854 and March 1855 were devoted chiefly to examining and initiating recruits, taking up collections, and electing officers. After "other" or "regular" or "some other unimportant business," meetings adjourned. Unless those vague words covered exciting political activity, the meetings, with one or two exceptions to be noted, were uneventful.<sup>33</sup> After

<sup>33</sup> Again, the activities of the Guard of Liberty at Harrisburg were similar to those of

meeting weekly for five weeks in June and July, the group met but once in August, three times in September, and twice in October. Between the state and county elections at the end of October and February 27, just ahead of the mid-March borough election, there were no meetings. Because of "slim attendance" on February 27, the group adjourned until March 1. The last recorded meeting occurred on March 6. To all appearances the Guard was a sickly or dying organization, not lively and prospering. Once the initial enthusiasm of organizing passed, only the approach of an election aroused members to action, or led others to stir them up.

So far as the minutes show, the Guard's political activities consisted of nominating (and presumably supporting) candidates for public office. Surprisingly, the minutes indicate no political addresses or discussions of tactics or campaigning. The first political activity came in the form of deciding which candidates to support in the state and county elections in late October. Once the group began selecting candidates for office, Clyde, previously mentioned only when he was initiated on July 12, played a prominent role in the process and was subsequently elected as a delegate to "the county convention" (presumably of Know Nothings).

At the first of two meetings devoted to determining which candidates to support for state offices, the Guard picked James Pollock (Whig) for governor of Pennsylvania, Henry S. Mott (Democrat) for canal commissioner, and Thomas Baird (Know Nothing) for Supreme Court judge. The state Know Nothing organization threw its support to the same three candidates. At their next meeting, the Guard endorsed candidates already nominated by the regular parties for county office, six Whigs and one Democrat. Clyde and the other delegates to the county convention must have been persuasive: six of the Guard's seven candidates apparently won that body's support.

At the general election, Harrisburg decisively threw its votes to the Know Nothings. State-wide, Pollock (with the help of Whigs)

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other lodges whose minutes have been studied. The meetings of Worcester Council #23 were devoted to learning passwords, voting on and initiating new members, and instructing them in the principles of the order: Haynes, "Chapter from the Local History of Know Nothingism," 90. The meetings of Lancaster, Pa., Lodge #42 were largely spent admitting new members and disciplining those who failed to vote as instructed in public elections: Hensel, "A Withered Twig," 174-81.

TABLE 3

## Harrisburg Votes for Dauphin County Officials 1850-1857

Since the number of votes cast of each candidate for each office differed, they have been averaged for purposes of cross-election comparisons

Year	Aver Total	Democrat Av vote	%	Whig Av vote	%	American Av Vote	%	Offices No.	Dem Wins	Dem Vote Margin
1850	927	521	54	435	47			7	6	+ 57
1851	1285	749	58	536	42			9	9	+ 106
1852	1294	744	57	550	43			9	8*	+ 96
1853	1200	729	61	471	39			9	8	+ 128
1854	1390	527	38	863	62			8**	1**	- 169
1855	1190	565	48	33#	3	567#	48	8	2	- 31
1856	1481	803	54			678##	46	10	10	+ 62
Amer-Rep										
1857	1445	827	57	513	36	104	7	11	11	+ 104

\* The Whig and Democratic candidates for prothonotary tied.

\*\* All winners were endorsed by the Guard of Liberty.

# 1855: Whigs split, majority endorsed American candidates.

Minority ran a Whig slate.

## 1856: Whigs and Americans fuse.

@ 1857: Americans split, majority joining Republicans, minority running a "straight-out" American slate.

Source: Official returns, Harrisburg newspaper each October.

and Mott (with Democratic support) won easily; Baird, running with only Know Nothing support, lost. Harrisburg voters, however, favored all three. With just over 1,400 votes cast, Pollock won with 62 percent of the vote, Mott with 83 percent, and Baird (in a three-way race) with 49 percent. This was impressive since Democrats usually carried the town. In the 1848 and 1851 races for governor, Democrats had won with 50.5 percent of 1,100 votes and 54 percent of 1,300 votes, respectively.<sup>34</sup> In the county contests, Harrisburg gave from 60 percent to 64 percent of its votes to the six Whigs backed by Know Nothings, and 82 percent of its vote to the single Democrat supported by the order. For Whigs to carry Dauphin County was to be expected. In spite of Harrisburg's steady support of Democratic candidates, Whigs won 29 of 35 offices between 1850 and 1853. The surprise in October 1854 was that Harrisburg, thanks to the Know Nothing movement, had shifted to the Whig column. (See Table 3.)

The most informative, yet confusing, election the Guard took part in was for borough officials in March 1855. Excepting the contest in 1853, when a campaign was mounted against constables who ran down fugitive slaves, town elections of the era attracted little attention.

<sup>34</sup> *Morning Herald*, Oct. 14, 1854; *Telegraph*, Oct. 25, 1848, Oct. 22, 1851.



Although newspaper coverage of national and state elections in Harrisburg was extensive and vehemently partisan, local races, mildly partisan at most, got little notice. Voter interest was limited, too: only about a third of males over twenty-one (from 500 to 600) bothered to vote, the exception being 1853 when 730 turned out. By contrast, about three-fifths of the eligible voters cast ballots in gubernatorial and two-thirds in presidential elections. Party caucuses to nominate candidates usually met ten days to two weeks before elections; sometimes they met as late as election-eve. On occasion, parties did not even bother to run slates. Although some residents served several terms on the borough council or on one of the school boards, and a small coterie regularly vied for the posts of high constable and constable, few showed long-term interest in holding office. Candidates almost never published ads or statements, and the newspapers reported no campaign rallies or speeches and rarely discussed borough issues. Democrats had long dominated Harrisburg politics, though from one to four of the nine principal borough offices each year between 1850 and 1854 went to Whigs or other non-Democrats.<sup>35</sup>

In preparation for the borough election on March 16, the Guard of Liberty on March 1 began by "nominating" one candidate for each of Harrisburg's twenty-eight ward and borough offices. Fourteen of the nominees themselves were Guard members—including the candidate for chief burgess, all three constableships, a justiceship of the peace, and a member of the school board. The others were for minor ward positions. Of the twenty-eight, nine could be identified as Whigs, two as Democrats, and one who switched parties. The two Democrats were William Kline (incumbent chief burgess and a member of the Guard), selected for re-election, and Charles F. Muench (a frequent local officeholder and chief burgess in 1849), now nominated for the town council. Of the eleven others, nine had previously run for or held public office. In spite of the Know Nothings' alleged disdain for politicians of the existing parties, whom they characterized as corrupt "trimmers," the initial instinct of the Harrisburg chapter was to propose known politicians for office rather than newcomers.

<sup>35</sup> Based on a study of elections in Harrisburg, 1846-1860, as reported in the newspapers. The number of males over twenty-one years of age is based on "Computerized Census Data."

Following the "nominations," however, and without any indication of why, the Guard proceeded to "elect" the candidates they would support. Nominees for only five of the twenty-eight positions won endorsement: three for borough council and two for justice of the peace. None were members of the Guard, and Muench was the only Democrat. Kline, the incumbent chief burgess, was bypassed along with the others. Possibly someone argued that to nominate so many of themselves was self-serving and risked public exposure of the group and its members. Moreover, *if* there were other Know Nothing lodges in Harrisburg, the final borough-wide slate would have to be named by a higher authority in the name of all the lodges. To put forward so many of their own members would make the Guard of Liberty appear greedy. On the other hand, the move may simply have been a ploy to dump the Democrat, Kline, whose three-term incumbency as chief burgess could not have been popular with such Whig members of the Guard as Clyde.

In contrast to past practice, editor Miller devoted an unusual amount of space in his newspapers to this borough election. The race, he predicted, would boil down to a contest between "Sam," and a "fusion" ticket scraped together by the "'old liners,' Catholics, rummies, and fag ends of all other factions." "Trot out your Catholic and 'lager beer' ticket gentlemen fusionists!" he challenged.<sup>36</sup> By March, Miller's papers carried reports of numerous victories for "Sam" in local elections around the Commonwealth.

Miller also raised a new argument against immigrants and Catholics: the "burden of foreign paupers." Of 1,615 overnight transients at Dauphin County Poor House in 1854, he reported, 1,506 had been foreigners, costing the taxpayers over \$600. Two-thirds of the other paupers needing handouts and aid were also foreigners, costing an additional \$1,270. But for the "*foreign paupers*" crowding the poor houses, he declared, such institutions would be unnecessary in many Pennsylvania counties. Miller went on to complain that not content with being housed, fed, and clothed by the American people and protected by their laws and institutions, the foreigners "impudently" aspired to rule the country. These "minions of the Pope" banded

<sup>36</sup> *Telegraph*, Feb. 17, 1855.

together both at the ballot-box and in secret organizations for political and revolutionary purposes. "Influenced and controlled entirely by the Romish Priesthood," Irish and German Catholics cheapened and degraded labor, displaced American mechanics and workingmen, and waged "open war with our government and institutions." He traced their growing role in politics. Arriving "filthy and destitute," they crowded poor houses where they were supported by American taxpayers. Soon they appeared at caucuses, and began controlling nominations and elections, "thrusting foreigners into all the subordinate offices, and boldly demanding repeal of all laws interfering with their 'largest liberty'—the 'liberty' to desecrate the Sabbath day by selling and drinking 'lager beer' and getting drunk—the 'liberty' to exclude the Bible from our public schools, and to maintain sectarian Roman Catholic schools at public expense—the 'liberty' to fill important offices, make our laws, and crush out our republican institutions." Only the success of the American party would preserve American liberty and institutions, he concluded.<sup>37</sup>

Miller was not above stirring up trouble to help his cause: "We hear of no preparations on the part of our Irish population to celebrate St. Patrick's day," he observed in the *Morning Herald* on March 13. Given his views on Irish Catholics, it is difficult to believe he had anything in mind other than an Irish parade that might arouse nativist sentiment or even "provoke" a riot on the eve of the election.

As late as a week before the voting, no Democrat, Whig, or fusion slate had appeared. "Sam's" slate, of course, was neither reported nor advertised. In the vacuum, a few citizens announced themselves as candidates for justice of the peace, and independents and volunteer firemen named a three-person slate for town council. Early on election day, March 16, Miller reported in the *Herald* (the only morning newspaper) that he had been "authorized to announce" that the independent slate for council wished to withdraw. The firemen's ticket had "completely fizzled out."

About 600 voters turned out, 60 more than in 1851 and 1852, but 130 fewer than in 1853, and 20 fewer than in 1854. Apparently, two groups handed out tickets, one distributing a list of "American"

<sup>37</sup> This particular item appeared in both the *Morning Herald*, March 14 and *Telegraph*, March 17, 1855. See also the *Telegraph* for Feb. 7, 1855.

candidates for all offices, the other only the three candidates of the independents and firemen for borough council seats, candidates whom the *Morning Herald* reported had withdrawn from the race. Not surprisingly, the "American" slate won overwhelmingly. Kline, who was not a candidate, received 20 write-ins for chief burgess; one of the independent candidates for council received 141 votes, the other two, 93 each. "Harrisburg, the Capital of the old Keystone State," Miller announced, "has been thoroughly Americanized. The whole American Borough ticket, as well as the ward tickets, were elected by immense majorities."<sup>38</sup>

The *Democratic Union*, bitter rival of Miller's publications, acknowledged the Know Nothing victory, but charged the independents had not authorized announcement of their withdrawal by the "Hindoo Christians of the *Herald*." The "'villainous lie' had its effect," the *Union* pointed out; "the midnight assassins had a clear field." Miller denied the charge, claiming that in each instance the candidates or their "friends" had asked him to make the announcement. He now called upon the candidates themselves to vindicate his action.<sup>39</sup> No one stepped forward either to support or repudiate the claims of either paper. This was not the first time, however, that rival newspapers accused Miller of lying about the outcome of elections that spring. Two weeks before the Harrisburg election, the *Union* had carried a story from the Hollidaysburg *Standard* denouncing Miller for claiming that "Sam" had "carried everything before him" in an election in that town. In fact, only five Know Nothing candidates of thirty-one were elected.<sup>40</sup>

So long as the Know Nothings adhered to strict secrecy, their method of nominating and supporting candidates for public office was subject to abuse. Some recent historians have compared the process

<sup>38</sup> *Telegraph*, March 21, 1855. I have been unable to determine the exact procedures at polling places at the time. Government-printed ballots did not yet exist, so each party seems literally to have printed up its own "tickets" and distributed them to voters at the polling place. Since the total vote cast for each office differed, and candidates from different parties won in the same election, voters could scratch off those they did not like, write in others, and somehow vote for persons on more than one ticket.

<sup>39</sup> *Democratic Union*, March 21, 24, 1855; *Morning Herald*, March 22, 26, 1855.

<sup>40</sup> *Democratic Union*, March 3, 1855.

favorably with the later primary election system.<sup>41</sup> So far as the process is known, however, the resemblance to nominating from the bottom is misleading. Local lodges began by choosing candidates they wished to support. They might select new candidates of their own, or endorse candidates already selected by either or both the Whig and Democratic parties. Candidates were not necessarily asked if they wished to be backed by the Know Nothings, and many were not. The names of those selected at the local level were forwarded to higher councils who announced the final candidates. However, there the resemblance ended. Since council sessions were secret, with no votes tallied or reported, it cannot be and was not known whether the candidates selected were those supported by the majority in the lodges or the arbitrary choices of the men who ran the councils. In either event, the membership at large, so far as results indicate, blindly supported those candidates.

What happened at the Guard of Liberty meeting in Harrisburg on March 1 and in the borough election on March 16 suggests some of the problems. Someone appears to have manipulated the Guards at their meeting on March 1, persuading them to back nominees for only five of the twenty-eight offices they initially planned to support. Once "elected," the Guard voted that the "nominations be signed by the officers of the meeting," perhaps preparatory to forwarding the list to a city-wide Know Nothing council that would determine the final ticket.

But were there other Know Nothing groups in Harrisburg and a city-wide Know Nothing council?<sup>42</sup> Since secrecy within the organi-

<sup>41</sup> Baker, *Ambivalent Americans*, 119; Gienapp, "Nebraska, Nativism, and Rum," 440-41.

<sup>42</sup> The absence of conclusive evidence leaves only logic to answer the question. Favorable to more than one lodge were the large number of Harrisburg voters who supported candidates backed by Know Nothings in the fall 1854 election and those that followed. Even if all 87 Guard of Liberty members voted en bloc, they alone could not have shifted Harrisburg from the Democratic to the Whig column. But voters, of course, did not have to belong to the Know Nothings to take up their tickets at the polls and vote for their candidates. On the other side, the fact that the Guard drew its members from such a wide variety of occupations, and about equally from all four wards of Harrisburg, suggests that it was a city-wide lodge, not one of several lodges. Had there been several, one would expect concentrations by occupation, residence, or the like in particular lodges. This is not to say there were no other lodges in the county. The Guard elected delegates to a county convention.

zation allegedly was as profound as with the outside world, rank-and-file members of the Guard itself presumably did not know for certain whether there were other Know Nothing units in town or a city-wide coordinating council. Who finally decided which candidates the Know Nothings would support that spring is not known. If there was a Harrisburg council, it, logically, would have performed that task. But if there were no such council, someone, possibly Miller and Clyde, and perhaps other confederates, could have announced the nominations and no one would have been the wiser. Guessing who may have printed the "American" tickets to be passed out to the voters at the polls on election day is not difficult.

According to Miller, all victors at the polls on March 16 were "Americans." This may have been literally true; that is, the winners were probably all natives of the United States. But were they the choice of rank-and-file Know Nothings or of self-appointed "leaders" of the movement? Only two of the three winners of borough council seats had been on the final list drawn up by the Guard of Liberty. Oddly enough, five others who were elected had been among the twenty-eight original Guard of Liberty nominees, though they were not on the Guard's final list. Since no regular party nominated a slate, and the American slate was drawn up secretly without consulting the candidates, who could deny that the election produced a Know Nothing, all American victory?

Following the "triumph of Americanism" in Harrisburg, Miller attempted, without success, to instruct the borough's new officials on the proper way to run the town. He urged a stricter handling of teen-aged rowdyism and disturbances of church services. He also called for the rigorous enforcement of various blue laws and liquor restrictions. Adding a paid night watch, he believed, would bring an end to the disorders. In these recommendations Miller followed a pattern set earlier by other nativist groups who longed for a less boisterous society. Miller's papers reported little improvement under the "Amer-

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The minutes of the Guard do not refer to city-wide conventions or officers, however, and the county organization would not have determined candidates running only for borough office.

ican" regime, however, beyond an initial cleaning of litter from the streets.<sup>43</sup>

By this time Miller's interest in Harrisburg affairs had declined; he had larger fish to fry. Because of his vigorous support of James Pollock during the campaign of 1854, the new governor appointed him inspector of flour at Philadelphia. Thereafter, Miller's papers regularly trumpeted Pollock for president in 1856.<sup>44</sup> The memoirs of A. K. McClure, a prominent Whig politician and editor of the era, hint at the possibility of a less flattering explanation for Miller's appointment. According to McClure, three men "of low cunning" had taken advantage of the "peculiar facilities offered by the new secret organization" to seize autocratic control of the Know Nothings in Pennsylvania. Since the order held no public assemblies where issues or candidates were discussed, the three were in a position to declare, in the name of the organization, "any decision that best suited their purpose." Before the election, the three met with Pollock's Whig campaign manager, Andrew G. Curtin, and offered to throw the support of the Know Nothings to Pollock. It would not matter how the lodges voted, they told Curtin, for they would simply declare Pollock the nominee if he would promise them, in return, three of the "most lucrative offices in the gift of the Governor": the Philadelphia inspectorships of flour, leather, and bark. Curtin pledged only to recommend their appointments to Pollock. Satisfied, the three submitted the names of Pollock for governor, Mott for canal commissioner, and Baird for Supreme Court judge to the local lodges as official candidates (which, if true, may account for the coincidence of the Guard of Liberty nominating the same three at their meeting on September 5). As McClure observed, "it mattered little whether the lodges voted for . . . or voted against them, as there was no power to revise the returns."

True to his word, Curtin, following Pollock's victory, proposed the three for inspectorships but explained the circumstances to the governor. Pollock initially decided against any of them, but later relented

<sup>43</sup> *Morning Herald*, March 29, Apr. 2, 3, 1855; *Telegraph*, March 31, Apr. 4, 18, 1855. For earlier nativist demands for the same objectives at the local level, see, for example, Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 320-23.

<sup>44</sup> *Telegraph*, Feb. 28, May 9, 1855.

and named one of them to a "minor inspectorship of the city." Having no way of enforcing their demands, the three accepted defeat. McClure declined to name the conspirators; saying only that they were "never even locally prominent in the politics of the State," though one became "an active Republican and finally reached legislative honors" in another state.<sup>45</sup>

Despite McClure's attempt to conceal their names, one of the three might well have been Stephen Miller. The Whig editor was one of the more prominent supporters of Know Nothing principles in Pennsylvania and was well located to serve as a leader of the state Know Nothing movement. At the same time, his support of Pollock in Harrisburg's leading Whig paper, the *Telegraph*, entitled him to a reward. Had McClure said that Pollock appointed one of the conspirators inspector of flour, he in effect would have exposed Miller. And so McClure said appointment was made to some other "minor inspectorship." Similarly, had he said that one of the three later reached executive honors in another state, he again would have pointed directly at Miller who became governor of Minnesota in 1864. Instead, McClure said that the conspirator achieved "legislative honors" in another state.

Whatever the circumstances of his appointment, Miller's duties as inspector of flour required his frequent absence from Harrisburg. Although the work of putting out his newspapers increasingly fell to others, Miller continued to write editorials. He urged the American party to broaden its appeal beyond nativism and anti-Catholicism, to denounce the "Nebraska infamy" (the Kansas-Nebraska Act which potentially opened those territories to slavery), to call for a prohibition law in Pennsylvania, to propose the immediate sale of the state's public works (the canal system built and owned by the state since the 1830s), and to support doing away with the board of canal commissioners.<sup>46</sup>

At the end of 1855, apparently because of economic pressure exerted by Simon Cameron, who frequently used his banking connections to finance newspapers of potential use to him, Miller and

<sup>45</sup> A. K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1902), 1:215-18, 221.

<sup>46</sup> For example, see *Telegraph*, March 17, 21, Apr. 25, July 11, 1855.



Clyde sold the *Telegraph*. Cameron, nominally a Democrat, had courted the Know Nothings in early 1855, hoping, with their votes in the legislature, to win election to the United States Senate. When voting irregularities denied him the post and the fall elections in 1855 indicated that Know Nothingism was on the wane in Pennsylvania, he began moving to the emerging Republican party.<sup>47</sup> On January 1, 1856, McClure and James M. Sellers took over the *Telegraph*. By June it had become a Republican journal edited by McClure and John J. Patterson. About the same time, Miller sold his interest in the *Morning Herald* to Clyde. After passing through other hands, its Democratic nemesis, the *Patriot & Union*, absorbed it in August 1858.<sup>48</sup> That same year, Miller moved to Minnesota, where, after distinctive service in the Union Army, he became the fourth governor of that state. By then a staunch Republican, Miller's subsequent biographical sketches include no mention of his involvement with Pennsylvania Know Nothingism. Clyde, by contrast, apparently lost interest in politics, at least to the extent of seeking public office. He remained in Harrisburg, where he voted Republican and served as agent of the Lebanon Valley Railroad.<sup>49</sup>

The Know Nothing movement in Harrisburg, as elsewhere in 1855, gave way to the American party based on Know Nothing principles. That autumn the Dauphin County Whigs split, the majority endorsing the candidates of the American party and a secessionist group running

<sup>47</sup> Writing to Cameron on Nov. 7, 1855, James M. Sellers reported that McClure and he were trying to buy the *Telegraph*. "I have been of the opinion that you could squeeze Brother Miller and Clyde a little, and get them away from the office, by some means induce them to sell at a fair price." Nine days later, Miller wrote Cameron, "Your letter alarms me: as it conveys the idea that I am indisposed to enter into the arrangement you name. There is evidently a conspiracy to injure or ruin me." Many at the time, including McClure, believed Cameron was a Know Nothing: *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 1:198. Cameron's biographers state that he worked with the order opportunistically so long as he thought it might elect him senator, but began a shift to the Republican party shortly after the fall elections of 1855: Lee F. Crippen, *Simon Cameron, Ante-bellum Years* (Oxford, Ohio, 1942), 138-46; Erwin Stanley Bradley, *Simon Cameron, Lincoln's Secretary of War* (Philadelphia, 1966), 91-109.

<sup>48</sup> *Telegraph*, Jan. 1, June 21, 1856; *Morning Herald*; Nov. 7, 1855, Aug. 25, 1856, Aug. 10, 1858.

<sup>49</sup> *National Cyclopaedia* 10:63; Robert Sobel and John Raimo, eds., *Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789-1978* (4 vols., Westport, 1978), 2:775-6; Egle, *History of Dauphin County*, 567.

a Whig slate. Two delegates to the Whig convention that voted to adopt the American ticket had been members of the Guard of Liberty.<sup>50</sup> The Americans, with the support of most Whigs, swept all Dauphin County offices in October 1855. Harrisburg gave a majority of its vote to six Americans (albeit by smaller margins than in 1854) and two Democrats. The next March, Americans ran a full slate of candidates for borough offices. Of those for the nine major offices, one was a former Democrat. Five won: the chief burgess, a council member, the high constable, and two constables. After that, the tide turned against them. In October 1856, Harrisburg cast the majority of its votes for Democrats in every state and county race. In November, former Whig president Millard Fillmore, running as the American party candidate, received 548 votes (35 percent) in Harrisburg, as compared to 839 (53 percent) for the Pennsylvania-born Democratic candidate, James Buchanan, and 188 (12 percent) for the candidate of the new Republican party, John C. Frémont. Whether Fillmore attracted the votes he did because of his Know Nothing present or his Whig past cannot be known. Buchanan's Harrisburg percentage compared favorably with that of earlier Democratic presidential candidates: Lewis Cass had received 51 percent in 1848, and Franklin Pierce 54 percent in 1854.<sup>51</sup>

Thereafter Know Nothingism faded as quickly as it had appeared three years earlier. In the Harrisburg borough election in March 1857, Democrats swept seven of nine offices and returned William Kline to the post of chief burgess after a two-year hiatus. It is improbable that many voters knew of his brief flirtation with the Guard of Liberty or how that group had declined to support him for reelection in 1855 in spite of his membership in their organization. The opponents of the Democrats that March elected only the high constable and one of the three regular constables. In October, Harrisburg gave the majority of its votes to Democrats for every state and all but one county office. Not once in its brief existence did the American party nominate for any local or county post any of the men who had once belonged to the Guard of Liberty.

The long-range political impact of membership in the Guard of

<sup>50</sup> *Telegraph*, Sept. 6, 1855.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1848, Nov. 10, 1852, Nov. 7, 1856.

Liberty appears to have been slight. Of the nine members who before 1855 had run for office or participated in caucuses of the Whig party, one later claimed membership in the Republican party, two ran for office on anti-Democrat tickets in the late 1850s, and one held public office as a Democrat. The remaining five members either moved from Harrisburg or stopped attending caucuses and running for public office. Of the six Guard members who attended caucuses or ran for office as Democrats before 1855, four continued to do so after that date and two became inactive. The one activist independent before 1855 won election to office as a Democrat after 1855. Four not involved in party caucuses before 1855 became active after that date, two as Democrats, one as a Unionist, and one as a Republican. The member who ran for office first on one party ticket and then another before 1855 continued to do so. That persons concerned with law and order were attracted to the movement is borne out by three former Guards, of differing parties, regularly running for and being elected to the constabulary, and one, after the Civil War, becoming chief of police.

These outcomes suggest that, at least in Harrisburg, Know Nothingism did not serve as a vehicle for carrying former Whigs or Democrats who participated in caucuses or sought local office into similar activities in the emerging Republican party. The politics of the large majority of Guard members before and after encountering "Sam" cannot be determined. They may have become Republicans as many scholars claim was common among Know Nothings. If so, the more apolitical members of the movement in Harrisburg responded differently than their politically active colleagues.<sup>52</sup>

If Harrisburg's experience was at all typical, far more people were willing to cast a vote for Know Nothing candidates than were attracted to formal membership in its lodges. Relatively few Harrisburgers tried to join the Guard of Liberty; those who did could not have found it satisfying for long. This suggests that perhaps the movement had the limited appeal of most single, negative-issue factions. But if that is true, how can the decisive victories of Know Nothings and

<sup>52</sup> For a recent strong assertion of the role of the Know Nothings in bringing Whigs and Democrats to the Republican party, see Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority," especially 559.

American party candidates in Harrisburg between October 1854 and March 1856 be explained? For some voters, no doubt, the rhetoric of the movement at least briefly struck a sensitive chord. For others, Know Nothingism provided the only viable alternative to voting Democratic. As their party declined, demoralized Whigs no longer fielded candidates. Because many local Know Nothing and American party candidates had been active Whigs, however, voters of that persuasion, whatever their view of Know Nothingism per se, ought not to have found it difficult to vote for familiar names. Similarly, Democrats, disgruntled for any of several reasons with their party, could register disgust, not by voting for the Whig enemy, but for the new third force, whatever they thought of much of its program.

In the turmoil, opportunists took advantage of the movement's secrecy to advance their personal fortunes. Opportunism, combined with ineptitude, soon discredited the American party wherever it came to power. In both Harrisburg and the nation, the Know Nothings failed to convert election victories into lasting loyalties, and failed to transform rhetoric into programs with broad and lasting appeal. As the slavery issue once more came to the fore, the new Republican party soon replaced both Whigs and Americans and became the dominant party in the North.<sup>53</sup> In Harrisburg the majority of voters returned to the Democratic party for another decade.

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<sup>53</sup> See Huston's detailed and authoritative account of "The Demise of the Pennsylvania American Party, 1854-1858."