

“Americans Shall Rule America!”

The Know-Nothing Party in Cumberland County

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In 1854 Americans took a detour from the road to civil war. It was the year of the Kansas-Nebraska act, which allowed slavery to spread into the formerly free Kansas territory. This act, the warfare between pro- and anti-slavery settlers in Kansas that followed, and the rise of the free soil Republican party, so inflamed hostile feelings between North and South that the firing on Fort Sumter took place less than seven years later. But 1854 was also the year that a new movement boiled up out of New York and Philadelphia to spill out across the entire country, a movement dedicated to suppressing the political power of immigrants in general, and Catholic immigrants in particular. This movement, whose supporters were known derisively as “Know Nothings”, came to Cumberland County and shaped its politics for more than two years. This was the time, “when the Know Nothing furor swept over the land—when former majorities, political status, personal fitness and all similar considerations were tumbled into the common whirlpool of temporary political disintegration.”¹

Americans had had a long tradition of suspicion and fear of Roman Catholicism, and added to this a dislike for immigrants when Catholic Irish and Germans flooded from Europe into the northeastern coastal cities of the United States during the 1840s and 1850s. Urban immigration brought with it drunkenness, crime, poverty, and competition for jobs. Worst of all (for supporters of the Whig party), they voted overwhelmingly for Democrats. In response to these problems, the Native Party had formed in the mid-1840s and captured some seats in Congress, but it failed to gain widespread support before 1852. However, opposition to Catholicism sharpened in 1852 and 1853 with controversies over control of Catholic church land, the reading of (Protestant) Bibles in school, and public funding of Catholic parochial schools.² There was also a growing sense of impatience with professional politicians unresponsive to the popular will, a will that more and more embraced nativism and anti-Catholicism among native-born Protestants.³

The Know Nothing movement began in 1850 as the secret Order of the Star-Spangled Banner in New York. Members of the Order recognized each other by handshakes, signs and passwords, and were forbidden to reveal anything about the Order's name, membership or goals to anyone not a member. When asked, a member should reply, "I know nothing." The Order did not originally act as an independent party, but exerted its influence to support Democrats, Whigs or "independent" candidates favoring the Order's goals. These goals included requiring a twenty-one year residence by immigrants before they might qualify for citizenship, and restricting political office to native-born, Protestant Americans. In other words, Americans should rule America.⁴ When Know Nothings did organize a political party, they called it the "American" party.

The American party attracted the loyalties of many Cumberland County voters between 1854 and 1856. But it is hard to see why it did so. Although a Catholic community had existed in Carlisle, at least, since the late eighteenth century, its size was small. The local Whig newspapers, and certainly the Democratic, had not shown any hostility toward Catholics or immigrants in the years before 1854, as they did toward black residents. The *Carlisle Herald*, Carlisle's Whig paper, had even criticized the Kansas-Nebraska bill for excluding foreigners about to be citizens, such as "thrifty" Germans, from voting and holding office in the territories.⁵ Nor did nativism interest the voters. Although the Native party had had some success in Philadelphia, the best showing it could make in Cumberland County was 148 votes out of about 4600 cast for its 1845 statewide canal commissioner candidate. The same candidate got only 22 votes here the following year.⁶

The voters had also seemed uninterested in backing any third party movement. In 1852 an "Independent Union" ticket in Carlisle that included both regular party nominees and independent candidates competed with the major parties for council, chief burgess and other Carlisle borough offices. However, the voters ignored the "Independent Union" distraction, voting for only those Union candidates who had also received major party nominations, and soundly rejecting those who had not.⁷

But the crumbling of the national Whig party during 1853 demoralized Cumberland County's own Whigs. The *Herald* felt compelled to print an opinion denying that the Whig party was defunct.⁸ And whereas Cumberland County Whigs could usually count on getting at least 47 percent of the vote on election day, that October they captured only 42 percent, their worst showing in percentage terms since the merger of the Whig and Anti-Mason parties in the late 1830s.⁹ This Whig decline foretold the coming mass defection of Whig voters and politicians to the Know Nothing movement.

THE RISE OF THE KNOW NOTHINGS

When it first appeared in Cumberland County, the movement was a matter of mystery, and even humor. On April 29, 1854, the *Shippensburg News* noted that a lodge of the new order was about to be established in Shippensburg. "This Order is fast spreading, but of its object and aim we 'know nothing.' We shall speak more fully when we know something. We hope few of our readers know nothing, but we suspect that the know nothing idea is the idea of knowing something."¹⁰ After the *Herald* published a rumor that a Know Nothing organization had appeared in Carlisle, the Democratic *Volunteer* responded that, "we 'know nothing' of the truth or falsity of the report," and printed a satire on the secret organization of "Do Nothings," bound by an eternal oath of laziness.¹¹

But the chuckling faded quickly as the new movement gained support, including that of the county's Whig newspapers. On June 21, the *Herald* attacked the Democratic practice (elsewhere) of awarding patronage by ethnic blocs, and commented that, "It is not strange, therefore, that under such circumstances native born citizens-if they have the spirit of *Americans*-should combine their strength to resist such odious and impudent provisions."¹² The *Shippensburg News* proclaimed, "We have always held that the aegis of our freedom, was too open to abuse and that the ballot box has been prostituted to the basest and meanest purposes through foreign votes. We have always believed that there was too much pandering to Popery and too much succumbing [sic] to the foreign vote."¹³

Some Cumberland County Democrats, too, came to support the Order. At first the *Volunteer* scoffed at Know-Nothing chances in Carlisle. "[W]e predict for [the Know Nothings] a speedy and ignominious disruption. Carlisle is not the soil to foster and encourage treasonable and anti-republican secret political associations."¹⁴ But the *Volunteer* soon worried enough about Democratic loyalties to warn that, "the Know Nothing association means Whiggery or Federalism by another name...if any Democrats, through curiosity or deception have been induced to join it, they should at once withdraw as members and use their influences to smother this demon that attempts to swallow up the Constitution of our country."¹⁵ The *Volunteer's* worries were well-founded. After the Democratic county convention had selected its candidates for the fall elections, rumors began circulating that three of them were Know Nothings.¹⁶ The *Volunteer* asked the candidates to issue written denials of membership in the Order.¹⁷ It then printed denial letters the following week from Democratic candidates for the state house, as well as the candidates for prothonotary and county commission.¹⁸ But other Democratic county candidates submitted no such letters. Irritated, the Democratic county executive committee called on John M. Gregg

and William Lytle, running for Clerk of Court and Register of Wills, to disavow Know Nothingism or be stricken from the ticket.¹⁹ Their reply is unknown.

One Carlisle Democratic politician, Lemuel Todd, a 37 year-old lawyer, openly converted to the Know Nothing cause. Todd had served a term on Carlisle's borough council from 1848 to 1849, and had run unsuccessfully without his party's nomination on the Independent Union ticket in 1852. Since then he had met defeat again in 1853 and 1854, running as a Democrat in the Whig-leaning West Ward. Now he ran for Congress as an "independent", endorsed by the Whig party, which had failed to nominate a candidate of its own.²⁰ According to the hostile account of the *Volunteer*, the Know Nothing recruiting committee was determined to find a Democrat, but was vehemently sent packing, first by Judge Stuart, and then by one-time District Attorney William Miller. Only then was Todd approached and initiated into the Order.²¹

The *Volunteer's* scornful attacks on Lemuel Todd did not stop him from winning his Congressional seat, representing Cumberland, York and Perry counties. He took Cumberland County by an 1100 vote margin out of 5700 cast, winning nearly 60 percent of the vote. The Whig candidates for the state house, Montgomery Donaldson and George Criswell, probably benefitting from Know Nothing support, won their seats by lesser margins. The Whigs showed only a meager recovery in the county office contests; on average, the Whig county candidates polled a mean average of only 44 percent of the vote.²² But the Whig defeat was also a Democratic defeat, for three of the Democratic victors were definitely revealed as covert Know Nothing candidates.²³ These three victors included Gregg, Lytle and Daniel K. Noel, the candidate for prothonotary who had issued a written denial of membership in the order.²⁴ All three substantially outpolled the other Democrats.

The *Carlisle Herald* trumpeted the elections here and elsewhere in the state and country as a strong endorsement of Know Nothing principles, and their ability to unite all native-born Protestant Americans:

What is this new star that has risen upon us—ascending so suddenly from the horizon to the Zenith—that commands the adoration of our countrymen; which unites all hearts and hands—which brings together political antipodes—which tames the fiery democrat and the chavalrous [sic] whig, and which unites in fond embrace the sons of the frigid north and the sunny south?²⁵

Democrats blamed their losses on fraud. In Dickinson and Frankford townships, and all over the county, the Know Nothings allegedly circulated spurious tickets that resembled genuine ones, except that they lacked the name of the Democratic Congressional candidate, J. Ellis Bonham. The circulators' "former

reputation as Democrats shielded them from suspicion, and rendered their treachery more effectual than under ordinary circumstances." In Carlisle's Democratic East Ward and elsewhere, the Know Nothings apparently had the sympathies of Democratic election inspectors, who cooperated with the Whig election officials to deny votes to Democrats, especially to naturalized citizens.²⁶ What truth was there to these charges? Todd did outpoll Bonham in traditionally Democratic areas like Carlisle's East Ward. But he himself was a known Democrat. On the other hand, the *Carlisle Herald* and *Shippensburg News* did not deny the existence of spurious tickets. The *Herald* argued that, "there were but a few Democrats who intended to vote for Mr. Bonham, as was well known before the election, and we venture to say that he lost none for want of tickets."²⁷

Much as loyal Democrats might write off Todd's election as fraud, they were dismayed by the broad appeal of the Know Nothing movement now taking shape as the American party and nicknamed "Sam." The dismay translated into weakness at the polls in March 1855. North Middleton Township, which had remained solidly Democratic in 1854, now went over to the Know Nothings in its township elections, thanks to a drastic drop in voter turnout. In Carlisle's borough elections the Democrats failed even to run a slate in the Whig-leaning West Ward, and went down to overwhelming defeat in the East Ward. The new party controlled the entire borough council, and all but one of the other borough offices. The *Volunteer* tried to make the best of it, remarking that, "most of our citizens, opposed to the new order, felt a willingness to give 'Sam' full rope, so that he might hang himself as soon as possible." The paper also pronounced itself "gratified" that the new council was determined to extend Pomfret Street.²⁸ But the Democratic party had done better than the Whigs. Although three old-line Whigs ran on their own for chief burgess, and justice of the peace (one for each ward), and one of them was actually elected, the Whig party itself refused to run a slate in either ward. The rot that had broken down the party at the national level was now dissolving it at its local roots.

The American party's great success in contesting local elections for the first time was accompanied in the same month by another important step—the opening of an independent Know Nothing newspaper, the *Carlisle American*.²⁹ The *American* would be edited by George Zinn, former Whig prothonotary and a butcher. It seemed that the Know Nothings had come to stay.

THE CHARACTER OF THE KNOW NOTHING ORDER

It is almost impossible to write a history of the inner workings of the Cumberland County Know Nothings, since no minutes, membership lists, or resolutions of the organization seem to have survived. The very character of the Know Nothings as a secret organization meant that its members would refuse

to publish or perhaps even to create documents revealing information that they were pledged to withhold from non-members.³⁰ Furthermore, the entire first year's run of the *Carlisle American*, the most important year of all, has also disappeared. One spot of light in this dark void of sources is a "quarterly return" distributed to Know Nothing members along with an address by Dickinson College's professor of mathematics, the Reverend Mr. Otis H. Tiffany, president of the Know Nothing State Council. The return required local branches to report initiations, rejections, expulsions and withdrawals of members, and to pay a semi-annual assessment.³¹ Otherwise, the information we have rests in the pages of local newspapers, especially the hostile *American Volunteer*, which seems to have drawn its material both from loyal Democrats and from disgruntled members of the Order.

Despite their precautions, it must have been quite difficult for the Know Nothings to preserve their secrecy in Cumberland County, where small-town residents would have had plenty of opportunity to observe odd doings by their neighbors. Know Nothings tried to protect their identities by wearing masks to their meetings, which were announced in advance by distributing paper triangles—"three-cornered bits of red paper."³² But their customary meeting site at Education Hall on Church Alley in Carlisle was public knowledge by September 1854.³³ Indeed, the *Volunteer's* editor, John B. Bratton, reported watching Know Nothing politicians from around the county gathering at Education Hall, waiting outside during the meeting, and accosting one of the members for an unpaid bill.³⁴ In all likelihood their other meeting-places in Cumberland County became known as well.

Of course, the Know Nothing order was no mere secret social club, but an underground political movement dedicated to intolerance under the slogan "Americans Shall Rule America."³⁵ Know Nothings believed that immigrants and Roman Catholicism were dangerous to America. For example, the heart of the Know Nothing oath apparently ran as follows:

You furthermore promise and declare that you will not vote nor give your influence for any man for any office in the gift of the people unless he be an American-born citizen in favor of Americans-born ruling America, nor if he be a Roman Catholic, and that you will not, under any circumstance, expose the name of any member of this Order, nor reveal the existence of such an organization.³⁶

Professor Tiffany, a statewide leader of the Know Nothings, gave a public lecture on the the Protestant origins of American freedoms and on the dangers of the vast immigration and rapid naturalization of foreigners. "No foreigner is competent to discharge the duties of an American until he ceases to be identified with the land which gave him birth."³⁷ Tiffany also objected to the Catho-

lic program of removing bibles from public schools. In an address to the American party officers and members a year later, Tiffany reviewed the party's chief goals.

It had the pure and lofty aim to bring back the government of the State and of the country to the purity of former days; to recall, if possible, the national spirit that animated the fathers and founders of the Republic in the administration of public affairs. In order to do this, it was necessary that the foreign influence which, more perhaps than all other causes, had contributed to the corruption of our politics, should be put down; and that politicians should be taught that the American people must be governed on American principles.³⁸

The *Herald*, which continued to support Know Nothingism for a short time after the 1854 election, complained that the millions of foreign residents entering the United States.

have introduced religious controversy into our political contentions. They have demanded public office as a right. They have insisted upon the political proscriptions of the Americans for denying this claim. They have formed plans for the control of the polls: and they have organized themselves into pands, [sic] through whose misconduct perpetual disorder and tumult disturb our streets, and our prisons are filled.

The root of all these evils is the premature conferment upon foreigners of the right of suffrage...[The American party] should go at once to the root of the matter, and either repeal the naturalization laws or extend the period of residence to at least twenty-one years³⁹.

But Know Nothingism also rose (or sank) to more bitter and hateful denunciations of immigrants and Catholics, as shown by the pages of the *Carlisle American*. Although we do not have the first year's issues of this paper, later articles show its probable tone during that time. The *American* protested that America was never designed to be "a haven for the paupers and criminals of all the world." Given the increasing numbers of immigrants, Americans could "Look forward a few years, and behold one million of wretched outcasts from every European country vomited annually on your shores. Behold your almshouses overflowing with foreign paupers-your streets swarming with foreign beggars, and your jails and prisons filled with foreign criminals."⁴⁰ But it was Catholic immigrants in particular that stirred Know Nothing wrath, because behind them stood the ever-threatening Catholic church, ruled by the Pope in Rome.

The foreign German protestant, thinks and deliberates before he votes, but he too is duped by corrupt demagogues, and carried astray by the facinating [sic] cry of democracy. We are not without hope, however, as to this class of foreigners. They are generally honest and well meaning and have some capacity for thinking and reasoning, and independence to act

out their honest convictions. Not so with the Irish—particularly the Catholic Irish. These are the abject slaves of their Priests and Bishops, who are the tools of the Pope—of that hierarchy, which has always opposed freedom of thought, of speech and of action, whether in literature, politics and religion...But for the active interference of their spiritual guides, the Catholics would not go in droves to the polls, and vote the same ticket, no matter who the candidates, as they have been doing for years.⁴²

The *American* warned emphatically against the Pope, a “foreign King-Pontiff,” who “claims universal dominion, [and] wishes to establish a hierarchical despotism in our midst.” His hierarchy of officials, vicars-general, archbishops, bishops, priests and monks, were his officers for an invading army, an army of well drilled and obedient immigrants.⁴²

Possessing, as he does, the undivided empire of South America, the devoted allegiance of Mexico, with a majority of Canadian professors, he only wants the valley of the Mississippi to secure the spiritual monarchy of the new world. He already boasts of two millions of true sons of the Church, in the United States of America. For these few sheep in the wilderness he has created bishops and ecclesiastic helps with unprecedented liberality...From the Vatican, from the throne of St. Peter on the Tiber, the decree has gone forth, that our Protestant American liberties shall be new modeled and baptized at the sacred fount of the ‘Prince of the Apostles,’ and made to minister to the dictates of a confessor, according to the interests and honors of ‘Holy Mother Church.’⁴³

Although the Know Nothings did their best to stir up fear and hatred of Catholic immigrant political power, violence seems to have broken out on only one occasion in Cumberland County. One night in early September 1854, a German immigrant (and a Lutheran rather than Catholic), happening to pass by Education Hall, the meeting place of the Carlisle Know Nothings, was stopped and questioned by half a dozen apparent members of the order. When the German did not give them satisfactory information about himself, they shoved him, ordered him away, and pelted him with stones.⁴⁴ Although the poor German suffered at least some bruises, the criminal court dockets for 1854 and 1855 do not show that anyone was arrested or tried for the crime. Fortunately, the Know Nothings normally channeled their hostility into electoral politics. As the *Carlisle American* put it much later, “The American party wish to meet this question at the ballot box now, while there is hope of amendment, before the dire necessity shall arise of meeting the question by the cartridge box.”⁴⁵

THE DEMOCRATIC CRITIQUE

As the *Volunteer* saw it, the real object of the Know Nothings was a hankering for the spoils of office. The great majority of Know Nothing leaders were “men who have been ‘everything by turns and nothing long,’ and so that their inor-

dinate desire for office is satisfied, they care little what party is in power or what set of principles triumph.”⁴⁶

However, the Know Nothing dedication to intolerance did not go unchallenged either. “The policy of prescribing [sic] men because they happened to be born in some other country than this, or because they belong to some other church than that to which we ourselves are attached, is, when stripped of its disguise, too despicable to be tolerated for a moment.” Even assuming Catholicism to be as the Know Nothings represented it, “Are we to repudiate the inspired declaration of JEFFERSON, the great apostle of Democracy...that ‘error of opinion may be safely tolerated, while reason is left to combat it?’” Democrats objected not only to Know Nothing intolerance, but also to the secrecy of their organization.

Have we become so alarmed by the influx of foreigners that we no longer dare to look our danger in the face, and must skulk into secret holes and corners...?...If our naturalization laws are defective, let them be revised and made right. If Catholicism is erroneous, let it be refuted. But we want, in this country, no secret inquisition, and no Jesuitical combination, to uphold truth, or put down error. Give us an open field and fair play; that is all we ask.⁴⁷

If any Know Nothings bothered to read the *Volunteer*, they must have been infuriated by being compared to the Inquisition and to the Jesuits.

But in August 1855 the clash between the *Volunteer* and the *Carlisle American* descended from the political to the personal. It appears that the *American* started the quarrel, although we do not have its side of the affair. On August 23 John B. Bratton, editor of the *Volunteer*, blamed the “knave” and the “fool” of the *American*, particularly the “knave,” for making personal attacks on him after a death in Bratton’s family. References to the “Honorable whelp,” and “people of a Congressional District disgracing themselves,” would seem to identify the “knave” as none other than Lemuel Todd. In any case, Bratton called the “knave” a “wretched specimen of humanity—a vile scab upon society...” He accused the “knave” of hypocrisy—engaging in debauchery in Philadelphia and drinking binges in a neighboring county while advocating morality and temperance in the pages of the *American*⁴⁸. Having lacerated Todd, Bratton belittled the “fool”, George Zinn, the following week. Zinn, charged Bratton, had gotten his job at a meeting of stockholders by ballot fraud because Zinn’s supporters wanted someone they could control. Bratton expressed low regard for this “journeyman butcher.” “Of course he can’t help it, but GEORGE, it is well known, was born with a very limited quantity of brains, and if a jury were called to say yea or nay in regard to his sanity of mind, we doubt not they would pronounce him non compos mentis.” He concluded, “[Zinn] is most admira-

bly fitted to be used as the sewer through which his dirty, beastly, ruthless, vagabond masters vomit forth their filth, and bile, and balsam against the impregnable characters of other men."⁴⁹ One would never have known that Bratton had once praised Zinn's record as prothonotary.⁵⁰

Since Bratton also charged that Zinn did not write his own articles, Zinn made a similar allegation against Bratton.⁵¹ Bratton responded by meeting Zinn in the office of the justice of the peace on September 14, and swearing by affidavit that he *had* written his articles. Zinn accepted the truth of Bratton's statement but refused to make a similar statement about his own articles.⁵² Unfortunately, this confrontation did not end the strange affair. A manuscript written by William L. Shearer, the district attorney, was stolen from the *Volunteer's* office, along with other documents, and brought to the *Carlisle American*. The *American* referred to this manuscript as evidence that Bratton had not, after all, written his own articles. Bratton related these events to show Zinn's lack of honor, and then let the matter rest there.⁵³

THE DECLINE AND SUBMERGENCE OF THE AMERICAN PARTY

1855 had opened as a year of great promise for Cumberland County Know Nothings, now formally organized as the American party. But the promise was broken. The first sign of trouble was a controversy over a nomination of Pennsylvania's United States Senator by the Know Nothing legislature. One possible serious candidate was none other than the Reverend Professor Tiffany. However, many Know Nothings in the legislature, including Donaldson and Criswell, voted for Democrat Simon Cameron, the notorious patronage boss. This decision outraged Cumberland County's Whig newspapers, and probably helped turn them away from the Know Nothing movement.⁵⁵

The Senate election may have also contributed to serious dissension or disillusionment among Cumberland County Know Nothings. At the end of the summer two or three unnamed Dickinson College professors wrote the Know Nothing council to announce their resignations. In September 41 members in Carlisle petitioned the Council to withdraw from the Order. The four who were present and permitted to withdraw, including the Council's secretary, were later publicly excommunicated by having their names published in the *Carlisle American*. The rest were refused the right to withdraw without being personally present.⁵⁶

The *Volunteer*, expressing indignation at the treatment of the 41, bragged that the organization's continued secrecy was for naught. "Of late we have had a great many visits from Know Nothings...and we are perfectly 'booked up' in regard to the secrets and doings of the lodge." The paper claimed half a dozen informants ("reporters") at each meeting, and that, "Were it not that we do not

wish to be instrumental in bringing men into disrepute, we could publish a full and complete list of members of the Carlisle Council, the names of its officers, &c.”⁵⁷ The *Volunteer* also cited the fact that only seven or eight hundred Americans voted at their lodges for county candidates as evidence that interest in the movement was waning.⁵⁸

Unchastened by its membership problems, the American party would make one crucial mistake that would hand the fall county elections to the Democrats. That mistake was to refuse Whig participation in nominating a joint anti-Democratic slate.⁵⁹ Their refusal is mysterious, since such alliances were being formed in other counties and had also been formed to elect a state canal commissioner. Perhaps the Know Nothings here wished to preserve their secrecy, however flawed, which would have been sacrificed by fusing with the Whigs. The Whigs answered the rebuff by calling for an open organization, although they claimed also to support a “radical change” in naturalization laws.⁶⁰ In addition to freezing out Whig loyalists, the Know Nothings would not or could not infiltrate the Democrats’ county convention, where delegates were required to deny Know Nothing connections before being seated.⁶¹ So the Know Nothings met in their lodges across the county to nominate a purely American ticket. “Purely” American meant of course a balance of former Democrats and Whigs. Former Whigs included Jacob Bomberger (past editor of the *Shippensburg News*) for Assembly, John Williams for treasurer, Christian Eberly for commissioner, and James Postlethwaite for coroner. Former Democrats included Valentine Feeman for Assembly, William Riley for sheriff, Jacob Hemminger for director of the poor, and Frederick Muntzer for auditor.

The day after election day, Americans could count the cost of their refusal to coalesce with the Whigs. Even though the Democrats drew less than 47 percent of the some 5000 votes cast, a sharp decline from their performance two years earlier, their votes put them ahead of the Americans, who received just under 45 percent. The once-mighty Whig party drew only eight percent of the vote, but it was enough to doom the entire American ticket to defeat.⁶² The Whigs had even managed to get their own candidate for commissioner elected, thanks to the absence of the Democratic candidate, George Gleim, who had died after his nomination.⁶³ But this success was the last flourish of Cumberland County’s old Whig party, which never appeared on the ballot again.

The 1855 election must have been a bitter disappointment for the Americans. 1856 would be worse; not only would the Cumberland County Know Nothings lose more elections, but they would also begin losing their identity. In the Carlisle borough elections that year the Americans lost the offices of chief burgess, assistant burgess and assessor to an anti-Know Nothing slate of Democrats and Whigs headed by Armstrong Noble, elected chief burgess the previous

year as a Know Nothing. In odd counterpoint, the Know Nothing loser for chief burgess, Joseph Blair, had been the Democratic loser for the same office the previous year.⁶⁴ Now it was the turn of the Americans to blame their losses on fraud.⁶⁵ In Shippensburg an "anti-administration" ticket that included at least one Democrat beat a "fusion" ticket composed of both Democrats and Whigs. Elsewhere in the county, the picture was confused by the breakdown of party lines and the lack of official published returns. The *Volunteer* and the *American* put in partly conflicting claims of who had won which municipalities.⁶⁶ Generally speaking, however, it appears that the Democrats had reclaimed townships and boroughs that had historically been theirs, while the Americans held on to precincts that had once voted Whig.⁶⁷ At any rate, the Americans had clearly lost the ground gained a year earlier.

Immediate tactical losses aside, it was slavery that really killed the Know Nothing movement. If Know Nothingism was an effort by American politicians and voters to distract themselves from the grave crisis created by the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska bill, as it probably was, the effort failed. In fact, slavery had always competed for public attention throughout 1854 and 1855. Even as Lemuel Todd had opened his 1854 campaign against the Pope, he had declared himself against allowing slavery to expand into the territories.⁶⁸ After the National Council of the Know Nothings adopted a resolution in June 1855 opposing Congressional interference with slavery in the territories (an endorsement of the Kansas-Nebraska bill), Pennsylvania's State Council repudiated that section of the national platform and supported limiting slavery in the territories.⁶⁹ Justifying the State Council's action, Professor Tiffany blamed the National Council for trying to impose on Pennsylvania the views of southern states, "states in which no American triumph had ever been gained." As President Franklin Pierce submitted to the "slave power" in Kansas,

Voices of indignation reach us from every county in the state, and from every class of men except the post masters and government officials, who keep their principles in their pockets; and everywhere the cry is—"Repeal the Kansas bill—restore the Missouri compromise—admit no more Slave States!

Would not the American party of Pennsylvania be mad to set itself against this torrent? Would it not be worse than mad to set itself against its own conviction of right and truth and duty? Thank God, no such disgrace is before us...Our party is, as it was last year, opposed to the temporal dominion of the Pope, opposed to the corruption and debasement of the old political parties, and opposed to the Nebraska bill and the extension of slavery.⁷⁰

In 1856 the American presidential convention likewise split over slavery, and part of Pennsylvania's delegation joined other northerners in a walkout. In Penn-

sylvania itself, the Americans agreed to combine forces with the "free soil" Republican party, whose main purpose was to oppose slavery in the territories. Voters of both parties would have their choice of John C. Fremont, a famous western adventurer nominated by the Republicans, or former president Millard Fillmore, an old-line Whig nominated by the Americans. If the votes for both exceeded the Democratic vote, Republicans and Americans would split Pennsylvania's electoral vote according to their relative shares of the popular vote.⁷¹

Democratic papers noted the subordination of the American party to the Republicans with glee.⁷² Even the *Carlisle American* itself demonstrated the primacy of the free soil issue by devoting space to it in column after column.⁷³ The *American* not only supported the Republican position of containing slavery, but conditioned its support for Millard Fillmore on his taking the same stance.⁷⁴

Unfortunately, the October elections showed that the Democratic party, helped by the national focus on the issues of slavery and union, had beaten down the threat of Know Nothingism. Even under the umbrella of a combined "Union" slate, Cumberland County Know Nothings and Whigs together polled only 48 percent of the vote, out of about 6000 votes cast. Congressman Lemuel Todd, though barely outpolling Democrat John Ahl of Carlisle in Cumberland County, was voted down by York County voters and forced out of office.⁷⁵

The following month Democrat James Buchanan carried Cumberland County against the combined opposition, winning over 52 percent of about 6500 votes cast. In supporting Buchanan the county merely fell in with a slight majority of Pennsylvania voters. However, the proportion of votes cast for Fremont and Fillmore differed greatly in Cumberland County from that of the state overall. Whereas 32 percent of Pennsylvania's 459,000 voters voted for Fremont and only 18 percent for Fillmore, Fillmore outpolling Fremont in Cumberland County by over a hundred votes.⁷⁶

What did this disparity mean? Did Cumberland County voters continue to support the Know Nothing agenda in greater strength than elsewhere in Pennsylvania? Without opinion polls, no one can be sure. Fremont had been tarred as a secret Catholic by the Democrats.⁷⁷ The *Carlisle American* had tried to keep Know Nothing issues alive, if not paramount, in its pages during 1856. But it is likely that the preference for Fillmore over Fremont reflected conservative feeling rather than anti-Catholic bigotry. Although Cumberland County Whigs had supported the state party's commitment to containing slavery before 1854, no one had bothered to form an independent Republican party, as had been done in other Pennsylvania counties. 1856 was the first time that the voters here faced a purely Republican candidate. And while the Republican party was "tainted" by association with abolitionism, the American party had nominated

Fillmore, a conservative, old-line Whig, *implied* by the *Carlisle American* to be safely free-soil, or at least not under the control of the South.⁷⁸

In fact, Know Nothing sentiment was visibly withering in Cumberland County. The *Carlisle American* had to plead for the continued existence of the American party as such.⁷⁹ For four months after the presidential election the paper tried to rally party faithful by running a series of blistering opinion columns that provided some of the material quoted earlier. But by March 1857 even the *American* devoted itself almost entirely to carrying the free soil themes of the Republican party. That month Pennsylvania's Know Nothings met in a combined convention with the Republicans to nominate a combined slate. In July of 1858 the American party officially merged with the Republicans under the banner of the People's Party.⁸⁰ Cumberland County's own Know Nothings likewise merged their organization with the remnant of the Whigs and followed their state leadership into the Republican ranks. Know Nothingism uttered a last gasp in an 1858 resolution passed at the People's Party congressional nomination meeting for Cumberland, York and Perry counties. That resolution, last in a long list of resolutions, urged passage of federal laws prohibiting the introduction of foreign paupers and criminals, to lighten the burden on American taxpayers.⁸¹ Thereafter, only the *Carlisle American* remained, a paper without a party, a memento of a vanished movement, until 1864, when it ceased publication.

Notes

1. Conway P. Wing, *History of Cumberland County* (Philadelphia, 1879), 176.
2. Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History*, LX (1973), 324.
3. *Ibid.*, 317-18.
4. "The Know Nothings," *Shippensburg News*, July 1, 1854; Warren F. Hewitt, "The Know Nothing Party in Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History*, II, (1935), 70.
5. "The Nebraska Bill Passed," *Carlisle Herald*, March 8, 1854.
6. "Returns of Cumberland County-Official," *Ibid.*, October 22, 1845; "Official Returns of the Election," *ibid.*, October 21, 1846.
7. *American Volunteer*, March 25, 1852.
8. "Have We a Whig Party Among Us?" *Carlisle Herald*, August 24, 1853.
9. "Official Returns for 1853," *ibid.*, October 19, 1853.
10. "Know Nothings," *Shippensburg News*, April 29, 1854.
11. *Carlisle Herald*, May 31, 1854; "The Do Nothings," *American Volunteer*, June 8, 1854.
12. "Cause of Know-Nothingism," *Carlisle Herald*, June 21, 1854.
13. "The Know Nothings," *Shippensburg News*, July 1, 1854.
14. *American Volunteer*, June 8, 1854.
15. "The New Name Adopted by the Whigs," *ibid.*, June 22, 1854.
16. *Carlisle Herald*, August 23, 1854.
17. "False Rumors, We Hope," *American Volunteer*, August 24, 1854; *Carlisle Herald*, August 23, 1854.

18. "Letters from Candidates," *American Volunteer*, August 31, 1854.
19. "'Under Which King, Benzoni? Speak or Die!'" *Carlisle Herald*, September 20, 1854.
20. "Whig Conferee Meeting," *Shippensburg News*, September 16, 1854.
21. "Lemuel Todd-Who Bought Him Out?" *American Volunteer*, October 5, 1854.
22. "Official Returns, 1854," *Carlisle Herald*, October 18, 1854.
23. "Delegate Elections," *American Volunteer*, July 30, 1857.
24. "Great Old Line Victory!" *Carlisle Herald*, October 18, 1854.
25. "The Know Nothing Party," *ibid.*, November 29, 1854.
26. "Disgraceful Conduct," *American Volunteer*, October 19, 1854.
27. "Poor Consolation," *Carlisle Herald*, October 25, 1854.
28. "'Sam's' Victory in Carlisle," *American Volunteer*, March 22, 1855.
29. Once the Know Nothings had a paper of their own, the *Carlisle Herald* and *Shippensburg News* lost their early enthusiasm for Know Nothingism, and continued backing the Whig party until it sank entirely out of sight.
30. In the interest of accuracy, I must state that my research to date has not extended beyond the holdings of the Dickinson College, Hamilton, and Bosler libraries in Carlisle. It is possible that political correspondence of Cumberland County Know Nothings may yet turn up.
31. Otis H. Tiffany, "To the Officers and Members of the American Party In the State of Pennsylvania," August 10, 1855, Special Collections, Boyd Lee Spahr Library, Dickinson College.
32. "Know Nothingism A Bad Investment," *American Volunteer*, January 3, 1856; "The Troubles of the American," *ibid.*, August 20, 1857.
33. "An Outrage by Carlisle Know-Nothings," *ibid.*, September 7, 1854.
34. "A K.N. Pow-Wow," *ibid.*, August 9, 1855.
35. "Americans Determined to Stand by Their Principles," *Carlisle American*, December 24, 1856.
36. "Delegate Elections," *American Volunteer*, July 30, 1857.
37. "Politics and the Pulpit," *ibid.*, November 16, 1854; "America and American Institutions," lecture given at Carlisle Union Fire Hall, November 23, 1854, published *Carlisle Herald*, December 6, 1854.
38. Otis H. Tiffany, "To the Officers and Members of the American Party In the State of Pennsylvania," *loc. cit.*, 1.
39. "Americanism," *Carlisle Herald*, November 22, 1854.
40. "Foreign Paupers and Criminals," *Carlisle American*, February 11, 1857.
41. "American Sentiment," *Carlisle American*, December 3, 1856.
42. "Foreign King-Pontiff," *ibid.*, February 18, 1857.
43. "Romanism," *ibid.*, April 23, 1856.
44. "An Outrage by Carlisle Know-Nothings," *American Volunteer*, September 7, 1854.
45. "Foreign King-Pontiff," *Carlisle American*, February 18, 1857.
46. "Decline of Know-Nothingism," *American Volunteer*, February 22, 1855.
47. *Ibid.*
48. "The Knave and Fool of the 'American,'" *American Volunteer*, August 23, 1855.
49. "The Fool of the American," *ibid.*, August 30, 1855. See also "Know Nothing Election," *ibid.*, December 21, 1854.
50. "Our New County Officers," *ibid.*, December 7, 1854.
51. *Ibid.*, September 6, 1855.
52. "We Did 'Toe the Mark'," *ibid.*, September 20, 1855.
53. "That 'Amende Honorable'," *ibid.*, September 27, 1855.
54. "United States Senator," *Carlisle Herald*,

- January 31, 1855.
55. "U.S. Senatorship," *Shippensburg News*, February 17, 1855; "The American Party," *Carlisle Herald*, February 28, 1855.
 56. "Violation of the Oath," *American Volunteer*, September 20, 1855.
 57. *Ibid.*
 58. *Ibid.*, August 23, 1855.
 59. "The Whig Organization," *Carlisle Herald*, September 12, 1855.
 60. *Ibid.*, September 5, 1855.
 61. "Democratic County Convention," *American Volunteer*, August 23, 1855.
 62. "Official Returns, 1855," *Shippensburg News*, October 20, 1855.
 63. "The County Convention Re-Assembled," *American Volunteer*, September 27, 1855.
 64. *Ibid.*, March 22, 1855; March 27, 1856.
 65. "The Elections," *Carlisle American*, March 26, 1856.
 66. "Result in the County," *American Volunteer*, March 27, 1856; "The Volunteer and the Elections," *Carlisle American*, April 2, 1856; "The American and the Elections," *American Volunteer*, April 10, 1856.
 67. This conclusion is based upon a comparison of the claims of the *Volunteer* and the *American* with the official returns of the 1853 county-wide elections.
 68. *Shippensburg News*, October 7, 1854.
 69. Hewitt, "The Know Nothing Party in Pennsylvania," loc. cit., 79-80.
 70. Tiffany, "To the Officers and Members of the American Party In the State of Pennsylvania," loc. cit., 2.
 71. Hewitt, "The Know Nothing Party in Pennsylvania," loc. cit., 82.
 72. "Black Republicanism vs. Know Nothings," *American Democrat*, June 26, 1856; "What has Become of the Know-Nothing Party?" *American Volunteer*, September 18, 1856.
 73. See, e.g., "Kansas," *Carlisle American*, May 28, 1856; "The New Kansas Dodge," July 9, 1856; "Pennsylvania's Favorite Son," July 30, 1856; "Who are the Negro Worshipers?," and "Shamocracy," August 27, 1856; "Civil War in Kansas," September 3, 1856; "Border Ruffian Triumph," September 17, 1856.
 74. "Mr. Fillmore and the Next Presidency," *ibid.*, June 18, 1856.
 75. "The Election-Our Defeat," *Carlisle Herald*, October 15, 1856; "Official Returns of Cumberland County," *ibid.*, October 22, 1856.
 76. *Carlisle American*, November 12, 1856; "Presidential Elections," *ibid.*, December 10, 1856.
 77. "Violation of the Oath," *American Volunteer*, June 26, 1856; "Is Fremont a Catholic?" *ibid.*, July 17, 1856; "Fremont Know Nothings," *American Democrat*, July 24, 1856.
 78. "Our Standard Bearers," *Carlisle American*, October 22, 1856.
 79. "Keep Up Your Organization," *ibid.*, November 26, 1856.
 80. Hewitt, "The Know Nothing Party in Pennsylvania," loc. cit., 84-85.
 81. *Carlisle Herald*, September 29, 1858.