



Republicans Gather at Chicago

by Michael Burlingame

<http://housedivided.dickinson.edu/sites/journal/2010/07/29/republicans-gather-at-chicago/>

The convention opened on Wednesday, May 16, with David Wilmot of Pennsylvania serving as temporary chairman. Orville Browning called him “a dull, chuckle headed, booby looking man” who “makes a poor presiding officer.” The convention hall, specially built for the occasion, was known as the Wigwam because it resembled an Indian longhouse. A large, clumsy, solid, barn-like structure, measuring 100 x 180 feet, with a capacity of twelve thousand people, it was constructed “of rough timber, decorated so completely with flags banner, bunting, etc., that when filled it seemed a gorgeous pavilion aflame with color and all aflutter with pennants and streamers.” The interior resembled a huge theater whose stage was occupied by the delegates and the press. The acoustics were so good that an ordinary voice could easily be heard throughout the building. One journalist deemed it a “small edition of the New York Crystal Palace.”

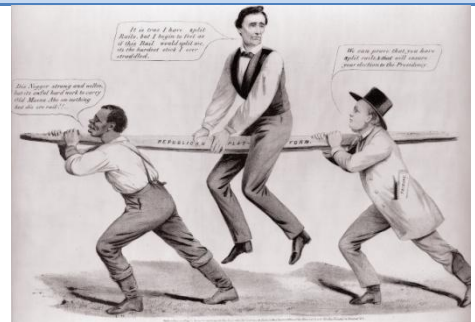


Inside the “The Wigwam”
Chicago, Illinois, 1860

"Republicans Gather at Chicago "

p. 2

An “overflowing heartiness and deep feeling pervaded the whole house,” John G. Nicolay remembered. “No need of a claque, no room for sham demonstration here! The galleries were as watchful and earnest as the platform. There was something genuine, elemental, uncontrollable in the moods and manifestations of the vast audience.” The city was awash with visitors, some of whom wound up sleeping on tables at billiard parlors. The first two days were devoted to routine business and to adopting a platform that criticized attempts to limit the rights of immigrants; endorsed the sentiments of the Declaration of Independence; condemned disunionism, the popular sovereignty doctrine, and threats to reopen the African slave trade; upheld the right of states to regulate their own institutions; denounced the Buchanan administration’s extravagance, corruption, abuse of power, and support of the Lecompton Constitution; maintained that the normal condition of the territories was freedom; called for the immediate admission of Kansas as a free state; and endorsed protective tariffs, internal improvements (including a Pacific railroad), and homestead legislation.



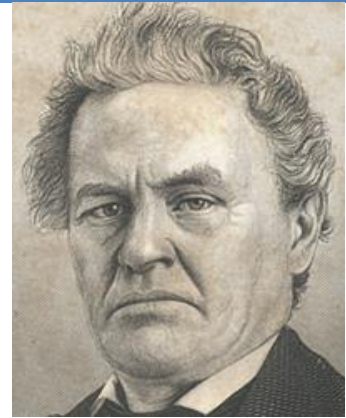
"The Rail Candidate," cartoon, 1860



"Republicans Gather at Chicago "

p. 3

The plank on corruption was emphatic: "That the people justly view with alarm the reckless extravagance which pervades every department of the Federal Government; that a return to rigid economy and accountability is indispensable to arrest the system of plunder of the public treasury by favored partisans; while the recent startling developments of fraud and corruption of the Federal metropolis, show that an entire change of administration is imperatively demanded." The platform committee omitted any reference to the Declaration of Independence. When doughty old Joshua R. Giddings moved from the floor that a plank endorsing its principles be added, his motion was defeated. Angered, he stormed out of the Wigwam, whereupon young George William Curtis of New York made a stirring speech which reversed that action. Giddings came back radiant.



Joshua Reed Giddings
circa 1855



Further Reading

Bromley, Isaac H. "Historic Moments: The Nomination of Lincoln." *Scribner's Magazine* 14 (November 1893): 645-657.

Ecelbarger, Gary. *The Great Comeback: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to Win the 1860 Presidential Nomination*. New York: St. Martins Press, 2008.

Nicolay, John G., and John Hay. *Abraham Lincoln: A History*. 10 vols. New York: Century 1890.

***Proceedings of the First Three Republican National Conventions of 1856, 1860 and 1864*. Minneapolis: Charles W. Johnson, 1893.**

Stamp, Kenneth M. *The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Wendt, Lloyd. *"Swift Walker": An Informal Biography of Gurdon Saltonstall Hubbard*. Chicago: Regnery Books, 1986.



Document 1— Entry by Orville Browning, May 16, 1860

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/33837>

Source Citation –

Theodore Calvin Pease, ed., *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning Volume I, 1850-1864* (2 vols.; Springfield, IL: Blakely Printing Company, 1925), 1: 407.

Transcribed Text –

Wednesday May 16 At 12 Meridian the Convention assembled at the wigwam near Lake Street bridge, and were called to order by Gov Morgan of New York, who is Chairman of the National Central Committee. David Wilmot of Pa: was appointed temporary Chairman. He is a dull, chuckel headed, booby looking man, and makes a very poor presiding officer. After appointing Committees with a view to permanent organization adjourned till 5 P. M. at which time we again assembled, when Mr. Ashman was elected President of the Convention. I was designated by our delegation as Vice President for Illinois, but declined, and Judge Davis was appointed in my place. After appointing some additional Committees we adjourned till 10 O'clock tomorrow morning.



Document 2– Chicago (IL) Press and Tribune, "The Convention Week in Chicago," May 17, 1860

<http://hd.housedivided.dickinson.edu/node/33854>

Source Citation –

"The Convention Week in Chicago," Chicago (IL) *Press and Tribune*, May 17, 1860, p. 1: 2.

Transcribed Text –

The interest which, not alone with our own citizens, has for months past attached to the week now passing here, is fast culminating toward the point when its completed result shall give to our Republicans a leader, and to our ticket a name before the people, and with the people. The city filled up rapidly yesterday morning as the great excursion trains poured in fresh arrivals. Full to repletion before, our hotel keepers met fresh appeals, which, from a call for single rooms, had narrowed down to the earnest,

"O, give me a Cot!"

In more than one instance, billiard rooms and their tables have come to pay a double debt and bear a double burden. Until a moderate hour for retiring the markers are busy, and the lick of the balls tells of the progress of the game, but at a signal of the clock, mine hosts "take their cue" from the crowd of weary guest, and during the rest of the twenty four hours, passed on mattresses spread upon the tables, the only "angles" studied, are those of tired humanity wooing "nature's sweet restorer." We looked in, just after midnight, upon one *ranch*e of this kind, where one hundred and thirty persons were making this use of billiard tables in a manner and with a zest, from the fatigues of the day, that would have excited the sympathy of the most unfeeling bosom, albeit the use was rather "*un-Phelan*."