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The Origin of the REPUBLICAN PARTY



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WISCONSIN

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PREFACE.

The "Origin of the Republican Party" was presented at a special meeting of the Ripon Historical Society on March 20, 1914; it being the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of the Republican Party. Later, excerpts from it were read at a meeting of the Wisconsin Academy of Arts, Letters and Science, that convened in Milwaukee during April 9-10 of the same year.

So many inquiries concerning it have come in from various parts of the state that it seemed advisable to have it put in print. In the following pages an effort has been made to present in a connected form an account of the more important facts in the hope that it may prove of service to any who are interested in the history of Wisconsin.

The Bibliography which will be found at the end of the pamphlet will serve to indicate the sources of information which are at hand. Special mention should be made of the following references to be found in the collections of the Ripon Historical Society: Interviews with Mr. A. E. Bovay, by Leo F. Nohl, and others; letters of Mr. A. E. Bovay from Horace Greeley; a biographical sketch by Irvin W. Near; two historical sketches by S. T. Kidder; and also an article by S. M. Pedrick in which the writer has very carefully and forcibly set forth "Ripon's Claim, the historical evidence, and the conclusion of historians."

The Author.

ORIGIN OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY.

By Prof. A. F. Gilman, Ph.D.

In the little town of Ripon (Wis.) early in the fifties there lived a man with sufficient political sagacity to read the signs of the times and to predict that a new political party would soon be formed which would become national in its scope and character. This man was Alvan Earl Bovay.

Born in Adams, Jefferson County, New York, on July 12, 1818, he received his preliminary education in the schools of his native state and was graduated from Norwich University in Vermont at the age of twenty-three years. He began teaching and was made principal of the Glen Falls and Oswego academies in New York state and later became Professor of Languages in the Bristol Military Academy (Penn.). He passed several years in New York City reading law and teaching school alternately. Mr. Bovay was secretary of the National Reform Association and while in New York City, he met and became a firm friend of Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune. He was admitted to the bar in Utica, N. Y., in 1846.

In the latter part of the year 1850, he moved to Wisconsin and settled in Ripon where he began the practice of law. He was one of the original incorporators of Brockway, now Ripon College, and for a time taught mathematics in the college. It was natural that the people of a small frontier town should look to a man of Mr. Bovay's training for advice and he was soon recognized as a leader in the political questions of the day. Although

an ardent Whig he felt that there were subtle forces at work which would eventually result in the disintegration of his party.

During the time of the National Whig Convention in 1852, Mr. Bovay was visiting in New York City. He was the guest of his old friend, Horace Greeley, at a lunch in the Lovejoy Hotel, and as the convention was then in session their conversation naturally turned to the candidates whose names had been presented. Mr. Bovay declared that General Scott would be the Whig nominee, although at this time the returns showed that he was not in the lead. Mr. Greeley felt confident that the candidate nominated by the Whigs would be elected in the coming presidential election, while his guest predicted the defeat of the Whig party, for he maintained that its vitality was gone, and that its issues no longer commanded the attention of the people.

The slavery question was absorbing the minds of the people and it had assumed the phase of as much of a political as of a moral issue, and Mr. Bovay urged the formation of a new party with the idea of bringing together the anti-slavery element of all parties. He seems to have been as much concerned about the name of the proposed party as about the formation of it and when asked by Mr. Greeley what name he would give to the new party he suggested the name "Republican." His reasons for the use of this name were:

1. Political parties should have significant names and this name was not only significant but it indicated the thing they wished to symbolize: "Res publica," common weal. It also suggests equality, that "you are as good as I," not like the Democratic doctrine that "I am as good as you."

2. It should be a simple and not a compound word like Free-Soil, Free-Democrat or Liberty Party.

3. That it should be flexible and could be used as an adjective as well as a noun.

There were two other considerations, however, that outweighed all of the rest and which Mr. Bovay thought would contribute the most to the success of a new party: one of these was that this name had been applied by Thomas Jefferson to his party and it would be held in reverence by the best people of the land; and the other was, that it would attract the foreign element. He said: "These people (the foreigners) will at once decide that the Republican party is the one for them and we shall bring in thousands of Democrats just by the name, if we call it 'Republican.'" Mr. Greeley did not accept the suggestion of forming a new party because of his confidence in the Whig party which he thought would win in the coming election.

Mr. Bovay returned to Wisconsin and continued to support the Whig party, "following its banners, fighting its battles faithfully, at the same time praying for its death." The prediction in regard to the defeat of General Scott came true, and after the presidential election of 1852 the Whig party went to pieces, many of the old party joining the new Know-Nothing party that had just been organized.

During the two years that followed a spirit of unrest prevailed throughout the country and the people were losing confidence in their political leaders. The introduction into the Congressional session of 1853-54, by Senator Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois, of the "Kansas-Nebraska Bill" brought forth a storm of indignation from the anti-slavery people in the North. Mr. Bovay and his followers thought that the time had come for some definite action and on February 26, 1854, when the Nebraska Bill was before the senate, he wrote a letter to Greeley explaining how strong the feeling was in Ripon and

vicinity against the Nebraska Bill, and as the New York Tribune was the leading paper in the country, he urged upon Mr. Greeley the necessity of calling together in every church and school-house in the free states all opponents to the Nebraska Bill and band them together under the name Republican, the only name, he said, that would serve all purposes and the only one that would live and last. This organization, he said, should be formed at once.

Without waiting to hear from the editor of the Tribune a meeting was called in Ripon; the summons of this meeting was as follows:

"NEBRASKA. A meeting will be held at 6:30 o'clock this Wednesday evening at the Congregational Church in the Village of Ripon to remonstrate against the Nebraska swindle."

(Signed) Many Citizens.

This meeting was held on Wednesday, March 1, 1854. What took place at this first public meeting may best be expressed by the resolution that was adopted, which is as follows: "Resolved, That of all the outrages hitherto perpetrated or attempted upon the North and freedom by the slave leaders and their natural allies, not one compares in bold and impudent audacity, treachery and meanness with this, the Nebraska Bill; as to the sum of all its villainies it adds the repudiation of a solemn compact held as sacred as the constitution itself for a period of thirty-four years." At this meeting a resolution was also adopted to the effect that if the Nebraska Bill, then pending in the senate, should pass, they would throw away old party organizations and form a new party directly opposed to the principles of the Nebraska Bill.

On March 3 the Nebraska Bill passed the senate and there was a general feeling that it was destined to pass the house and become a law. This bill was looked upon by Bovay and his followers as "expressly intended to



ALVAN EARLE BOVAY

1818-1903

FOUNDER OF REPUBLICAN PARTY

extend and strengthen the institution of slavery," and they decided to call a second meeting for more definite action and to make an attempt to effect an organization.

A reply from Mr. Greeley came in a letter dated March 7 in which he said that he thought the plan of organizing a party was all right if the people were ripe for it, but no mention of it was made in the Tribune and apparently the editor was not much interested in the plan.

The second meeting was held in the school-house of district No. 2 on Monday evening, March 20, 1854. With reference to this meeting Mr. Bovay said: "I went from house to house and from shop to shop and halted men on the street to get their names for the meeting of March 20, 1854." Of the one hundred voters at that time in Ripon fifty-four were secured for the meeting, composed of Whigs, Democrats and Free-Soilers. They assembled at 6:30 p. m., completely filling the school-house. A discussion of the situation was begun and continued until "the hour was late and the candles burned low. It was a cold, windy night at the vernal equinox. But in the end all but two or three gave in and we formed our organization." At this meeting Mr. Bovay offered the name "Republican" for the new party and it was well received. By a formal vote the town committees of the Free-Soil and Whig parties were dissolved and five men, consisting of J. Bowen, A. Loper, A. E. Bovay, A. Thomas and J. Woodruff, one Democrat, three Whigs and one Free-Soiler, were appointed as the committee of the new party.

The Nebraska Bill passed the house on May 22. The next day about thirty anti-slavery members of the House of Representatives, Whigs and Democrats, held a meeting and discussed the necessity of organizing a new party under the name "Republican," and they pledged themselves to fight against the extension of slavery. President Franklin Pierce strongly favored the bill and signed it May 30, 1854.

The "Weekly Tribune" of June 3 appeared in mourning for the passage of the obnoxious Nebraska Bill. On June 7 there was a state convention of Prohibitionists and anti-slavery Democrats at Strong, Oxford County, Maine. This convention nominated Anson P. Morrill for governor. At this meeting C. J. Talbot, the presiding officer, delivered an address advocating a combination of these two parties with the old-line Whigs under the name of "The Republican Party." This suggestion was vigorously cheered and the Maine Republicans claim that this was the first time that the name was cheered in a public assembly. A delegated convention was held in the same place on August 7, 1854, and the name Republican was adopted for the party.

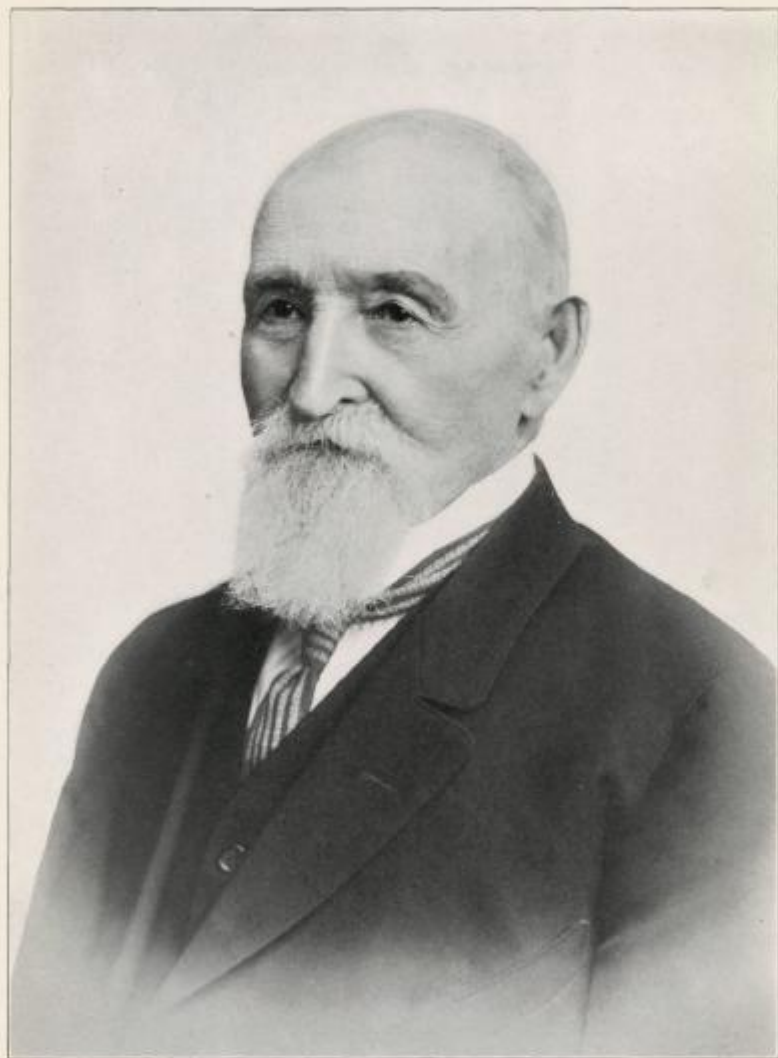
On June 12 Mr. Bovay again wrote to Horace Greeley urging him to put forth the name Republican, and in the Weekly Tribune of June 24, appeared an article headed "Party Names and Public Duty," in which the editor recommended the name Republican, previously suggested to him by Mr. Bovay, to designate those who had united to restore the Union to its true mission of champion and promulgator of liberty.

Mr. Greeley learned that a massed convention had been called in Michigan to voice the protests in that state against the Nebraska Bill and he wrote to Mr. Jacob M. Howard, suggesting that the convention adopt the name Republican for the party that he thought was about to be formed. He said that Wisconsin, in its state convention to be held a week later, would select the name Republican for the new party. The Anti-Nebraska convention in Michigan met at Jackson on July 6 and nominated a state ticket. The managers of the convention were Zachariah Chandler and Jacob Merritt Howard, both of whom afterwards became United States Senators. Howard drew up the platform and gave the name Republican to the party. Kingsley S. Bingham was nominated for

governor and elected at the following election. On July 13, the anniversary of the adoption of the ordinance of 1787 and one week later than the Michigan meeting, there were several state conventions of Anti-Nebraska men and of these Wisconsin and Vermont chose the name Republican. Later in July Asher N. Cole, a veteran editor of Alleghany County, New York, called a mass meeting of Anti-slavery voters at Friendship in that county which resulted in the origin of the Republican Party in New York state, and for years afterward in western New York Mr. Cole was referred to as the "Father of the Republican Party." A convention of anti-slavery men was held in New York state on August 16, and another on September 27. A convention was also held in Massachusetts on September 7.

The anti-slavery state conventions which were held during the summer and fall of 1854 resulted in an overturning of the House of Representatives and a decidedly marked inroad into the Senate. Fifteen states showed anti-slavery extension pluralities and eleven United States Senators were elected as Republicans, or afterwards acted with the new party.

An informal convention for the purpose of perfecting a national organization was held in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on February 22, 1856. This convention met in pursuance of a call issued by the chairmen of the Republican state committees of Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Wisconsin. Twenty-four delegates were present, the name Republican was adopted for the national party and the delegates declared that the object and purpose was opposition to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise and to the extension of slavery to free territory. Among those present were Horace Greeley and Abraham Lincoln. At this convention a Republican National Committee was formed, and on March 29 the committee called the national delegate convention which met in Philadelphia on



ALONZO ALFRED LOPER
Born March 23rd, 1829

June 17, 1856, the anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, and nominated John C. Fremont of California for President and William L. Dayton of New Jersey for Vice-President. At this time Charles Durkee was sent to the United States Senate from Wisconsin as a Republican.

About a month before the Bovay meetings in Ripon (the first of February) the "Appeal of the Independent Democrats in Congress to the People of the United States" was published. This address was written by Chase of Ohio and signed by Giddings, Sumner, Edward Wade, Gerrit Smith, Preston King and other anti-slavery men; it protested against the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill which aimed to repeal the Missouri Compromise and to thus give slavery an equal chance with freedom in territory from which it had been excluded by the Missouri Compromise. However, there was no purpose of forming a new party on these lines suggested in the address, and it was in the school-house at Ripon, Wisconsin, on March 20, 1854, that the first political meeting was held for organizing a new party.

Mr. Alonzo A. Loper, who is still living in Ripon, was a young man twenty-four years old at the time of the Bovay meetings. He is now eighty-four years old and is remarkably alert, both physically and mentally, for a man of his age. He recalls how Mr. Bovay repeatedly urged that there was no use to wait any longer, it was time to act against the movement to extend slavery. He attended the meeting in the school-house with his father, Mr. Amos Loper, who called the meeting to order and appointed Deacon William Dunham as chairman and Marcus W. Martin, secretary. At this meeting Mr. Amos Loper was appointed a member of the committee of the new party.

The Republican Party was organized to meet a demand on the part of the anti-slavery people of the North, and was founded upon the sole issue of the non-exten-

sion of slavery, and was a direct result of the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which was regarded as a measure to extend slavery, thus repudiating the Missouri Compromise.

The Republican Party was born in Ripon, Wisconsin, March 20, 1854, was christened by the state convention at Jackson, Michigan, July 6, was nourished and grew in strength and power by the help it received from many other state conventions and arrived at the age of maturity when the National Convention met in Philadelphia on June 17, 1856.

A few statements with reference to the school-house in which the Republican Party was born may be of interest. In the year 1850 the superintendent of schools in the town of Ceresco (now a section of Ripon) formed a new district to be known as district No. 2; and an appropriation of \$300 was made "for the purpose of building a school in said district." This school-house was built on a triangular piece of land just north of where the present Ripon High School stands.

Several years later it was moved eastward to the corner of Houston and E. Fond du Lac streets and was converted into a dwelling-house. In the year 1867 it was purchased and occupied by Mr. Geo. W. Peck, who later became governor of Wisconsin and is the author of the famous Peck's Bad Boy Series. He lived in the house for two years, and it was then sold to John Perrine, who lived there for about thirty years.

During the early part of the year 1908, this property was offered for sale. Through the efforts of the Ripon Historical Society, the City Council and the Commercial Club, the property was purchased and the building moved to the southwest corner of the Ripon College Campus where it now stands and is to be preserved as an historical relic.

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BIRTHPLACE
— OF THE —
REPUBLICAN PARTY

In this School House
March 20th 1854 was held
the first Mass Meeting
in this country that
definitely and positively
cut loose from old parties
and advocated a new
party under the name
Republican.