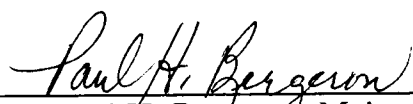
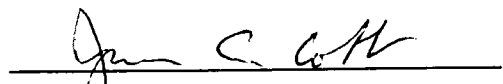
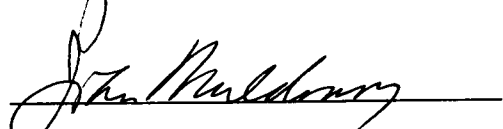


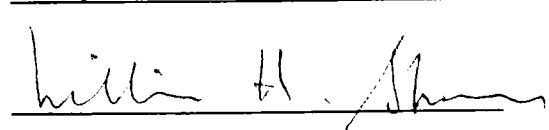
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Brian Edward Crowson entitled "Southern Port City Politics and the Know Nothing Party in the 1850s." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in history.


Dr. Paul H. Bergeron, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

Southern Port City Politics and the Know Nothing Party in the 1850s

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Brian Edward Crowson

December 1994

Copyright © Brian Edward Crowson, 1994
All rights reserved

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandparents, Elizabeth H. and the late John T. DeJarnette; my parents, Edward S. and Corenne D. Crowson; and my wife, Dr. Toni McDaniel. Without their continued support and love none of this would have been possible.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my dissertation director, Dr. Paul H. Bergeron, for his invaluable assistance in completing this study. Although I arrived at the University of Tennessee with a very rough idea for a dissertation topic, Professor Bergeron's insight provided the refinement necessary to make this a manageable work. Always ready to discuss the peculiar conduct of the Whig, Democratic, and Know Nothing parties in the political life of the early republic, he likewise proved a regular and welcome source of counsel, humor, and friendship through six years of apprenticeship as his doctoral student. I look forward to our continuing association.

In addition, I must acknowledge the debt owed to the other members of my dissertation committee: Professors James C. Cobb, John Muldowny, William H. Shurr, and Bruce Wheeler. Their astute criticism of this work no doubt improved its quality and made me a better historian.

Finally, I wish to thank Professor Wayne Cutler, editor of the *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, for his guidance and friendship. During three years as a graduate research assistant under his tutelage, I learned more about history and scholarship than a career of graduate seminars could ever provide. Also, Dr. Cutler's generosity and skill as raconteur always made the drudgeries of graduate life altogether more bearable. Our shared passion for sailing never failed to ease the tension that accompanied dissertation work.

ABSTRACT

Scholars of the 1850s have focused their attention on national or state issues which fostered the development of sectionalism and disunion. Political parties which operated beyond the mainstream of national partisan rivalries have usually been treated as episodes peripheral to the national story. Consequently, the American party, despite its electoral success and goal to become a national party, usually has received only cursory treatment.

More recently, some historians have begun to reassess the American party in terms of the socio-economic changes which distinguished the 1840s and 1850s. While these studies have improved our understanding of the American party in general, they address the party only within the limited scope of northern political institutions.

To broaden this limited perspective and underscore the complexity of Know Nothingism, this study examines the development of the American party within the unique framework of southern municipal politics, and more specifically, in the context of four southern port cities: Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah. Focusing on the actions of the Know Nothing press, municipal officials affiliated with the American party, and their Democratic opposition, one can determine the extent to which the movement influenced southern politics in the 1850s.

Examination of Know Nothing development in these cities reveals that in each community the party responded to local circumstances and created a

hybridized form of the national movement. American party spokesmen also adopted the nativist, Unionist, and reform-oriented principles of their counterparts in the North. Introduction of Know Nothingism in the municipal political arena energized the local electorate and increased voter turnout for both the American and Democratic parties. Although the American party's popularity in these cities reveals that many residents were dissatisfied with the existing political order and were distressed over the more troublesome socio-economic problems of the day, the movement's failure reflected heightened concern over antislavery sentiment and the rapid expansion of the Republican party. Ultimately, association of Know Nothingism with the advent of Republicanism in the North galvanized public opinion against the movement and heralded the rapid demise of the American party as a force in southern politics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. The American Party and the Political Ferment of the 1850s	1
2. "Put Only Americans on Watch Tonight": The American Party in Norfolk, Virginia	27
3. "For Fillmore, Donelson, The Constitution, & the Union": The American Party in Wilmington, North Carolina	78
4. States' Rights & Nativism: The American Party in Charleston, South Carolina	135
5. "Freedom for Foreigners But Supremacy for Ourselves": The American Party in Savannah, Georgia	186
6. The Legacy of the American Party	250
Bibliography	272
Appendix	287
Vita	291

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
2-1. Voter Turnout, Norfolk Elections, 1853-1856	57
3-1. Voter Turnout, Wilmington Elections, 1852-1859	92
4-1. Voter Turnout, Charleston Mayoral Elections, 1852-1859	148
5-1. Population of Savannah, Georgia, 1800-1860	191
5-2. Foreign-Born Population of Savannah, Georgia, 1840-1860	195
5-3. Voter Turnout, Savannah Elections, 1853-1857	219
A-1. Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Norfolk, 1854-1856	288
A-2. Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Wilmington, 1854-1856	288
A-3. Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Charleston, 1854-1856	289
A-4. Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Savannah, 1854-1856	289
A-5. Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Aggregate, 1854-1856	290

Chapter I

The American Party and the Political Ferment of the 1850s

In the closing weeks of the spring of 1855, John Cunningham, editor of the *Charleston Evening News*, traveled to Philadelphia to represent South Carolina at the national convention of the American party, scheduled to commence on June 8. Feted by the citizens of Philadelphia in a banquet dedicated to the "National Union" and highlighted as the focus of national political attention, Cunningham and his fellow delegates doubtless recognized the great significance of their convocation. After a year of astounding political success, the American party's enthusiastic local lodges and state councils seemed poised to coalesce as a truly national political entity capable of defeating the strongest of Democratic, Whig, and Republican rivals. The Washington, D.C. *American Organ*, the self-styled national newspaper of the Know Nothing movement, optimistically predicted that the party's Philadelphia convention would bring glory to the participants and demonstrate to the American people the virtue of the American party creed.¹

¹W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 129-30; Washington, D.C. *American Organ*, June 8, 1855.

Of course, the task of party construction was replete with difficulties. The creators of the Know Nothing movement--the disparate cadre of nativists who had organized themselves in New York and Pennsylvania as early as the 1844 presidential contest, disaffected Whigs and Democrats, countless political novices and hangers-on, as well as the zealous reformers baptized in the enthusiasm of evangelical Protestantism--were attempting to establish a political unit that operated, at least in a rhetorical sense, beyond the realm of the existing party system. But at the same time Know Nothing organizers attempted to deny association with the partisan legacy of Jackson, Van Buren, Clay, and Webster, while heralding the birth of a "no-party" party, the order clearly borrowed from this diffuse political heritage. Indeed, at the heart of Know Nothingism lay the very essence of the partisan animus that had shaped American political discourse and competition. The American party, like its Whig, Democratic, and Federalist antecedents, identified itself as the vital conservator of the republican ideal while labeling its opposition as the chief enemy of that political construct.

Still, for pragmatic delegates like John Cunningham, who toiled primarily in the often brutal domain of municipal politics, articulation of a national platform that enjoyed widespread public support and incorporated a wide variety of goals was perceived as the best way to infuse local Know Nothing councils with a heightened sense of partisan purpose. In addition, successful creation of a party platform that diverted public attention from sectional issues and instead united

southern and northern Know Nothing adherents would propel the party forward to confront the challenge of the following year's presidential contest.²

Although neither a seasoned politician nor established officeholder like his prominent southern counterpart, Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina, John Cunningham nonetheless employed his skills as partisan rhetorician to play a surprisingly important role among the rank and file figures of the American party elite. Indeed, his presence at what was arguably the most significant of Know Nothing convocations prior to the national convention of 1856 reflected the close relationship which had developed between the American party and the press. In the absence of a well-established, complex party machine capable of rallying large numbers of voters, the embryonic Know Nothing movement perhaps relied more heavily than its opponents on the support of sympathetic journals and editors. The Know Nothing press, for example, rendered invaluable service to the formation of the party through the dissemination of nativist rhetoric and the creation of intense public curiosity. This role seemed particularly crucial in the first year of the order's life when it still operated under the veil of secrecy. Thus Cunningham, by virtue of his vocation, proved most responsible for the mobilization of American party support in Charleston, employed the editorial pages of the *Evening News* to criticize vociferously the character of his city's Democratic/Southern Rights leadership, and established himself as the local

²Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 129-30.

party's most zealous and contentious votary within the arena of municipal affairs.³

While in Philadelphia, Cunningham joined his Know Nothing peers in defining the future course of the movement, a task made all the more problematic by the free-soil faction within the American party and by the appearance of the Republicans as a threat to Know Nothing mobilization. On one occasion Cunningham engaged in the convention's debate over a proposal that the party should enlist new members from the ranks of native-born Catholics. Joining the angry chorus of those opposed to such a modification of fundamental Know Nothing principles, Cunningham contributed to the overwhelming defeat of the resolution. Yet beyond such peripheral involvement in the more desultory issues of the convention, Cunningham most likely focused his attention on those duties required of members of the party's platform committee, and thus played a role in the bitter internecine conflict which eventually divided northern and southern delegates over the party's contested stance on slavery.⁴

In addition, Cunningham's presence at the Philadelphia convention proves significant in terms of illustrating the diffuse interests that defined--albeit ambiguously--the ranks of the American party. More importantly, it reveals the

³A. Cheree Carlson, "The Rhetoric of the Know-Nothing Party: Nativism as a Response to the Rhetorical Situation," *The Southern Communication Journal* 54 (1989): 379-80; Charleston *Evening News*, January 6, 20, February 15, 1855; James Marchio, "Nativism in the Old South: Know-Nothingism in Antebellum South Carolina," *Southern Historian* 8 (1987): 41-42; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 129-30.

⁴Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York, 1992), 166-70; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 130-32.

often anomalous character of southern participation in the Know Nothing movement. For example, although the great majority of southern Know Nothings emphasized their devotion to the union and consequently based their participation in the movement on a desire to preserve that union in the face of sectionally divisive issues, Cunningham apparently had little sympathy for such idealistic views. In the pages of the *Evening News* he made no secret of his intense devotion to the preservation of southern rights and, despite his participation in the American party's Philadelphia convention, underscored his political independence from such national councils. The failure of the 1855 national party convention to reach a consensus on slavery doubtless heightened his wariness of the American party's national leadership. The *Charleston Courier*, reflecting on Cunningham's foray into the arena of national party politics, observed that he was a "perfect fire-eater and secessionist."⁵

The participation of individuals like John Cunningham who fail to fit historians' narrowly defined parameters for the "typical" Know Nothing adherent begs for further explanation. How could a political party, in which members ostensibly identified themselves according to some ideological common ground, accommodate someone with such antithetical views? Of course, to understand this kind of divergence within the American party one must examine the nature of the local party organization in which such deviations might prove more tolerable. But as a preface to any exegesis on Know Nothingism as it functioned at the

⁵Charleston *Courier*, June 16, 1855.

municipal level, one must consider the party's development within the framework of the national political order. For example, what forces prompted the rise of the American party in the early 1850s and what role did the movement play in the national political turmoil of the decade? Moreover, why did the American party dissolve so rapidly after enjoying a meteoric rise to electoral success in 1854 and 1855?

Much of the sentiment expressed by the Know Nothings was hardly new; in fact, one could find throughout the colonial era the rhetoric and prejudices of nativism and anti-Catholicism. Ideally, America's revolutionary experience promised to quell such sentiments and, in fact, the frequency of violent incidents motivated by nativism declined after 1800. Yet while governmental authorities eventually came to disapprove of nativist agitation, these prejudices did not disappear entirely.⁶

Increasingly, Americans' fear of immigration and the influence of a growing, non-native Catholic populace prompted the creation of secret societies

⁶For example, in the two decades prior to America's struggle for independence, many residents of colonial New York and Massachusetts took part in Pope Day celebrations which typically involved the parading and burning of papal effigies. In the 1790s, residents of New York City began the practice of parading effigies of the Irish "Paddy" on St. Patrick's Day. And, during the first decade of the nineteenth century New York City was also the scene of numerous incidents involving the persecution of Irish Catholics. But episodes of this nature, usually limited to verbal harassment and insignificant property damage, hardly constituted an institutionalized or organized attack against these citizens nor were such actions explicitly sanctioned by city officials. New York authorities, fearing more violent riots and attacks against property, even attempted to ban such activities. As Paul Gilje concludes in his study of popular disorder in New York City, the rituals of Pope Day and "Paddy" effigy processions were deemed "incompatible with both the new emphasis on religious toleration and the middle-class demand for an orderly society." Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill, 1987), 25-26, 127-38, 209-11; Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (Chicago, 1938), 380-400; Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, Conn., 1986), 120-35.

and even political parties devoted to redefining the naturalization process and limiting the potential political power of recently-arrived Irish and German laborers. In 1843, for example, a union of nativist Whigs and Democrats in New York City produced the American Republican party, an organization that pledged to extend the naturalization period to twenty-one years, reserve government offices for thoroughly Americanized citizens, and maintain Bible reading and nonsectarian religious education in public schools. Although the American Republicans scored a significant triumph at the polls in 1844, having won the mayoralty and control of the city council, the party's inability to secure its proposed reforms prompted the quick dissolution of the movement.⁷

But the rapid failure of the American Republican party belies the importance of this episode. First, the construction of a party on an anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant foundation highlights the politicization of the nativist movement. Moreover, the sudden success of the American Republicans reveals the potential appeal of such a party with a disaffected electorate. In 1844, however, the strength of traditional political loyalties quickly overshadowed efforts to forge a new political union. In the meantime, adherents of nativism in the Northeast retreated to secret societies like the Order of United Americans, the United Sons of America, and the Order of United American Mechanics. Without a doubt the nation's established party system would have to splinter or be severely weakened

⁷Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 9-11; Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York, 1981), 36-37; Ira M. Leonard, "The Rise and Fall of the American Republican Party in New York City, 1843-1845," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 50 (1966): 151-92.

before more political efforts proved successful. Ultimately, the Know Nothing movement would secure the benefits of the social and political ferment that had occasioned the rise of the American Republicans during the 1840s. In fact, the unrest that plagued American society in the decade prior to the Civil War, particularly the destruction of voter confidence in the major parties, threatened to make nativism, and not anti-slavery, the focal point of political debate and partisan competition in the 1850s.⁸

Evolving from a secret fraternal society known as the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, the American party surged onto the national political scene in 1854 and quickly established itself as a powerful political force across the country. The *Know Nothing Almanac* of 1855, reflecting on the astounding success of the order, observed that the American party arrived "with the silence of a zepher [*sic*], but with the crushing force of a tornado." Whereas previous political manifestations of nativism seemed predominantly local in character, the American party eventually captured support at every level of politics, competing successfully for municipal, state, and even national offices. Even before the movement coalesced under a unified network of local lodges, state councils, and national conventions, the Know Nothings, as they were popularly labeled, had surprised voters with their ability to win elections without running a publicized ticket. In fact, in their earliest attempts to secure political offices the Know Nothings shocked their bewildered opponents by running secret candidates or endorsing

⁸Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 301; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York, 1976), 250.

candidates who shared their views on the proscription of immigrants. By the autumn of 1854 thousands of voters throughout the Northeast--Democrats and Whigs alike--had apparently flocked to the new order and undergone the secret ritual of initiation that conferred membership on those willing to adhere to the Know Nothing creed. According to some reports, at the very peak of its strength the movement could claim over 1.25 million members active in ten thousand local councils in every section of the country. In Massachusetts, the site of the American party's greatest success, Know Nothings swept aside Whig, Democratic, and Free-Soil opposition and scored a major victory in 1854 by winning the gubernatorial contest and nearly every seat in the state legislature. And, within months of the Massachusetts triumph Know Nothings controlled all of New England with the exceptions of Vermont and Maine. The following year, 1855, seemed to hold great promise for the party as the Know Nothings prepared to contest numerous congressional and gubernatorial seats across the country. More optimistic party journals even predicted that the American party would control the next presidential election.⁹

But how did the American party, within just a few months of its creation, accomplish what its nativist antecedents had failed to achieve just a decade

⁹*The Know Nothing Almanac and True American's Manual for 1855* (New York, 1855), 19; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 17-18; Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 157-59; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 250-51; Stephen E. Maizlish, "The Meaning of Nativism and the Crisis of the Union: The Know-Nothing Movement in the Antebellum North," in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station, Texas, 1982), 166; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston, 1990), 4-5; Holt, "The Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," in *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 114.

earlier? On the one hand, the message of Know Nothingism was scarcely different from that espoused by previous nativist societies, fraternal orders, and political factions. At its core, at its most basic level, the American party simply reflected the anxiety generated by the increased immigration of the 1840s and 1850s. Between 1845 and 1854 nearly 3 million immigrants arrived in the United States and, according to the Know Nothings, many of these newcomers constituted the dregs of European society. Not surprisingly, American party adherents alleged that such an influx of impoverished, Catholic immigrants produced unwanted changes that endangered the health of the republic. These aspiring citizens threatened to take the jobs of native-born citizens; the immigrants' Catholicism ostensibly imperiled the religious freedom of the republic; and their social customs, graphically and grotesquely stereotyped by the nativist press, jeopardized the very moral fabric of the nation.¹⁰

Significantly, however, nativism alone did not propel the American party to its initial triumphs, nor did this single issue define the full scope of American party ideology. In addition, one can attribute the rapid ascendancy of the American party to the movement's ability to represent a broad spectrum of popular issues that clearly transcended the rhetoric of nativism. Within the ranks of the order one could find an often unstable alliance of unionists, temperance advocates, supporters of labor reform, Sabbatarians, proponents of expanded and professionalized police forces, as well as patrons of the antislavery movement. In

¹⁰Maizlish, "Know-Nothing Movement," 166, 170; Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 156-58; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 32-33.

some states Know Nothing organizers even made a direct appeal to citizens who were hostile to established parties and politicians. For example, Know Nothings in Massachusetts promised to restore political power to the common voter while diminishing the authority and influence of the professional politician and the perpetual seeker of patronage. Local lodges would then control the process of nominating candidates for local office, while democratically chosen representatives of these lodges would convene in American party state councils. According to John Mulkern, author of the most recent study of American party activity in Massachusetts, the movement reflected the strong reform impulse and sectarian divisions present in antebellum American society. Political mobilization, at least in Massachusetts, was achieved at the level of local American party lodges and was a function of both urban and rural disillusionment with the existing state political hierarchy. In essence, Know Nothingism in Massachusetts was an anti-party, populist expression of discontent directed against the staid and corrupt Whig and Democratic organizations. As such, Know Nothingism possessed far greater potential for success than most scholars recognize.¹¹

Yet despite such promise and popular enthusiasm, the American party dissolved just as quickly as it had formed. Party architects had hoped to create a national order that committed its members to the preservation of the Union against the forces of sectionalism. To that end, for example, Kenneth Rayner of

¹¹Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York, 1983), 331-35; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 5; Holt, "Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," 126-27.

North Carolina had proposed adoption of the "Union Degree" at the party's 1854 convention held in Cincinnati. The oath obligated members "to protect, maintain, and defend the Union, at all time, under all circumstances, and at all hazards, and to vote for no one, who entertained sentiments unfriendly to the Union, or who were plotting and intriguing for its overthrow or injury." Although such efforts briefly bridged the chasm that opened between northern and southern Know Nothings, even Rayner's militant Unionism could not prevent the divisive factionalism that ruptured the party only a year after its creation.¹²

Unable to agree on the American party's stance vis-à-vis slavery, leaders of the movement divided at the Philadelphia convention of 1855. Attempting to conciliate the anxious delegates, Rayner tried in vain to steer the convention away from the slavery debate entirely. Unfortunately for the party, few delegates seemed willing to compromise. As a result, the convention adopted a controversial platform that accepted the existence of slavery, endorsed the repeal of the Missouri compromise, and effectively alienated nearly every northern representative attending the proceedings. Thereafter, many northern Know Nothings abandoned the order and gravitated to the growing Republican party. Following the Philadelphia convention the American party could never again claim to function as a national movement.¹³

¹²Gregg Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent* (Urbana, 1993), 84-85.

¹³Ibid.; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 129-30; Maizlish, "Know-Nothing Movement in the Antebellum North," 197-98.

Yet disagreement over the slavery question, although crucial, was not entirely responsible for the failure of Know Nothingism. Even before the disastrous national convention of 1855, in fact, just as the American party peaked in terms of its success at the polls, the movement seemed to falter. Many voters, particularly old adherents of the Antimasons, sympathized with the tenets of Know Nothingism, but despised the secrecy and ritual that defined membership in the order. While many state and local party councils, striving to dispel these suspicions, lifted the veil of secrecy by 1855, such changes only alienated members who were attracted to the ritual and secrecy associated with the Know Nothing lodge. At the same time, supporters of the movement's anti-party rhetoric and commitment to displacing established politicians quickly discovered that by 1855 the American party had installed the very leaders against whom its members had rebelled. This reality proved particularly offensive to former Democrats who discovered that the American party had become a haven for politically homeless Whigs. In addition, reform-minded Know Nothing supporters soon discovered that, once elected, American party officeholders at both the state and local levels proved as unwilling or unable as their Democratic and Whig predecessors to carry out a reform agenda. Not surprisingly, then, the complex alliance of fervent supporters which swelled the ranks of the American party in 1854, melted away by 1855 leaving only the most zealous of nativist and Unionist disciples. By 1856, the American party could not even agree on a presidential candidate who might represent the order. Millard Fillmore's candidacy, endorsed by a poorly attended

convention of disgruntled Know Nothings and seconded by a meeting of old-line Whigs, proved unacceptable to most voters in the North and South. The presidential contest of 1856 represented the anti-climactic dying gasp of the American party.¹⁴

What was the ultimate legacy of Know Nothingism and to what extent was its nativist creed a challenge to the antislavery movement and the incipient Republican party? Unfortunately, few historians agree on either issue nor have they sought to understand the complex nature of southern Know Nothingism. Of course, considering the focus of more recent research on the decades prior to the Civil War, such disagreement and neglect are not surprising.¹⁵

Scholars of the political maelstrom of the antebellum decades, and of the 1850s in particular, have typically focused their attention on those national or state issues which fostered the development of sectionalism and disunion. As a result, presidential and congressional political concerns, addressed within the confusing matrix of Democratic, Whig, and later Republican party competition, generally shape our interpretations of that period. Those political factions which operated beyond the mainstream of partisan rivalry--the Antimasons, the workingmen's parties, or single-issue parties that most often generated only very localized support--have typically been treated as peripheral episodes or as footnotes to the more important national story.

¹⁴Holt, "Antimasonic and Know Nothing Parties," 131-32; Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 6.

¹⁵Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 309-10.

Obviously, however, this era of growing political chaos and incipient sectionalism, during which the nation's established party system fragmented, involved more than the bitter controversies sparked by slavery and states' rights. Yet Know Nothingism, which developed concomitantly with the Republican party after 1854, has scarcely generated the volume of debate characteristic of the historiographical battles waged over slavery, secession, and the Civil War itself. Consequently, the American party, despite its brief but surprising electoral success and its goal to become a truly national party capable of closing the rift opened by sectionally divisive issues, usually receives only cursory treatment in monographs and journals. Indeed, the party is most often judged within the narrow context of the presidential election of 1856. Yet while Millard Fillmore's controversial candidacy represents an important moment in the evolution of the Know Nothing movement, analysis of the Fillmore-Donelson ticket and the party's failure hardly informs our understanding of that movement as a whole.

As a predominantly northern phenomenon, the development of the American party has most frequently been treated as only a brief transitional step in the organization of the nascent Republican party. For example, according to Eric Foner, the siren call of Know Nothingism sounded briefly within the ranks of the Republican party and limited, albeit briefly, the effectiveness of the free soil movement in the North. Eventually, however, Republicans successfully co-opted the Know Nothing movement and endorsed its reform-oriented agenda, without wholly subscribing to the overtly nativist principles of the party. Indeed, Foner

observes that the free labor ideology, with its emphasis on economic expansion and the necessity of a growing labor force, ultimately supplanted the proscriptive tenets of Know Nothingism as the dominant reflection of the popular will in the North. Still, as David Potter has argued, one cannot speak of the American party as a mere "stepping stone" for voters who were preordained to join the Republican party. Instead, the mobilization of the American party appears as a much more complex phenomenon that incorporated a number of different forces *in addition to* the antislavery cause.¹⁶

Clearly understanding the convoluted nature of Know Nothingism, Michael Holt offers perhaps the most complete explanation of the appeal of the American party. Although Holt does not discount the obvious importance of nativism and the deeply-rooted fear such sentiment engendered, his analysis attributes the order's germination in the 1850s to the disruptive socio-economic changes of the antebellum decades. Suggesting that Know Nothingism reflected the "politics of impatience,"¹⁷ Holt argues that the existing political order, characterized by an advancing ideological "congruence" between Whigs and Democrats, failed to satisfy the demands of many Americans by the 1850s. As a result, disillusioned voters were more willing to support partisan alternatives such as the Know

¹⁶Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 233-40; Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 169-70; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 258.

¹⁷Actually, Holt borrows this phrase from the work of Samuel Lubell who used it to describe the popular protests of the 1960s within the framework of the rapid social changes of the post-World War II decade. Samuel Lubell, *The Hidden Crisis in American Politics* (New York, 1970), 17-26, cited in Holt, "The Politics of Impatience," 289-90.

Nothings and likewise more inclined to ascribe society's ills to newcomers who had long suffered as targets of popular persecution. In addition, Holt suggests that support for the American party represented a reiteration of republican ideals evident in the party's symbolic identification with the nation's revolutionary heritage. The American party therefore functioned as altogether more than the stillborn creation of pragmatic Whigs searching for a popular vehicle with which they might continue to challenge the Democracy. In fact, rather than concluding that the dissolution of the national Whig party precipitated the genesis of Know Nothingism, Holt suggests--albeit in a controversial hypothesis--that Know Nothingism initially developed independently of the Whig party and actually hastened the demise of Whiggery after 1854.¹⁸

Nevertheless, still missing in this picture of Know Nothingism is the South's peculiar interpretation of the movement. Holt clearly acknowledges the popularity of the American party in the South. In fact, he suggests that many southerners, as a result of perceived challenges to slavery and the divisive politics of sectionalism, were more impatient with the unresponsiveness of the Whig/Democratic hierarchy than some of their northern counterparts. But how did the message of the American party fare in a region that had few immigrants and ostensibly had little reason to support enthusiastically a nativist order? Moreover, what forces prompted southern Know Nothing adherents to challenge

¹⁸Ibid., 283-90; Holt, *Political Crisis*, 156-57, 162-65.

their northern counterparts and thus contribute to the eventual demise of the national party?¹⁹

The goal of this study is to provide some insight into the complexity of American party activity in the South. Yet the four port cities on which this work focuses--Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah²⁰--can hardly stand together as an example of southern Know Nothingism in microcosm. Beneath a common set of assumptions that defined party activity in each city--employment of the rhetoric of nativism, for example--the Know Nothings in these cities responded to uniquely local sets of circumstances that produced a marked hybridization of the movement. Expanding the geographic focus to include cities like Richmond, Baltimore, Mobile, or New Orleans would likely reveal this same development. Thus, the failure or success of American party organizations at the municipal level, while in part a function of events in the national political arena, can be traced to the personal, partisan, and ideological rivalries which had long defined political life in each community. Still, the genesis, maturation, and

¹⁹Ibid., 238-40.

²⁰Although this study--in an attempt to define Know Nothingism over the entire region--might have focused on a wider area within the South, it addresses the movement in these four cities because the American party, North and South, appeared strongest in the nation's ports. I selected four Atlantic ports because of their significant commercial ties to the North, their function as major communications hubs for the South, and, from a pragmatic standpoint, as a result of a desire to preserve the geographic continuity of this work. Moreover, in terms of their size, demographic makeup, and the nature of their political and economic institutions, these cities were also remarkably similar to one another. Finally, each of these municipalities underwent significant change during the two decades prior to the Civil War and thus offered a healthy medium for the cultivation of American party lodges. Still, despite such similarities, one can detect an obvious difference in the Know Nothing appeal between the individual cities as well as between the upper South ports (Norfolk and Wilmington) and the two lower South cities (Charleston and Savannah).

success--albeit brief--of the American party in the South raises some intriguing questions about the nature of political life in the region, particularly considering the socio-political ferment of the 1850s.

While the victories of the American party appear logical when viewed in the context of ethnically diverse northern urban areas with their renascent nativism, the party's role in the southern political domain stands as a problematic issue. A cursory analysis of the panorama of southern social and political institutions reveals an environment scarcely conducive to the fervent support of Know Nothing issues and ideals potentially alien to the region's perceived political orthodoxy. At mid-century, for example, the South's citizens--at least those who could be counted as members of churches--were predominantly Protestant and native-born. Few areas in the region had sufficient non-native populations or Catholic congregations to present tangible targets for nativist attacks. Thus, the American party bombast circulated by northern journals and politicians should have found only a limited audience in the South. Indeed, because the South appeared far different from northern states in terms of its demographic character, some scholars allege that Know Nothing ideology mattered little to the southern wing of the party. Of course, by doubting the political convictions of southern Know Nothings, scholars find it easier to dismiss the potency of the American party appeal and thus ascribe the movement's germination entirely to the demise of Whiggery.²¹

²¹Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 16, 215-25; William J. Cooper, Jr. *The South and the Politics of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 364-65.

Nevertheless, southern nativists, echoing their northern counterparts, proved equally outspoken against the increasing number of immigrants pouring into America's ports and likewise objected to the pro-immigrant policies of the Democratic party manifested in allegedly fraudulent naturalization practices. Even without a foundation of extant nativist societies and fraternal orders, the American party appeared. Moreover, the question of the sectional allegiance of immigrants and the potential effects of immigration on northern congressional representation worried southern nativists. Unchecked immigration, they believed, might both irreversibly tip the political scales in the North's favor *and* increase the membership and fervor of antislavery organizations determined to restrict or even abolish the South's "peculiar institution" altogether. At the same time, defenders of the southern way of life highlighted the social and cultural ills associated with immigration in the North and consequently provided the South's citizens with false reassurances that diversity and disorder did not adversely affect their region.²²

Yet such attempts to exaggerate the differences between an urbanizing North and homogeneous agrarian South denied the reality of southern development and demographic change in the two decades prior to the Civil War. In fact, by the 1850s many southern cities were experiencing serious growing pains akin to those witnessed in urban centers like New York or Philadelphia. Clearly

²²Ira Berlin and Herbert Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South," *American Historical Review* 88 (1983): 1175-2000; Herbert Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Towns of the Lower South," *Journal of Southern History* 13 (1947): 62-73.

by the 1850s ports like Savannah and Charleston had become havens for numerous poor, working-class German and Irish immigrants who redefined the complex social matrix which long characterized relationships between slaves, native-born white citizens, and free blacks. A number of southern cities--Savannah and Charleston among them--even experienced substantial labor unrest during the 1840s and 1850s, some of which was a direct result of friction between native-born, immigrant, and free black laborers. And, just as such sentiments played a role in the creation of the American party in the North, one could likewise find a working-class appeal among southern Know Nothings. Nevertheless, because historians most often identify the Know Nothing party as a distinctly northern socio-political preoccupation, few scholars have accepted the task of addressing the seemingly anachronistic southern wing of the party.²³

Among the most important yet limited efforts to examine the American party within the southern context are Jean H. Baker's analysis of the order's activity in Maryland and Leon C. Soulé's study of Know Nothing development in New Orleans. Baker's study, representing the most sophisticated attempt to understand the American party phenomenon in a single state, employs complex statistical analyses to determine the nature of party leadership and voter behavior.

²³Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Studies* 24 (1985): 32-33; Richard B. Morris, "Labor Militancy in the Old South," *Labor and Nation* (1948): 32-36; Richard H. Haunton, "Law and Order in Savannah, 1850-1860," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56 (1972): 1-24; Fred Siegel, "Artisans & Immigrants in the Politics of Late Antebellum Georgia," *Civil War History* 27 (1981): 221-30; Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "Charleston: Manufacturing Center of the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 26 (1960): 330-51.

Although these works contribute noteworthy chapters to the movement's history, particularly Soulé's focus on the controversial inclusion of Louisiana's Catholic Whigs in the American party's ranks, these monographs add little to our understanding of Know Nothingism in a region-wide framework. Indeed, one could argue that the party organizations in both Baltimore and New Orleans were anomalous and therefore atypical of southern Know Nothingism as a whole. For example, although Baltimore, with a sizable slave population, was doubtless a "southern" town in some respects, by the 1850s the port had shed its bucolic character and more closely resembled its frenetic, industrializing neighbors to the North. The value of industrial production climbed 400 percent in the decade prior to 1850, and between 1830 and 1850 the city's population more than doubled, rising to nearly 170,000 residents. Moreover, Baltimore became a major port of entry for foreign-born immigrants, with over 12,000 "alien passengers" arriving in 1850 alone. Although Baltimore was not alone among southern cities in terms of such dramatic growth in the 1840s and 1850s, no other urban center of the South experienced such a dramatic transformation. Still, the impact of demographic change as a spark for American party mobilization would prove significant in substantially smaller cities like Savannah and Charleston.²⁴

²⁴Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 15-17, 152-54; Leon C. Soulé, *The Know-Nothing Party in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1961), passim; Leonard P. Curry, "Urbanization and Urbanism in the Old South: A Comparative View," *Journal of Southern History* 38 (1972): 46.

Beyond the range of monographs there are few secondary sources which merit close consideration. Still, within the very limited scope of journal articles²⁵ devoted to the southern American party, James Broussard's study of the order's strength in the region stands as an important essay employing regression analyses to gauge the character of the Know Nothing electorate. Unfortunately, his essay seems most concerned with the rapid dissolution and demise of the party throughout the 1856 presidential campaign. Not surprisingly, Broussard's data suggest an obviously strong correlation between support for the Whig and American parties. Yet his conclusion that nativism bore "the entire burden of Know-Nothing campaign oratory" in the South denies the greater complexity of the order and the realization among party leaders that nativism alone could not sway a sufficient proportion of voters to ensure success at the polls. As the examples of Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah demonstrate, Know Nothing organizers employed a highly varied message to appeal to a diverse body

²⁵More recent journal articles on Know Nothingism in the South include: A. Cheree Carlson, "The Rhetoric of the Know-Nothing Party: Nativism as a Response to the Rhetorical Situation," *Southern Communication Journal* 54 (1989): 364-83; Royce McCrary, "John MacPherson Berrien and the Know-Nothing Movement in Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 61 (1977): 35-42; James Marchio, "Nativism in the Old South: Know-Nothingism in Antebellum South Carolina," *Southern Historian* 8 (1987): 39-53; Harold T. Smith, "The Know Nothings in Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 291-303; Ralph A. Wooster, "An Analysis of the Texas Know-Nothings," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 70 (1967): 414-23; Philip Morrison Rice, "The Know Nothing Party in Virginia, 1854-1856," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 55 (1947): 61-75.

In addition to these works one can find a substantial body of scholarship in theses and dissertations. These studies include Ann Wells Ellis, "The Know-Nothing Party in Georgia" (M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1967); Thomas H. Leath, "The Know-Nothing Party in North Carolina" (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1929); John C. R. Taylor III, "Virginia Know-Nothings: Whigs in Search of a National Party" (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1974); Marius M. Carriere, "The Know Nothing Movement in Louisiana" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1977); Cecil S. H. Ross, "Dying Hard, Dying Fast: The Know Nothing Experience in Mississippi" (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 1982).

of voters. Finally, Broussard's emphasis on the party's performance in 1856, no doubt a pivotal stage in the life of the movement, does not reveal the true character of the organization and its evolution. By 1856, the American party could no longer suppress debate on the slavery issue which tore at the very fabric of the Democracy and gave life to the Republican party. Indeed, Michael Holt concludes that the American party in 1854, the year of its birth and the apex of its popular support, was a very different association from the party which ultimately compromised its principles and fractured over the failed Fillmore candidacy.²⁶

Surprisingly, W. Darrel Overdyke's study, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*--published over four decades ago--is still identified as the most substantial effort to define fully the scope of the southern American party experience. Indeed, the most recent synthesis of southern history, William Cooper's and Thomas Terrill's *The American South*,²⁷ cites Overdyke's work as the *only* attempt to address the Know Nothing movement from an entirely southern perspective. Yet even Cooper and Terrill acknowledge the severe limitations of this dated study.

Although Overdyke's efforts deserve praise, particularly in terms of the geographic breadth of his work and the sheer volume of American party journals

²⁶James H. Broussard, "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South," *Louisiana History* 7 (1966): 11-15; Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973-74): 313-20; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978), 172-73.

²⁷William J. Cooper and Thomas Terrill, *The American South* (New York, 1990), 798.

consulted, his work fails to broaden our understanding of Know Nothing activity beyond the milieu of state contests and their relation to national political institutions. In addition, his work does not consider the party's development in the context of the significant demographic and economic changes that altered southern society in the 1850s. As a result, one is left with a very limited picture of the southern American party which overlooks the discrete commonalities *and* obvious dissimilarities within the order at the local level. To Overdyke, Know Nothingism in the South appeared as little more than reconstituted Whiggery, with the occasionally aberrant Democrat and zealous nativist labeled as inconsequential variants within the movement.²⁸

Still, after significant reappraisal of northern Know Nothingism in recent years, Overdyke's work remains the foundation on which our understanding of the American party in the South is constructed. Yet from that historiographic base must be fashioned a fuller analysis and explanation of the Know Nothing movement in the South. To that end, this study will consider the party's development within the framework of municipal socio-political institutions. Such an inquiry will provide not only new insight into the transformation of southern politics in general during the 1850s and offer a clearer comprehension of the South's increasing anxiety over sectional issues, but will likewise broaden the scope of southern urban history. For example, analysis of Know Nothingism and its impact on the southern urban landscape will doubtless provide a sharper

²⁸Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 304-07.

picture of the relationship that existed between socio-economic change and local political institutions, as well as inform our understanding of southern municipal leadership during this period. Finally, a more precise attempt to determine the nature of Know Nothingism in the South, at least as defined by local politicians and local voters, will reveal more clearly southern attitudes about republicanism and its defense against the perceived threats of the 1850s, and thus explain the forces that motivated party organizers like southern rights editor John Cunningham of Charleston.²⁹

²⁹Cooper, *Politics of Slavery*, 363; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 309-10.

Chapter II

"Put Only Americans On Watch Tonight": The American Party in Norfolk

On the eve of Norfolk's municipal elections in June 1855, local American party lodges, confident of victory, staged an elaborate rally and torchlight procession and marched boisterously through the city's streets. Shouting "Put only Americans on watch tonight," a popular Know Nothing slogan, this partisan chorus assembled at Ashland Hall to continue the celebration. Members of the city's Select and Common Councils, as well as American party mayor Simon Stubbs, marched at the head of the parade and graciously accepted the huzzahs and accolades of the spirited crowd. Culminating in patriotic oratory and the public excoriation of the local Democracy, the procession was designed to drive an enthusiastic electorate to the polls in support of the party's mayoral and councilmanic candidates. The drama of this celebration, as well as the number of supporters and curious spectators drawn into the city, prompted one local journal to observe that "the streets were illuminated by burning tar barrels, and the utmost enthusiasm prevailed. A large number [of supporters] came over from Portsmouth, headed by a band of music, with banners flying. A procession was

formed and marched through the principle [sic] streets, and the enthusiasm was kept up to a late hour, reminding us of the spirit which pervaded the people in 1840." Indeed, local observers frequently compared this municipal contest--with its parades, dramatic oratory, vitriolic editorial battles in the press, and episodes of partisan violence--to the "log cabin and hard cider" presidential campaign which had carried William Henry Harrison and the Whigs into office only fifteen years earlier. Roughly the same scene had been repeated in the presidential campaign of 1848. Norfolk's residents, who had given Whig presidential candidates significant majorities in each contest since 1836, eagerly backed Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore, held clamorous meetings of "Taylor & Fillmore Clubs," and carried their support into the streets with the requisite parades, illuminations, and torchlight processions.¹

Norfolk's American party leaders, intoxicated by the 1855 election-eve spectacle of popular support, expected overwhelming triumph; they assumed that with such public approbation they would retain firm control of the city council and mayoralty and therefore secure the party's future in local government. This unbridled zeal and seemingly confident anticipation, however, belied the growing weakness of the American party in Norfolk. The passionate support of 1854, which had swept the entire American party slate into office, had been replaced in 1855 with a whispered ambivalence and growing suspicion of an electorate unsure

¹Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 25, 1855; Charles H. Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia From 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910), 303; Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port* (Durham, 1931), 199; Arthur C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, D.C., 1913), 367.

of the American party's ideology or specific local goals. The municipal elections of 1855, despite the election-eve gala publicized by the *American Beacon*, brought defeat to many local American party candidates and dealt the movement a crippling blow in Norfolk. Even with a brief resurgence of support in the following year, the American party in Norfolk dissolved with little fanfare; lodges once flooded with riotous adherents, prominent benefactors, and even established politicians, disbanded with virtually no membership after the presidential contest of 1856.²

What had happened? Why did the party in Norfolk enjoy such a meteoric rise to prominence and electoral triumph, and just as suddenly collapse entirely by the late 1850s? Moreover, did this experience have any significant or lasting impact on the socio-political character of the city? To what extent was the mobilization of the American party in Norfolk altered by the peculiar economic circumstances of the city? To understand the complex process of Norfolk's brief political metamorphosis, one must first examine the socio-economic character of the city. Only in the context of this local social and commercial network can one understand fully the city's course of political development.

Like the American party throughout the nation, the city of Norfolk itself optimistically predicted success in its endeavors, but instead experienced disappointing defeat during the mid-1850s. Reflecting an initial spirit of confidence, however, the *Norfolk Herald* noted in February 1854: "We are

²Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 199-200.

gladdened by the neat, cleanly, and thriving aspect of our city, and we are almost ready to exclaim--Behold a new town and a new people!" Considering the great legacy of agriculturally-based prosperity in Virginia's tidewater region and the characteristic economic interdependence which existed between southern cities and their agricultural hinterlands, one might expect Norfolk, the Old Dominion's principal port, to exhibit the material trappings of an illustrious commercial heritage which reached back to the colonial era. In fact, recognizing the importance of this intimate urban-rural economic relationship to the city's fortunes, the *Norfolk Southern Argus* observed that "their interests are often one in the same." While the port served as an outlet for Virginia's tobacco and other agricultural commodities, it likewise functioned as one of the state's chief markets for the manufactured goods of Europe and northern U.S. cities. Moreover, this urban connection to the tempo of the rural economy even dictated the timing of the city's social and cultural calendar.³

As one walked down Water or Main Streets, through Newton's Wharf, or the other thoroughfares and wharves which defined Norfolk's commercial district, one could see clearly the physical manifestations of life most often associated with a thriving port: warehouses stocked with Virginia tobacco and produce, docks

³Norfolk *Herald*, February 18, 1854; Harrison W. Burton. *The History of Norfolk, Virginia: A Review of Important Events and Incidents Which Occurred from 1736 to 1877; Also a Record of Personal Reminiscences and Political, Commercial, and Curious Facts* (Norfolk, 1877), 17; Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "The Urban South: The First Two Centuries," in *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South*, ed. by Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield (Port Washington, N.Y., 1977), 23; Lyle W. Dorsett and Arthur H. Shaffer, "Was the Antebellum South Anti-Urban? A Suggestion," *The Journal of Southern History* 38 (1972): 93, 96-97; *Norfolk Southern Argus*, June 16, 1854; David R. Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 1013-14.

crowded with slaves and sailors, and this commercial scene backed by the busy hum of commission merchants inspecting the latest European or West Indian cargoes. A forest of masts on the Elizabeth River complemented this mercantile spectacle. Indeed, Virginians proudly extolled the manifold virtues of their great Atlantic port. In a letter to the *National Intelligencer*, Matthew Fontaine Maury, noted oceanographer and meteorologist, advertised Norfolk's advantages and even declared that the port's natural assets were "superior, *beyond comparison*, to those of New York."⁴

Unfortunately by 1854 this idyllic scene did not match the reality of her stagnant economic development. For a port possessing one of the finest natural harbors in the United States, surrounded by an extensive network of navigable inland waterways which tapped Virginia's resources, Norfolk's commercial situation by the mid-nineteenth century was truly disappointing. Indeed, since the War of 1812, Norfolk had lost much of her direct trade with Europe and the West Indies to competing ports, such as Baltimore and New York City. As a result, the city's economic fortunes were defined by the more limited intracoastal trade which linked Norfolk to Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah to the south and likewise the major northern commercial centers. The most profitable sector

⁴Among the sources which described the physical characteristics and occupational diversity of Norfolk, city directories proved invaluable. Indeed, for Norfolk the directories supplemented the decennial data of census returns and provided a view of the complex social and business networks which defined the community. *Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852* (Norfolk, 1851), passim; *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk, To Which is added A Business Directory for 1859* (Norfolk, 1859), passim; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 181; *National Intelligencer*, October 31, 1854, quoted in Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York, 1856), 137; Vicki Vaughn Johnson, *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871* (Columbia, Mo., 1992), 61.

in this intracoastal commerce came in the "truck trade," as contemporaries described it, through which Norfolk supplied northern cities with fresh vegetables and fruits grown nearby. During the 1850s Norfolk, which became known as the "Atlantic Garden," exported a diverse harvest of produce which included strawberries, radishes, apples, and potatoes. In 1858, this "truck trade" represented slightly more than 84 percent of Norfolk's intracoastal trade. This substantial business, while profitable for a few merchants and shippers, did not make Norfolk one of the major Atlantic-coast ports, nor did it offer substantial promise for the city's economic future.⁵

While competing ports, such as Wilmington and Savannah, grew substantially during the antebellum decades, Norfolk apparently progressed at a much slower pace. Moreover, visitors to Norfolk often observed that the city offered little in terms of comfort or natural beauty. Although some historians of the urban South have noted the "hybrid appearance," in essence the rural character of many southern cities, apparently the utilitarian urges of Norfolk's residents stifled or overshadowed the "rural metaphors" employed by the citizens of Savannah or Charleston. The city possessed none of the parks or open public spaces which had become a hallmark of urban development in the 1850s; its

⁵"Vegetable and Truck Trade of Norfolk," *Hunt's Merchants Magazine* 39 (1858), 733; David R. Goldfield, *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism: Virginia, 1847-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1977), 238-39; Johnson, *Southern Commercial Conventions*, 98.

boulevards and alleys reflected an overwhelming interest in commerce and evinced an apparent indifference to aesthetic appeal.⁶

Having travelled through Norfolk in January 1855, Frederick Law Olmsted, one of the leading proponents of urban parks, could only highlight the squalor of the city in his journal.

Norfolk is a dirty, low, ill-arranged town, nearly divided by a morass. It has a single creditable public building, a number of fine private residences, and the polite society is reputed to be agreeable, refined, and cultivated, receiving a character from the families of the resident naval officers. It has all the immoral and disagreeable characteristics of a large seaport, with very few of the advantages that we should expect to find as relief to them. No lyceum or public libraries, no public gardens, no galleries of art . . . no public resorts of healthful and refining amusement, no place better than a filthy, tobacco-impregnated bar-room or a licentious dance-cellar, so far as I have been able to learn, for the stranger of high or low degree to pass the hours unoccupied by business.

Even the local press lamented the poor physical condition of the city. In 1853 the *Herald*, fearing epidemic, appealed to the Council for more effective drainage of the city to protect the health of the community. Smith's Creek--Olmsted's "morass"--formed the northwestern boundary of the city and served as a dump for much of Norfolk's waste. Shallow and brackish, Smith's Creek daily receded with the tides to expose slime-covered mud which assaulted the populace with a variety of foul odors. Nevertheless, while many residents might have disagreed with

⁶Echoing this idea of a peculiarly rural character to southern urban development, C. Vann Woodward has described the South's experience as "rurbanization." C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, quoted in Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," 1013, 1018. In his study of antebellum urban development in Virginia, Goldfield notes that concerned citizens of Norfolk, having recognized the aesthetic appeal of tree-lined avenues and public recreation areas, tried to secure the establishment of parks in the city but failed on several occasions between 1852 and 1857. Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 169-72.

some of the points in Olmsted's description, or even questioned the *Herald's* harsh condemnation of Norfolk's physical appearance, few involved in commerce would have disputed his assessment of the city's economic malaise. One need only look to the region's once-profitable tobacco crop for evidence of the degree of economic stagnation and decline. The tobacco trade from Norfolk to New York, for example, dropped from 1,754 hogsheads in 1834 to only 180 hogsheads by 1845. This statistic only reinforces conclusions about the interdependence which existed between southern urban areas and their agricultural hinterlands. Without the prosperity of surrounding rural counties, Norfolk suffered considerably. Unfortunately for the port, this decline in tobacco exports represented just one aspect of the economic contraction which had plagued Norfolk since the end of the War of 1812.⁷

Equally important to Norfolk's sagging commercial fortunes was the dearth of investment capital necessary for funding internal improvements and supporting new business enterprises. Throughout the 1840s and early 1850s Norfolk's commercial leaders, anticipating appropriations from the state legislature, complained bitterly that their city received only the crumbs from the portions awarded to Richmond, Alexandria, and Wheeling. Despite the establishment of several local banking institutions, including the Norfolk Savings Bank and a branch of the Bank of Virginia, conservative credit policies hindered growth, particularly for internal improvement projects which might have fostered a more

⁷Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 135-36; *Norfolk Herald*, February 25, 1853; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 14-15; Wertebaker, *Norfolk*, 181; Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 2.

profitable relationship between Norfolk, neighboring cities, and the Virginia backcountry.⁸

An examination of lending practices reveals an overly cautious system in which parsimonious financial institutions rarely offered long-term or large-scale loans to fledgling enterprises. Instead, Norfolk's banks and insurance companies typically extended short-term loans of no more than several hundred dollars to well-established, credit-worthy merchants who utilized the funds to restock their shops and warehouses with goods purchased in New York and other northern ports. While local banks might have backed internal improvement or manufacturing projects with their capital, intrastate commercial competition severely limited large-scale projects which could have created a state-wide market economy. By the 1850s Norfolk possessed only an iron foundry and a flour mill as its most substantial manufacturing concerns.⁹

Unfortunately, the rancorous commercial rivalry between Norfolk, Richmond, and Petersburg stifled inter-urban cooperation and therefore limited the commercial potential of the entire eastern Virginia region. In addition, because Richmond and Petersburg had access to the James River, these competing ports prospered at Norfolk's expense as shippers and merchants bypassed Norfolk and sailed inland. By 1859, while Norfolk exported only

⁸Peter C. Stewart, "The Commercial History of Hampton Roads, 1815-1860" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1967), 220-23; *Norfolk Directory For 1851-1852*, passim; *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk*, passim.

⁹Stewart, "Commercial History of Hampton Roads," 220-23.

\$561,000 worth of goods, Richmond was shipping \$6,000,000 worth of Virginia merchandise to northern and overseas ports. Richmond had more effectively tapped the Virginia countryside with an extensive network of railroads constructed in the 1850s. For example, in the first half of the decade, completion of the Richmond & Danville Railroad had linked the city with some of Virginia's richest agricultural counties. Ideally, this region should have been served by Norfolk. The port also had to worry about increased competition from other southern coastal cities, such as Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah.¹⁰

In the decade prior to secession, however, Virginians appeared poised or at least optimistic to begin a new era. The reform Constitution of 1851, which offered universal white male suffrage and, most significantly, balanced representation between eastern and western counties, seemingly erased old rivalries and united Virginians behind the goal of recovery. Residents of Norfolk, perhaps more acutely aware of the economic crises which gripped the Commonwealth, thus entered the decade with an attitude of cautious determination as a statewide commercial and manufacturing renaissance promised to erase the inertia and sense of failure which had punctuated local economic development. As the *Norfolk American Beacon* boldly declared, "progress has

¹⁰Stewart, "Commercial History of Hampton Roads," 220-23, 236; Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 195, 197.

become the motto of our people." The editors of the *Norfolk Herald* added that they were "gladdened by the thriving aspect of our city."¹¹

By the early 1850s this idealism was manifest in an organized attempt to stimulate economic growth and improve Norfolk's fortunes. For example, in November of 1854 representatives from several states convened at Norfolk to discuss the South's economic future. As with the other southern commercial conventions of the period, its primary aims were to increase commercial cooperation within the South, improve the South's railroad network to facilitate trade, and plot a course for the commercial betterment of the entire region. Yet the convention also explored ways to ameliorate Norfolk's declining economic position. While some representatives suggested establishing a link between the Chesapeake Bay and the Ohio River, the most popular scheme was a proposal for direct trade with Europe conducted on a new line of steamships based at Norfolk. Advocated the previous year in an article appearing in *DeBow's Review*, this plan promised to halt the flow of southern capital to northern mercantile and shipping companies. In addition, it would serve as a model for other southern ports. Norfolk's merchants and civic leaders enthusiastically supported the proposition, yet expressed doubt that the necessary capital could be subscribed to realize their ambitions. Similarly, local leaders wondered if shifting party loyalties might hinder a commitment to such investment. Indeed, by late 1854 the political

¹¹Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 300-01; Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 26-27; W.H.T. Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk* (Norfolk, 1936), 42; *Norfolk American Beacon*, August 20, 1853; *Norfolk Herald*, February 11, 1854.

landscape of Norfolk had changed considerably with the unexpected success of an entirely new political organization--the American party--which had secured control of all municipal offices in June of that year. How would this new party address the city's economic crisis? Moreover, did the results of Norfolk's municipal contest herald a complete realignment of local politics and promise a transformation of voters' attitudes and conduct at the polls?¹²

The American party appeared quite suddenly in Norfolk's political arena in May of 1854, only one month prior to the city's municipal elections. Prior to that time no mention had been made of a local party, lodges, or potential candidates. Unfortunately, as a result of the secrecy surrounding its early meetings virtually no evidence exists to suggest precisely when the party began organizing in Norfolk. Rumors circulated in the press hint that local lodges first organized at the ward level in the spring of 1854. By June, however, this hastily organized movement had secretly nominated a full slate of over fifty candidates from mayor to gauger of liquors and had achieved perhaps the first electoral victory for the party in Virginia. Nothing in the municipal elections of previous years had foreshadowed such a sudden realignment of candidates and voters. Unlike the American party in Savannah, which was preceded by a reform-oriented "People's party" in 1854, Norfolk's organization did not emerge from an extant, organized body of disaffected voters and politicians. Norfolk's citizens had cast their ballots--albeit uncharacteristically--for the *Democratic* presidential candidate, Franklin

¹²Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 19; "Southern Enterprise: A Line of Steam-ships from Norfolk to Europe," *DeBow's Review* 14 (1853): 125-27; Johnson, *Southern Commercial Conventions*, 91-92.

Pierce, in 1852, a result which reflected the South's intensifying dissatisfaction with the national Whig party and the divisive candidacy of Winfield Scott. Southern Whigs, still angry over the conduct of Zachary Taylor and suspicious of their northern counterparts who had failed to support the Compromise of 1850, found it difficult to cast their ballots for another candidate who might fail to respect and protect southern institutions. Ultimately, Winfield Scott won only Tennessee and Kentucky in the South, and polled fewer votes than any previous Whig presidential candidate in the region. Although Norfolk's Democrats hailed Pierce's slim majority in local balloting as evidence of changing voter loyalties, one contemporary observer noted that many Whig voters remained at home--a sentiment echoed throughout the South--while the Democratic party had been "extraordinarily vigilant" in securing the support of the eligible electorate.¹³

Nevertheless, developments in the national political arena did not seem to have affected significantly the nature of local politics in the first half of the decade. Indeed, between 1850 and 1854 municipal contests generated neither great excitement nor substantial numbers of voters. For example, in the mayoral election of 1853, Hunter Woodis, the incumbent mayor and candidate of the Democratic party, polled only 566 votes in his triumph over Norfolk attorney and former mayor Simon Stubbs, who collected only 238 votes (see Table 2-1). This

¹³Norfolk *American Beacon*, May 5, 1854; William S. Forrest, *The Great Pestilence in Virginia; Being an Historical Account of the Origin, General Character, and Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1855* (New York, 1856), 394; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York, 1990), 553-54; William J. Cooper, Jr., and Thomas E. Terrill, *The American South: A History* (New York, 1990), 313-14; Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 229-31.

meager turnout for Stubbs, with the Whig mayoral candidate faring poorly in each of Norfolk's four wards, suggests that as early as 1853 Whiggery at this local level already exhibited signs of decay as a strong, unified partisan organization.¹⁴

Prior to election day the *American Beacon*, while publishing the Whig ticket and reminding citizens to support the party's candidates, did not even editorialize on the merits or failings of either the Democratic party or its candidates. Woodis and Stubbs had challenged each other in previous elections, were prominent figures to anyone who had resided in Norfolk in the early 1850s, and were thus entirely familiar characters on the local political stage. Moreover, they were typical of the mercantile and professional elite who had dominated political life in the city and effectively controlled the Select and Common Councils for years. The mundane tone of local political dialogue prior to 1854 makes the sudden rise of the American party and the attendant fervor of Norfolk's citizens and press all the more puzzling. How, then, did the American party transform a seemingly static political environment and secure a position of leadership amidst the established political hierarchy?¹⁵

The incorporation of the movement and its issues into the political dialogue of the city's major newspapers, particularly with the traditionally Whig-oriented *American Beacon*, advanced rather slowly through 1854. Indeed,

¹⁴Three other candidates, Edward Delaney, Charles H. Shield, and William Stone, polled 367 votes. A total of 1171 votes were cast in the 1853 mayoral contest. *Norfolk American Beacon*, June 21, 25, 1853.

¹⁵Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 233; *Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852*, passim; *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk*, passim.

established Whig journals across the South most often effected only a very gradual and circumspect association with local American party organizations. Rather than immediately supporting Know Nothingism, Whig journals tested cautiously the political waters, withheld their immediate endorsement of the party and its candidates, and penned their editorial references in cautious terms: "we hear, " "we are told," "it is rumored," or "the mysterious 'Sam' [the mythical gentleman who personified southern Know Nothings] has been recently in our midst." The *American Beacon* followed this editorial policy declaring, "the sect known as the Know Nothing Society, seem to be gaining a very deep and rooted impression in the minds of this community." This hardly represents a resounding endorsement of the new party.¹⁶

Moreover, the Whig faithful, dismayed at the continuing dissolution of their party, yet vehemently denying any ideological or institutional affiliation between their party and that of the Know Nothings, alleged that

the Locofoco press about here are resorting to one of their old tricks, which has been revived for the occasion, that of charging the Whigs with being Native Americans. . . . We deny that the Whig party has done any such thing. Individual Whigs may belong to it, and doubtless do, but we opine that some of the pillars of the Democracy may also be found in their ranks.

¹⁶W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know Nothing Party in the South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 52, 65; *Norfolk American Beacon*, May 5, 1854.

On the other hand, Norfolk's Democratic organ, the *Southern Argus*, suggested that the "secrecy, and affected ignorance" of the new party demonstrated that it was merely a conspiracy of Whigs and therefore deserved little attention.¹⁷

In addition, the *American Beacon* urged Norfolk's citizens and municipal authorities to worry less about nativism or the proscription of foreign-born citizens and more about abolitionism and the troublesome underground railroad which apparently plagued local slaveowners. This admonition certainly reflected a growing apprehension over sectional issues. The local press regularly published advertisements for runaway slaves and stories of slaves recaptured trying to escape from Norfolk on north-bound vessels. While congressional debates on the fate of Kansas or Nebraska might seem unimportant and invite little attention in a local context, the more immediate problem of policing the port for runaway slaves or agents of the underground railroad undoubtedly produced anxiety.¹⁸

Evidently such advice failed to diminish the growing chorus of support for Know Nothingism; by late June the *American Beacon* had tacitly endorsed the new party and its principles and quickly forged a relationship with the American party which would continue until the disastrous presidential contest of 1856.

Printing nativist editorials and letters to the editor, the *American Beacon*

¹⁷Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 8, 1854; Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 10, 1854; *ibid.*, June 23, 1856. Considering the great significance which scholars often ascribe to the controversy over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the organization of those territories, the Whig and Democratic press in Norfolk devoted little attention to the issue. In fact, the Crimean War often captured large headlines in the local press. As if presenting the chapters of a serialized novel, newspapers in Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah, published detailed narratives of the conflict.

¹⁸Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 9, 1854, May 23, June 11, 1855.

appeared fully converted to the cause. Furthermore, as the party secured the acceptance of the local Whig press, it more clearly defined its message to broaden its popular appeal and move beyond the invective language of nativism. For example, an editorial penned by "One Who Knows a Little" emphasized that the American party was a movement that transcended traditional party definitions. It was created neither for "present [electoral] purposes" nor for "destroying the democratic party"; instead, the American party offered "a platform upon which all parties may meet without political dissensions." Significantly, such statements reflected the continuous attempts of the party, at all levels, to distance itself from the Whig/Democratic party system and the issues which had long polarized the nation's political system. The striking irony in this editorial, however, is the author's reference to Ignatius Loyola and the "spiritual shock troops" of the Roman Catholic Church, the Society of Jesus. The author suggests that perhaps the energy of Know Nothingism was analogous to that of Loyola and the Jesuits. One wonders if he recognized this obvious incongruity in his argument for a party which explicitly advocated the proscription of Roman Catholics. Yet to what extent did the American party in Norfolk absorb the venom of nativism, offered so vociferously by northern politicians and party organs, and attack local citizens of foreign birth?¹⁹

While some historians suggest that southern Know Nothings did not accept anti-Catholic or anti-immigrant rhetoric as wholeheartedly as their northern

¹⁹Ibid., June 28, 1854.

counterparts, Norfolk's nativists, whether sincere or not, at least employed the malicious dialogue of the national party through 1854 and 1855 with all the zeal of Bostonians or New Yorkers. Norfolk's orientation in terms of commerce and news might in part explain this trend. Much of the city's news came from northern urban areas, and, in the case of Know Nothingism, from the Washington, D.C. *American Organ*, reputedly the principal organ for national party spokesmen. Indeed, the *American Beacon's* editorials echoed the nativist rhetoric typical of northern journals, vividly illustrated by the following attack against the nation's Irish immigrants.

There are, of course, exceptions to all general rules, and we are here and there acquainted with Irishmen whose hearts are sound and whose judgments honorable. But, as a body, the Irish are always insincere, always corrupt, always ungrateful, ignorant, bigoted, and despotic. They are unfit for freedom and cannot properly appreciate it.²⁰

Even the actions of immigrants outside Norfolk prompted outrage within the American party press. Indeed, the publication of the resolutions of the so-called "German Democratic Association of Richmond, Virginia" proved effective in fomenting anti-immigrant tirades in the Know Nothing press. The association's list of radical reforms ostensibly included universal suffrage, abolition of the presidency and senate, American intervention in favor of every people struggling for liberty, an eight-hour workday, the incorporation of labor unions, and the end

²⁰William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 364-65; Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 19, 1854; Cole, *Whig Party*, 317; James H. Broussard, "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South," *Louisiana History* 7 (1966), 11; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 17; Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York, 1992), xii.

of capital punishment. Yet the association's avowed support for the abolition of slavery in the United States represented the most shocking portion of this document, and ostensibly offered tangible confirmation of immigrants' dangerous stand on the issue of the "peculiar institution." Not only would the nation struggle under the bonds of a Catholic vassalage, but the South as well would suffer the ruin precipitated by emancipation.²¹

In reality, however, no such "German Social Democratic Association" existed. It was instead the product of nativist agitators who had taken a document drafted at an insignificant 1850 meeting of approximately twenty Richmond Germans attempting to form such an organization. Ironically, at the time of this meeting many established German residents of Richmond felt so annoyed by this group and its radical program that they advised it to leave the city. Yet to Norfolk's American party organizers in 1854 this incident constituted ample evidence of the political objectives of non-native, Catholic citizens and justified further the promotion of proscriptive measures designed to curb the political influence of such citizens.²²

Between 1854 and 1855, as public interest in Norfolk's municipal elections apparently increased, the *American Beacon's* editorials against non-native citizens became even more venomous. Moreover, in its attempts to whip the local electorate into an anti-immigrant frenzy, the Know Nothing press maliciously

²¹Klaus Wust, *The Virginia Germans* (Charlottesville, 1969), 211-12.

²²*Ibid.*, 211-12.

attacked its so-called "hydra headed" Democratic opposition, claiming that all citizens who stood against the just cause of the American party represented "a foreign opposition, a Jesuit opposition, and an anti-republican opposition." The local American party press even supplemented such anti-Democratic and nativist sentiment with appeals to the electorate couched in the familiar terms of patriotic nostalgia and allusions to the nation's revolutionary heritage.

How long shall we lick the dust from the foreigner's foot and kiss the Papal toe? In the language of a departed patriot, I would exclaim, 'The wail of your father's blood cries to you from the ground. In vain we crossed the boisterous ocean--In vain we toiled--In vain we fought and bled and died, if you, our sons, prove recreant to your trusts.' And shall the soil, still moist with the blood of Revolutionary patriots and martyrs, be polluted by the footsteps of spiritual despotism? Shall the air of liberty be tainted by the breath of foreign influence? Never! Never!! Never!!!²³

Filled with quotations selectively gleaned from Washington and Jefferson, the American party's editorials even appropriated and misrepresented the principles of the "Founding Fathers"; the heroes of the nation's genesis were thus transformed into nativists who allegedly favored the proscription of immigrants. To those who countered such attacks with the seemingly unassailable argument that countless men of foreign birth had served ably in the cause for American independence and in subsequent military conflicts, the Know Nothings simply declared that non-native soldiers of the Revolution had served not for the love of national liberty and republican principle, but out of hatred of Protestant England.

²³Norfolk *American Beacon*, May 23, 24, 1855.

American party editorials even questioned the sincerity of the Democratic party in its appeal to immigrants.

They [Democratic leaders] have a peculiar love for foreigners. Oh, how they caress the dear foreign population! They have a particular regard for all those immigrants who go for the "democratic" candidate; but when they [immigrants] manifest a little independence, and refuse to become the tools and serfs of their self-appointed masters, they are forthwith pronounced "insincere, corrupt, ungrateful, bigoted, and despotic."

If attacks of this nature failed to convert Norfolk's citizens to the Know Nothing cause, they more than likely drove any of the city's politically indecisive non-native citizens squarely into the ranks of the Democratic party. In fact, the local Democratic organ, the *Southern Argus*, wasted little time in attacking American party activities.²⁴

Yet to what extent were immigrants a factor in Norfolk society? Did they, for example, constitute a significant portion of the local electorate and therefore represent an obvious target for nativists? Or were they merely the ill-fated victims--the scapegoats--of a political realignment which threatened the denizens of the established order?

Recognizing the city's status as a port tied to Europe and northern urban areas, one might assume Norfolk would function as a major port of entry for European immigrants. In this context the vicious anti-immigrant editorials and speeches of Norfolk's Know Nothing party would appear as actions congruous with those of other citizens around the nation; such behavior was merely

²⁴Ibid., May 28, 1855.

representative of the attitudes of many Americans in the 1850s. Yet did Norfolk truly have an "immigrant problem" on the scale of Boston, New York, or Philadelphia, which might prompt city-wide support for the American party and its program of proscription?

Norfolk's foreign-born citizenry represented only a small minority of the city's population and thus did not garner the attention that non-native residents received in Savannah, for example. Consequently, nativism, although an important factor to Norfolk's American party spokesmen, did not always constitute the focal point of Know Nothing rhetoric. Indeed, of equal significance in the American party's arsenal was its ardent opposition to the Democratic party. The *American Beacon's* publication of "The Independent Ticket: A Farce in One Act," in which local Independent (Democratic) candidates became caricatured subjects of Know Nothing ridicule, perhaps strengthens the validity of this conclusion. This "farce" altogether abandoned the language of nativism and focused instead on the alleged unscrupulous character of the Democracy. Indeed, charges of Democratic corruption, particularly in the context of electoral fraud, became one of the most potent issues in the American party arsenal. For example, on the eve of the city's 1855 elections "Americus," writing to the *Beacon*, reminded voters that

Every artifice will be resorted to, every cunning adopted, which the ingenuity of an unscrupulous party can invent, to defeat Sam. Let him teach them that he is not to be caught napping. That he is 'wide awake' that his eyes never grow dim in watching. That he sleeps not when upon the watch tower of freedom. That he has

taken in hand the interests of his country, and his duty compels him to guard well its portals.²⁵

While some scholars claim that Irish and German citizens regularly called attention to themselves through their fighting, rioting, moral laxity, and propensity to sell their votes to the highest bidder, Norfolk apparently had few if any such incidents, despite its reputation as a typically rough-edged port city. Neither the *American Beacon* nor the *Southern Argus* carried reports of such conduct that might be judged out of the ordinary. The city government's records likewise included no unusual accounts of immigrant misconduct. Commentary in the Democratic press suggests that, despite their small numbers, foreign-born residents had long played a role in the development of Norfolk society. Moreover, there was a firmly established tradition of cooperation between local residents and the ever-present traffic of European merchants, sailors, and laborers who frequented the docks and warehouses that crowded the shores of the Elizabeth River. Yet this is not meant to suggest that nativism was entirely absent in Norfolk's socio-economic life. There is some evidence to suggest that by the 1850s there was growing public concern with crime in the city's poorer districts. For example, as a result of citizens' petitions²⁶ offered to municipal officials the Common Council adopted a measure to increase significantly the size of the city watch "to more effectually preserve the peace of the city and to protect

²⁵Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 11, 25, 1855.

²⁶Unfortunately, such petitions no longer exist, only notations in the records of the Common Council highlighting their submission to municipal authorities.

the property of the citizens." In addition, the Common Council passed ordinances aimed at regulating the conduct of taverns and the sale of liquor. Although such ordinances were never drafted in explicitly nativistic terms, these measures would clearly have their greatest effect on the Irish and German laborers, tavern keepers, and shop owners who represented a sizable body of the city's poorest citizens.²⁷

An investigation of the size and socio-economic character of Norfolk's immigrant community might provide some evidence to explain the popularity of Know Nothingism and the vehemence of the party's attacks. One is surprised to discover, however, that according to the census returns for 1850 and 1860 Norfolk's non-native citizens never represented more than 10 percent of the city's entire population of just over 14,000 persons. Moreover, neither Lutheran nor Catholic Germans were numerous enough to support their own churches and relied instead on circuit ministers and pastors brought in from Richmond. In fact, in 1856, a year in which New York City reported 141,000 and Baltimore 7,000 alien arrivals, the customs district of Norfolk and Portsmouth listed only twelve immigrants arriving at the port! Although no records exist which might reveal the destinations of those few immigrants, it is quite possible that many travelled on to Richmond, which had sizable German and Irish communities and an equally outspoken American party movement. In addition, an evaluation of the manuscript census returns for 1850 reveals that, despite the predominance of Irish

²⁷Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 19; *Record of Select Council*, Norfolk, Virginia; *Record of Common Council*, Norfolk, Virginia, May 2, 1854; *Norfolk Ordinances, 1840-1857*, 187.

and German families in Norfolk's immigrant community, the city had attracted a very small but diverse collection of European ethnic groups. In fact, this community included small numbers of Spanish, Portuguese, French, Swedish, Norwegian, Swiss, Dutch, Italian, and Polish families. Despite such limited diversity, however, Norfolk's population still reflected, to a large degree, the ethnic homogeneity of the South. Yet while European immigrants, sailors, and itinerant laborers would doubtless attract attention within the community, the conduct of the local African American population--made up of 956 free black and 4,295 slaves in 1850--likely proved of greater concern to Norfolk's inhabitants. During the 1850s city authorities enacted an elaborate system of measures designed to limit the freedom and define the conduct of Norfolk's black residents. Employing everything from curfews to ordinances prohibiting the use of tobacco on city streets, Norfolk's council demonstrated an obvious resolve to monitor the actions of the port's slaves and free black inhabitants.²⁸

Why, then, did Know Nothingism in Norfolk assume the rhetorical character of nativist organizations most often associated with northern ports possessing large Catholic, foreign-born populations? Considering the widespread national appeal of nativism during the antebellum decades, even in communities that welcomed few foreign-born residents, the adoption of the Know Nothing

²⁸Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 210; Wust, *Virginia Germans*, 216; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C., 1853), 258; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census* (Washington, D.C., 1864), 678; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), 327.

creed in Norfolk should not prove surprising. In addition, pragmatism and opportunism--although intangible variables in discussions of party preference--likely played crucial roles in politicians' decisions to campaign under the banner of the Know Nothing party. Observing the potential drawing power of nativist issues, clearly illustrated by American party electoral victories in other cities, Norfolk community leaders and political aspirants, drawn from the city's commercial and professional elite, perhaps chose the party as the most effective--albeit temporary--means of combatting a growing Democratic hegemony. Ideally, the American party promised to unite the various factions which had unsuccessfully challenged Democrat Hunter Woodis in the mayoral contest of 1853. But, because the American party movement in Norfolk had not been constructed on the foundation of any existing nativist fraternal or political order, local American party lodges apparently adopted a rather liberal stance regarding the Know Nothing rituals and initiation proceedings. Such a policy would possibly attract a broader base of support, particularly among voters who regarded suspiciously the ritual and secrecy that most often defined the American party movement.²⁹

One of the peculiar features of Know Nothingism in Virginia, in fact, was the participation of many who were never formally initiated into the order. Moreover, a substantial number of Virginia Know Nothing candidates never actually belonged to the party itself, a conclusion reached even by the *American*

²⁹Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 28, 1854.

Beacon. Indeed, the initial success of Know Nothingism in the state prompted a small number of Democrats to break ranks and follow the new party. Although questionable in terms of its accuracy, the *Southern Argus* issued a vague claim that ten former Democrats served in Norfolk's municipal government under the guise of Know Nothingism. The traditionally Democratic *Argus* even briefly acquiesced and atypically echoed its opponents' concern over the possible danger of unchecked immigration.

Know-Nothingism is partly right. American citizenship ought not to be made dirt cheap. The sovereignty of this republic is in the people; and every vagabond adventurer escaping from jails and packed off from the poor houses of Europe, is not fit for sovereign citizenship in this country the moment his dirty rags and stinking carcass touch our shores.

Such guarded empathy, however, did not diminish the Democratic party's commitment to defeating the American party. When the Know Nothing press attacked foreign-born citizens and questioned the possible influence of Catholic immigrants, the Democratic press in Norfolk quickly rallied to assume a position of support for the Irish, Germans, and other non-native residents.³⁰

Considering their success, why did the American party in Norfolk falter in 1855 and fail entirely following the temporary reprieve offered by the municipal elections of 1856? Like their counterparts north and south, Norfolk's Know

³⁰Unfortunately, no records exist which might provide an accurate list of the rank and file members of the American party in Norfolk. Nevertheless, an analysis of the 93 individuals who ran for municipal office from 1854 to 1857 reveals that only three candidates represented both the American and Democratic parties. Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 35-39; Overdyke *Know-Nothing Party*, 55-56; *Norfolk American Beacon*, June 28, 1854; *Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852*, passim; *Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk*, passim; *Norfolk Southern Argus*, April 26, 1856, December 12, 1854.

Nothing politicians quickly discovered that they too were victims of the sectionalism which had begun to divide the national party at its 1855 convention in Philadelphia. Indeed, as the national party withered, the local party faced increasing attacks on every point of its doctrine. The *Southern Argus* even suggested that the American party, despite its call for electoral reform, engaged in electoral fraud and anti-immigrant violence to steal the municipal contests of 1854 and 1856. For example, the outraged editors of the *Argus* revealed that

men of foreign birth were insulted and beaten for venturing to show their faces at the precincts. We are credibly informed that fully 100 illegal votes were given by Know Nothings, and we are satisfied that not less than 100 legal voters of our party were kept away from the polls by the fear of being beaten to death by a mob. We have never before seen such prevalence of disorder and violence at a Norfolk election.

If such attacks proved detrimental to the reputation of Know Nothingism, charges that Know Nothingism and abolitionism were synonymous assuredly proved even more devastating. As early as 1854 the *Argus*, in addition to questioning the propriety of secret, ritualistic political groups in America, suggested that Know Nothingism was the "mongrel spawn of northern . . . abolition fanaticism."³¹

Although the American party had begun to organize and campaign in many northeastern cities by the spring of 1854, one can find little evidence of party activity in Norfolk just one month prior to the city's June municipal elections. Yet on May 5, an editorial in the *American Beacon* suggested that there were lodges meeting secretly throughout Norfolk. A letter to the editor of

³¹Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 169-71; Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 26, 1856, June 10, 1854.

this traditionally Whig organ counseled that if the American party could combat abolitionism and halt the underground railroad in Virginia, it might prove popular with disaffected southern Whig voters. Even the Democratic *Southern Argus* concluded that the national Whig party, now ostensibly allied with the "factions of abolition and free soil," no longer represented the interests of the South. As for the fortunes of this new party organized under the banner of nativism, the *Argus* could only condemn Know Nothingism as "abolitionised Whiggery." In addition, it declared that "a secret political society in a free country, where the Constitution guarantees to all freedom of speech, and freedom of religion, is an iniquity and an abomination." These attacks of Norfolk's Democratic press in June 1854, focusing on the dangers of abolitionism and nativism, would define the character of local campaign dialogue for the next three years, in spite of the American party's efforts to present itself as a party of nativism, economic development and reform.³²

As with so many elections in which the American party first participated in 1854, no slate of candidates presented itself publicly prior to the June 24 election; the American party's campaign was conducted secretly and the party organs could only speculate on the activities of the new organization. Once the votes had been counted, however, the incredible success of the American party was revealed. Its candidates could claim victory in each of the nearly sixty offices which made up

³²Norfolk *American Beacon*, May 5, 1854; Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 9, 10, 23, 1854.

Norfolk's municipal government.³³ Simon Stubbs, American party mayoral candidate, secured 716 votes and defeated his Democratic rival, Hunter Woodis, by a majority of 182 ballots out of 1250 cast (see Table 2-1). Significantly, only a year before Woodis had defeated Stubbs by a substantial margin of over three hundred votes out of 1171 cast. Although voter turnout for the Democratic party had changed only slightly--dropping from 566 to 534 votes--the number of non-Democratic ballots, now united behind one candidate, increased from 605 to 716. Reflecting the party's goal of including new men in the political process, voters

³³The victorious Know Nothing ticket included sergeant William T. Hendren, attorney; register Joseph H. Robertson, a merchant and member of the Norfolk Humane Assoc.; assessor Finlay F. Ferguson, a lumber merchant, chief engineer of the fire department, secretary of the City Gas Light Co., chairman of the Mechanical Benevolent Society, and member of the Norfolk Humane Assoc.; collector R. A. Worrell, clerk of the navy agent's office; city attorney John S. Lovett; inspector of streets Nathaniel Currier, occupation unknown; city surveyor John Williston, owner of a local sawmill; clerk of the market Eli Cutheirell; captain of the city watch, E. Guy; lieutenant of the city watch, D. B. Dyer; physician to the alms house, R. H. Gordon; keeper of the alms house, William Hawkins; gauger of liquors James M. Steed, member of the Norfolk Humane Assoc. and first warden of the fire department; keeper of weights and measures R. R. Dove, a tinsmith; weigher of hay William T. Winslow; keeper of the magazine H. J. Dalby; first measurer of wood J. R. Wyatt, carpenter; and second measurer of wood John Banks, Sr., carpenter. Successful American party candidates for the city council included Charles H. Shield, commission merchant; John Williams, clerk; Mordecai Cooke, attorney and colonel of the Norfolk militia; B. W. Gatch, a painter and member of the Mechanical Benevolent Society; William T. Harrison, grocer; John Tunis, merchant, director of the Dismal Swamp Canal Co., director of the American Insurance Co., and a director of the Virginia Telegraph Co.; P. W. Hinton, commission merchant; Miles Davis, occupation unknown; William Dey, tailor, member of the Seamen's Friend Society and Norfolk Humane Assoc.; W. W. Lamb, occupation unknown; Edwin H. Delk, merchant; John W. Davis, sailmaker; Augustus Jordan, engineer; John D. Copper, stone cutter; J. Hardy Hendren, grocer and member of the Norfolk Humane Assoc.; John Ridley, brickmason; A. L. Hill, grocer; William A. Graves, shipwright; William D. Roberts, Jr., stove & tinsmith manufacturer; E. T. Summers, cooper; Seth March, grocer and member of the Norfolk Humane Assoc.; George Bramble, occupation unknown; N. C. Whitehead, physician, president of the Farmers' Bank and president of the Seamen's Friend Society; John R. Ludlow, druggist and member of the Norfolk militia; John S. Holmes, grocer; J. G. H. Hatton, banker, member of the Seamen's Friend Society and Norfolk Humane Assoc.; Francis Mallory, physician; William H. Turner, shoe merchant; Dennis Moseley, occupation unknown; Croel Noe, occupation unknown; Joseph Rosson, carpenter; James Cornick, president of the Dismal Swamp Canal Co. and director of the Norfolk Drawbridge Co.; Charles Reid, commission merchant and member of the Norfolk Humane Assoc.; Edward Delany, copper & tin worker; A. B. McLean, president of the American Insurance Co.; and Tazewell Taylor, attorney, president of the Norfolk Savings Bank and member of the Norfolk Humane Association.

Table 2-1
Voter Turnout, Norfolk elections, 1853-1856

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Total
1853 Mayoral					
Whig	89	33	67	49	238
Democrat	155	96	173	142	<u>566</u>
				Election total	1171*
1854 Mayoral					
American	150	141	216	209	716
Democrat	153	51	166	164	<u>534</u>
				Election total	1250
1855 Mayoral					
American	142	126	221	189	678
Democrat	207	109	195	229	<u>740</u>
				Election total	1418
1856 Mayoral					
American	146	106	228	211	691
Democrat	160	115	161	176	<u>612</u>
				Election total	1303
1856 Presidential					
American		No ward returns available.			357
Democrat					<u>811</u>
				Election total	1168

*Three independent candidates, Edward Delaney, Charles H. Shield, and William Stone, polled 367 votes.

elected twenty-two officials who had never before served in local government.³⁴

The Democrats, or "Anti-Know Nothings," admitting defeat, simply declared that

³⁴The political novices elected to Norfolk's council included Mordecai Cooke, B. W. Gatch, P. W. Hinton, William Dey, Miles Davis, W. W. Lamb, Edwin H. Delk, John W. Davis, Augustus Jordan, John D. Copper, J. Hardy Hendren, A. L. Hill, William A. Graves, E. T. Summers, George Bramble, John S. Holmes, Dennis Moseley, Joseph Rosson, A. B. McLean, Tazewell Taylor, Croel Noe, and John R. Ludlow.

a majority of the electorate and even the Know Nothing candidates had been "misled." Yet what had produced this reversal of the previous year's results? What made Simon Stubbs a more attractive candidate? Had the politics of nativism actually made a difference with Norfolk's voters?³⁵

Although one can not gauge precisely why Norfolk's voters supported the American party so readily in 1854, several factors certainly increased the party's chances. The clandestine and ritualistic character of the Know Nothing organization, an important element in the mobilization of the movement in other communities, likely generated some initial enthusiasm among curious voters and most likely with prescient Whigs who sensed the demise of their party. The party lodges, organized in each of the city's four wards, also offered an outlet for disaffected or ambivalent voters who had supported neither Whig nor Democratic candidates in 1853. The substantial support (716 votes) for the American party's mayoral candidate in 1854 suggests that a large body of the Norfolk electorate fell into that category in 1853. As noted earlier, in that year only 238 voters supported Simon Stubbs and the Whig party. Examining the non-Democratic vote in Norfolk elections from 1854 through the mayoral contest of 1856, one can see that at the height of Know Nothing popularity the new party succeeded in drawing significantly more support than the Whigs had secured in 1853. Only after the party's ideals and image had been compromised in the presidential campaign of 1856, did non-Democratic voter support return to the pre-1854 level.

³⁵Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 25, 1853, June 26, 28, 1854.

In addition, the party's initial support for democratic reform and adherence to Constitutional principles may have represented one of its strongest attractions in a city where the tenets of nativism, although important, would have less appeal to the average voter. At the same time, the Know Nothing press stressed the new party's commitment to improving Norfolk's economic fortunes. The *American Beacon*, lobbying those voters whose livelihoods revolved around commerce, argued that the Democratic city government under the leadership of Hunter Woodis had done little to attract new businesses and investment capital to the struggling port. In addition, the paper's editors suggested that Woodis's administration ignored citizens' requests to improve the physical appearance and safety of the community. Finally, in terms of attracting voter support, Simon Stubbs, despite his defeat the previous year, was a familiar figure to Know Nothing and Whig voters and his candidacy no doubt gave the fledgling party the cachet of legitimacy.³⁶

In 1855 the Democrats would not be surprised on election day by the American party. With the Know Nothing party no longer a secret organization, opposition to their administration could organize well before municipal elections. On June 5, 1855, representatives from each of Norfolk's four wards convened at Ashland Hall to "rescue the city from Know Nothing misrule." Significantly, Dr. Francis Mallory, a Democrat who had supported the American party in 1854, presided over this anti-Know Nothing assembly and proved most outspoken in his

³⁶Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 28, 1854.

condemnation of "the Dark Lantern Order." Although the *American Beacon* "raised a hue and cry" over the secret and "undemocratic" character of this convocation, a "self constituted oligarchy," only three days later these reconstituted Democrats, now the enemies of Know Nothingism, raised the standard of the "Independent Ticket," claimed to represent voters from all parties, and nominated Hunter Woodis for mayor.³⁷ Considering Woodis's prominence in the community and his previous experience as mayor of Norfolk, his selection at the top of the Independents' slate offered significant hope to the opponents of Know Nothingism.³⁸

The American party responded by again nominating a full slate of candidates that, with a few noteworthy exceptions, reflected the previous year's ticket. Yet for no obvious reason the Know Nothings failed to renominate Simon Stubbs as their mayoral candidate. Instead, Stubbs received the party's

³⁷The "Independent," or Democratic, ticket included Joseph H. Robertson, an attorney and former candidate of the American party; William D. Seymour, merchant; W. S. Forrest, occupation unknown; Thomas V. Foreman, commission merchant; W. W. Jacob, occupation unknown; John S. Lovett, attorney and candidate for the American party in 1854; James M. Steed, first warden of the fire department and former Know Nothing; Caleb Williams, wheelwright; Herbert Nash, physician; Henry H. Newsom, schoolteacher; A. A. Martin, carpenter; H. Moore, carpenter; E. R. Johnson, occupation unknown; Thomas T. Kemp, merchant; A. W. Small, commission merchant; John Williams, clerk and former candidate of the American party; Thomas Newton, physician; William H. Taylor, occupation unknown; George Blow, Jr., attorney and major of the Norfolk militia; A. F. Leonard, attorney; John B. Whitehead, merchant and lieutenant of the Norfolk militia; Josiah Wills, occupation unknown; William H. Smith, merchant; William Denby, Sr., brickmason; G. W. Randolph, attorney; James E. Barry, crockery & china merchant and lieutenant of the Norfolk militia; William S. Mallory, merchant; James R. Hubbard, occupation unknown; George Bramble, Know Nothing candidate in 1854; William Callis, architect and carpenter; Wilson Capps, grocer; Charles H. Rowland, occupation unknown; T. J. D. Reilly, tobacconist; Henry Selden, physician; Francis Mallory, physician and former supporter of the American party; William H. Hallett, merchant; Edward P. Tabb, hardware dealer; Richard Walker, occupation unknown; J. H. Johnston, occupation unknown; J. M. Smith, occupation unknown; and Joseph R. Spratley, captain of the Norfolk militia.

³⁸Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 6, 11, 12, 1855; Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 11, 13, 1855.

nomination for city attorney, while William Reid, a local commission merchant, became the mayoral candidate. Although there was no public evidence of a rift within the Know Nothing ranks, the *American Beacon*, hinting at some dissension and dissatisfaction over the party's choices, noted that "there is no doubt but many of us would have preferred different persons for some of the offices." At the same time, one cannot fail to notice that several candidates on the Independent Ticket had campaigned under the banner of Know Nothingism in 1854. Indeed, they had won election to municipal office representing the American party. Clearly these individuals, whether formerly Democratic or Whig, had reevaluated their support for the American party and determined they could no longer champion the order. That they would gravitate to the Democratic opposition *and* secure that party's nomination for local office suggests that these deserting Know Nothings had previously supported the Democratic party. Yet despite such problems, the American party appeared poised to battle fiercely their Independent opponents.³⁹

Claiming that "Roman Catholicism is opposed to the genius of republican institutions," "Americus," in a series of letters to the *American Beacon*, merely continued the American party's emphasis on the threat of foreign-born, Catholic citizens. Asking voters to "disregard those who would approach you under the sanctimonious garb of a 'no party ticket,'" the *Beacon* further questioned the integrity of those politicians who actively courted the support of immigrants, many

³⁹Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 23, 25, 1855.

of whom ostensibly represented the dregs of European society. But if nativism proved an oft-employed tool to capture impressionable voters in 1854, it was a much diminished weapon by 1855.⁴⁰

Waging a campaign which emphasized the non-southern character of the American party, the Independents, backed by the *Southern Argus*, presented Hunter Woodis as a long-devoted servant of Norfolk's interests and implored voters to reject the heresy of Know Nothingism. They maintained that a vote for the American party constituted a vote against southern institutions and republican principles. Moreover, although the Independents/Democrats failed to provide specific evidence supporting such allegations, they charged that the Know Nothing-controlled municipal government had mismanaged the city's affairs, trampled on the rights of all citizens, whether immigrant or native-born, and damaged irrevocably the image of Norfolk. In fact, Norfolk's municipal authorities under American party control seemed most committed to improving the city's image and commercial prospects. And, like their counterparts in neighboring port cities, these Know Nothing officials had concerned themselves with the preservation of public order in their community.⁴¹

The *American Beacon*, suggesting that the Independents had "suddenly become afflicted with a sort of 'killing love' for the city," declared that these "dyed in the wool Locofocos" and former American party adherents sought control of

⁴⁰Ibid., June 25, 1855.

⁴¹Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 11, 12, 23, 1855; William S. Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity* (Philadelphia, 1856), 394-95.

the local government merely to profit at the city's expense and enjoy the spoils of office. Yet despite such efforts to defend the American party's brief record of service, on election day, June 25, the Independent ticket gained control over a majority of local offices. Surpassing even the previous year's turnout, over 1400 enthusiastic voters went to the polls as Hunter Woodis, with 740 votes, defeated his American party opponent, William Reid, by a slim majority of only 61 ballots (see Table 2-1). Although Know Nothing support had decreased by only 38 votes since the mayoral election of 1854, the Norfolk Democracy, with greater support in each of the city's four wards, secured an increase of more than 200 votes over their total for the previous year. The Democratic press, reflecting on the defeat of Know Nothingism in both the recent gubernatorial and municipal elections, predicted that the American party would dissolve as quickly as it had formed. In fact, they divined that without the American party to incite violence and stir the dangerous passions associated with partisan politics, the citizens of Norfolk would welcome the quiet of previous municipal contests which, prior to 1854, had been conducted without the explicit invocation of party monikers.⁴²

While the Democratic victory over Know Nothingism in June might have promised a restoration of peace and political normality to the city, the summer of 1855 would also bring catastrophe. On June 7, 1855, the steamer *Ben Franklin*, bound for New York yet in need of repair, anchored in the Elizabeth River. Although there were rumors of a yellow fever outbreak on board, her captain

⁴²Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 28, 1855; Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 11, 13, 22, 23, 25, 28, 1855.

reassured port authorities that the crew was in fact healthy, and the *Ben Franklin* docked at the Gosport shipyards. In less than one month yellow fever would claim its first victim in Norfolk. While the port had suffered through several yellow fever epidemics in the past--as in 1795, 1821, and 1826--the epidemic of 1855 would overshadow all previous bouts with the disease, kill an estimated 2000 people, and force nearly half of Norfolk's citizens to leave the city for several months.⁴³

According to the press the fever started in a district of crowded tenements known as Irish Row which was quickly evacuated by city health authorities. Evicted residents of Irish Row, representing the poorest of Norfolk's immigrant laborers, were quartered and quarantined in an area known as Barry's Row, which one observer described as "filthy in the extreme." Indeed the editor of the *Norfolk Herald* noted that around the docks and ramshackle tenements of Barry's Row "poverty and filth seem to hold possession by a sort of 'fee simple.'" Although local authorities had hoped to contain the disease and avoid an epidemic, their actions probably hastened its spread. Within days more families fell victim to the fever and healthy residents began to panic. Those who could, left the city until most of the towns and cities of Virginia, as well as the major ports from New York to Charleston, closed their doors to those leaving Norfolk. The city even evacuated Barry's Row and burned the buildings, but the pestilence continued to claim dozens of lives every week. On some days between seventy-

⁴³Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 191-93; George Holbert Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights, 1584-1881* (Norfolk, 1972), 73.

five and one hundred persons might die. As cemetery plots and the supply of coffins dwindled victims were placed in sacks or discarded crates and interred in hastily dug pits. William S. Forrest, who penned one of the many first-hand accounts of the epidemic, offered a grim description of Norfolk during the worst period of the fever.

As we look out along the water-front we see that wharves and warehouses, with the names of occupants painted in large letters upon their fronts, all appear as usual, saving that their doors and windows are closed, and there is no living thing to be seen about them. The names painted there will, many of them, if they are to give true directions, soon have to be blotted out, and graven, instead, on the sign-stones in the city of the dead. . . . Poor desolate Norfolk!

By the time the cooler weather of October finally slowed the spread of fever, Norfolk was crippled. Among the dead were numerous physicians, ministers, prominent citizens, and dozens of persons who had traveled to Norfolk to provide relief for the sick. Democratic mayor Hunter Woodis and John G. H. Hatton, a Know Nothing leader and president of the Select Council, were also counted among the dead. Many businesses had closed; newspapers ceased publication; and commerce had stopped entirely. Yet how did the yellow fever epidemic, and the circumstances under which it started, affect the local political order?⁴⁴

⁴⁴Armstrong, *The Summer of Pestilence: A History of the Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk, Virginia, A.D. 1855* (Philadelphia, 1856), 18-19, 25, 43-45; *Norfolk Herald*, July 7, 1855; Tucker, *Norfolk Highlights*, 73; William S. Forrest, *The Great Pestilence in Virginia; Being An Historical Account of the Origin, General Character, and Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1855* (New York, 1856), 97-100; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 194-95; Squires, *Through the Years in Norfolk*, 44.

Obviously, the spread of the fever from the poorest areas of the city, particularly from Irish Row and Barry's Row, added strength to nativists' claims that the city's immigrants were responsible for the epidemic. Yet Norfolk's plight was also explained as divine punishment for the city. Catholic Bishop John McGill of Richmond, for example, attributed the devastation caused by the fever to the actions of the American party. Bishop McGill's speculations of divine retribution aside, assessing the impact of the yellow fever on life in Norfolk proves problematic. On one level, the epidemic united the residents of Norfolk and generated a spirit of cooperation which temporarily lessened ethnic and socio-economic differences. The more prominent citizens who remained in the city founded the Howard Association (an organization of citizens committed to securing aid for Norfolk), appealed to neighboring cities for relief, and solicited donations to construct a hospital and orphanage for the fever's victims. Dozens of physicians as well as average persons responded to the city's plea for help and journeyed to Norfolk. For example, among the volunteers was William Porcher Miles, a professor at the College of Charleston and candidate for mayor. Indeed, while Miles battled the fever in Norfolk, his friends managed a successful campaign in Charleston which yielded an overwhelming victory against that city's American party. Norfolk's Catholic and Protestant congregations alike also united to care for the ill and bury victims. In fact, the local Catholic clergy, including Reverend John O'Keefe and the Sisters of Charity from St. Patrick's Church, played a vital role in ministering to victims throughout the summer. At

the same time, however, reports that the yellow fever started in the neighborhoods inhabited by poor immigrants galvanized a mood of anxiety and nativism which in part contributed to a return of the American party to power in 1856. In essence, the trauma of the epidemic extended briefly the life of the American party in Norfolk, despite the party's defeat in the mayoral election of 1855.⁴⁵

Yet victory for Norfolk's American party in 1856 had to be swallowed with the bitter pills of Henry A. Wise's decisive victory over Thomas Flournoy in the gubernatorial campaign of the previous year and the overwhelming defeat of Millard Fillmore in November 1856. Indeed, through the municipal campaign of that year it was obvious that the tenor of political debate in Norfolk had changed and, significantly, reflected a growing concern with sectional issues. As early as March, several months before any local elections, the *Southern Argus* demanded "in every platform, democratic, whig, or American, *specific* language on the subject of slavery." The American party's pledge to avoid slavery or sectional questions, affirmed at its 1855 Philadelphia convention, now constituted a substantial liability even for local party organizations. In April the "Anti-Know Nothing" press accused the council-appointed interim mayor, E. T. Summers, a successful Norfolk cooper, of being sympathetic to "freesoilers" and abolitionists. While the *American Beacon* obviously tried to refute such charges, it had become

⁴⁵Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 236; Armstrong, *Summer of Pestilence*, 58; Forrest, *Great Pestilence in Virginia*, 46, 169; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 196; Clarence McKittrick Smith, Jr., "William Porcher Miles, Progressive Mayor of Charleston, 1855-1857," in *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, (1942): 30.

apparent, if one was to believe the *Southern Argus*, that popular support for Know Nothingism in Norfolk was already waning. According to one report, an April 8 meeting of the American party and its leaders had drawn a crowd of only fifty to Ashland Hall. To weaken further the public's commitment to Know Nothingism, particularly that of former Whigs disenchanted with Know Nothingism, both the *Herald* and the *Southern Argus* claimed that many members of the American party, including current officeholders, were formerly loyal Democrats. Although this statement might have represented a valid claim in 1854, when a few disaffected Norfolk Democrats had supported Know Nothingism, such a charge made in 1856 cannot be deemed accurate. Yet whether correct or not, the symptoms of illness within the local American party would only prove more pronounced with the approach of summer's municipal elections.⁴⁶

By early June the American party had begun the task of nominating a slate of candidates for city offices. Yet even before the party had announced the names of its candidates, "Old Line Whigs," including former Know Nothing politicians, convened on May 31 to consider an alliance with the Democratic party. While the Whigs barely rejected such an alliance, the motion itself indicates the waning appeal of the American party in Norfolk. Moreover, the party itself had, according to the *Southern Argus*, thrown out or "pitched overboard" some of its more prominent members, including incumbent mayor E.

⁴⁶Turner, "The 1855 Gubernatorial Campaign in Virginia," 127, 133; Shanks, *Secession Movement in Virginia*, 52; Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 303; Norfolk *Southern Argus*, March 25, April 10, 14, 26, 1856; Norfolk *American Beacon*, April 11, 1856; Norfolk *Herald*, April 25, 1856.

T. Summers and former mayor Simon Stubbs, and nominated for mayor Finlay F. Ferguson,⁴⁷ an alleged critic of the Know Nothing movement only a few months before. Although the American party continued to employ the rhetoric of nativism, particularly in reference to the previous year's yellow fever epidemic and its genesis in the city's poorer districts, it had to assume a defensive posture against a Democratic, or "Anti-Know Nothing," opposition committed to portraying Know Nothingism as anti-southern.⁴⁸

The Democratic opposition, in fact, virtually ignored the Know Nothings' talk of nativism and stated that the "great issue of the present canvass is SLAVERY." Declaring that "protection for the rights of the South is a cardinal doctrine of the Democratic creed," the *Southern Argus* lamented "the blindness among Southern men," attacked the American party's ambiguous stance on slavery, and suggested that its southern adherents had united with northern "Black Republicans" to subvert the liberties of slaveholders. The editors of the *Argus* even suggested that some of the city's disloyal Know Nothings had aided abolitionists in their attempts to make Norfolk a major depot for the underground railroad. And, ironically, local Democrats adopted a plank in the American party platform, unionism, and declared that the Democracy constituted the only truly national party capable of preserving the union and the rights of her citizens,

⁴⁷A prominent lumber merchant, Ferguson aided the city as chief engineer of the fire department; engaged in charitable activities through membership in the Norfolk Humane Association and Mechanical Benevolent Society; and served as secretary of the City Gas Light Company.

⁴⁸Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 2, 3, 1856; Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 11, 1856.

North and South. Clearly the tenor of political debate in Norfolk had changed dramatically since the contest of 1854; national issues had crept into the local political dialogue and overshadowed typically municipal concerns. Despite such attacks, however, the American party still claimed victory in fourteen of twenty-six councilmanic contests. In the election for mayor just over 1300 voters (115 fewer than the previous year) went to the polls; American party candidate Finlay F. Ferguson, polling 691 votes, secured a slim majority of only seventy-nine ballots over his Anti-Know Nothing opponent, A. F. Leonard, a Norfolk attorney (see Table 2-1).⁴⁹

More significant than the result, however, was the suggestion that electoral fraud and violence had determined the outcome. Decrying the results of the contest, the anti-Know Nothings claimed that crowds of American party supporters blocked entrances to the polls, prevented naturalized citizens from voting, and "opened the way for the disciples of Sam." They further alleged that American party operatives had cast at least 100 illegal votes. Noting that "the bludgeon and the knife have become potent arguments against constitutional rights and legal privileges," the *Southern Argus* proclaimed bitterly:

We have never before seen such prevalence of disorder and violence at a Norfolk election. Ashland Hall was converted into a dram shop for free distribution of Know Nothing liquor and the turbulence in that vicinity was unprecedented in our history. Men of foreign birth were insulted and beaten for venturing to show their faces at the precincts. . . . Opposition to them is more than ever a patriotic duty.

⁴⁹Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 8, 10, 26, 27, 1856; Norfolk *American Beacon*, June 26, 27, 1856.

Whether such allegations were true or not, the American party's victory meant little. Mayor Ferguson, apparently ignoring his brief flirtation with Know Nothingism, labored to promote order and recovery in the city. By the autumn of 1856, many American party adherents had dropped all pretenses of their association with Know Nothingism, while a minority supported only halfheartedly the ticket of Fillmore and Donelson. Unwilling to join the ranks of the Democracy, some local leaders, like Simon Stubbs, withdrew from the political arena. Dejected and disillusioned, the few remaining Know Nothings cast their ballots for Fillmore and watched jubilant Democrats celebrate James Buchanan's victory in November. The Know Nothings could muster only 357 ballots for their presidential ticket while the Democrats rallied over 800 votes for James Buchanan. In the summer of 1857 the Know Nothing movement in Norfolk finally ended when the party failed to offer a slate of candidates for municipal elections.⁵⁰

What was the legacy of American party activity in Norfolk? In terms of Norfolk's municipal government, the American party apparently changed neither its character, personnel, nor legislative direction in any permanent fashion. Although the *Southern Argus* suggested that American party officeholders "tyrannized" over Catholics, foreign-born residents, and even some Protestants, the Know Nothing administrations of the period, despite their control of the

⁵⁰Norfolk *Southern Argus*, June 26, 27, November 12, 1856, June 3, 1857; Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 200; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 26-27; Norfolk *Herald*, September 20, 21, 1856; Cole, *Whig Party*, 326.

mayoralty and council, declined to enact any significant measures which might explicitly fulfill the party's promise to curb the influence of foreign-born citizens. Instead, they passed resolutions to "prevent drunkness [*sic*] and disorderly conduct," attempted to prevent begging on the city's streets, and enacted an ordinance to prohibit "illicit traffic" and commerce with the residents of the city almshouse. Although these measures obviously struck at the poorer members of the community and therefore affected a large number of Irish and German laborers who lived on the margin of poverty, they did not represent an explicit or concerted effort to restrict the rights of Norfolk's non-native citizens. The only measure which specifically addressed the city's Catholic element was a resolution passed by the Common Council which stated that the city's contract to pay for medicine for the poor extended to the almshouse but not to the Catholic Sisters of Charity. This legislative inaction certainly strengthens the conclusion that the nativist rhetoric of the three campaigns in which the party competed only served to exploit the prejudices of the local electorate and incite voter rejection of the Democratic party.⁵¹

Like the citizens of Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah, many Norfolk residents responded to the formation of this new party with higher levels of voter participation (see Table 2-1) in local elections, yet failed to discard entirely the old political order and its leaders. Because Norfolk was home to only a small foreign-born population, her citizens quickly lost interest in a party whose

⁵¹Norfolk *Southern Argus*, February 29, 1856; *Norfolk Ordinances, December 1840 to May 1857*, 197, 209; *Record of Common Council*, September 2, 1854.

platform ultimately had little relation to life in the city nor had any immediate impact on the economic or political character of the city. In addition, the long history of interaction between the port's few foreign-born citizens more than likely diminished the influence of a political ideology which threatened to undermine the established economic and social networks which determined the fortunes of the city as a whole. On a positive note, the Know Nothing administration of 1854/55 did initiate the movement to establish a public school system, a goal which was realized in 1857. But the issue most often discussed at meetings of the Select and Common Councils was the general improvement of Norfolk. If the Know Nothing movement proved no more successful than its Whig or Democratic counterparts in this regard, it at least made economic development, improved gas lighting, road construction, and improved drainage increasingly important topics for public and political debate. The Democratic and American party presses regularly highlighted the port's economic woes and underscored the necessity of encouraging greater commercial development. Both Democrats and Know Nothings also championed internal improvements, but during the 1850s neither party could really alter the port's economic course.⁵²

Similarly, the party did not introduce unfamiliar characters to the city's political stage. Key figures such as Mayor Simon Stubbs, prominent well before the appearance of Know Nothingism, merely continued the trend of alternating party domination of the city government. Indeed, nearly 70 percent of Norfolk's

⁵²Wertenbaker, *Norfolk*, 200, 255; *Record of Common Council*, October 4, 1854.

municipal leaders, regardless of political affiliation, remained in office throughout the 1850s. This continuity in local leadership further explains some voters' initial willingness to accept a new partisan organization. In the end, however, any such assault did little to unseat Norfolk's established leaders.⁵³

Indeed, the limited Democratic apostasy of 1854, as well as the brief appearance of political neophytes in the American party's ranks, failed to herald the accession of an altogether new political order. Throughout this period Norfolk's voters regularly nominated and elected the most prominent individuals who represented the city's mercantile and professional interests (see Table A-1, Appendix). Many of those holding local political positions served together as officers for several of the city's banks, utilities, and insurance companies, including the Dismal Swamp Canal Company, City Gas Light Company, and the Norfolk Savings Bank. Additionally, Norfolk's leaders were bound together through affiliation with clubs and benevolent societies such as the Norfolk Humane Association, the Mechanical Benevolent Society, and the Seamen's Friend Society. Yet unlike Charleston, where party divisions defined or determined one's commercial or social affiliations, Norfolk possessed an institutional network that apparently functioned independently of the political arena. The American party, at least for its leaders, simply represented a fresh--albeit unsuccessful--means of maintaining the political status quo and preserving the two-party symmetry which had characterized the city's political structure for

⁵³Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 233.

roughly twenty years. It did not, however, presage a loss or diminution of political power for the established elites. Only in a limited sense did individuals outside this network of mercantile and professional elites secure political office. Of the 91 individuals who ran for municipal office in Norfolk from 1854 to 1856, only 23 (roughly 25% of the total number of Democratic and Know Nothing candidates) could be classed as artisans. A much smaller proportion--approximately 3% of the 91 candidates for local office--were non-skilled workers (see Table A-1, Appendix).⁵⁴

For the predominantly Whig politicians who gravitated to the American party movement in Norfolk, the strongest force behind their participation was most likely pragmatism. With the collapse of Whiggery by 1854, these individuals identified Know Nothingism as the surest means of winning elections and securing local offices. Their commitment to nativism and the Know Nothing creed proved secondary to a sense of political self-preservation.

After the dissolution of the American party, calm--indeed, popular disinterest--defined Norfolk's municipal elections. As one contemporary observer noted after the failure of the American party movement, "there is not much of the bickering and strife of mere party views; the clamorous noise, and rabid denunciations of political factions have never prevailed in Norfolk to an extraordinary extent." Although Know Nothing candidates had gained a significant number of council seats in 1856, this victory represented the party's last

⁵⁴*Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852, passim; Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk, passim.*

gasp. Thereafter, the party ceased to exist, as local Know Nothing politicians either returned to their old Whig and Democratic organizations or left the political arena altogether. Norfolk's citizens appeared content to set aside the politics of nativism and instead trust the leadership of Whig mayor Finlay F. Ferguson, a prominent merchant and former member of the American party, who ably served the city until 1859. Norfolk's residents increasingly troubled themselves with the issues of the growing sectional crisis and confronted the task of recovering from the disastrous yellow fever epidemic.⁵⁵

As in other southern states, organizers of the American party in Norfolk and throughout Virginia ostensibly used the party to reunite the various factions of the disintegrating Whig party and likewise to sidestep sectional issues and northern agitation over slavery. But if Norfolk's experience represented a hybridization of the Know Nothing movement based on local circumstances, it likewise remained identifiable as a product of the national party movement. And, significantly, it is that identification with the national organization and its platform which irrevocably damaged the local party. The failure of the national party to address explicitly the issue of slavery in its 1855 convention, and the refusal of northern Know Nothings to recognize the sacrosanct character of the peculiar institution, alienated southern Know Nothings and, as was demonstrated in Norfolk, provided ammunition for anti-Know Nothing attacks. Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina had attempted to heal the rift between northern and southern

⁵⁵Forrest, *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk*, 394-95.

Know Nothings that had opened at the national party's Philadelphia convention in 1855. Recognizing that nativism would not secure enough votes for success in the South, he highlighted the danger of anti-republican politicians and parties and proved instrumental in adding the "Union degree" to the party ritual. Rayner believed that an emphasis on unionism might quiet talk of disunion in the South and abolitionism in the North.⁵⁶

Although unionism was a component of Know Nothing rhetoric in Norfolk, it did not often constitute an explicit portion of the local party's dialogue. Perceived as a dangerous political heresy by the Norfolk Democracy, Know Nothingism could not escape association with the abolitionism of the North. In fact, perhaps the most significant effect of Know Nothingism in Norfolk was the attention it focused on the changing dynamics of northern politics, particularly in the context of the nascent Republican party.

⁵⁶Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia*, 303-04; Goldfield, *Urban Growth*, 41; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 48; Burton, *History of Norfolk*, 233; Cole, *Whig Party*, 316; Gregg Cantrell, "Southern and Nativist: Kenneth Rayner and the Ideology of 'Americanism.'" *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (1992): 133, 135, 146.

Chapter III

"For Fillmore, Donelson, the Constitution, & the Union": The American Party in Wilmington, North Carolina

When the leaders of Wilmington's American party lodges convened in April of 1856 to establish a Young Men's Fillmore & Donelson Association, they hoped to inspire and insure the support of a future generation of Know Nothing voters. Imbued with the fervor and acquainted with the mysteries of the new political order, the Association's members were expected to enlist the support of their peers and extol the manifold virtues of the American party's presidential ticket. The young men were likewise instructed to prepare for December's municipal elections through which Wilmington's voters would choose their representatives on the Board of Commissioners, the city's governing body. Yet these young Wilmingtonians, who in only five years would answer the call of the Confederate States, seemed poised to inherit an organization already weakened by defeat, sectionalism, and growing disinterest. In only a year Wilmington's citizens, like so many others throughout the South, would abandon the American party movement altogether and merely observe that a few "unsuspecting citizens" had fallen victim to the divisive politics of Know Nothingism. By 1857 Wilmington's citizens had clearly grown tired of the partisan strife which had redefined and invigorated municipal politics. Yet despite the short-lived career of "Sam" in Wilmington's political arena, the American party message obviously held

some attraction for the local populace and commanded briefly the enthusiastic support of a majority of the city's electorate. Indeed, for two years Know Nothings controlled a majority of municipal offices and temporarily brought unprecedented numbers of voters to the polls.¹

Belatedly introduced to Wilmington's citizens in the spring of 1855, Know Nothingism promised to transform the very character of local politics. Vowing to secure the election of native-born Americans to municipal offices and spur the city forward to renewed prosperity, the incipient American party gained the editorial support of the *Wilmington Daily Herald*--traditionally Whig in terms of its political tenor--and proclaimed to speak for the "no party" voter. Significantly, however, the appearance of the American party in Wilmington also politicized once non-partisan municipal campaigns. Party mobilization by both Democrats and Know Nothings intensified competition for local office which, by 1856, spawned violence and popular disgust with the entire electoral process. Describing the conduct of municipal elections during this period, one local eyewitness, Ezekiel Edward Lane, observed that "there will be a considerable row, fights are frequent there now, a very sorry ticket on both sides I think." Lane, like other Wilmingtonians, ultimately regretted the political course of the town and vowed to maintain his distance from local political affairs.²

¹*Wilmington Daily Herald*, April 1, 1856; James Sprunt, *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River; Being Some Account of Historic Events on the Cape Fear River* (Raleigh, 1914), 177.

²Ezekiel Edward Lane to William Walter Lane, December 12, 1855, Lane Letters, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Wilmington, North Carolina; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, May 5, 1856; Sprunt, *Chronicles*, 177.

Of course, in this sense Wilmington was like many other areas in which Know Nothingism gained support. Violence stalked "Sam" and the American party faithful North and South as Know Nothing adherents, inflamed by the passions of nativism, battled Democrats and their immigrant allies for control of the nation's political machinery. But to what degree did nativism, often dismissed as only an insignificant force in the creation of southern Know Nothingism, play a role in the development and success of the American party in Wilmington? Indeed, what factors prompted Wilmington's citizens to adopt the Know Nothing creed so readily? In addition, to what extent did the American party in this city follow the counsel of North Carolinian Kenneth Rayner, a leader of the southern wing of the party and principal author of the "Third" or "Union Degree" in the organization's ritual? Did Rayner's emphasis on unionism, for example, define the rhetoric of the party in Wilmington? Finally, how did American party control of Wilmington's Board of Commissioners ultimately affect the character of the city's municipal government? Did Know Nothing commissioners attempt to enact proscriptive measures designed to implement the party's nativist doctrine? To understand the significance of Know Nothingism in Wilmington one must first take a cursory glance at the character of the city itself.³

Smallest of the cities addressed in this study, Wilmington, although one of the larger towns in North Carolina and the Tarheel State's principal port,

³Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York, 1992), xii; Gregg Cantrell, "Southern and Nativist: Kenneth Rayner and the Ideology of 'Americanism,'" *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (1992): 133; W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 129-30.

struggled through the first half of the nineteenth century to compete with neighboring ports, particularly Charleston. Hampered by unpredictable conditions on the Cape Fear River and a poor transportation network which might link the port with North Carolina's rich backcountry, Wilmington developed slowly in the three decades following the war of 1812. According to the 1820 census the city had a population of only 2,633; by 1840 it had increased to just 4,744 citizens. With the completion of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad in 1840, the city's population swelled in the following decade to just over 7,000 inhabitants. Although Wilmington by 1850 had outpaced Norfolk in terms of both domestic and foreign cargoes entering the port, the town continued to lose business to Charleston and Savannah. In fact, Charleston handled three times the domestic and nearly five times the foreign cargo that entered and cleared Wilmington. With the creation of better ties to other areas of North Carolina and the herculean efforts to improve river travel up the Cape Fear, the port's success seemed assured by mid-century.⁴

Yet Wilmington's economic growth in the half century prior to the Civil War was hardly uniform. Periodic recessions hindered commercial development and limited the port's ability to compete with neighboring cities. Yet by the early 1830s the city boasted five steam sawmills, two steam rice mills, and one steam

⁴Wilmington Daily Herald, July 21, 1855; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York, 1856), 374; Malcolm Ross, *The Cape Fear* (New York, 1965), 159-60; Alan D. Watson, *Wilmington: Port of North Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 1992), 46-47, 67-68, 70; Lawrence Lee, *New Hanover County: A Brief History* (Raleigh, 1971), 34-39; Sprunt, *Chronicles*, 140-41; *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C., 1853), 308; Kelley's *Wilmington Directory, 1860* (Wilmington, N.C., 1860), passim.

bark mill, in addition to other manufacturing operations. Lumber, barrel staves and shingles, naval stores, tobacco and rice--all responsible for the initial colonial-era establishment of the town--kept the city alive as a trading port and made it the social center of local plantation life. In fact, in terms of commerce in naval stores, Wilmington was the country's most important city; during the antebellum era the port handled roughly two-thirds of the nation's turpentine production.⁵

Unfortunately, despite the city's obvious commercial importance, numerous problems plagued Wilmington during the first half of the nineteenth century; inadequate hotels, poor banking facilities, and a reputation for unhealthiness all conspired to defeat the arduous efforts of her citizens to build, improve and prosper. A series of devastating fires razed substantial portions of the town, including the workshops of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad in 1843, and further hindered the town's commercial development. Moreover, the lack of hotels and banks detracted from efforts to promote Wilmington's economy and secure investment capital. In 1854 the *Daily Herald*, lamenting the sluggish growth of the local economy, appealed to the state legislature for an infusion of \$1.5 million additional banking capital for commercial development. "We need it, and have a right to expect it," the paper declared.

What folly to open up new avenues of trade, if we are deprived of the means to accommodate it. How *can* we compete with rival communities if the weapons are taken from our hands? Our friends the Legislators from the rural districts, or some of them, perhaps,

⁵Watson, *Wilmington*, 46-47; Lee, *New Hanover County*, 34-36; Ross, *The Cape Fear*, 160.

unconsciously underrate the business and necessities of our town;
and would grant us only partial and inadequate relief.

If insufficient capital stifled expansion of local business opportunities, it also hampered the efforts of local innkeepers to build superior establishments with the appointments and amenities which might enhance the town's image. In fact, Wilmington apparently offered little comfort to visitors seeking relief at one of the town's hotels. Frederick Law Olmsted visited Wilmington in 1854, found the city's accommodations unacceptable, and left as quickly as possible. Fearing "another Norfolk experience," Olmsted "shouldered [his] baggage, and ran for the wharves" to secure passage to Charleston.⁶

Nevertheless, despite Olmsted's unfavorable opinion of Wilmington, by the 1850s the city's residents seemed optimistic over the port's commercial future. In 1850 the Fayetteville *Observer*, noting Wilmington's progress, remarked:

The public spirit of the citizens of our sister town is really amazing: it seems to have no limit when any scheme is presented which is regarded as essential to the prosperity or honor of the place. And the resources of the community seem to be as abundant as the spirit with which they are employed is liberal. . . . Thus this community, even now not containing more than eight or nine thousand inhabitants, of whom probably not more than two-thirds are white, has contributed to public works eight or nine hundred thousand dollars.

As the *Observer* suggested, local entrepreneurs and even ordinary citizens demonstrated their commitment to securing Wilmington's future prosperity by subscribing substantial sums for internal improvement projects; in 1847 the town

⁶Lee, *New Hanover County*, 34-36; Sprunt, *Chronicles*, 104-05; Watson, *Wilmington*, 46-47; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, December 5, 1854; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, February 8, 1854; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 374.

initially promised over \$150,000 for the construction of the Wilmington & Manchester Railroad, and in 1851 citizens subscribed to an additional \$100,000 for the project. During the late 1840s Wilmington also attempted to copy the success of Fayetteville in the construction of plank roads. Although the state legislature granted charters to several companies intent on laying plank roads from Wilmington to neighboring counties, only the twelve-mile road of the Wilmington and Topsail Sound Plank Road Company, connecting the port to nearby Onslow County, rewarded local investors and increased the flow of commerce to the port. Ultimately, however, the railroad proved to be the greatest stimulus to Wilmington's economic expansion, a point not lost on the port's commerce-minded citizens. In fact, the town's citizens realized that without new railroad lines and generous public subscriptions to support construction, the town might reach its "culminating point, and would hence forward remain stationary, or go down in the scale of commercial importance--eclipsed by some more favored or enterprising community."⁷

Significantly, this drive to prosper and build a dynamic commercial hub seemed to define the mindset of Wilmington's citizens. Indeed, the town's spirit of boosterism, evinced by citizens' commitment during the 1840s and 1850s to costly improvement schemes, appeared stronger than that found in Norfolk. Of course, as the town grew, local authorities discovered they had to address more

⁷Fayetteville *Observer*, January 1850, quoted in Sprunt, *Chronicles*, 140-41; Watson, *Wilmington*, 49-51; Ross, *The Cape Fear*, 192-93; Lee, *New Hanover County*, 39-40; Thomas E. Jeffrey, "Internal Improvements and Political Parties in Antebellum North Carolina, 1836-1860," *North Carolina Historical Review* 55 (1978): 111; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, June 7, 1855.

than the typical issues of railroad financing, the improvement of navigation into the port, and the collection of taxes.⁸

Like the citizens of Norfolk, Charleston, and other ports, Wilmingtonians also concerned themselves with the safety and conduct of the ever-increasing population of sailors, dockworkers, and merchants who temporarily made the port their home.⁹ As a result, the townspeople responded with the provision of charitable aid directed through organizations such as the Seamen's Friend Society and the Marine Hospital Association. But if local citizens were concerned with the diseased or debilitated sailors arriving at Wilmington, they were also suspicious of those visitors who violated the town's laws and contributed to the generally rowdy character of the port.¹⁰

Of particular concern to residents and town authorities were the problems of drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and the unlicensed sale of liquor. On numerous occasions the commissioners received petitions from citizens requesting more vigilant prosecution of disorderly citizens. In response, the town government passed ordinances to prohibit liquor sales on Sunday, assess a \$5 fine for public drunkenness, and empower the magistrate of police to jail those accused of disorderly conduct. Concern over drunkenness and public order would become even more important as a campaign issue under the leadership of

⁸Watson, *Wilmington*, 48-49.

⁹According to Alan Watson's examination of the port's traffic, by mid-century approximately 4000 sailors arrived at Wilmington each year. *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰Andrew J. Howell, *The Book of Wilmington* (Wilmington, 1930), 107.

American party officials who exploited the existing popular anxiety and cited immigrant laborers as the most frequent violators of the town's peace. Indeed, worry not only for order but for improvement of the town's fortunes constituted one of the hallmarks of Wilmington's political leadership, regardless of party alignment. Yet the introduction of Know Nothingism and the politicization of local electoral contests promised to make such issues even more volatile.¹¹

So how did the American party fare in this environment of optimism for the future development of the city? How did the local Know Nothing movement gain support so quickly in 1855 and why did the party organize in Wilmington?

Undoubtedly the dissolution of the Whig party throughout the nation and the South contributed to the formation of the American party in North Carolina. Although national issues might play only an insignificant role in determining voters' choices in state or municipal contests, the idea of the national party provided identity and reassurance for voters at the local level. While most governmental activity focused on the state legislature, county courthouses, and myriad institutions of local government, association with a national party was a prerequisite for the viability of state and local parties in North Carolina. Until the 1850s the state had a healthy two-party system with Whigs and Democrats fairly evenly matched in the competition for state offices. Typically, partisan competition was characterized by disagreement over internal improvement

¹¹"Minutes of the Town Commissioners," February 27, March 24, 1852, February 21, 1854, May 10, 1855, New Hanover County Museum of the Lower Cape Fear, Wilmington, North Carolina; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, January 5, 1855.

projects, banking, and taxation. Of course these lines of party contention could on occasion be blurred by purely intrastate rivalries. By the early 1850s, however, North Carolina's established political order proved increasingly unstable as the Whig party began to crumble.¹²

One should, for example, highlight the failure of the Whigs in the state's 1854 gubernatorial election. Younger party members, chafing under the counsel of older Whig leaders who jealously guarded the reins of power, apparently discarded their partisan loyalties in the wake of electoral defeat. Even more telling was the Democrats' successful attempt to adopt key elements of the Whig state platform, including support for internal improvements, public education, and constitutional reform. Marc Kruman maintains, however, that ultimately it was the disintegration of Whiggery at the national level that crippled North Carolina's Whig party. In essence, the national party provided the glue--based on patronage and an ideological common ground--which held politicians together who might otherwise drift apart as a result of divisive state and local issues. The demise of the national Whig party therefore created an institutional vacuum that pervaded even local politics. The American party promised to fill that void, create a new national party which might unite disparate blocs of politicians and voters, and, significantly, shift attention away from the issue of sectionalism.¹³

¹²Thomas E. Jeffrey, *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861* (Athens, 1989), 256, 313-14; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, August 12, 1856.

¹³Clarence C. Norton, *The Democratic Party in Antebellum North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1930), 222; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 47, 68-69; Jeffrey, *State Parties*, 322-25; Thomas E. Jeffrey, "National Interests, Local Interests, and the Transformation of Antebellum North Carolina

The American party was more than likely introduced to North Carolina in 1854 by the distinguished Whig politician Kenneth Rayner, who would become the most prominent southerner in the Know Nothing movement. At his urging American party lodges began to form across the state and gradually once hostile Whig party organs, such as the *Raleigh Register*, began to support the movement. By October 1854 the party had scored its first triumph in Raleigh's municipal election, prompting North Carolina's Democratic press to speculate on the motives of the state's still secret Know Nothing lodges. In November 1854 Know Nothings in North Carolina elected a state council which sent delegates, including Rayner, to the first meeting of the national council in Cincinnati.¹⁴

In Wilmington the party's first lodges probably organized in late 1854, although an examination of the *Daily Herald* for the closing months of the year reveals that the Whig paper remained silent on the issue. Nevertheless, the local Democratic organ, the *Daily Journal*, suspecting the arrival of "Sam" in Wilmington, declared that Know Nothingism constituted a conspiracy against the interests of the South and was merely "northern whiggery and rampant freesoilism" in disguise. This direct attack against the American party as a threat to the South and the peculiar institution demands consideration, because it differs significantly from the approach of the Democracy in Norfolk. There the

Politics," *Journal of Southern History* 50 (1984): 67; Jeffrey, "Internal Improvements," 111; Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1983), 160-62, 165-67.

¹⁴Gregg Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent* (Urbana, 1993), 83-84; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 160-61; Arthur C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, D.C., 1913), 262-63, 316; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 52-53, 98-99.

Democratic press had first criticized Know Nothingism's nativist rhetoric and only addressed the American party's relationship with antislavery forces in late 1855 as southerners began to speculate on the incipient Republican party and its possible influence in the approaching presidential contest.¹⁵

The immediate juxtaposition of Know Nothingism and abolitionism by Wilmington's Democratic press supports Tyler Anbinder's assertion that success for the southern American party proved elusive because of the perception that the antislavery cause, rather than being an issue that only gradually crept into the American party creed, represented one of the movement's primary tenets from its inception as a political organization. Predicting that such a heterogenous organization could not maintain its solidarity, the *Daily Journal* likewise mused:

Their secret enclaves will, in a short time, when either mortified by defeat or flushed with victory, be like a mob meeting of the lunatics that claimed Frederick Douglass as brother and Abbey Fulsum [*sic*] as a sister. They will resemble a meeting in Pandemonium, where each band of devils desires to work its own peculiar iniquity, and where all the schemes are so vile and villainous that it is impossible to give them precedence.

Still, however, the *Daily Herald* maintained its editorial silence on the development of a local American party. Moreover, the Whig press all but ignored the approaching municipal contest, scheduled for the new year. While the *Herald* dutifully published the various non-partisan tickets brought forward by

¹⁵Wilmington *Daily Journal*, June 10, 1854, February 22, 1855.

citizens, the paper's editors neither endorsed any of the candidates nor discussed issues which might concern or influence Wilmington's electorate.¹⁶

By December even the *Daily Journal* seemed less concerned about Know Nothingism's possible influence on local politics and instead admonished voters against "over-excitement" and political extremism, particularly with regard to the temperance issue. Only obliquely pairing Know Nothingism and the temperance cause, the *Journal* back in March had equivocated and declared that the Democracy was neither a temperance nor an anti-temperance party; the question had to be decided outside of the context of party platforms. Yet beyond this brief attention devoted to temperance and local proponents of a Maine Law, the Democratic press likewise failed to address specifically the subject of municipal elections and in December merely published without editorial comment the various non-partisan tickets offered for the Board of Commissioners.¹⁷

On January 1, 1855 Wilmington's voters went to the polls to choose their representatives on the Board of Commissioners. The election tickets, published only about a week prior to voting, included candidates affiliated with both the Whig and Democratic parties, although party distinctions were not identified for the campaign. Moreover, the candidates reflected the diverse commercial character of the port. The fourteen men who stood for election--for they did not

¹⁶Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 28, 1854; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, June 13, 1854; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 19. An English reformer and proponent of free speech, Abby Folsom migrated to the United States in 1837 and became an outspoken supporter of the antislavery cause.

¹⁷Wilmington *Daily Journal*, March 21, 30, June 10, 13, December 13, 1854.

actively campaign--included Isaac Northrop, a clerk; John A. Taylor, president of the Wilmington Savings Bank; Dr. John H. Dickson; W. S. Anderson, a jeweler; Henry P. Russell, director of the Bank of Wilmington; A. A. Brown, an insurance agent; Miles Costin, commission merchant; and Col. John McRae, an attorney and prominent advocate of local railroad development. These men served together on the boards of directors in Wilmington's banks and had played principal roles in securing for the city the benefits of improved transportation through the recent establishment of the Wilmington & Manchester and Wilmington, Charlotte, & Rutherford railroads. Bound together by the common goal of improving Wilmington, these men, the most prominent in their community, were also united by their affiliation with the Freemasons, Temperance Society, Thalian Association, Fire Department, Library Association, Chamber of Commerce, and the town's various charitable organizations. According to tradition, Wilmington's voters were to ignore purely partisan issues and instead select from this body of notables the seven men most qualified to govern the town. Results as well were published without reference to parties or factions. The *Daily Herald*, reflecting on the character of the election, declared that "there was no excitement whatever, and but little apparent interest manifested." More than 500 citizens--the "usual" level of voter interest according to the *Daily Herald*--appeared at the polls to cast their ballots (see Table 3-1).

Table 3-1
Voter Turnout, Wilmington elections, 1852-1859

Date	Election	No. of Voters
Jan. 1852	Town Commissioners	651
Nov. 1852	Presidential	892
Jan. 1853	Town Commissioners	411
May 1853	Navigation Commissioners	345
May 1854	Navigation Commissioners	409
Jan. 1855	Town Commissioners	530
May 1855	Navigation Commissioners	589
Aug. 1855	Congressional	828
Dec. 1855	Town Commissioners	947
May 1856	Navigation Commissioners	1010
Nov. 1856	Presidential	1103
Dec. 1856	Town Commissioners	219
May 1857	Navigation Commissioners	740
Aug. 1857	Congressional	416
Dec. 1857	Town Commissioners	581
Dec. 1858	Town Commissioners	305
Dec. 1859	Town Commissioners	271

Among the seven victors, each polling over 400 votes, Col. John McRae received the highest number of votes and therefore secured the office of Magistrate of Police.¹⁸ S. D. Wallace, first among the defeated candidates, secured only 67 votes. To most observers who might pay scant attention to the town's politics, rumors of growing Know Nothing influence in Wilmington must have seemed farfetched by January of 1855. Apparently the local American party, failing to capitalize on the organization's much-publicized mobilization in Raleigh and

¹⁸In November of 1855 the North Carolina legislature passed a resolution designating the head of Wilmington's government "mayor."

growing popularity among state legislators, exerted no influence in the municipal contest. By the middle of January, however, Democratic leaders and the editors of the *Daily Journal* would discover otherwise.¹⁹

On January 14 the *Raleigh Register*, a traditionally Whig journal now sympathetic to the Know Nothing cause, proclaimed that Wilmington's election for its Board of Commissioners represented an American party triumph. The editors of the *Daily Journal*, disputing the claims of a Know Nothing victory, reminded the *Register* of John McRae's long affiliation with the local Democratic party and reaffirmed the non-partisan character of Wilmington's municipal contests. If once loyal adherents of the Democracy were in fact transferring their political loyalties to a new party, the *Daily Journal* could only speculate:

We find that among those Democrats who have succumbed before the pressure of Know-Nothingism, nine-tenths, at least, are restless and disappointed men--unsuccessful, or something of that kind, or men who have been for a considerable time more or less shaky.

Yet despite suggestions that the victors in the recent municipal election had secretly represented the American party, the *Daily Herald* never acknowledged the report. Moreover, although the members of the Board of Commissioners, now linked by the press with the American party, would neither confirm nor deny any such connection with Know Nothingism, their administration of the town's government in no way reflected any adherence to American party principles.

¹⁹Wilmington *Daily Herald*, January 2, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, March 30, December 30, 1854, July 11, November 5, 1855; *Kelley's Wilmington Directory*, passim; Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner*, 92.

Throughout 1855 neither the *Journal* nor the *Herald* could report any unusual behavior from the Board of Commissioners.²⁰

While the Whig press did publish an editorial condemning the unrestricted immigration of "foreign paupers and criminals," its editors appeared more concerned with an economic downturn which apparently plagued the city in early 1855. Although offering no cause or statistical evidence to support its conclusion, the *Daily Herald* declared that "Hard Times is here yet, and every body has become acquainted with him." The Democratic press likewise acknowledged the crisis, ascribed it to a "want of confidence," and noted that exports from the port for the first quarter of 1855 "exhibited a marked falling off" as compared with the same period in 1854. Citing prolonged drought as the primary cause for a decreasing commerce in naval stores, particularly turpentine, the *Journal's* editors likewise pointed to the decreased demand of northern shipbuilding interests.²¹

In an earlier editorial, however, the *Daily Journal* reached back to the Democracy's Jacksonian foundations and imputed the hard times to reckless speculation in railroad bonds. As Thomas Jeffrey has concluded in his analysis of party divisions and internal improvements in North Carolina, bipartisan support for internal improvement projects in a town like Wilmington did not always translate into universal Democratic support for such schemes. Undoubtedly a few tradition-bound Democrats in Wilmington, with the editors of the *Journal*, still

²⁰Raleigh *Register*, February 14, 1855; quoted in Wilmington *Daily Journal*, February 15, 1855.

²¹Wilmington *Daily Herald*, January 6, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, April 2, 1855.

questioned the risky subscription of public funds to the construction of railroads and turnpikes. However, it would remain to be seen whether or not the issue of support for internal improvements, as well as anxiety produced by a period of economic contraction, would divide Democrats and Know Nothings in Wilmington. And, it would remain to be seen if Know Nothingism would emerge from the shadows and play a public role in Wilmington's political contests. By the spring of 1855 "Sam" had yet to show his face and the *Daily Herald* had not yet endorsed the movement.²²

Nevertheless, Democrats in Wilmington persisted in their editorial assault against the Know Nothing movement. Assuming that the new party's success in other parts of North Carolina would prompt local Whigs and political mercenaries to form Know Nothing lodges, the *Journal* continued to highlight the anti-southern character of the American party and denounced the movement's anti-Catholic, nativist rhetoric. Declaring Know Nothingism insulting to Protestants and "those whom it pretends to defend," Democratic editorials even challenged the "Americanism" of the movement. Naturally Democrats also displayed their suspicion of the secret character of Know Nothingism which, they maintained, contradicted the democratic nature of the American political system. But the *Journal*, in its May 14 issue, reserved its most vociferous objections for the introduction of partisan conflict into the local political arena.

²²Wilmington *Daily Journal*, January 27, 1855; Jeffrey, "Internal Improvements," 149.

There was a time, not long past, when politics did not enter into the local elections in the town of Wilmington; when the administration of our municipal affairs was openly conducted for the good of the whole, by men chosen upon grounds totally irrespective of their political leanings. . . . Tickets for town commissioners were made up of three Democrats and four Whigs, or three Whigs and four Democrats, as the case might be. . . . In times gone by there used to be 'Peoples' Tickets,' 'Citizens Tickets,' 'Old Tickets,' 'New Tickets,' but not party tickets. . . . The Democratic party, and all other willing to co-operate with it in 'crushing out' this spirit of officious party interference, must and will hereafter organize openly and fairly with reference to this object.

In May of 1855 local Democrats, traditionally the dominant party according to the results of state and national contests, would get their first chance to probe the depth of local Know Nothing influence in the election for the town's five Commissioners of Navigation.²³

Although once appointed by the town's Board of Commissioners, after 1847 Commissioners of Navigation were subject to annual popular election. The commissioners regulated all navigation in the Cape Fear area, licensed pilots, imposed penalties against those vessels violating the law, appointed harbor masters, port physicians, and port wardens, and determined quarantine procedures to protect the port against the introduction of infectious diseases. Yet despite the substantial authority wielded by this body, voters typically showed little interest in the annual campaign to select navigation commissioners. It was assumed that Wilmington's most conscientious citizens would choose individuals

²³Wilmington *Daily Journal*, February 22, March 29, May 11, 14, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, May 7, 16, 1855.

acquainted with maritime regulations and competent to administer the affairs of the port.²⁴

On May 7, 1855 over 500 citizens--or roughly the same number that had participated in the January municipal contest--appeared at the polls to elect new commissioners. Nevertheless, although there was no public electioneering for the candidates and only a small number of Wilmingtonians concerned themselves with the selection of Commissioners of Navigation, this contest heralded the arrival of Know Nothingism in the town. While the local order still preserved the clandestine character of its meetings, the American party at least published a list of candidates prior to the election.²⁵

Democratic leaders, upon learning of the formation of a Know Nothing ticket--which included commission merchants R. F. Brown, J. H. Flanner, Thomas C. Worth, George R. French, and George Harris--had hurriedly organized to oppose the American party with their own slate of candidates. Ironically, the creation of this Democratic ticket--made up of George W. Davis, William B. Flanner, A. H. Van Bokkelen, Jacob Wessel, and D. A. Lamont--prompted the *Daily Herald*, now supporting the Know Nothing cause, to attack the Democrats' "secret ticket." Reflecting the American party's emphasis on the undemocratic nature of the existing party system, the *Herald's* editors asked:

What becomes now of the *Journal's* holy horror of secret conclaves?
At what '*public meeting*' was this ticket nominated? Down what

²⁴Watson, *Wilmington*, 57-58; Sprunt, *Chronicles*, 476-78.

²⁵Wilmington *Daily Herald*, May 7, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, May 17, 1855.

'dark alley' did the bold, open and above-board Loco Focos go, to concoct this 'secret' trick?

A majority of Wilmington's electorate, they maintained, had nominated the American party ticket for Commissioners of Navigation and had dutifully ratified this selection at the polls on May 7.²⁶

As for the Democrats' rejection of the "Americanism" of the Know Nothing movement, the *Herald*, employing rhetoric typical of other American party's organs, cited the anti-immigrant sentiment gleaned from the works of Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson. "I most devoutly wish," Washington reportedly proclaimed, "we had not a single foreigner among us, except the Marquis De Lafayette, who acts on very different principles from those which govern the rest." The Democrats merely countered with the conclusion:

This pithy expression of exclusive Americanism, so accordant with the narrow policy of the party of secrecy, intolerance, and real hostility to the broad principles of American liberty, has been unscrupulously palmed upon the illustrious founder of the Republic.²⁷

And, obviously, Democrats could argue that immigrants and Catholics in Wilmington, indeed in all of North Carolina, were not numerous enough to represent a significant threat. The *Daily Journal*, in fact, pointed out earlier that "neither foreigners nor catholics, have any vote to be counted in N. Carolina.

²⁶Wilmington *Daily Herald*, May 7, 16, 1855. Unfortunately neither the *Daily Herald* nor the *Daily Journal* published complete returns for the May 7 election of Commissioners of Navigation. However, the *Journal* did note that nearly 500 voters cast their ballots and that of the five victorious American party candidates the most popular received 357 votes.

²⁷Wilmington *Daily Herald*, May 22, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, June 23, 1855.

There is not a single one of them . . . that either holds or seeks for office of any kind in the state." According to the 1850 census only 2,565 of North Carolina's 553,028 white residents were foreign-born. Of the slave-holding states only Arkansas had fewer foreign-born citizens. In addition, by 1850 there were only four Catholic congregations in the entire state, one of which was in Wilmington; just a decade later there were still only seven in all of North Carolina. While Know Nothing organs in Wilmington and across the state might highlight the supposed danger of unchecked immigration in terms of national affairs, one can hardly expect North Carolinians to have supported a movement whose tenets held little appeal at the local level. Kenneth Rayner had recognized this problem in gauging the potential popularity of Know Nothingism in the South as a whole. But despite this distinctively southern liability in the development of Know Nothingism, many of Wilmington's residents quickly united under the American party banner and espoused the party's nativist creed.²⁸

Why would Wilmington's citizens and local American party leaders construct their movement on a foundation of nativism, given the insignificant number and limited influence of immigrants in North Carolina? Marc Kruman concluded that nativism proved popular in the state because Know Nothing organizers linked foreign influence and abolitionism. Moreover, party leaders hoped that nativism and anti-Catholicism were sentiments which could cut across old party lines and appeal even to more conservative Democrats who watched

²⁸Wilmington *Daily Journal*, February 22, 1855; Johnson, *Antebellum North Carolina*, 369; *Seventh Census of the United States*, 309; Cantrell, "Southern and Nativist," 146.

anxiously the growing influence of the antislavery movement in the North. In this sense, Know Nothingism was to become more than an order for Whigs who had contracted "Popephobia." In Wilmington this enthusiastic support paved the way for the transformation of local politics and by the end of 1855 the town's citizens would be engaged in the most violent and divisive political canvass in the port's history.²⁹

In the seven months which passed between the campaign for Commissioners of Navigation and elections for the town's Board of Commissioners, the American party in Wilmington reached maturity. The order dropped its veil of secrecy and popular support for the movement swelled, as evinced by the crowded meetings and boisterous parades staged by party leaders. More important, however, in foreshadowing the party's local impact was the August 1855 election for North Carolina's Third Congressional District.³⁰ Local observers concluded that the contest between American Union candidate David Reid, a former Democrat, and his Democratic opponent Warren Winslow was "unexampled" in the political history of the area. The Know Nothing press typically offered its caustic rhetoric of nativism proclaiming:

Nothing could be more humiliating to the pride of an American patriot, than the fact that a certain class of *Americans by birth*, yclept the *Democracy* have a co-operative alliance with our *imported* Roman Catholic population, which is daily tending to place our governments, General and States, under the dominion of a *foreign*

²⁹Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 165; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, July 20, 1855.

³⁰North Carolina's Third Congressional District included New Hanover, Duplin, Sampson, Columbus, Harnett, Robeson, Brunswick, Bladen, and Richmond counties.

potentate, whose dictum flows omnipotently from the Vatican at Rome, to his soul-bound creatures throughout the world.³¹

Although Democrats continued to declare that the anti-republican American party had become "thoroughly abolitionized" and therefore antagonistic to the interests of the South, the *Daily Herald*, advancing beyond Know Nothingism's nativist platform, presented the Democracy as the party of Martin Van Buren, David Wilmot, and "hosts of other notorious Freesoilers." Here the American party likewise expected to secure the backing of voters opposed to sectional agitation. Portraying the Democracy as the party of disunion, the *Herald's* editors invoked the name of John C. Calhoun to suggest that secessionist Democrats would welcome the dismantling of the republic. Indeed, they declared that the national Democratic party was "dead--very dead." It is

a thing of shreds and patches, like a housewife's quilt, compounded of abstractions, effete ideas, exploded notions, mixed up in one mass, and joined together with the cement of the spoils. . . . Need we say more? Heaven help the South, if in the coming hour of her need, (and it seems to us fast approaching,) her dependence is to rest upon the *National Democratic party*!

Granted, it seems the American party attempted to be all things to all people--Whigs, Democrats, unionists, and proslavery advocates--but its efforts to legitimize the movement and construct a broad base of voter support went even further.³²

Know Nothings in Wilmington, adding a thoroughly Jeffersonian plank to the party's platform, even made a direct appeal to the city's mechanics and

³¹Wilmington *Daily Journal*, August 6, July 20, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, July 7, 1855.

³²Wilmington *Daily Herald*, June 13, 19, July 26, 1855; Cantrell, "Southern and Nativist," 132, 146; Jeffrey, *State Parties*, 247-50.

shopkeepers, suggesting that Democratic leaders had forgotten their political heritage and cared little for the interests of the common laborer. The American party, they promised, would not only acknowledge the needs of such constituents, but also would work to protect their interests and include them in party councils. This explicit recognition of Wilmington's working class by the American party adds weight to recent studies which reject the more traditional assessments of Know Nothingism as a narrowly focused, one-issue party. Indeed, in his analysis of Know Nothingism in Massachusetts, John Mulkern maintains that this working class appeal constituted one of the most important factors in its amazing success. Although Tyler Anbinder has discounted Mulkern's conclusion, determining that it does not adequately explain the party's development, clearly Wilmington's Know Nothing leaders, taking a cue from their northern counterparts, recognized the potency of the issue. One does, however, have to avoid overstating this issue's importance to organizers of the American party in Wilmington.³³

Undoubtedly party officials did not expect to construct the local order solely on a foundation of working class mobilization. To have done so would have represented an absolute rejection of the Whiggish principles of many Know Nothing leaders. But coupled with the apparent economic crisis which gripped the port in 1855, this pragmatic attempt to exploit working class discontent over the old political order offers a compelling argument to support Mulkern's thesis,

³³Wilmington *Daily Herald*, June 19, 1855; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston, 1990), 177; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 303.

at least partially. Obviously Massachusetts and North Carolina were significantly different in terms of their socio-economic character. Yet to suggest that Wilmington could not have experienced the same stresses associated with working class status anxiety as Boston discounts the increasingly complex character of the antebellum urban South. Indeed, the American party's working class appeal in Wilmington highlights the changing dynamics of social and economic relationships in the South's urban centers.

In a society which focused on and praised agrarian values, the problems associated with urban development received scant attention from southern leaders. Yet, as some of the more recent studies of southern urban development have revealed, these rapidly growing cities like Wilmington were hardly peripheral or anachronistic to the South. They played a key role in facilitating commercial development and served as focal points for the region's banking and insurance capital. And, to contradict those scholars who like to highlight the rural or "non-urban" character of these cities, urban centers in the South were not, at least in an institutional sense, significantly different from cities in the North. They were, in fact, beginning to display some of the characteristics and problems once associated only with northern urban centers. The American party's appeal to Wilmington's working class voters only underscores this similarity. As Wilmington progressed to become the state's principal port and thus encouraged the migration of laborers to work at the docks, warehouses, sawmills, and railroad shops, the city obviously experienced growing pains. For some of Wilmington's

political leaders, operating through the American party, even to have recognized the importance of their working class constituency represents an important measure of the town's maturity. Unfortunately, however, no membership rolls for the American party in Wilmington exist. As a result, one cannot gauge the extent to which local working class citizens joined the ranks of the Know Nothing order and assumed leadership roles. However, if working class participation on the American party's electoral tickets is analagous to that class's place in the movement as a whole, then one must conclude that the party's leaders simply employed such rhetoric in a pragmatic effort to exploit a significant portion of the electorate. During the brief life of Know Nothingism in Wilmington only one candidate for the order could be identified as a member of the city's working class (see Table A-2, Appendix).³⁴

By August of 1855 Wilmington's American party leaders appeared confident that their party could offer a strong challenge to Warren Winslow for the district's congressional seat. More optimistic assessments of the order's development even suggested that the Know Nothings, with lodges forming across the state, could win the gubernatorial contest the following year. Yet the party still faced some serious problems in its attempts to win the support of Wilmington's voters. According to the *Daily Herald* a number of the party's

³⁴Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Studies* 24 (1985): 31-33; Leonard P. Curry, "Urbanization and Urbanism in the Old South: A Comparative View," *Journal of Southern History* 40 (1974): 43; Blaine A. Brownell, "Urbanization in the South: A Unique Experience?" *Mississippi Quarterly* 26 (1973): 105; David R. Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 1009.

adherents defected in 1855 and published a broadside stating their reasons for rejecting Know Nothingism. The *Herald's* editors, implying that this apostasy was the work of disaffected Democrats, questioned the honor of the defectors and warned that any public disclosure of the order's secrets would be punished. Unfortunately for local Know Nothings this episode proved particularly embarrassing and only aided the cause of the Democrats. The *Daily Journal* labelled the Know Nothings "undemocratic" and noted that secret councils--independent of public meetings--still determined the party's course. Moreover, the Know Nothings were guilty of a "party tyranny"--evinced by their secrecy and threat of reprisals--unequaled by either the Democrats or Whigs. Additionally, the American party in Wilmington continued to battle charges that it was anti-southern and anti-immigrant. "Southern men! this is *your* party! Support it, and all will be well," the party press declared in defense of Know Nothingism, adding that the party had built its platform squarely on the foundation of the Constitution and those principles alone. Addressing the issue of nativism and alleged persecution of naturalized citizens, the party press, in its August 2 editorial, noted that the Know Nothing order:

does not persecute the worthy foreigner, but the scum of European shores. It interfered not with the vested rights of alien born citizens,--these were guaranteed them by the constitution; but it aimed to correct the abuses which now surround the naturalization laws, and to require a longer residence and a more perfect familiarity with our institutions before receiving the boon of citizenship.³⁵

³⁵Wilmington *Daily Herald*, July 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, August 2, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, July 20, 24, August 3, 1855.

This initial public campaign for Wilmington's American party concluded with a torchlight parade through the town's streets to demonstrate that the "dark lantern' party stood forth revealed in the persons of the majority of the legal voters of the town." Although David Reid lost to his Democratic opponent in the election, Wilmington's voters--in the past divided fairly evenly between Whigs and Democrats--gave the American party candidate 445 votes and a majority of 62 over Warren Winslow, who polled only 383 of the 828 votes cast. The local Know Nothing press, which had predicted certain defeat for Reid, concluded that the result represented a victory of sorts for the American party in Wilmington. Reid's majority in the town revealed that in just a few months Know Nothingism had captured considerable support and promised to fill the vacuum created by the crumbling Whig party. And, the high level of voter participation, surpassing recent local contests by nearly 300 ballots, suggested that the introduction of the party to Wilmington had drawn previously ambivalent citizens into the political arena.³⁶

American party organizers hoped that the enthusiasm generated by the movement would entice some of these new voters to join the order and support Know Nothing candidates in the December municipal contest. They also counted on the blessing of the "old Whig guard" which ostensibly had refused to support the American party and David Reid. In fact, the *Herald* intimated that a majority of the district's Whigs had either abstained from rendering aid to the American

³⁶Wilmington *Daily Herald*, August 2, 7, 10, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, August 3, 4, 1855; Cole, *Whig Party*, 367.

cause or openly canvassed for the Democratic opposition, although one must doubt such an assertion given the degree of voter support for the American party.³⁷

To the area's Democrats, Reid's slim majority in Wilmington represented only a Pyrrhic victory, gained at the expense of the new party's honor. In securing such support, the American party, Democrats maintained, had resorted to bribery, lies, and violence to coerce the town's voters. Moreover, in the New Hanover County districts surrounding Wilmington, David Reid and the American party received only 178 votes; Warren Winslow's substantial majority of 453 outside of the town reflected clearly the predominantly Democratic makeup of the county. This pattern also underscores the urban character of Whig/Know Nothing support in the South. Therefore, without the support of the rural electorate of New Hanover county the American party had little chance for success in the area. The *Daily Journal*, explaining the reason for the American party's defeat, declared that Know Nothingism had made "no impression among the honest yeomanry of the county." The district's farmers had steadfastly supported the Democracy for decades and therefore could hardly be counted on to reject that political heritage.³⁸

Sectional crises notwithstanding, the outcome of the election certainly demonstrates the strength of antebellum partisan devotion and reveals the

³⁷Wilmington *Daily Herald*, 7, 1855.

³⁸Wilmington *Daily Journal*, August, 3, 4, 1855.

inability of the American party to gain support in areas having only limited Whig support. Even the local Know Nothing press, recognizing this ideological and historical connection, declared that the American party faced a difficult task by attempting to break down established partisan loyalties. But in this recognition appeared contempt for those citizens so vital to the success of Know Nothingism. The *Daily Herald*, so often solicitous to the New Hanover yeomanry, impugned:

The small farmer with his patch of potatoes is the type of a class--very worthy men, but the hardest sort of material to work on, because the habit of their life is aversion to thought, and a blind confidence in the judgment of other people. They come seldom to town, do not read the newspapers, and are in ignorance that the times are changed from what they were ten or twenty years ago.

Although American party leaders might have sought the approbation of the average farmer or laborer, they retained their Whiggish antipathy for those same voters.³⁹

Of course for the approaching campaign for town commissioners the Know Nothings would not have to worry about the surrounding rural districts and their antagonistic Democratic voters. Nevertheless, the election promised to be one of the most bitterly contested political battles in the town's history. Even as the congressional election ended, the Know Nothing press, marking David Reid's defeat as a temporary setback, predicted triumph in the party's future endeavors. Emphasizing unionism and patriotism, the *Daily Herald* suggested that a "love of

³⁹Wilmington *Daily Herald*, August 7, 10, 1855; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 36-37.

country" would sway a majority of local voters to support the American party's candidates.⁴⁰

The municipal election of 1855 represented the peak of Know Nothing power in Wilmington. The canvass for a new Board of Commissioners brought out over 900 voters, an extraordinary level of participation, considering the limited public interest in previous municipal campaigns, and yielded victory for the entire American party ticket. Yet for Know Nothingism the campaign also revealed significant liabilities which the party would labor to overcome, albeit unsuccessfully. For example, although North Carolina's state Know Nothing council had officially abolished the doctrine of secrecy for the order in all meetings, rituals, and initiations, the movement continued to fight charges that it not only conducted important business in secret but also was opposed to honest government and republican principles. Such attacks, echoed by the *Daily Journal*, struck directly at the American party's attempts to model itself as an organization committed to democratic reform. The *Journal*, exploiting the perception that the American party remained a secret, ritual-bound order, even published a key reportedly used to decipher Know Nothing codes and passwords. Moreover, while average citizens played ceremonial leadership roles within party lodges, only professional politicians, the Democratic press maintained, wielded true authority and exerted influence over party nominations.⁴¹

⁴⁰Wilmington *Daily Herald*, August 21, 1855.

⁴¹Wilmington *Daily Journal*, September 11, 1855; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 79-80.

Local Know Nothing officials, attempting to discount such accusations, scheduled regular public meetings of the party in the four months prior to municipal elections. They likewise highlighted the secret nature of Democratic party proceedings and emphasized that in the past only a small number of privileged Democrats had been responsible for determining the party's nominations. Local American party organizers hoped to spark a revolt among those voters dissatisfied with the undemocratic nature of the existing political hierarchy. But if Wilmington's American party leaders had expected a groundswell of enthusiasm and even bipartisan support for their allegedly patriotic, reformist cause, they more than likely could not have predicted the fervor of the Democrats' opposition.⁴²

By October of 1855 Wilmington's Democrats, now calling themselves the anti-Know Nothing or anti-American party, had organized to "*proscribe* proscription" and put an end to Know Nothing "interference" in the town's politics. In a series of well-publicized meetings, the Democrats passed resolutions denouncing all aspects of Know Nothingism, appointed a twenty-one member Vigilance Committee to register Democratic voters, and on November 10 nominated a ticket of seven candidates for the Board of Commissioners. According to the exaggerated rhetoric of the *Daily Journal*, these candidates-- Stephen D. Wallace, ticket agent of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad; Dr. J. D. Bellamy; John Dawson, a dry goods merchant and president of the Wilmington

⁴²Wilmington *Daily Herald*, September 14, October 29, December 21, 1855.

branch of the Bank of North Carolina; T. C. Miller, an attorney; Thomas H. Howey (occupation unknown); D. A. Lamont, a commission merchant; and John A. Taylor, president of the Wilmington Savings Bank--represented not just the Democratic party but all citizens of Wilmington whether native-born or not. Indeed, the Democrats proclaimed that the Know Nothings, by subscribing to the prejudices of nativism, had dishonored America's founders and the very citizens who had established Wilmington. Citing a November meeting of the American party chaired by Thomas D. Meares, the *Journal* of November 23 noted:

In one man's veins ran the blood of that defamed Irish race which Mr. Meares so much execrated. In another's that of the German, the Scotchman, the Swiss or the Englishman. Beneath the green sod of Ireland--in the quiet churchyards of England--in the bosom of the German Fatherland--sleep the forefathers of the American people. In heaping measureless and groundless contumely upon all these, he but defiled the graves of the nation's fathers--sought to muddy the fountains from which the great national stream took its rise.⁴³

Rhetorical battles of this nature, waged between Democratic and American party organs, were typical of the partisan strife which defined the political competition of the antebellum period. One could find the same issues, prejudices, and editorial jargon in the party organs of Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah. However, the language of the American party press in Wilmington also reflected the desperate mood of those opposed to the Democratic party. As Wilmingtonians prepared to cast their ballots for town leaders, the *Daily Herald* literally begged "independent Whigs" who had not committed themselves to the

⁴³Wilmington *Daily Journal*, October 30, 31, November 10, 23, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, October 31, November 1, 7, 1855.

Know Nothing cause to reject the Democracy. Beyond attempting to reforge the partisan bond which had united Whigs before 1854, Wilmington's Know Nothings likewise warned of the consequences of contributing to a Democratic victory. "Do you not see that you are to be used for the purpose of assisting to place in office the very men who have always been opposed to you in politics," the *Herald* admonished.⁴⁴

Yet in their earlier attempts to distance themselves from existing political organizations with anti-party rhetoric, North Carolina's American party organizers, including those in Wilmington, had succeeded in alienating a substantial portion of the old Whig electorate. Consequently, by the end of 1855 the American party throughout most of the state had become merely an enervated version of the Whig party. With such limited support across North Carolina, the American party could only expect to score victories at the local level; Wilmington, then, would provide one of the few venues for Know Nothing success.⁴⁵

But even in Wilmington, where the party had organized so quickly and with such obvious enthusiasm, the Know Nothing movement could not escape identification with the "Freesoilism" and anti-southern sentiment which ostensibly formed the crux of the American party ideology in the North. Thus in the final weeks of the campaign for town commissioners the Know Nothing press struggled

⁴⁴Wilmington *Daily Herald*, November 1, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, November 12, 1855.

⁴⁵Jeffrey, *State Parties*, 248, 253; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 171-73; Herbert D. Pegg, *The Whig Party in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1968), 177.

to portray the order as the only national party committed to defending southern rights. Moreover, they attacked the "Lococrats" as a thoroughly radicalized, abolitionized, and proscriptive party which in years past had employed the spoils system to discharge "laborers and mechanics from employ for a difference of political opinion."⁴⁶

Again, the Know Nothing press attempted to gain the support of Wilmington's working class citizens. In fact, the *Daily Herald* suggested that the artisans, shopkeepers, and laborers of the American party paid two-thirds of the town's taxes and therefore deserved a proportionate voice in town matters. Declaring that the American party displayed an unequalled devotion to the best interests of the town, her working class citizens, and the South, Know Nothing leaders offered their recommendations for commissioners to an enthusiastic crowd of supporters which reportedly ratified the nominations without opposition. The *Daily Herald* reminded voters that the American party's seven candidates--O. G. Parsley, Isaac Northrop, Thomas M. Gardner, George Davis, William Sutton, Levi A. Hart, and Henry P. Russell--had for years demonstrated their commitment to Wilmington's development and now generously offered to assume the "thankless" and "undesirable duties" of town commissioners.⁴⁷

Significantly, both parties only obliquely acknowledged that their candidates, despite appeals to the town's rank and file voters, also represented

⁴⁶Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 103, 163; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, November 21, 23, 1855.

⁴⁷*Wilmington Daily Herald*, December 1, 4, 5, 12, 21, 1855.

Wilmington's banking and railroad interests. For example, American party candidates O. G. Parsley, Thomas M. Gardner, George Davis, Levi A. Hart, and Henry P. Russell served on the board of directors of the Bank of Wilmington. On the Democratic side, John Dawson served as president of Wilmington's branch of the Bank of North Carolina; John A. Taylor administered the Wilmington Savings Bank; and Stephen D. Wallace served as a director of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad. Even the other less prominent candidates--employed as attorneys, commission merchants, and naval stores merchants--could scarcely be counted among the port's common citizenry. Thus in terms of the diffusion of political power, Wilmington seemed no different from Norfolk, Charleston, or Savannah. If Wilmington's political and economic elite displayed any substantive interest in the well-being of the port's working class citizens, then that concern more than likely stemmed from a paternalistic desire to maintain a reliable and complacent work force. Even the advent of the American party, despite its vocal entreaties to Wilmington's ordinary citizens, did not promise a redistribution of political power in the city. Still, by December 20, 1855--election day for the town's Board of Commissioners--the energy generated by Know Nothingism doubtless heralded a new style of local politics.⁴⁸

After months of campaigning, "far excelling in spirit, bitterness, and zeal any other canvass, municipal, State or National," the American party could claim victory for its seven candidates. Over 900 citizens cast their ballots for the Know

⁴⁸*Kelley's Wilmington Directory*, 110-11; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, September 14, 1855.

Nothing and Democratic tickets, surpassing the 828 votes cast in the August congressional contest. At 7 o'clock on the evening following the election, Know Nothing supporters illuminated their residences, assembled in the streets, and marched through the town with bands, banners, and transparencies proclaiming the party's triumph.⁴⁹

The *Daily Herald*, hailing the strenuous efforts of the American party faithful, declared that even the unscrupulous practices of the Democrats failed to obscure the obvious virtues of the Know Nothing ticket. The Greensboro *Patriot*, covering Wilmington's municipal contest, published a rumor that Democrats had spent approximately \$10,000 on the campaign. Yet the *Herald* observed:

All that money could do, we have reasonable assurances for believing, was done. All that promises of place could accomplish, we believe was resorted to, and the entire foreign vote, with one or two exceptions, constituting near a sixth of the whole vote was marshalled and aroused by inflammatory appeals and empty professions of sympathy.

The *Herald* even suggested that the town's "German legions" had tried unsuccessfully to threaten American party voters and prevent them from reaching the polls, but the "disciples of Washington--the sons of revolutionary sires, were there also--men who were not to be intimidated by menace--not to be influenced by vain boasting--and not to be bought by gold." Clearly, Wilmington's Know Nothing lodges, organized for barely a year, had accomplished a great deal in terms of mobilizing the town's electorate. However, beyond the din of the

⁴⁹Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 21, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, December 21, 1855.

American party's celebration those politicians scrutinizing the election returns must have questioned the completeness of the Know Nothing triumph.⁵⁰

If the American party could revel in its victory in the municipal contest of December 1855, then Wilmington's Democrats could likewise celebrate an impressive turnout to oppose Know Nothingism. Although O. G. Parsley gained the mayoralty by polling the highest number of votes (486) for the American party ticket, he secured a majority of only 25 votes over his Democratic opponent Dr. John D. Bellamy, a prominent physician and director of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad. Judging the election a "close shave," the Democratic press attributed the party's defeat to the failure of older citizens to register and the disfranchisement of working class citizens who were unable to pay their municipal taxes.⁵¹ While local Democrats, fearing the implementation of proscriptive measures by a Know Nothing municipal administration, certainly lamented the results of the election, they likewise looked with confidence to the May campaign for Commissioners of Navigation and anticipated success.⁵²

Only two weeks after the election for town commissioners Democrats convened at Wilmington's courthouse and organized a Democratic Association to oppose more forcefully the American party in future elections. Voicing their

⁵⁰Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 21, 1855, January 10, 1856.

⁵¹Wilmington required all adult male voters to register at least one month prior to elections and produce a receipt for that year's town taxes. Wilmington *Daily Journal*, September 28, 1855.

⁵²Wilmington *Daily Journal*, December 21, 22, 1855, January 5, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 21, 1855.

regret that partisan strife had been introduced to the administration of the town's affairs, Wilmington's Democrats claimed that the American party had made necessary the creation of such an association. The Know Nothing press demurred and simply observed that if the town "is convulsed with excitement, and the bonds of friendly union are broken up," the Democracy alone could accept responsibility for fostering party competition. Both parties, however, certainly recognized that 1856 would be a pivotal year in terms of Wilmington's political development.⁵³

In the months following the election for town government, as Wilmingtonians labored through an unusually harsh winter, both parties prepared to campaign for Commissioners of Navigation. With regularity the *Daily Herald* reminded Wilmington's citizens of the dangers of unchecked immigration, warning that "foreigners have no sympathy with the peculiar institution of the South." Local Democrats, on the other hand, bitterly noted that their calculation of election returns revealed that the number of ballots cast exceeded the number of citizens registered to vote, confirming their suspicion that the Know Nothings had employed fraud to secure victory. They intimated that the Democracy would prove more vigilant in preventing such tactics in future contests. In addition, the *Daily Journal* observed that within weeks of the American party's victory the newly-elected commissioners had initiated a policy of proscription against all Democratic employees of the city--including the town guard, clerks, inspectors of timber and lumber, inspectors of naval stores, and auctioneers--by dismissing

⁵³Wilmington *Daily Journal*, January 8, 9, 15, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, January 10, 1856.

them from their positions. Beyond the rancor of local politics, mayor O. G. Parsley and the Wilmington Chamber of Commerce selected twenty prominent citizens to represent the town as delegates at a Richmond, Virginia commercial convention. Significantly, both the Democratic and American parties were represented equally among Wilmington's delegates, revealing that the recent asperities of party competition had not loosened the economic bond which had long united the port's commercial elite. Although Parsley appeared to have extended an olive branch to restore peace among Wilmington's leaders, American party operatives had no intentions of abandoning their campaign against the Democratic party.⁵⁴

By March of 1856 Wilmington's Know Nothings, confident of a victory in the election for Commissioners of Navigation, had begun to prepare for the upcoming presidential contest. While many southern Know Nothing councils hesitantly accepted Millard Fillmore as their standard-bearer for the November election, Wilmington's American party leaders resolutely embraced the Philadelphia convention's ticket. Indeed, local Know Nothings rejected a proposal, tendered by the *Alabama State Sentinel*, to hold a separate nominating convention in Nashville at which southern adherents of the American party would choose John J. Crittenden as their presidential candidate. Wilmingtonians, despite widespread northern rejection of Fillmore's candidacy, reaffirmed their

⁵⁴Wilmington *Daily Herald*, January 17, February 1, 13, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, January 15, 16, 1856; Vicki Vaughn Johnson, *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871* (Columbia, Mo., 1992), 116.

commitment to the American party ticket by organizing a Fillmore and Donelson Club. At the club's first meeting members recommended candidates for the Commissioners of Navigation election, scheduled for May 5, and finally accepted the incumbent commissioners--T. C. Worth, R. F. Brown, Joseph H. Flanner, George Harriss--with the exception of George R. French, who was replaced by Silas N. Martin, a prominent commission merchant. The Know Nothing press, highlighting the inexperience of the Democratic nominees, observed that this ticket, composed entirely of successful merchants familiar with the administration of the port, represented the most qualified slate of candidates ever placed before the voters of Wilmington.⁵⁵

Even the editors of the *Daily Journal* acknowledged the obvious experience of the American party's candidates, concluding that the nominees might be acceptable to men of all parties. But, the *Journal* added, the Commissioners of Navigation should not represent only the town's more prosperous commercial interests. The Democratic candidates--N. N. Nixon, a commission merchant; George W. Davis, an attorney; Miles Costin, a commission merchant; George Houston, a bookkeeper for a local mercantile house; and L. B. Huggins, a grocer--having pledged to maintain the health and safety of the port, ostensibly represented the great diversity of interests in the port, although one is compelled

⁵⁵Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 139, 143; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 208-10; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, March 27, April 1, 19, 29, 1856.

to observe that even this ticket was comprised of merchants and professionals recruited from the ranks of the town's elite.⁵⁶

Although the American party had seemed certain of victory through February and March, it was, according to the *Daily Herald*, hardly sanguine a month before the election. No doubt the strenuous efforts of local Democrats to guarantee a Know Nothing defeat had cautioned the American party to expect a close race. Just a week before election day, in fact, the *Daily Herald* advised:

Friends, if you do not work hard in the few days now remaining before the election comes off, *we are beaten!* That is plain talking, but we believe it to be the truth. You are too confident. Our adversaries have been for weeks and months busily and noiselessly engaged in perfecting their plans, arranging their forces, and getting every thing ready to carry this election.

Ultimately, the results of the May 5 contest should have allayed the fears of the American party. With over 1000 citizens having cast their ballots, Know Nothingism obviously continued to generate considerable excitement in the town and the party's candidates polled a slightly larger number of votes than had been cast in December. Yet even with increased support the American party could not claim total victory; the Democracy had secured the election of one of the five Commissioners of Navigation as George W. Davis outpaced Silas N. Martin by nine votes. Moreover, the Democratic candidates had lost by very slim margins. George Harriss received the largest vote for the American party with 507, but

⁵⁶Wilmington *Daily Journal*, April 1, 23, 29, 1856; Kelley's *Wilmington Directory*, passim.

gained election by a majority of only four ballots over his Democratic opponents.⁵⁷

While the American party could claim that its victory in the election would "inspire confidence in the success of the American cause throughout the State," surely local party leaders recognized the growing strength of the opposition. The *Daily Herald's* editors argued that Democrats had engaged in the fraudulent naturalization and registration of immigrants through election day. The *Daily Journal*, however, obviously buoyed by the victory of George Davis, concluded that the "working men" of Wilmington, "without monied power or other influence beyond that of principle alone," had proudly supported the Democratic cause. In addition, the *Journal* claimed that "by some strange mistake" a number of Democrats, in the heat and crowded excitement of the voting, had unfortunately gained possession of and deposited Know Nothing ballots, thus adding to the American party's narrow majority. But if Democrats lamented their misfortune at the polls, then all of Wilmington's citizens, regardless of political allegiance, must have mourned the tragedy of the Wilkings-Flanner duel which had been provoked by partisan discord. The death of William C. Wilkings, however, did not diminish the resolve of both parties to prepare for the upcoming presidential contest and a December election for the town's Board of Commissioners.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Wilmington *Daily Herald*, April 29, May 6, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, April 29, May 6, 1856.

⁵⁸On April 3, 1855, American party candidate Joseph H. Flanner and Dr. William C. Wilkings, a young physician and fervent Democrat, removed to Marion, South Carolina and fought a duel

Throughout the summer of 1856 Wilmington's Democrats and Know Nothings, realizing that the outcome of the presidential campaign would no doubt influence the canvass for local offices, campaigned vigorously for their candidates. In October, Democrats staged a rally which allegedly attracted over 4,000 supporters from surrounding counties. The American party likewise scheduled parades, dinners, speeches, and illuminations to excite voters. But by late October, Wilmington's Know Nothing leaders were clearly worried about the extent of popular support for Fillmore and Donelson. Issuing an urgent call to arms, the *Daily Herald* declared:

The Locos here are moving 'Heaven and earth' in behalf of their cause, while we have been dozing, inactive, apparently unconscious that such a thing as a Presidential canvass was progressing. Why is this? There never was a more important election, for on its result may depend the Union itself. Rouse up! Day is breaking in the East.⁵⁹

Obviously both parties, in their attempts to mobilize Wilmington voters, would emphasize the threat of John C. Fremont and the Republican party. Local

with pistols. According to reports Dr. Wilkings had maligned Flanner and the American party in several speeches delivered before the Wilmington Democratic Association. The incident, which resulted in the death of Dr. Wilkings, served only to inflame further the passions of partisan hatred. While the *Daily Journal* emphasized its regret over the tragedy, noting that the men's seconds should have stopped the confrontation, to the Democratic press the Wilkings-Flanner duel underscored the calamity of introducing party competition to local politics. Moreover, the *Daily Journal* saluted Dr. Wilkings as a martyr for Democratic principles and intimated that the extremism engendered by Know Nothingism had sparked the dispute. Several hundred people attended Wilking's funeral and the entire affair was recalled for years thereafter as one of the most lamentable events in the town's history. *Wilmington Daily Herald*, May 5, 6, 1856; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, May 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 1856; Sprunt, *Chronicles*, 177-79; Ezekiel Edward Lane to William Walter Lane, June 5, 1856, Lane Letters, Lower Cape Fear Historical Society, Wilmington; Howell, *Book of Wilmington*, 115-16.

⁵⁹*Wilmington Daily Herald*, October 17, 24, 25, 29, 30, 1856; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, October 22, 23, 25, 30, 1856.

Democrats declared that a vote for Know Nothingism only increased the likelihood of a Republican victory; Buchanan, they insisted, promised to respect the South's traditions. As a result of such Democratic attacks the *Daily Herald* had to deny charges that Know Nothings in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania had fused with Republicans to oppose the South. Granted, the American party press also noted explicitly that "the slavery question . . . is the uppermost topic" in the campaign and cautioned Wilmington's citizens to avoid open discussion of the issue in the presence of the town's slaves. But the *Daily Herald*, moving beyond the rhetoric of nativism which had played such a prominent role in previous campaigns, argued that the American party alone could guarantee the preservation of the peculiar institution.⁶⁰

In the final days of the campaign Wilmington's Know Nothings, proclaiming that they were "for Fillmore, Donelson, the Constitution, and the Union," labored to convince voters that the American party could hold the nation together against the radical forces of abolitionism and disunion. While the *Herald's* editorials included complex discussions of the virtues of popular sovereignty and underscored Fillmore's support for the principle, American party rallies, on the other hand, obviously were designed to appeal to the average voter. Know Nothing mottoes included: "Uncle Sam's farm will never be divided while Young Sam has the management of it," and "Millard Fillmore--He has filled many offices of honor and will yet Fill-more." At a rally staged just days before the

⁶⁰Wilmington *Daily Journal*, October 23, November 6, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, October 24, 25, 29, 30, November 5, 1856.

election the American party faithful rolled a wheel through Wilmington's streets that was "12 feet high with 31 spokes with the name of a State on each spoke, the rim representing the Constitution of the United States, the hub, the Union . . . with the motto, 'I am for the Union up to the hub.'" Ultimately, however, the slogans, parades, Fillmore songs, Fillmore dinners, and even a Fillmore Chorus could not secure sufficient votes for the American party ticket.⁶¹

Over 1100 of Wilmington's citizens, an unprecedented number surpassing even the turnout in the most recent municipal elections, appeared at the polls to cast their ballots in the 1856 presidential contest.⁶² Although the American party had done well, receiving 515 votes for Fillmore and Donelson, the Democrats had succeeded in erasing the Know Nothing majority by polling 588 votes (see Table 3-1). Yet if the contest seemed close in Wilmington, with only 73 votes separating the parties, throughout the other areas of New Hanover county the American party secured only 72 additional votes, while the Democracy had maintained its control of the county's rural electorate with 884 votes cast outside of the town. The American party, having again failed entirely to win the support of the area's traditionally Democratic voters, undoubtedly seemed poised

⁶¹Wilmington *Daily Herald*, October 29, 30, 1856.

⁶²In the 1852 presidential contest, 892 voters cast their ballots for Franklin Pierce and Winfield Scott. Underscoring the unpopularity of Scott's candidacy in the southern states, only 296 of Wilmington's citizens voted for the Whig candidate, while Pierce received 596. Unable to transfer their political loyalties to Pierce, many of Wilmington's Whigs likely stayed at home for the 1852 contest. Although the Democratic vote in 1856 varied only slightly from that polled in 1852, the significant increase in support for the non-Democratic candidate no doubt highlights the extraordinary efforts of American party organizers and suggests that Fillmore proved more acceptable than Scott to the town's traditionally Whig voters. *Wilmington Daily Journal*, November 4, 1852.

at a critical juncture in the development of the movement. The party faithful, those who had organized Wilmington's lodges and eventually gave their support to Fillmore and Donelson, must have observed that the upcoming municipal election for town commissioners would represent a referendum on the viability of the new party in Wilmington and even throughout North Carolina.⁶³

The outcome of the election clearly stunned American party leaders and made them question the party's chances in the commissioners' election. Shortly after Fillmore's defeat the editors of the *Herald*, sensing that perhaps Wilmington's citizens had tired of political strife, deprecated the introduction of partisan competition to municipal campaigns and suggested a possible compromise to placate warring Democrats and Know Nothings. The *Herald*, noting that it did not assume to speak for the party leadership, offered:

Let the American party select three candidates, and the Democratic three, and let them conjointly select the seventh; or, if this cannot be done, let the names of two gentlemen be placed in a hat, and the one drawn be declared the remaining candidate. We consider this a perfectly fair proposition, and while, if adopted, it will give to both parties an equal share in the honors and responsibilities, it will, at the same time, bring about a union where most it is needed, and effectually prevent all excitement and asperities.

Although the American party, after adopting resolutions condoning the plan, asserted that this proposal was not a product of the order's recent defeat, one can probably attribute the offer to the Know Nothings' fear of a complete Democratic victory in the election for town commissioners. Shared power, they likely

⁶³Wilmington *Daily Journal*, November 6, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, November 5, 1856; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 176.

reasoned, seemed preferable to a total loss of authority in Wilmington's municipal affairs.⁶⁴

As expected the town's Democrats rejected the proposed fusion of party tickets. Nevertheless, despite this refusal, the Wilmington Democracy did not nominate candidates for the election. The editors of the *Daily Journal* merely concluded that in a short time local citizens would recognize the failure of Know Nothingism and the American party would dissolve. Ultimately, Wilmington's remaining American party adherents, assuming the Democrats' refusal promised a renewed partisan battle, renominated the sitting board of commissioners. But by December 1856 the American party in Wilmington had obviously foundered. With the defeat of the party's presidential ticket and the *Journal* predicting the imminent demise of the movement, few citizens attended Know Nothing party rallies and parades. Even the *Daily Herald* did little to campaign for the American party's slate of candidates. On December 18, election day, only 219 citizens deigned to appear at the polls and cast their ballots for town commissioners.⁶⁵ Although the American party candidates had retained control of the municipal government without opposition, the results of the election hardly represented a triumph for Know Nothingism nor did the victory breathe new life

⁶⁴Wilmington *Daily Herald*, November 27, 1856.

⁶⁵Although the substantial drop in voter participation might appear extraordinary, one can more than likely attribute such a turnout to the election's close proximity to the presidential contest. For example, a similar fall in voting occurred in 1852. While nearly 900 voters had cast their ballots in the 1852 presidential contest, only 411 of Wilmington's citizens took part in the January 1853 election for town commissioners. Wilmington *Daily Journal*, January 4, 1853.

into the party. Indeed, this campaign would be the last for the American party in the town.⁶⁶

Within only a few months the Know Nothing order ceased to exist in Wilmington. Without editorial comment the *Daily Herald* simply ignored local government affairs and increasingly lamented the course of national politics. "We are sick, sick, sick of the everlasting discussion of the slavery question," the *Herald* complained. However, the growing tension over slavery seemed not to have immediately affected the town's politics. Indeed, as the town prepared for municipal elections in December of 1857, one could scarcely suspect that the American party had ever organized successfully in Wilmington. The candidates, standing for non-partisan Citizens' and People's tickets, had once opposed each other bitterly as Democrats and Know Nothings but now, avoiding the asperities of party competition, ran together on the same tickets. Neither the *Journal* nor the *Herald* endorsed one ticket over another and both organs merely published the election results without comment. Only 581 voters--typical of voter support prior to the advent of Know Nothingism--appeared at the polls to elect John Dawson and the Citizens' Ticket to a one-year term as Board of Commissioners. Peace, indeed ambivalence, had apparently returned to Wilmington's political arena.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Wilmington *Daily Journal*, December 18, 19, 1856; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 3, 8, 11, 12, 19, 1856.

⁶⁷Wilmington *Daily Journal*, December 14, 16, 18, 1857; Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 19, 1856, June 5, December 18, 1857.

This lack of interest in municipal politics, typical of Wilmington before the advent of Know Nothingism, only continued after 1857. In fact, after the 1857 canvass for town commissioners voter interest declined even further. In 1858 only 305 residents cast their votes for non-partisan tickets, and in 1859 just 271 citizens appeared at the polls to reelect John Dawson as mayor of Wilmington. Although the town's voters and the press had shown little interest in these contests, the transformation which had taken place since the presidential election of 1856 did not escape the attention of the *Journal's* editors. Just prior to the December 1859 election they observed:

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a more marked contrast than that which prevailed between the present state of public feeling and that prevailing some few years since on the eve of a municipal election. . . . We have hardly heard the thing mentioned. Perhaps Congress, Harper's Ferry and other exciting topics had measurably engrossed public attention, but we think the main cause of the quietude is, first, that our citizens have ever since regretted the embittered and exciting scenes of a few years past, and second, that they are fully satisfied with the present able and faithful administration of their municipal affairs.⁶⁸

With this observation in mind, how does one assess the brief life of the American party in Wilmington? In what ways did the American party affect the town's political life? Moreover, why did the city's residents, accustomed to peaceful, non-partisan competition for municipal office, suddenly become avid supporters of the nascent American party and, just as abruptly, abandon the party altogether?

⁶⁸Wilmington *Daily Journal*, December 14, 17, 1858, December 12, 16, 1859; Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 179.

The American party in Wilmington probably derived most of its support from former Whigs searching for unity under a new party banner; without poll books and the evidence to track voters' behavior through the 1850s, however, such a conclusion must remain speculative. Yet Know Nothingism clearly filled the organizational vacuum created by the advancing decrepitude of the Whig party. And, significantly, Know Nothingism represented a powerful new means of attacking the Democrats as enemies of republicanism, the southern way of life, and the union. Yet, explicit in this anti-Democratic campaign was the local party's commitment to the rhetoric of nativism. Although non-native citizens made up only a small proportion of the local populace (246 or just slightly more than 3% of the town's total population of 7,264) Wilmingtonians friendly to the American party cause--at least those who expressed their views in the pages of the *Daily Herald*--opposed unrestricted immigration and naturalization, because they believed that foreigners typically gravitated to the Democratic party. Also, immigration increased the representation of the North, thus multiplying the power of the antislavery forces. In that sense, the American party in Wilmington displayed the characteristics typical of the southern Know Nothing movement. Immigrants did not have to constitute an identifiable local threat to draw the ire of southern nativists. Yet as Marc Kruman has pointed out in his study of antebellum politics in North Carolina, such a conclusion, focusing on the Whig foundations of Know Nothingism, does not explain fully the party's successes in areas such as Wilmington. Other forces, including temperance and unionism,

clearly motivated voters to abandon their traditional complacency, become embroiled in the secret machinations of Know Nothingism, and engage in an unprecedented partisan scramble for the spoils of local office.⁶⁹

But in the end, the Know Nothing movement constituted merely a weakened version of North Carolina's old Whig party. For example, as the American party, it could not gain the support of all of the former Whigs in the state. Nor could it count on the favor of disaffected Democrats after 1855. By the presidential campaign of the following year the American party's support in Wilmington and throughout North Carolina had waned considerably. In April of 1856 the Know Nothing party of North Carolina held its only state convention at Greensboro with a mere 230 delegates representing 46 counties present; this seemed a disappointing showing for a movement which had begun with such promise. While many Whigs/Americans had backed Fillmore's candidacy, as demonstrated in Wilmington, others had certainly shifted to the Democratic candidate James Buchanan in order to oppose Frémont and the Republican party more forcefully. By 1858 North Carolina's Whig and American party adherents had united against the Democracy to form the Opposition party which by 1860 would support the Constitutional Unionists.⁷⁰

⁶⁹Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 159-62; Norton, *Democratic Party*, 222; Pegg, *Whig Party*, 177; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 65; *Statistical View of the United States . . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, D.C., 1854), 284-85; *Wilmington Daily Herald*, November 1, 1855.

⁷⁰Kruman, *Parties and Politics*, 171-73, 176; Pegg, *Whig Party*, 179; Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner*, 120-22.

For Wilmington, parades and bombastic rhetoric ultimately could not sustain the American party. Yet how does one explain the dramatic increase in voter turnout among Wilmington's citizens and, conversely, the sudden evaporation of public interest in the town's municipal contests as seen in Table 1?

One can most likely attribute the groundswell of support for both the Democratic and Know Nothing organizations to the redoubled efforts of party workers to recruit and register voters, particularly those ambivalent voters not readily identified by partisan loyalty. Indeed, according to the Wilmington press, both parties committed considerable manpower to the registration of the town's citizens. And, one must consider the democratic appeal of the decentralized Know Nothing order. No doubt the organization of American party lodges in Wilmington offered a promise of influence in the town's political affairs to disaffected or politically ambivalent citizens who had taken little interest in previous non-partisan municipal campaigns. Additionally, the order's secrecy and ritual initially appealed to ordinary citizens who wished to play a role in the town's institutional network.⁷¹

Nevertheless, ritual and renewed party vigilance still do not account entirely for a doubling of voter participation between 1855 and 1856. Predictably, each party accused its opposition of having engaged in bribery, violence, and electoral fraud, and, considering the efficacy and frequent employment of such tactics in antebellum political contests, similar incidents surely occurred in

⁷¹Wilmington *Daily Herald*, December 21, 1855; Wilmington *Daily Journal*, December 21, 1855.

Wilmington. Moreover, as a result of the excitement generated by Know Nothingism, local party operatives probably increased their use of such electioneering techniques through 1855 and 1856. Yet with victory secured, what did the Know Nothing members of the Board of Commissioners do for Wilmington?

As in Norfolk, the Know Nothing-controlled municipal government in Wilmington did nothing to turn American party rhetoric into policy. During the two years of American party management of town affairs, Wilmington's Board of Commissioners simply maintained the status quo and followed the practices of earlier administrations. Indeed, a reading of the minutes of the town commissioners' meetings reveals no difference between the business conducted by either partisan or non-partisan boards. They levied taxes to pave the streets and employ a city watch, enforced town ordinances, and labored to bolster the fortunes of Wilmington in general. The commissioners' conduct simply reflected their mercantile and professional backgrounds and appeared to satisfy the towns' residents regardless of party affiliation. As the Democrats and Know Nothings battled to secure popular support even the *Daily Journal* could not complain about the American party's management of the town. By 1859 the *Journal* asserted that Wilmington's citizens were so satisfied with the conduct of the municipal government "they would be perfectly satisfied to keep on without any election."⁷²

⁷²"Minutes of the Town Commissioners," February 27, March 5, 1852, May 10, 1854, January 20, March 23, 1856; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, December 12, 1859.

Ultimately, the mobilization of the American party in Wilmington seems to have done little to alter the town's course. Nor did the order, despite an appeal to working class interests, herald the dissolution of Wilmington's existing socio-political order. Between 1854 and 1859 only sixty-five men--roughly 1% of the town's population--competed for political office and among those with identifiable vocations over 90% of this distinguished group were either professionals (attorneys, physicians) or were engaged in commerce (see Table A-2, Appendix). Know Nothingism professed an interest in democratization, but in Wilmington the American party did not promise an extension of political power to the ordinary voters. The town's small corps of elites, only temporarily divided by partisan rhetoric, assumed responsibility for the port's economic development, meted out punishment to those who disturbed the peace, dutifully ministered to the poor, and, regardless of party affiliation, subscribed considerable capital to the town's internal improvement endeavors. In this ordered community Know Nothingism represented only an aberration. Perhaps the astute editors of the *Daily Journal* were correct in their assessment of the period. National politics undoubtedly diverted some voters' attention away from municipal contests. One must also observe that, beyond the partisan rhetoric of the period, local rivalries, the character of local personalities, and group identities so often determined political behavior. But it is equally possible, as the *Journal* declared, that Wilmington's citizens quickly tired of the "embittered and exciting scenes" which had accompanied the politicization of the town's government. After the presidential

election of 1856 voter turnout in some cases dropped below those levels witnessed prior to 1855. Even in the congressional election of August 1857 only 416 citizens appeared at the polls; just two years earlier over 800 Wilmingtonians had cast their ballots in the congressional contest of 1855.⁷³

⁷³Kelley's *Wilmington Directory*, passim; "Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor, 1850-1868," New Hanover County, North Carolina, passim; Jeffrey, "National Interests," 48; Jeffrey, "Internal Improvements," 111; Jeffrey, *State Parties*, 313-14; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, December 12, 1859.

Chapter IV

States' Rights & Nativism: The American Party in Charleston, South Carolina

In the summer of 1855, William Porcher Miles traveled from his home in Charleston, South Carolina to Norfolk, Virginia, where he volunteered to battle that city's devastating yellow fever epidemic. A professor of mathematics at the College of Charleston and scion of a distinguished South Carolina family, Miles was noted for his "gentlemanly bearing, handsome appearance, brilliant intellect, moral courage, resolute independence, and genuine modesty," and certainly represented one of the city's most prominent citizens not directly associated with the commercial oligarchy that ostensibly defined respectability in Charleston.¹

Despite such respect, however, he had no obvious political aspirations prior to 1855, and probably journeyed to Virginia with scant knowledge of his imminent candidacy in Charleston's November mayoral election. Yet by late September of 1855, representatives of Charleston's Democratic, or Southern Rights, party had hailed Miles as their unexpected candidate for the mayoralty, even as he attended

¹Clarence McKittrick Smith, Jr., "William Porcher Miles: Progressive Mayor of Charleston, 1855-1857," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* 43 (1942): 30; *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men of the Carolinas of the Nineteenth Century*, 2 vols., South Carolina, vol. I (Madison, Wisconsin, 1892), 659-61; Wayne L. Jordan, "Police Power and Public Safety in Antebellum Charleston: The Emergence of a New Police, 1800-1860," in *South Atlantic Urban Studies*, eds. Samuel M. Hines and George W. Hopkins (Columbia, 1979), 130-31.

the sick in Norfolk. At best a reluctant and no doubt inexperienced candidate, Miles delivered few speeches during the autumn campaign and instead allowed his supporters to sustain the canvass against a determined Know Nothing opposition that had mobilized over the previous few months. His signal victory in the November contest, secured by a sizable majority over American party candidate and Charleston attorney, F. D. Richardson, initiated a period of reform for the city, and launched a political career that would culminate in Miles' election to the U.S. House in 1856.²

Miles' surprising success in 1855 is doubtless significant in terms of its impact on Charleston's nascent--and anomalistic--American party. Indeed, the mobilization of the Know Nothing party in Charleston, achieved in preparation for the city's 1855 municipal elections, surely represents one of the most unusual episodes in the political history of antebellum Charleston and offers an obvious counter to the other cities addressed in this investigation of Know Nothingism in southern port cities. At the same time, however, the harsh reaction of the town's Democratic/Southern Rights partisans suggests that Charleston's civic leaders, long secure in their control of local political affairs, regarded with anxiety and suspicion the emergence of a new political party which might threaten that hegemony.

²Smith, "William Porcher Miles," 30; *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men*, vol. I, 659-61; Jordan, "Police Power," 130-31; *Charleston Courier*, November 6, 1855; *Charleston Mercury*, September 18, November 9, 1855.

Thus far this study has focused on American party organizations that operated within the ideological framework established by the national Know Nothing leadership through its conventions and party organs. In fact, beyond the obvious local hybridization of the movement, the Know Nothing parties that developed in Norfolk and Wilmington clearly resembled the organizations evolving in other sections of the country. They adopted the nativist rhetoric of the national party and decried the increasing influence of America's immigrant residents, participated in the party's Philadelphia conventions, and endorsed the candidacy of Millard Fillmore in 1856. They likewise regarded with anxiety the rising tide of sectional animosity, and thus espoused the unionist sentiment that became a hallmark of Know Nothingism, North and South.

In Charleston, however, mobilization of the Know Nothing party proceeded along an altogether different course. And, despite the very brief life of the American party in Charleston, the organization of that movement not only reveals a great deal about the dynamics of partisan competition and status anxiety in the city, but also illustrates the degree to which the sectional agitation of the mid-1850s shaped even the local political milieu. Yet how and why did the American party in Charleston represent an aberration within the Know Nothing movement as a whole? In addition, to what extent did the creation of the party reflect a growing anxiety over the city's flagging development and concomitantly represent an assault against the established commercial interests that had long dominated the economic and political institutions of the city? Of course, to assess the

fortunes of the American party in Charleston one must have some sense of the character of the city during this decade prior to secession and the Civil War.

Perhaps rivaled only by New Orleans, which had profited greatly from the nation's westward expansion, Charleston, by the 1850s, had established itself as one of the preeminent and archetypal cities of the South. Indeed, first sight of the port from the harbor must have offered the weary traveler a stark contrast to the pulsing industrial communities of the Northeast where the furnaces, textile mills, and factories, the siege engines of the industrial revolution, clouded the skyline. Charleston's visitors, once ensconced in one of the city's better hotels--either the Mills House or the Charleston Hotel for well-to-do travelers--often commented on the palmettos and magnolias that lined the streets, framing the substantial residences of Charleston's most prosperous citizens. St. Michael's Church, as well as the courtyards and gardens attached to the larger homes, likewise drew the attention of Charleston's guests. But visitors typically reserved their highest praise for the Battery, which one English observer noted was "their Hyde Park, their Prater, and their Champs Elysees." And, if travelers had the misfortune to arrive during the summer months, they more than likely copied the Charleston citizenry by walking to the Battery to escape the oppressive heat and humidity. Commenting on the sweltering summer weather, Frederick Law

Olmsted speculated that the port had "the worst climate for unacclimated whites of any town in the United States."³

In addition, the forest of masts and yards of sail assembled on the Ashley and Cooper rivers, a noisy chatter of merchants and longshoremen, as well as the earnest activity of the port's numerous slaves⁴--ever a curiosity to non-southern visitors--must have given the impression that Charleston thrived as a commercial hub for the Southeast. Even Olmsted, who rarely offered favorable commentary on his several journeys through the South, found Charleston's beauty a welcome change after less-than-satisfactory experiences in both Norfolk and Wilmington. He even observed that the city proved "much more metropolitan and convenient than any other Southern town."⁵

In addition, sight of the town's varied industry, which included iron foundries, rice, grist, and lumber mills, shops for manufacturing railroad cars, turpentine distilleries, and carriage works, must certainly have challenged any notions that South Carolina could produce only agricultural commodities. In terms of industrial production, antebellum Charleston, although small by northern standards, emerged as South Carolina's principal manufacturing town and ranked

³Ivan D. Steen, "Charleston in the 1850s," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 71 (1970): 36-38; Benjamin J. Klebaner, "Public Poor Relief in Charleston, 1800-1860," *ibid.*, 55 (1954): 210; Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom: A Traveler's Observations on Cotton and Slavery in the American Slave States* (New York, 1861), 499.

⁴According to the 1850 Federal census returns, Charleston had a population of 19,532 slaves which nearly equalled the white population at 20,012. *Statistical View of the United States . . . A Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, D.C., 1854), 302-03.

⁵Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York, 1856), 404.

third in the South behind Richmond and New Orleans. In 1856 the port's industrial production peaked with an output of \$3,000,000 in manufactured goods. Like the citizens of Savannah and Wilmington, Charlestonians also invested in internal improvement schemes to tap the resources of the Southeast better and expand the market for the port's goods. In 1854, for example, the municipal government subscribed \$250,000 for the Charleston & Savannah Railroad. Indeed, the construction of railroad lines to the port galvanized a brief period of economic recovery during the early 1850s.⁶

Charlestonians envisioned a thriving port that would serve as the focus of commercial activity for the South. To support such ambitions Charleston hosted one of the South's major antebellum commercial conventions in April 1854. Several hundred of the region's leading citizens, representing thirteen states, converged on the port to discuss the improvement and expansion of the southern economy. Delegates, although careful to acknowledge the preeminent importance of agriculture to the region, hastened to demonstrate their unified support for southern manufacturing. And, in its final resolutions, the convention promoted the construction of a more extensive regional railroad network, recommended the creation of new steamship lines to facilitate direct trade with European ports, and urged the federal government to consider seriously a southern route for a

⁶Walter J. Fraser, Jr., *Charleston! Charleston!* (Columbia, 1989), 232-33; Ernest M. Lander, Jr., "Charleston: Manufacturing Center of the Old South," *Journal of Southern History* 26 (1960): 330-31; Charleston *Daily Standard*, May 26, 1854; "Charleston-Savannah Railroad," *DeBow's Review* 18 (1855): 403-04; Gregory Allen Greb, "Charleston, South Carolina, Merchants, 1815-1860: Urban Leadership in the Antebellum South" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 1978), 229-30; Robert N. Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston* (San Francisco, 1982), 73, 82.

transcontinental railroad line. The results of the convention and aplomb of the delegates doubtless encouraged Charleston's citizens and reinforced the optimism of the town's commercial elite.⁷

Unfortunately, however, between 1854 and the outbreak of the Civil War, a disastrous series of fires destroyed many of Charleston's leading industrial concerns, including three iron foundries, the city's three largest rice mills, the railroad car factory, and its largest lumber mill. A major hurricane that struck the city in 1854, and a yellow fever epidemic that killed over 600 persons that same year, had only intensified the port's misery. In fact, despite its wealth, political strength, and historical importance in terms of the southern economy, Charleston's position as a major commercial entrepot had obviously eroded by the late 1850s. The anticipation that "a large amount of the commerce and travel of this vast range of country will be poured into the lap of Charleston," highlighted by the local press and journals such as *DeBow's Review*, never reached fruition.⁸

Indeed, the palmettos and magnolias of Meeting and King Streets, the city's principal thoroughfares, masked serious problems that afflicted Charleston during the antebellum period: a large and often unruly transient population

⁷"The Great Southern Convention in Charleston," *DeBow's Review* 16 (1854): 632-41; "The Great Southern Convention in Charleston, No. II," *ibid.*, 17 (1854): 91-99; Herbert Wender, *Southern Commercial Conventions, 1837-1859* (Baltimore, 1930), 101, 136-40; *Charleston Mercury*, April 12, 13, 17, 1854; Vicki Vaughn Johnson, *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871* (Columbia, Mo., 1992), 6, 94, 106-16, 127-28.

⁸Lander, "Charleston: Manufacturing Center," 331; Fraser, *Charleston!*, 233-34; Frederic C. Jaher, "Antebellum Charleston: Anatomy of an Economic Failure," in *Class, Conflict and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies*, eds. Orville V. Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr. (Westport, Conn., 1982), 207-208; "The Maritime Prosperity of Charleston," *DeBow's Review* 17 (1854): 82-84.

made up of sailors, seasonal laborers, and immigrants, a substantial number of poverty-stricken inhabitants reduced to vagrancy and public assistance, increasing crime and unemployment for the city's residents, and the ever-present fear of unrest within the large slave community. Of course, Charleston possessed the usual charitable organizations--churches, philanthropic societies, and fraternal orders--which ministered to the city's indigent residents and therefore supplemented the work of the Commissioners of the Poor. In addition, the municipal government maintained an almshouse and a home for orphans, the first municipally supported orphan asylum in the United States. But the existence of such institutions, and the increasingly heavy burden that they placed on the resources of the port, only highlight the severity of Charleston's economic woes in the years prior to the Civil War. Moreover, the mobilization of such relief efforts underscores the argument that southern cities, despite their oft-cited uniqueness and rural character, battled the same urban social ills that plagued larger cities in the North.⁹

In his analysis of the port's economic growth and decline from the colonial era to the Civil War, Frederic C. Jaher has concluded that Charleston represented "the biggest metropolitan failure in the United States." Offering a more pessimistic assessment of Charleston's development than the optimistic rhetoric of

⁹Lander, Jr., "Charleston: Manufacturing Center," 330-31; *Charleston Courier*, September 11, 1856, October 4, 1858; Layton W. Jordan, "Police Power and Public Safety in Antebellum Charleston: The Emergence of a New Police, 1800-1860," *South Atlantic Urban Studies* 3 (1979): 124; Klebaner, "Public Poor Relief in Charleston," 210-11; Steen, "Charleston in the 1850's," 40; Fraser, *Charleston!*, 236-37; Blaine A. Brownell, "Urbanization in the South: A Unique Experience," *Mississippi Quarterly* 26 (1973): 106-07.

contemporary boosterism might suggest, he argues that after the heady years of the eighteenth century, the port's commercial significance and prosperity slipped precipitously during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Indeed, in terms of those variables that provide some measure of a port's commercial success--including total shipping tonnage, values of imports and exports, and tonnage in foreign trade--Charleston declined throughout the antebellum era. For example, the tonnage levels for Charleston's foreign trade--a subject of great concern to the city's commercial convention delegates and direct trade advocates during the period--did not reach 1800 levels until the slight recovery of the early 1850s.¹⁰

On the eve of the Civil War, Charleston's merchants and shippers, like those in Norfolk, Wilmington, and Savannah, engaged almost exclusively in coastal trade. Reduced to an almost colonial status delimited by the financial interests of the Northeast, Charleston, once the commercial equal of a Boston or Philadelphia during the colonial era, could only hope to compete against other southern ports. And, although strongly challenged by nearby Savannah during the antebellum years, the port continued to serve South Carolina's agricultural hinterland and thus maintained the characteristically interdependent relationship that existed between southern rural and urban areas. Still, one well-traveled visitor noted that Charleston's harbor did not appear as busy as either northern

¹⁰Jaher, "Antebellum Charleston," 207-08; Fraser, *Charleston!*, 233.

ports or even New Orleans. Moreover, the city, exhibiting "a very staid and remarkably slow" pace, seemed to be "gradually subsiding into forgetfulness."¹¹

Beyond the fashionable promenade of Meeting Street, more adventurous visitors discovered an altogether different side of Charleston. In fact, on the back streets one could find ample evidence of the city's decline. Frederick Law Olmsted observed:

I saw as much close packing, filth, and squalor, in certain blocks, inhabited by laboring whites, in Charleston, as I have witnessed in any Northern town of its size; and greater evidences of brutality and ruffianly character, than I have ever happened to see, among an equal population of this class, before.

One English observer, commenting on the obvious class differences within the Charleston populace, noted that there was "no middle class; only rich and poor." By comparison to most cities, the inequality in the distribution of wealth in Charleston was enormous. Just over 3 percent of heads of households owned roughly half of Charleston's wealth, while the vast majority of free citizens owned neither property nor slaves, and had little chance of improving their socio-economic status. And, according to contemporary observers, Charleston's wealthiest residents, impassive to the concerns of working class and indigent citizens, often regarded the port's relief agencies--an orphanage, almshouse, and

¹¹Steen, "Charleston in the 1850's," 39, 43; "Commerce of Charleston, 1855-56," *DeBow's Review* 21 (1856): 518; "Savannah and Charleston," *ibid.*, 18 (1855): 516-19; Klebaner, "Public Poor Relief in Charleston," 210; Johnson, *Men and the Vision*, 116; "The Great Southern Convention in Charleston," *DeBow's Review* 16 (1854): 640; J. H. Easterby, "The Charleston Commercial Convention of 1854," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 25 (1926): 181-83; Greb, "Charleston, South Carolina, Merchants," 236; David R. Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 1014.

insane asylum--in terms of their custodial, rather than reform, function; such institutions served merely to segregate further an already divided community. Expressing such contempt for Charleston's less fortunate residents, one wealthy citizen described poor whites as "mean, thieving, sneaking. . . . They teach our negroes to steal, sell them liquor, do everything to corrupt and demoralize them. . . . They ought to be slaves themselves." Although antebellum Charleston never experienced a truly class-based political revolt, the city's American party organizers would utilize the issues of class division and status anxiety among poorer whites as an important rhetorical weapon in the battle for votes.¹²

Ultimately, however, Charleston's visitors most often commented on the city's overly zealous concern, indeed mania, for public safety. Olmsted regarded this anxiety as one of the salient features of the town. He remarked that the constant drilling of militia units, obvious presence of Charleston's well-armed police force, and regular parades of students at The Citadel, South Carolina's military college, prompted one "to imagine that the town was in a state of siege or revolution." An examination of the municipal ordinances passed in the two decades prior to the Civil War reveals a concerted effort to check the behavior of the city's slaves and punish harshly those who violated curfews and the prescribed code of conduct. No doubt citizens' fears of slave insurrection, still fueled by the

¹²Steen, "Charleston in the 1850's," 36, 43, 45; Tommy W. Rodgers, "The Great Population Exodus from South Carolina, 1850-1860," *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association* 68 (1967): 14-21; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 404; Fraser, *Charleston!*, 240; David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston, 1971), 265-66.

memory of the 1822 conspiracy involving Denmark Vesey, underscored the exigency of such measures. Yet municipal authorities also voiced concern over the often disorderly conduct of the port's numerous Irish immigrants who lived on the brink of poverty and occupied a social status only slightly better than the city's sizable free black population. That the maintenance of order and public safety should become volatile political issues during the crisis-ridden 1850s should not seem surprising. In fact, one of the hallmarks of municipal reform immediately prior to the Civil War, particularly during the mayoral administration of William Porcher Miles, was the improvement of Charleston's police force.¹³

Against this backdrop of socio-economic anxiety Charleston's seemingly monolithic and oligarchic political system continued to function as the preserve of the city's commercial and professional interests. Voters had the opportunity to choose their mayor, sheriff, and city council, made up of aldermen representing the city's eight wards. Qualifications for voting in municipal contests had been liberalized by the 1850s with property ownership no longer necessary for the franchise. Voters were required, however, to be white males of at least twenty-one years of age, residents of South Carolina for no less than two years prior to the election, and residents of Charleston for six months. In addition, all voters

¹³Rosen, *Short History of Charleston*, 88; Steen, "Charleston in the 1850's," 42; Jordan, "Police Power," 162-63; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 404; H. Pinckney Walker, compiler, *Ordinances of the City of Charleston from the 19th of August 1844 to the 14th of September 1854 and the Acts of the General Assembly* (Charleston, 1854), viii-x; William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York, 1990), 79-81; *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men*, vol. I, 661; Smith, "William Porcher Miles," 31; William Porcher Miles, *Mayor's Report on City Affairs* (Charleston, 1857), 15-17; Fraser, *Charleston!*, 238; Jack K. Williams, *Vogues in Villainy: Crime and Retribution in Ante-bellum South Carolina* (Columbia, 1959), 73.

had to produce a receipt showing that their poll tax had been paid, and naturalized citizens were required to possess their certificates of citizenship at the time of the election. Finally, beginning in 1853, elections for the city council were held every other year, instead of annually.¹⁴

In the early 1850s, campaigns for the mayoralty and city council generated little excitement among Charleston's voters and newspapers. As in Wilmington, candidates did not campaign under the banners of the national parties, choosing instead to run on independent tickets selected by committees of citizens. In the 1852 and 1853 campaigns, for example, voters could choose from a number of slates: several unnamed tickets, an Independent People's ticket, and the Genuine People's Independent ticket. These groups of candidates included individuals who would later oppose each other in the struggle between Charleston's Know Nothing and Southern Rights parties. At this time, however, partisan differences were not a feature of municipal campaigns. In both contests, Thomas L. Hutchinson, a director of the Charleston & Savannah Railroad, defeated John Schnierle, a planter and prominent member of Charleston's German Friendly Society. Voter turnout in these mayoral elections had topped 2,000, considered "respectable" by the *Charleston Courier*, but neither campaign prompted serious political debate or animosity amongst the electorate (see Table 4-1).

¹⁴*Charleston City and General Business Directory for 1855* (Charleston, 1855), passim; *Charleston City Directory & Strangers Guide for 1856* (New York, 1856), passim; *Charleston Courier*, October 31, 1853.

Table 4-1

Voter Turnout, Charleston Mayoral Elections, 1852-1859

Year	Wards								Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1852									
Hutchinson	157	179	385	127	132	114	71	76	1,541
Schnierle	139	166	306	361	134	139	67	103	<u>1,415</u>
									2,956
1853									
Hutchinson	190	182	232	328	85	110	60	57	1,244
Schnierle	84	79	179	188	73	64	50	62	<u>779</u>
									2,023
1855									
Miles	159	200	290	305	74	106	43	83	1,260
Richardson	92	85	132	205	66	105	81	67	<u>833</u>
									2,093
1857									
Macbeth	140	207	263	294	81	115	47	57	1,204
Richardson	100	104	182	241	106	140	94	114	<u>1,081</u>
									2,285
1859									
Macbeth	125	200	230	344	94	116	69	72	1,250
Carew	104	94	198	188	90	120	75	81	<u>950</u>
									2,200

In 1853 over 900 fewer voters went to the polls to cast their ballots in the mayoral election. John Schnierle--who had received 1,415 votes in 1852 and lost that election by a narrow margin of only 126 ballots--polled only 779 votes to Thomas Hutchinson's 1,244. In both elections Schnierle did well only in the area north of

Calhoun Street that encompassed wards 5 through 8, the less populous and less prosperous areas in Charleston. Clearly the campaign generated little enthusiasm among voters, most of whom were content to leave Hutchinson in office.¹⁵

Apparently the greatest concern for voters was the ability of the candidates to provide the city with an honest and efficient administration. For example, in tendering the nominations of John Schnierle and sixteen other aldermanic candidates for the 1852 mayoral campaign, the citizens responsible for selecting these individuals remarked:

In the selection which has been made, you will perceive the names of useful and influential citizens, into whose guardian hands the safety and prosperity of our city may be readily consigned. They are too well known and appreciated in this community to require any commendation from us. They will, in representing and guarding every interest in our community, bring to the discharge of their duties that uprightness, intelligence and devotion, characteristic of their previous life and conduct.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of these candidates represented Charleston's mercantile/professional community and included attorneys, commission merchants, directors of the city's banks and railroads, as well as prominent members of the various benevolent associations and fraternal orders. More importantly, among the candidates who participated in the 1852 and 1853 elections, only two would later campaign under the banner of Know Nothingism.¹⁶

¹⁵In the 1852 mayoral contest 2,956 of Charleston's voters appeared at the polls; Thomas L. Hutchinson, securing a majority of only 126 to claim victory, polled 1,541 votes to John Schnierle's 1,415. The following year voter turnout declined markedly, falling to 2,023. Hutchinson, again triumphant, received 1,244 votes to Schnierle's 779.

¹⁶Charleston *Courier*, August 29, 1851, September 1, 3, 1852, October 29, 31, November 1, 4, 1853; *Charleston . . . Directory for 1855*, passim; *Charleston City Directory . . . for 1856*, passim.

But if Charleston's municipal elections had been relatively peaceful affairs that generated only limited public interest, the elections of 1855 would demonstrate that Charleston was not altogether immune to the partisan discontent and realignment that punctuated American politics during the 1850s. With a large population of Irish and German immigrants--representing approximately 40 percent of the white citizenry by the 1850s--the port appeared susceptible to the rhetoric of nativism as defined by the American party. Moreover, a substantial portion of this local immigrant population was Catholic. Charleston, in fact, possessed one of the largest and oldest Catholic communities in the South; the first Catholic congregation in the city, St. Mary's, was organized in 1791. The Hibernian Society, founded in 1799, formed the crux of the Catholic community and could count many of Charleston's most prominent and politically powerful citizens--including mayors Thomas L. Hutchinson and Charles Macbeth--among its members. Although the Society obviously offered an important social outlet for members, its most important function was as a provider of substantial charitable aid to the scores of poor immigrants arriving in the city during the 1840s and 1850s. But if the group's charter originally included a prohibition against the Society becoming a political order, it had evolved, by the mid-nineteenth century, into a highly politicized organization. Not surprisingly,

therefore, the Hibernian Society would become a primary target for the nativists of Charleston's American party.¹⁷

Know Nothingism apparently first appeared in South Carolina by the autumn of 1854. Yet this thoroughly Democratic state, long-attuned to the politics of sectionalism, would not prove fertile ground for the organization of a new party with such obvious ties to both Whigs and the North. By early 1855, in fact, the *Charleston Mercury* had argued that Know Nothingism had become synonymous with abolitionism. At a February 3 anti-Know Nothing meeting, the assembled citizens, declaring that they opposed the order because its principles would "prove ruinous to the South," argued that it failed to recognize "state sovereignty, and is detrimental to the progress of Republican Government." Still, however, no local American party had formally entered Charleston's political arena, nor had any of the local newspapers formally endorsed the movement. Even the *Charleston Evening News*, soon to become the official organ of Know Nothingism in the city, denied any direct affiliation with the party:

In no view should this paper, however, be regarded as an organ of that party; it has spoken neither by authority, nor upon instigation. It is not a Know-Nothing journal! . . . It is a press devoted to public affairs in general, and claims to discuss any and all subjects of public interest.

¹⁷Fraser, *Charleston!*, 179, 233; Rosen, *Short History of Charleston*, 86; J. J. Pringle Smith, "Some Account of the Government of the City of Charleston Before and After the Revolution of 1776," *Year Book of the City of Charleston, 1881* (Charleston, 1881), 342-51; Arthur Mitchell, *The History of the Hibernian Society of Charleston, South Carolina, 1799-1981* (Charleston, 1982), 12-15; John T. Cosgrove, "Sketch of the Hibernian Society of Charleston, South Carolina," *American Irish Historical Association Journal* (1926; reprint, Charleston, 1927): 15-18.

The *Evening News*, under the editorial leadership of John Cunningham, also argued that it opposed anti-Catholic prejudice and the proscription of naturalized citizens.¹⁸

Nevertheless, despite such vociferous denials, Cunningham had already started the process of aligning his newspaper with the Know Nothing movement. As early as January 1855 the *Evening News* reprinted pro-Know Nothing editorials from the Washington, D.C. *American Organ*, regarded as the national paper of the party. Cunningham himself even suggested that the new national party might determine the outcome of the next presidential contest. And if anyone doubted the ultimate goal of a Know Nothing party that might evolve in Charleston, perusal of a January 20, 1855, letter from "Nemo," published in the *Evening News*, should have provided some clue to citizens suspicious of the still secret organization. Harshly critical of Mayor Thomas L. Hutchinson and the city council, "Nemo" declared that "the city has so long been inertly, extravagantly & badly managed, that people are satisfied to suffer a little tyranny, if they can, at the same time, enjoy clean streets & strict police surveillance." In another article, signed "Sam and Order," the *Evening News* questioned the effectiveness of the local police force in protecting the port's citizens and administering justice, and claimed that the town authorities were either slow or selective in their notice of offenses committed against residents. No doubt Cunningham, in publishing these letters, expected the American party to enter the November 1855 contest for the

¹⁸W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 70, 95-96; Charleston *Mercury*, February 9, 12, 26, 1855; Charleston *Evening News*, March 23, 1855.

Charleston mayoralty and city council. And, considering the volume of editorial materials criticizing the municipal police force, reform of that institution promised to be a critical issue in the campaign.¹⁹

Through the winter and spring of 1855 the *Evening News*, if not yet officially united with the American party, at least promoted its growth in Charleston by publishing numerous editorials, letters to the editor, and pieces reprinted from the national Know Nothing press further explaining the principles of the organization. In most respects the *Evening News* echoed the nativist rhetoric employed by the American party press throughout the country. And, considering the size of Charleston's immigrant population, it is not surprising that the *Evening News* published accusations of improper naturalization of foreign-born citizens and highlighted those stories which most effectively vilified the town's German and Irish residents. But in a city clearly attuned to the sectional debate and mobilized against the menace of abolitionism, nativism alone could scarcely be counted on to form the foundation of a new political order. In particular, Cunningham demonstrated that Charleston's support for the movement would be tempered by respect for the principle of states' rights.²⁰

Realizing that this new political party could not survive in South Carolina without an explicit commitment to southern rights and institutions, the *Evening News* argued that Know Nothing organizations in each state should be "distinct,

¹⁹Charleston *Evening News*, January 6, 20, February 15, August 9, 1855.

²⁰*Ibid.*, February 23, 26, March 2, 1855; Charleston *Courier*, October 11, 1855; Charleston *Mercury*, May 26, June 2, 1855.

independent, and self-controlling as the sovereign states to which they belong."

Moreover, the *Evening News* emphatically rejected the proposed presidential candidacy of Millard Fillmore. One venomous editorial from Cunningham's pen alleged that Fillmore was:

an old party hack, reeking with Federal doctrines, tainted with anti-slavery propensities, a high tariff man, a squanderer of the public treasury on rivers and harbors, on old fogey on foreign politics and opposed to Cuban annexation, and one who approved and signed those infamous measures of 1850 which prostrate the South. Southerners select a northern president, who would not interpose the veto between us & aggression on Southern rights and who countenances a departure from the Constitution & States Rights? Never! Never! No Fillmores . . . for us!

A declaration of this nature placed Cunningham and Charleston's Know Nothing leaders in opposition to the American party hierarchy, then preparing to convene in Philadelphia for a national convention. Yet it no doubt reassured those cautious citizens who questioned political affiliation with northern politicians ostensibly associated with abolitionism and the newly-formed Republican party. Of course, considering South Carolina's reaction to the Compromise of 1850, rejection of Millard Fillmore seemed essential for a party ideally committed to protecting southern rights.²¹

Yet Cunningham used the *Evening News* to carry this redefined Know Nothingism even further. Noting that the state's Democratic party suffered from divisive factionalism, the *Evening News* claimed that the local contingent,

²¹Charleston *Evening News*, February 17, 1855; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 510, 519-23; Charles Edward Caughen, "The Secession Movement Before 1860," in *Perspectives in South Carolina History: The First 300 Years*, eds. Ernest M. Lander, Jr. and Robert K. Ackerman (Columbia, 1973), 136-37.

supported by the *Mercury*, was a "States Rights, Democratic, Sectional party, whose face is turnable in the mist of the future toward wherever Disunion may loom up." The American party, the editorial went on to observe, represented the only "truly democratic, truly American, and truly states' rights" party in South Carolina.²²

By espousing such an unorthodox interpretation of Know Nothingism, Cunningham had clearly distanced Charleston's American party from a national movement already compromised in the eyes of many southerners and the editors of the *Charleston Courier* and the *Mercury*. The latter paper in particular, identified as the organ of the town authorities, initiated an anti-Know Nothing editorial campaign that lasted throughout 1855. Describing the American party as chameleon-like in its attempts to appeal to a wide array of voters, the *Mercury* criticized Know Nothingism as a force to threaten "Southern unanimity." "That party the South has to dread," one editorial admonished, "because it brings with it strife, ill-feeling, intolerance, and proscription, arraying one portion of our citizens against the other, at the most critical period, we believe, in the history of the South."²³

Naturally the *Mercury* criticized the secrecy of the Know Nothing order, warning that such a movement threatened to "cast aside the strongest safeguards of civil liberty." But the most damning arguments in the *Mercury's* arsenal were

²²Charleston *Evening News*, March 2, August 6, 1855.

²³Charleston *Mercury*, February 24, May 22, 25, 26.

the numerous allusions to northern antislavery agitation. For example, editorials described southern support for Know Nothingism as an "entangling alliance with the North" that might lead otherwise loyal southerners to support abolitionism. Not mentioned explicitly in the *Mercury's* attacks, however, was the fear that Know Nothingism might prove divisive to the relationship that existed between the slaveholders and non-slaveholders who constituted a majority of the populace. Indeed, as Steven Channing has concluded in his study of the secession movement in South Carolina, this apprehension that class division might produce a political rift over the defense of slavery and southern rights was well established by the 1850s and plagued the state's slaveholders and political leaders until secession had been accomplished in 1860.²⁴

Nevertheless, the *Mercury* was not above publishing articles somewhat sympathetic to the cause of nativists. On one occasion, for example, the paper suggested that many recent German immigrants were potentially dangerous anarchists and revolutionaries. Here, of course, was an allusion to those political refugees who fled the persecution prompted by the failed German revolution of 1848. More condemnatory, however, was the accusation that these Germans adhered to the "licentiousness of abolitionism."²⁵

By July of 1855 anxious Charlestonians speculated on the conduct of the approaching election for sheriff. Editorials in the *Mercury* and the *Courier*

²⁴Ibid., June 2, 26, July 4, 9, 1855; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 38-58; Steven A. Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina* (New York, 1970), 254-55.

²⁵Charleston *Mercury*, February 12, 1855.

wondered if "Sam" would make his first appearance for the Know Nothing party in Charleston. Groups of citizens staged enthusiastic public rallies for the two nominees, Col. John E. Carew and Charles E. Kanapaux; but both men ran as independent candidates. The campaign was not without controversy, however. Supporters of Carew and Kanapaux accused each other of having employed bribery and corruption to secure votes. The *Evening News*, admonishing election officials to maintain the "purity of the ballot box," announced:

Votes! Votes!! Votes!!! On Monday next, the 9th July, between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., will be sold, at the Northeast corner of Broad and Meeting street, without reserve. Two Hundred and Fifty prime Votes, just arrived per schr. "Aid from Ireland."

The *Mercury* and the *Courier* also complained that local officials had naturalized over two hundred individuals in the week prior to the July 9 election.²⁶

But the most serious debate focused on Kanapaux's status as a Roman Catholic. "Why is Charles E. Kanapaux persecuted?" the *Courier* asked. "Is it a disqualification to be a Catholic? Is religious belief to be made a cause for proscription here?" Kanapaux, the *Courier* explained, was a "native and the son of a native." Although the *Evening News* had not explicitly favored one candidate over the other, apparently supporters of Charleston's nascent American party had used Kanapaux's Catholicism to advance the candidacy of John Carew.

²⁶Ibid., July 4, 9, 1855; Charleston *Courier*, July 3, 4, 7, 1855; Charleston *Evening News*, July 2, 1855.

Moreover, John Cunningham used this episode to exploit any resulting nativist sentiment.²⁷

Col. Carew, in spite of such unsolicited electioneering and the *Courier's* declaration that he had joined the Know Nothing ranks, neither ran as the candidate of the American party nor publicly acknowledged any affiliation with the order or Cunningham. In fact, the *Mercury* alleged that Carew actually lost votes because of the rumor (ostensibly initiated by an article in the *New York Herald*) that he was the secret candidate of the Know Nothings. One resident of Charleston, Jacob F. Schirmer, expressed regret over the character of the campaign and noted in his diary: "For some days back considerable excitement has prevailed and transactions so shameful that I did not vote. The 'No Nothing party' seem to think that they have gained a victory." But despite anxiety among election managers that the polling places in each of the wards might be the scenes of violence and voter chicanery, the election proceeded without incident and Carew secured victory with 2090 votes to Kanapaux's 1553.²⁸

If the election for sheriff did not represent the first appearance of a true Know Nothing candidate in the Charleston political arena, the contest clearly initiated the campaign for control of the town's government. Indeed, only a month after the sheriff's election, the *Mercury* announced a public meeting "of the

²⁷Charleston *Courier*, July 4, 9, 1855.

²⁸Charleston *Mercury*, July 4, 9, 13, 1855; Charleston *Courier*, July 3, 4, 7, 12, 1855; Charleston *Evening News*, July 12, 1855; "Diary of Jacob F. Schirmer, 1853-1860," July 9, 1855, South Carolina Historical Society.

friends of States' Rights, Southern Rights, and opponents of the Know Nothing party." Thereafter, John Cunningham and the *Evening News* would not abjure association with the American party.²⁹

In August, Cunningham himself would represent Charleston at a meeting of the South Carolina State Council of the American party. Although the State Council ratified the principles set forth by the national party at its recent Philadelphia convention, it also adopted resolutions affirming a strong commitment to slavery and states' rights. In the Council's final session of August 14, members affirmed their support for the doctrine of "Americans shall rule America," and advocated modification of the naturalization laws "to preserve the purity of the elective franchise." They likewise supported Kenneth Rayner's Union degree of the party ritual and disavowed any sympathy for secession or the partisans of disunion. To those critics who questioned the impact of Know Nothingism on naturalized citizens or suggested that the American party's doctrines violated the constitutional separation of church and state, the Council adopted measures designed to defend and clarify the Know Nothing creed. The members resolved to disapprove of laws which might affect the existing privileges of naturalized citizens and declared that "while we deprecate Romish politico-sectarian influence in America, we are inexorably opposed to any law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or any law which applies a religious test." Returning to Charleston from the Columbia

²⁹Charleston *Mercury*, August 15, 1855.

convention, John Cunningham published "The Principles and Objects of the American Party of South Carolina" and would include the State Council's resolutions in each issue of the *Evening News* until the dissolution of the local party.³⁰

Through the remainder of the summer of 1855 the *Evening News* continued to defend Know Nothingism and attack the growing influence of the nation's immigrants. To those critics of Know Nothingism who argued that the South had little to fear from foreign-born residents, Cunningham countered that immigration had a very real effect on the South, because it swelled the ranks of the abolitionists in the North and increased that section's representation in Congress. As for Charleston's substantial population of German and Irish immigrants, the *Evening News* asserted that the German Friendly Society and the Hibernian Society--represented by some of the city's most prominent and prosperous citizens--had organized for purely political ends and sought to gain control of municipal affairs.³¹

Not surprisingly, Charleston's Know Nothing order, continually condemned as the party of the "Republicans and abolitionists," also had to defend regularly its loyalty to the principles of states' rights and slavery. The election of several recognized abolitionists and free-soilers as American party congressmen, including Henry Wilson of Massachusetts and John P. Hale of New Hampshire in 1855, as

³⁰Charleston *Evening News*, August 16, 1855.

³¹Charleston *Evening News*, July 31, August 21, 1855.

well as the passage of antislavery resolutions by the Massachusetts and New Hampshire state councils of the American party, undoubtedly weakened efforts to mobilize support for the American party in the South. In addition, the results of the American party's national convention, held in Philadelphia in June of 1855, strengthened the arguments of anti-Know Nothing groups throughout the South.³²

Southern delegates attending the Philadelphia convention attempted to steer the assembly away from the issue of slavery. Kenneth Rayner of North Carolina even introduced a resolution declaring that "the question of slavery does not come within the preview [*sic*] of the objects of this organization." Yet by the end of the convention the party had experienced a serious rupture over the slavery question; a majority of the northern delegates, unable to equivocate on the issue of the peculiar institution, repudiated the party's Philadelphia platform, nearly seceded from the order, and ultimately fused with the Republicans for the coming presidential election. In Charleston, opponents of Know Nothingism must have welcomed the news from Philadelphia that clearly foreshadowed the ultimate demise of the American party as a national political organization. Moreover, the well-publicized failure of the American party to defeat Henry A. Wise in

³²Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York, 1992), 146-50, 163.

Virginia's recent gubernatorial contest had only further underscored the weakness of the party in the South.³³

Despite the American party's damaging setbacks across the nation, and the obvious ideological isolation of the party's chief spokesman in Charleston, John Cunningham continued to prepare the party for the November municipal elections. At a public meeting of the local party on September 11, 1855, Charleston's Know Nothing lodges, representing each of the city's wards, convened to nominate F. D. Richardson, former representative in the South Carolina legislature, as mayoral candidate in the upcoming contest. The assembled supporters of Know Nothingism also adopted the platform of the party's State Council and reaffirmed their support for reform in municipal affairs. In addition, the eight ward councils, with the endorsement of an enthusiastic crowd, tendered the nominations of candidates to fill the sixteen seats on the city council. The Know Nothing slate offered voters a fairly diverse group of candidates in terms of occupational background.³⁴ Yet the nomination of

³³In Virginia's 1855 gubernatorial contest Democrat Henry A. Wise squared off against American party candidate Thomas Flournoy. Considered one of the most bitter campaigns in Virginia political history, the contest was regarded as a significant test of Know Nothing strength in the South as a whole. Although Flournoy was expected to offer a strong challenge to the popular Wise, the Democrats handed the American party a substantial defeat from which Know Nothingism in Virginia never recovered. Some scholars suggest that this campaign, constituting a referendum on Know Nothing principles in the South, demonstrated the weakness of the movement beyond the arena of local politics. Ibid., 162-71; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 128-33; Charles H. Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago, 1910), 303-04; Henry T. Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861* (Richmond, 1934), 48.

³⁴The Know Nothing ticket included: F. D. Richardson, attorney and a director of the Santee Canal Co.; attorneys William Lloyd, and George S. Bryan; John H. Brawley, a dry goods merchant and director of the Commercial Insurance Co.; cotton factors E. H. Rodgers and Daniel Fairchild; brokers W. S. Gadsden and W. P. Shingler; bank tellers Aaron C. Smith, who served as a director of the Calhoun Building & Loan Association, and J. W. Brown; commission merchant W. B.

several well-known figures with experience in municipal affairs demonstrated that the American party in Charleston still needed the support of the community's more prominent citizens to bolster the ticket's chances. Moreover, the selection of such individuals, including directors from the Farmer's & Exchange Bank, Union Bank, and Charleston Commercial Insurance Company, ideally added legitimacy to the party's promise to exercise fiscal responsibility.³⁵

One week later, September 18, 1855, supporters of the Southern Rights & Anti-Know Nothing party gathered to announce the nomination of William Porcher Miles. Although a political novice stood at the front of the Southern Rights ticket, the city council slate represented the most successful of Charleston's citizens. Indeed, the Southern Rights nominees, like the majority of candidates who participated in the contests of 1852 and 1853, were bound together by more than their political affiliation. They were further united by their membership in Charleston's various social and charitable organization, such as the Charleston Mechanic Society, Fellowship Society, and Library Association. Moreover, a majority of these Southern Rights candidates served as directors of the city's

Smith, a director of the Union Bank; S. S. Farrar, a grocer and director of the Farmers' & Exchange Bank; shipwright Joseph S. Addison; carpenter Lewis Rebb; clerk Albert Elfe; comptroller William J. Laval, a director of the South Carolina Building & Loan Association; and railroad car builder Edward Addison. *Charleston . . . Directory for 1855*, passim; *Charleston City Directory . . . for 1856*, passim.

³⁵*Charleston Evening News*, September 11, 1855; *Charleston Courier*, November 6, 1855; *Charleston . . . Directory for 1855*, passim; *Charleston City Directory . . . for 1856*, passim.

banks. No doubt the party's leaders reasoned that their prominence, coupled with the popularity of William Porcher Miles, guaranteed success.³⁶

The announcement of Miles' candidacy surely surprised and possibly disappointed the Know Nothing party, which probably had expected to face the incumbent mayor Thomas L. Hutchinson, a seasoned veteran of Charleston's municipal campaigns and easy victor in the most recent mayoral contest against John Schnierle. Miles' nomination proves particularly unusual when one considers the economic and political status enjoyed by the town's elite. Such unexpected action, in fact, suggests that Charleston's leaders, far from feeling secure in their political hegemony, regarded nervously the rising threat of Know Nothingism. Doubtless familiar with the well-publicized successes of American party candidates in other southern cities, Charleston's elite charted an unconventional course to combat the novelty of Know Nothingism. Therefore,

³⁶The Southern Rights ticket for city council included: Robert N. Gourdin, a factor and member of the Charleston Port Society; John Drummond, a boot and shoe merchant; E. W. Edgerton, tailor and director of the Fireman's Insurance Co. and Carolina Gas Co.; physician Dr. William T. Wragg; Otis Mills, grain merchant, member of the Charleston Port Society, and director of the Union Bank, Charleston & Savannah Railroad, and Carolina Gas Co.; William H. Gilliland, dry goods merchant, member of the Hibernian Society and Fellowship Society, and director of the Bank of Charleston and the Charleston Building and Loan Association; William Kirkwood, shipwright, a director of the Charleston Savings Bank and member of the Mechanic Association; commission merchant Edwin H. Locke; Samuel J. Wagner, merchant and a director of the Charleston Savings Bank; William McBurney, merchant, member of the Hibernian Society, and a director of the Bank of South Carolina, Charleston Savings Bank, Commercial Insurance Co., and Carolina Gas Co.; John H. Steinmeyer, sawmill operator, member of the German Friendly Society, Library Association, president of the Mechanic Association, and a director of the Bank of South Carolina; Estell I. Adams, a cotton factor; William H. Houston, owner of a construction business, member of the Hibernian Society, Fellowship Society, Mechanic Society, and a director of the People's Bank; Dr. William Hume, an instructor at the Citadel; James M. Eason, shipwright, member of the Library Association and Mechanic Society, and director of the Charleston Bridge Co.; and Benjamin F. Evans, a stationer. *Charleston Mercury*, September 18, 1855; *Charleston Courier*, November 6, 1855; *Charleston Mercury*, November 6, 1855; *Charleston . . . Directory for 1855*, passim; *Charleston City Directory . . . for 1856*, passim.

organizers of the Southern Rights ticket, now labeled as a party hostile to the idea of reform and facing a new political organization of undetermined popularity, likely realized that the incumbent mayor, having served since 1852, could not act as standard-bearer in the upcoming election. Besides, Hutchinson's long affiliation with the Hibernian Society also would provide ammunition for John Cunningham's attacks against Irish influence in municipal affairs. Instead, Southern Rights leaders probably reasoned that their candidate should have little connection to the municipal administrations of recent years. Their candidate also needed to appear amenable to the popular demand for reform in order to co-opt that plank in the local Know Nothing platform.³⁷

To that end, the Southern Rights party addressed a letter to Norfolk offering the nomination to Miles; he agreed to accept the candidacy, but only if it did not require his immediate return to Charleston. Miles' sacrifice for the fever-plagued citizens of Norfolk provided a powerful propaganda weapon for those guiding his campaign, and made the candidate even more popular with local voters. Upon his return to Charleston just weeks before the election, Miles was greeted as a hero. Nevertheless, the campaign for the mayoralty and city council involved more than just the charisma or heroism of the candidates.³⁸

Apparently voters' greatest concern in terms of local affairs was reform; according to John Cunningham, Charlestonians wanted more effective yet more

³⁷Charleston *Evening News*, September 15, 18, 1855.

³⁸*Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men*, vol. I, 659-61.

efficient management of the port's affairs. As early as the autumn of 1854, before the mobilization of a Know Nothing movement in Charleston, Cunningham had employed the pages of the *Evening News* to excoriate the city's leadership. One editorial declared:

The crisis of city affairs has never been so serious as now in the whole history of our municipal concerns. Its finances are in apparent confusion. Its credit has suffered injury, judging from the depreciation of its stock. A city government in its administrative branches demand restraining regulations. Why should there be a higher claim of immunity from error, haste, impulse, rashness, in those collectively delegated with municipal power, than in those with whom are lodged the executive functions? We propose, therefore, that a memorial should be prepared to the Legislature requiring such an amendment of the city charter as will, in the government of Charleston, give to its citizens the security of a Council formed by two branches, differently constituted.

Cunningham also concluded that the "tax-paying citizens" played no role in the affairs of municipal government and issued a call for a November public

"Indignation Meeting" to protest the management of Charleston's finances.

Furthermore, calls for reform went beyond the issue of fiscal responsibility and included support for changes in the existing quarantine legislation and stricter enforcement of the laws to guard against the epidemics which had become an all too common feature of life in America's busy ports. Although these early calls for change apparently produced little result, the organization of a new political party in the following year would provide Cunningham and his supporters a platform for this reform agenda.³⁹

³⁹Charleston *Evening News*, October 11, 16, 25, November 20, 30, 1854.

Recognizing the potency of this issue, the *Evening News*, in a letter signed "Reform," declared that with a Know Nothing victory "a new broom will sweep clean." The *Courier* as well observed that the under the incumbent administration the "disbursement of the City Fund" had dramatically increased Charleston's debt and consequently multiplied the tax burden of the average citizen. "For the past three years," the *Courier* reminded voters, "have they been increasing almost two-fold, and a farther [sic] prospect of increase now threatens." Yet the *Courier* could find no evidence of mismanagement among municipal officers. That Charleston's debt and the tax burden of citizens would multiply as the city increased its expenditures on internal improvement schemes and programs to improve streets, lighting, and drainage is not surprising. Recognizing that fact, one must conclude that John Cunningham was merely attempting to make the city council and the administration of Thomas Hutchinson scapegoats for Charleston's economic weaknesses. In endorsing the candidacy of William Porcher Miles, the *Courier*, in an editorial signed by "A Warning Voice," also highlighted the record of Know Nothing-controlled municipal governments in other cities. For example, the American party administrations in both Philadelphia and New York--according to the *Philadelphia Pennsylvanian*--had allegedly driven those cities to the brink of bankruptcy. Whether or not such reports were true was irrelevant; the lesson for Charleston's voters was obvious. The American party, despite its talk of reform and retrenchment, could be counted on to spend freely and, as the press implied, perhaps even profit at the public's expense. Even the *Mercury*, citing the city's

commercial difficulties and echoing the *Courier's* distrust, advised voters to exercise prudence in their selection of a new mayor and council.⁴⁰

In the last weeks of the canvass both parties, now engaged in a frenzied battle for votes, held numerous public meetings, dinners, and torchlight rallies to win the support of undecided citizens. On the day before the election the Southern Rights party staged an "Anti-Know Nothing Meeting" which concluded with a march through the streets. The American party as well attempted to generate enthusiasm among voters. Speaking before a crowd of Know Nothing supporters shortly before the election, F. D. Richardson queried:

Shall she [Charleston] be governed by the 'bone and sinew' of her people, and no longer by the foreign vote? Shall her fate be decided by bribery and corruption, or the integrity and good sense of the permanent population? Shall a 'long purse' and demagogues rule her, or the intelligence and interests of the mass of the *home* community? Charleston must be redeemed! Gold--gold must no more be her arbiter, than it is the object of her worship, and the touchstone of her principles.

While the *Mercury* observed that the campaign had generated more public enthusiasm and furor than any municipal contest in recent memory, Jacob F. Schirmer perhaps understated the degree of excitement by noting in his diary that "both parties [were] very sanguine."⁴¹

The Know Nothing and Southern Rights parties also continued their editorial assaults. Referring to the opposition as "the Alien-Romanist party--the

⁴⁰Ibid., September 15, 1855; Charleston *Courier*, October 23, November 6, 1855; Charleston *Mercury*, August 13, 1855.

⁴¹Charleston *Mercury*, November 6, 1855; Charleston *Evening News*, October 27, 1855; "Diaries of Jacob F. Schirmer, 1853-1860," November 7, 1855, South Carolina Historical Society.

sachems of Hibernian Hall," the *Evening News* speculated that Charleston's Irish and German residents would resort to violence on election day to keep American party voters away from the polls. The "Hibernian Democracy," John Cunningham declared, would likewise resort to corruption and bribery to secure victory. On November 5 a story in the *Evening News*, citing a local law which prohibited any non-commissioned officer or private of the city guard to vote in municipal contests, alleged that Mayor Hutchinson had discharged 15 sergeants, 8 corporals, and 49 privates so they could vote in the election. Even more revealing in terms of the local American party's campaign rhetoric were the accusations that Southern Rights candidates had used their commercial and social influence to coerce voters. One of John Cunningham's editorials noted that "party prejudices accompany them [American party supporters] into bank parlors, into business connections, into the relation between employer and employee. . . . Loans, contracts and wages are made mediums of control over individual opinion."⁴²

Considering the nature of antebellum politics and the pressure often brought to bear against potentially recalcitrant voters, such complaints were probably justified for both parties. But Cunningham's editorials also betrayed a subtle class or status anxiety as well. In advocating reform, particularly in the area of the city debt and taxation, the Know Nothing press argued that Charleston's patricians paid scant attention to the burdens of native-born working class citizens who were least able to afford municipal extravagance and faced

⁴²Charleston *Evening News*, October 27, November 5, 1855.

increasing competition from slave and immigrant labor. Significantly, this kind of rhetoric highlights a rarely studied aspect of southern urban history, namely the increasingly tense relationship among immigrant, native-born, free black, and slave laborers. Cunningham and the organizers of the American party in Charleston at least comprehended this problem, and more importantly, pragmatically recognized its value as a political issue to mobilize dissatisfied workers. In that sense, therefore, the Know Nothing order in Charleston, despite its radical departure from the mainstream of the American party, resembled the movement as it had formed in northeastern cities like Boston. And although unsuccessful, such class-based politics underscored the changing dynamics of southern urban life. As Randall Miller has emphasized in his analysis of the effects of immigration on the South's urban centers, the region's cities "were becoming seedbeds of modern social and economic change," and thus challenged the traditional rural and agrarian focus of the urban South.⁴³

Nevertheless, in spite of John Cunningham's efforts to highlight reform and the problems experienced by Charleston's native-born workers, the *Mercury* and the *Courier*, in affirming their support for the Southern Rights campaign, remained focused on the American party as a national political organization, and thus highlighted the problems that plagued the larger Know Nothing movement. The Know Nothing press complained that the Southern Rights candidates

⁴³Ibid., October 27, 1855; Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Studies* 24 (1985): 32-34, 43-44, 52; Richard B. Morris, "Labor Militancy in the Old South," *Labor and Nation* (1948): 32-36; Klebaner, "Public Poor Relief," 218-20.

employed national political issues to deceive voters and turn the public's attention away from more immediate local concerns. In an editorial letter to the citizens of Charleston, Know Nothing mayoral candidate F. D. Richardson even attempted to deflect such attacks by stressing the distinctiveness of municipal and national affairs. Unfortunately for Richardson, Cunningham, and the Know Nothing ticket, the party never could escape identification with the national movement that by this time had begun to disintegrate along sectional lines.⁴⁴

On election day, November 6, 1855, Charleston's voters, after months of bitter campaigning and a bombastic editorial war between the city's partisan organs, finally went to the polls to decide the fate of the American party. While town officials worried that the hostility of the canvass would contribute to unrest at the polls--"Rows and Rowdyism" according to the *Evening News*--reports from Charleston's wards suggested that there were no significant disturbances between voters of the opposing parties. According to the election returns over 2,000 citizens had cast their ballots in the mayoral contest (see Table 4-1).⁴⁵

Yet unlike Wilmington, where the excitement of Know Nothing mobilization had generated increasingly higher voter turnouts over the life of the new party, Charleston witnessed a slight decrease in voter participation. This decline seems even more peculiar when one considers that the most recent election, in which 3,643 citizens cast their ballots, was a contest for sheriff.

⁴⁴Charleston *Courier*, November 6, 1855; Charleston *Mercury*, November 4, 5, 1855; Charleston *Evening News*, September 21, October 1, 1855.

⁴⁵Charleston *Mercury* November 8, 1855; Charleston *Courier*, November 9, 1855.

Judging from the American party's record in Wilmington and the nation, the Charleston mayoral election of November 1855 should have drawn either a comparable or larger number of citizens. What happened in Charleston to precipitate such a decrease?

One possible cause of this diminution could be popular disgust with the tactics of both parties. The angry rhetoric of the local press, regular excoriation of the town's authorities, rumors and threats of violence, and the constant public parade of the party faithful might have contributed to voter apathy. The more likely reason was the changing popular perception of the American party between July and November of 1855. At the time of the sheriff's election Know Nothingism still held the attraction of novelty and secrecy. Enticed by its success in other cities, somewhat sympathetic to the language of nativism, and attracted to the promise of reform, many of Charleston's citizens apparently rallied to the new party. By November, however, the *Courier* and the *Mercury* had discredited the American party as an order at odds with southern institutions and ideology. And, significantly, events in the North seemed to confirm such reports. By the autumn of 1855 the national party seemed poised to divide along sectional lines and increasing numbers of northern American party leaders had either forged alliances with or defected entirely to the growing Republican party. To the southern voter and potential American party adherent this political marriage of Know Nothingism and abolitionism represented an untenable situation. Finally, comparing voter turnout in the other mayoral elections of this period one

discovers that the results of the 1855 contest were not unusual, as seen in Table 4-1. In fact, voter participation in the 1855 election, comparable to previous and succeeding campaigns, compels one to observe that the efforts of neither the States' Rights nor the American party had a substantial effect on voters' likelihood to appear at the polls or alter their political loyalties. Moreover, despite his popularity and reputation, William Porcher Miles failed to draw support equivalent to John E. Carew and Charles E. Kanapaux, candidates in the campaign for sheriff. And, Miles only barely surpassed the vote polled by Thomas L. Hutchinson in the mayoral contest of 1853.

Regardless of the turnout, the election had yielded a victory of the Southern Rights ticket over the Know Nothing candidates. William Porcher Miles, with 1260 votes, secured a 427 vote majority over F. D. Richardson, who, despite his political experience, polled only 833 (see Table 4-1). Not surprisingly, Miles polled easy majorities in the city's first four wards that housed the more prosperous and prominent citizens of Meeting and King Streets. Only in the seventh ward--a district of working class housing, small shops, taverns, and warehouses--did Richardson secure a majority over Miles. Clearly citizens' suspicion of or ambivalence toward the American party and its creed had overshadowed any advantage created by Richardson's previous political service to Charleston. In addition, Dr. H. V. Toomer, mayoral candidate for an independent ticket that had simply nominated the Southern Rights ticket for city council, received only 7 votes in the contest. In the contest for city council each

of the Know Nothing nominees lost to the Southern Rights candidates who likewise averaged majorities of over 400 votes. Again, the seventh ward provided majorities for the American party's councilmanic candidates, but victory in that single district was not nearly sufficient to offset the Southern Rights triumph in every other ward.⁴⁶ Not surprisingly, the *Evening News* claimed that at least 300 illegal votes had been cast in the election. The Know Nothing press also argued that prior to election day the American party could count on the support of at least 1200 loyal citizens; they had simply failed to vote for Mr. Richardson. John Cunningham noted bitterly that "Treachery within has done its work." Only days after the election, he proclaimed that the American party in Charleston would remain active in spite of the defeat. "Americans! Rally," the American party press declared on November 8, summoning the remnants of the defeated order. "Our strength is sufficient to command respect . . . we can give victory to those who shall *least* pander to alien influence, and be *most true* to South Carolina." Nevertheless, just two days later the *Evening News* sounded less optimistic for the immediate fate of Know Nothingism in Charleston.

The organization . . . will no doubt disband itself. From its ashes a new party will arise--a genuine, public, undismayed American party. A party disconnected in origin and association from all factions. A party that will have nothing to do with National Conventions or caucuses. A party determined to kill off foreign Abolitionism in our country.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Southern Rights candidates averaged 43 votes in the seventh ward, while the Know Nothing candidates averaged 80.

⁴⁷Charleston *Evening News*, November 8, 9, 10, 12, 1855; Charleston *Courier*, November 9, 10, 1855.

Only a week later, November 17, 1855, the *Evening News* published the obituary of Charleston's American party.

It will be observed from the action of the American Council here, that the present organization of the American Order at Charleston is virtually abandoned. It is the end of what has been called Know Nothingism in our city. The name, and all which has peculiarly distinguished it, apart from the principle that "Americans shall rule America," have been repudiated and consigned to oblivion.

The Charleston Grand Council of the American party passed resolutions formally dissolving the organization, while the *Evening News* ceased publication of national, state, and local Know Nothing platforms. Although a few Know Nothing supporters in Charleston issued an appeal to continue the party, John Cunningham and the rest of the town obviously ignored it. Hastily organized and hurriedly disbanded, the American party in Charleston had failed entirely in its effort to gain control of the municipal government.⁴⁸

Conversely, William Porcher Miles proved earnest in his efforts to improve Charleston and during his two years as mayor he labored to institute a number of significant reforms. Deeply influenced by his experience in Norfolk, he secured the passage of ordinances improving local sanitation and tightening the system of quarantine for in-bound ships. He also worked to diminish Charleston's debt and subscribed no new funds for railroad construction. However, Miles was best remembered for his campaign to improve the city's police, for Charleston's City Guard--commonly known as "Paddy Miles' Bull Dogs"--was transformed into a

⁴⁸Charleston *Evening News*, November 17, 20, 1855.

full-time, uniformed force that numbered 265 men and officers by 1856. Miles employed a professional chief of police and advocated increased patrols in the city's more troublesome districts. Although some residents complained of the expense of these law enforcement improvements⁴⁹ and argued that Miles' efforts constituted "meddling tyranny," such measures were clearly progressive by mid-nineteenth century southern standards. Miles' efforts even elicited the praise of John Cunningham's *Evening News*.⁵⁰

For the most part, Miles' term as mayor of Charleston could be deemed a success. He had certainly achieved most of his goals and had no doubt satisfied many of the demands tendered in the local American party's 1855 platform.

Miles' sense of duty even included policing his own conduct. On one occasion

the Mayor reported a case on his own premises of neglect to have a platform from the street to the sidewalk, in front of his carriage house, plead guilty and paid the fine himself, which was five dollars according to the ordinance in such cases made and provided.

His popularity and success as mayor ultimately paved the way for a successful congressional campaign in 1856. Yet because of his sense of duty, Miles would not take his seat in Washington, D.C. until the end of his mayoral term in late 1857. Reelected to the U.S. House in 1858 and 1860, he would also represent

⁴⁹By 1857 yearly expenditures on law enforcement in Charleston were roughly \$100,000, or nearly twice the amount budgeted prior to 1856.

⁵⁰Smith, "William Porcher Miles," 31-38; *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men*, vol. I, 659-61; Miles, *Mayor's Report on City Affairs*, 16; Jordan, "Police Power in Antebellum Charleston," 128-33; Edward P. Cantwell, "A History of the Charleston Police Force," in *City of Charleston Year Book: 1908* (Charleston, 1909), 9-11; Williams, *Vogues in Villainy*, 73; *Charleston Evening News*, December 8, 1855.

South Carolina in the Confederate Congress after brief military service in the initial campaigns of the Civil War.⁵¹

Among the other actors in Charleston's political drama of 1855, John Cunningham, reportedly embittered by the rapid demise of Know Nothingism, continued to edit the *Evening News* and involved himself in Charleston's political life. In July of 1856 he reportedly fought a duel with J. L. Hatch, editor of the Charleston *Daily Standard* over supposed insults published by Hatch's paper; neither party was injured in the affair. Cunningham also challenged William Porcher Miles, candidate of the Southern Rights party, in the congressional contest of October 1856. Heading the "Palmetto Ticket," Cunningham received only 323 votes to Miles' 1,852 and James Gadsden's 1,521.⁵²

As for Charleston's municipal authorities, the Southern Rights party, despite regular opposition, continued to dominate the mayoralty and city council for the rest of the decade. In the 1857 municipal contest, for example, former Know Nothing F. D. Richardson ran as the mayoral candidate for the Economy, Retrenchment, and Reform ticket. Complaining of the "heavy burden of taxation" which plagued Charleston, the *Courier* remarked:

If another administration like the present should be allowed to grasp the Municipal reins, without giving us some guarantee for that course of administrative policy that will ensure judicious and economical measures in regard to the expenditures of the public

⁵¹Charleston *Evening News*, December 20, 1855; Smith, "William Porcher Miles," 38.

⁵²Edmund R. Stuart to Claudia Stuart, August 14, 1855, Stuart Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society; Charleston *Mercury*, July 30, 1856, October 8, 11, 17, 1856; *Cyclopedia of Eminent and Representative Men*, vol. I, 659-61.

money, they may, like the reckless Pharaoh of old, drive us in the gilded chariot of "City debt" into the raging billows of the Red Sea, or the yawning gulf of desperation.

In addition, the *Courier* criticized the reorganization of Charleston's law enforcement system and questioned the efficacy "of so ponderous an organization" in such a "peaceable and quiet community." Despite the popularity of the mayor, now preparing to take his seat in the U.S. House, clearly not every Charlestonian had agreed with the policies of William Porcher Miles and the city council.⁵³

During the campaign Richardson labored to attract a broad base of support in the city and, with an irony that did not escape the *Courier*, even struggled to secure the backing of Charleston's immigrant residents. On November 3, 1857, he appeared at a large public meeting held at Hibernian Hall and also appealed to the local German populace in a letter written in the German language. Nevertheless, he could not escape association with the American party. Even the *Courier*, which had supported the platform of the Economy, Retrenchment, and Reform ticket, questioned whether Richardson had renounced Know Nothing principles entirely.⁵⁴

On election day, November 6, Charleston's voters rejected Richardson again by giving Southern Rights candidate Charles Macbeth, a local planter and prominent attorney, a total of 1204 votes and a slim majority of only 123 (see Table 4-1). Richardson polled 1081 votes, over 200 more than he had received as

⁵³Charleston *Mercury*, November 4, 1857; Charleston *Courier*, October 28, 31, November 2, 3, 1855.

⁵⁴Charleston *Courier*, November 3, 4, 1857; Charleston *Mercury*, October 27, 1857.

the candidate of the American party, suggesting that in 1855 his affiliation with the Know Nothing movement proved a formidable liability at the polls. A number of citizens noted that many voters realized a defeat for Macbeth would result in the reversal of Miles' reforms. Commenting on the conduct of the campaign, Jacob Schirmer noted in his diary that "plenty of money [had been] used" by both candidates to secure votes. But to the *Courier* the defeat of Richardson, albeit by a narrow margin, constituted the final rejection of Know Nothingism in Charleston, even if Richardson did not actually represent the now-defunct party.⁵⁵

Two years later Charleston's citizens again cast their votes in an election for mayor and city council. But by the autumn of 1859 the tenor of political debate in Charleston had obviously changed. If, in years past, the city's residents had perhaps seemed obsessive over slavery and the safety of white citizens, John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, Virginia in late October turned obsession into panic. As Steven Channing pointed out in his study of South Carolina during the secession crisis, John Brown's raid "struck at the deepest and most intimate anxieties of the white South."⁵⁶

Significantly, Brown's attack occurred just weeks prior to Charleston's municipal elections. The rhetoric of reform, class division, and nativism, so loudly

⁵⁵Charleston *Courier*, November 6, 1857; Smith, "William Porcher Miles," 38; "Diaries of Jacob F. Schirmer, 1853-1860," November 4, 1857, South Carolina Historical Society.

⁵⁶Charleston *Courier*, October 18, 21, 25, 1859; Charleston *Mercury*, October 21, 1855; Channing, *Crisis of Fear*, 20-25; Freehling, *Road to Disunion*, 178.

debated in previous contests, was now discarded in the wake of outrage and fear; the politics of Know Nothingism had failed to slow the tide of sectionalism. Just days after Brown's capture the *Courier* published a letter from "Many Voters and Slaveholders" calling for the candidates to offer their views on the safety of Charleston's citizens. These voters also pledged to support those candidates committed to enforcing vigorously the laws that applied to slave conduct.⁵⁷

The mayoral candidates, Charles Macbeth, incumbent, and John E. Carew, sheriff, addressed large meetings of voters at Hibernian and Institute halls in the city to reaffirm their resolve to maintain order in Charleston. On election day, November 2, voters gave mayor Macbeth 1250 votes over Carew's 950. Apparently voters felt more comfortable with the present administration over Carew--rumored to have been the American party's secret candidate for sheriff in 1855--who now represented the Reform and Retrenchment ticket. Without fanfare the Charleston *Evening News*, once the chief organ of Know Nothingism and reform, simply endorsed Carew's candidacy. But by 1859 John Cunningham no longer involved himself directly in the city's political affairs.⁵⁸

Considering its brief existence and failure to secure political office, did Know Nothingism have any impact in Charleston? Judging from the numerous studies of antebellum South Carolina, and more specifically Charleston, one might consider the American party inconsequential to the town's political life in the

⁵⁷Charleston *Courier*, November 1, 1859.

⁵⁸Ibid., November 4, 1859.

decade prior to the Civil War. Nevertheless, the *mobilization* of the party in Charleston had some measurable effect, even if that legacy cannot be counted in electoral victories or significant voter support. For example, Know Nothingism certainly complicated the battle between South Carolina's Democratic factions, because the American party offered an alternative to those moderate Democrats seeking a new political home outside of the national Democratic party. They believed--albeit briefly--that the American party could reconcile South Carolina to the Union. Ultimately, however, National and States' Rights Democrats in South Carolina effected an alliance of sorts to defeat the abolition-stained Know Nothing insurgency.⁵⁹

At the local level, the sudden appearance of the order in 1855 more than likely prompted Charleston's political leaders to consider a new course in the municipal contests of that year. John Cunningham's outspoken appeal to local voters and his strenuous efforts to portray the American party in Charleston as *the party* of states' rights, no doubt forced Southern Rights spokesmen and editors of the *Mercury* to redefine the focus of the campaign for the mayoralty and city council. In previous contests, such as the elections of 1852 and 1853, they could assume that the stature of their candidates would insure victory. Indeed, without the threat of Know Nothing opposition, and this new party's insistence on reform, the Southern Rights party might not have tendered the surprising nomination of

⁵⁹Cauthen, "The Secession Movement Before 1860," 139; Laura A. White, "The National Democrats in South Carolina, 1852-1860," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 28 (1929): 372; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 70.

William Porcher Miles. Moreover, without Miles' strong leadership as mayor, Charleston might not have witnessed such significant reform after 1855. Yet Know Nothingism in Charleston had other effects as well.

One can speculate, for example, that the advent of Know Nothingism more than likely stimulated a proliferation of political opposition groups after 1855. In addition to the Economy, Retrenchment and Reform ticket of the 1857 mayoral campaign, there was the Conservative ticket, the Genuine Conservative & Southern Rights Democratic ticket, Palmetto ticket, Freedom of the Press ticket, and a Mechanics' Rights ticket. More importantly, each of the citizens' groups responsible for such tickets organized in opposition to the Southern Rights party that had backed the candidacies of William Porcher Miles and Charles Macbeth. The continued volatility of municipal politics suggests that some citizens remained dissatisfied with the existing political order.⁶⁰

Although the Southern Rights party retained its hold on the reins of power in Charleston, the development of these factions undoubtedly highlighted the greater complexity of local politics and revealed the increasing tension behind socio-economic relations within the community. Immigration, economic regression, and increasing competition for employment had, according to John Cunningham at least, paved the way for reform sentiment in the city. And, depending on how one views the rise of William Porcher Miles, the appearance of Know Nothingism possibly made Charleston's leaders more responsive to--or

⁶⁰Charleston *Mercury*, October 10, 11, 14, 1856; Charleston *Courier*, October 28, 1857, October 31, 1859.

afraid of--the public will. Ultimately, however, Know Nothingism, despite the peculiar hybridization of the American party in Charleston, could never compete with the politics of sectionalism.⁶¹

In addition, the inability of South Carolinians to cast their ballots in presidential elections further restricted the opportunity of local Know Nothings to mobilize Charleston voters. Certainly any student of the second American party system recognizes the great significance of presidential campaigns in terms of voter mobilization or loyalty and the creation of partisan political symbols. And, despite the importance of state and local contests in the dissemination of party ideology, the presidential campaigns still played a critical role in defining the tenor of political dialogue in the decades prior to the Civil War. In 1855 the most zealous among American party adherents surely looked to the next year's presidential contest, and the excitement generated by such a national campaign, to strengthen the movement at every level of politics. In Charleston--indeed, in all of South Carolina--Know Nothing leaders could do little to exploit the energy of the upcoming campaign. As Know Nothings in other southern states struggled to maintain party unity and prepared to back, reluctantly, the candidacy of Millard Fillmore, the order in South Carolina simply evaporated.

Yet even if Charleston's Know Nothing supporters had possessed the opportunity to cast their ballots in the presidential contest of 1856, it would have been unlikely for John Cunningham, as the order's guiding figure in the city, to

⁶¹Charleston *Courier*, October 21, 1859.

support the national American party ticket and campaign for Millard Fillmore and Andrew Jackson Donelson. Cunningham had already voiced explicitly his opposition to a Fillmore nomination in the pages of the *Evening News* well before the Fillmore-Donelson ticket ever became a reality.

Finally, in assessing the character of Know Nothingism in Charleston, one is drawn back to Cunningham and his significant leadership over the local party and its formation. Chronicler of the Know Nothing movement's genesis, development, and rapid demise, he represented Charleston's American party adherents at the order's South Carolina convention, traveled to Philadelphia to play a role in the party's national convention, and at home assumed primary responsibility for defining the local party's principles. Cunningham attacked the policies of the city government, appealed to Charleston's working class citizens in the pages of the *Evening News*, and employed the rhetoric of nativism in an effort to exploit any ill-feeling which might have been harbored against the city's substantial German and Irish populace. He even offered himself as a candidate to oppose William Porcher Miles in an election for the U.S. House. But what motivated John Cunningham to assume such a prominent role in the mobilization of the American party in that city?

Considering his actions both before and after the advent of the Know Nothing movement, Cunningham appeared to be motivated primarily by a desire to challenge the existing political establishment in Charleston and secure political influence for himself. The American party, despite its apparent incompatibility

with local political values, offered a means of effecting that challenge, even if the Know Nothing creed demanded modification to suit local prejudices. Thus, John Cunningham stands as the consummate pragmatic political figure. And, more than anything else, the development of the American party in Charleston was a product of his efforts.

Chapter V

"Freedom for Foreigners But Supremacy for Ourselves": The American Party in Savannah, Georgia

Visitors to Savannah, often awaiting passage upriver to the plantations and towns of the Georgia upcountry, typically appeared charmed by the spectacle of the state's principal port. Yet the town, perched on a sandy bluff some 40 to 60 feet above the Savannah river, hardly offered the skyline of spires and spacious verandas afforded visitors of Charleston, South Carolina. Indeed, to uninitiated travelers disembarking from the steamers which called at Savannah's wharves, the town seemed comprised of only warehouses and their harried employees--slave and free--racing to handle the traffic of arriving and departing cargoes. Those with the time to escape the din of the wharves and ascend the hill, however, would discover a city offering the amenities of any southern rival. Although no doubt attracted to the numerous churches and substantial homes of Savannah's commercial elite, visitors were perhaps most impressed with the orderly design of the town's primary streets. Intersecting at right angles, these unpaved avenues, forming the boundaries of numerous shaded squares, were lined with Pride-of-India trees and represented a visible legacy of James Oglethorpe's original design for the city. In fact, as a result of its bucolic appearance, Savannah often deceived its guests who scarcely suspected that the city ranked high among the

South's leading ports. Even Frederick Law Olmsted concluded that the town possessed "a curiously rural and modest aspect, for a place of its population and commerce." Thus Savannah, like Charleston, reflected the peculiarly rural character so often representative of southern cities. Still, it must be noted that Savannah's importance as one of the southeast's leading urban commercial centers was hardly assured before the 1840s.¹

By the 1830s Savannah, Georgia seemed fated to languish as only a minor port among the South's more prosperous Atlantic coast cities. Indeed, at the start of the decade, neighboring Charleston, having long surpassed Savannah in terms of commercial activity and prosperity, prepared to strengthen its economic hold on the South Carolina backcountry and threatened to divert the trade of Augusta and eastern Georgia away from Savannah's wharves. Fearing increased competition from neighboring cities and anxiously attentive to the slow pace of recovery in the decade following the Panic of 1819, Charleston's citizens sought to ameliorate their city's sagging commercial fortunes and responded with the chartering of the Charleston & Hamburg Railroad Company in 1828. By 1830 eager subscribers had pledged over \$500,000 to the fledgling line and a year later workers began hammering the first wrought iron rails to the pine timbers which reached into the South Carolina backcountry. In 1833, jubilant Charlestonians

¹"Great Cities of the United States: Savannah, Georgia," *DeBow's Review* 17 (1854): 245; "Commercial Cities and Towns of the United States: The City of Savannah, Georgia," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine & Commercial Review* 29 (1853): 57; Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; with Remarks on Their Economy* (New York, 1856), 405; David R. Goldfield, "The Urban South: A Regional Framework," *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 1013-14.

celebrated completion of the 136-mile long railroad--considered the longest in the world at the time--and anxiously anticipated construction of additional lines linking the port with the whole interior of the southern states. Charleston, closely following the example of the Baltimore and Ohio line, seemed poised at the genesis of the railroad age, confident of future success.²

Although some members of Savannah's mercantile and political elite looked to Charleston's efforts with skepticism, doubting that the railroad could surpass the immeasurable convenience of the Savannah River, the scheme more than likely worried those merchants and factors who relied heavily on trade with Augusta and her surrounding towns. In fact, just as Charleston launched service on its new railroad in the autumn of 1833, Savannah's citizens, after months of agitation in the press and at public meetings, took the first faltering steps in an endeavor that would permanently alter the social and political character of their city. Construction of the Central Railroad of Georgia, finally completed in 1843, linked Savannah to Macon with 192 miles of track which initiated a period of unprecedented growth for the port. Within a decade, observers of Savannah's progress noted that the Central Railroad "has thus far stimulated the enterprise of our state, far beyond the most sanguine expectations of the advocates of these works." J. D. B. DeBow, always eager to extol the achievements of southern

²Ulrich B. Phillips, *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860* (New York, 1908), 140; "Commercial Cities and Towns," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 29 (1853): 58-59.

industry and commerce, concluded that "the railroad improvements of Georgia are obliged to give her the position of the Keystone State of the South."³

By the 1850s Savannah had earned a place among the region's most important cities and in 1856--following the example of Charleston, Richmond, Memphis, and New Orleans--proudly welcomed delegates to one of the most important southern commercial conventions called during the antebellum period. On the eve of the Civil War a prospering Savannah, now the commercial and financial center for the surrounding plantation country, surpassed Charleston in cotton exports to become the nation's third largest cotton port behind New Orleans and Mobile, thus fulfilling the aspirations of the city's promoters.⁴

More importantly, however, the Central Railroad of Georgia, attracting large numbers of laborers and entrepreneurs to the area, ultimately changed the demographic character of Savannah. In particular, the influx of foreign-born workers, lured by the promise of employment and opportunity, swelled Savannah's population and severely strained the city's resources. This rapid growth after 1830, contributing to higher levels of poverty, disease, and crime, eventually pitted many established residents against more recent immigrants in a popular campaign

³Phillips, *Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt*, 253-54; Herbert Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* (hereafter cited as *GHQ*) 37 (1953): 1-2; "The City of Savannah," *DeBow's Review* 15 (1853): 106; Milton S. Heath, *Constructive Liberalism: The Role of the State in Economic Development in Georgia to 1860* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), 287; J. D. B. DeBow, *The Industrial Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States*, vol. 1 (New Orleans, 1853), 357-60; Richard H. Haunton, "Law and Order in Savannah, 1850-1860," *GHQ* 51 (1967): 1; Charles and Tess Hoffman, *North by South: The Two Lives of Richard James Arnold* (Athens, 1988), 33.

⁴Vicki Vaughn Johnson, *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871* (Columbia, Mo., 1992), 19.

to preserve law and order. And, in the mid-1850s, mounting unrest among the local populace, concomitant with the dissolution of the established partisan political system, would provide an ideal climate for the mobilization of the American party in Savannah.⁵

The unique socio-political environment of the port--surpassing Charleston, Wilmington, and Norfolk in terms of its volatility--ensured that the arrival of Know Nothingism in 1855 would attract either citizens seeking to remedy the city's multiplying problems or those politicians and aspirants for office attempting to exploit the decline of Georgia's Whig party. Copying the tactics characteristic of Know Nothing organizations which had developed in other cities, the American party in Savannah mobilized quickly, exploiting the incipient nativism in the city to secure the election of the mayor and several aldermen in the municipal contest of 1855. The new party also crystallized the debate over the place of immigrants in local society, rallied significant support for Millard Fillmore's presidential candidacy, and then rapidly disappeared as a force in local politics.⁶

To some observers, the hurried visit of "Sam" in Savannah might condemn the episode to the footnotes of the city's past. One could, for example, attribute the movement's arrival to the proliferation of short-lived, reform-minded parties characteristic of the urban political arena during the 1850s. As has already been demonstrated, Charleston experienced the same phenomenon. Savannah as well

⁵Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 1; Haunton, "Law and Order," 1.

⁶*Savannah Daily Morning News*, December 4, 1855, November 12, 1856, October 12, 1857.

witnessed the sudden rise and rapid demise of political groups such as the People's Ticket, active in the municipal contests of 1854, and the Young Men's Independent party, which arose in the wake of the American party's defeat in 1856. Yet to understand properly the instability which defined Savannah's political life in the 1850s and gave rise to the American party, one must examine the nature of the port's growth in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the 1830s and construction of the Central Railroad, Savannah grew only haltingly (see Table 5-1) in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In fact, a number of disastrous setbacks threatened to doom Savannah

Table 5-1
Population of Savannah, Georgia, 1800-1860

Census Year	No. of Residents
1800	5,166
1810	5,215
1820	7,523
1830	7,776
1840	11,214
1850	15,312
1860	22,292

altogether. In 1820, for example, the port suffered through a major fire and, several months later, battled a yellow fever epidemic which prompted over 6,000 of the 7,500 residents to flee the city. The year began with the January

conflagration which, worsened by high winds and the explosion of a large gunpowder supply, destroyed 463 structures, reduced the business district to smoldering ruins, and left between 3,000 and 4,000 people without homes.

Although a national appeal for relief supplies and donations aided in the town's recovery, the spread of yellow fever through the horrible summer of 1820 killed an estimated 700 citizens and further defeated efforts to restore normality to life in Savannah. A decade would pass before the port had recovered fully.⁷

Ultimately, however, Savannah's superior geographic position and the entrepreneurial spirit of its citizens, safeguarded the port's future. During the 1820s and 1830s, for example, even before the construction of railroad lines provided the town with access to a wider regional market, Savannah had gained distinction as an important center for lumber production. This industry employed dozens of residents who staffed the port's sawmills and managed the sawing, stacking, and shipping of Georgia's pine and cypress timber. In fact, the felling and rafting of trees from as far away as Augusta provided jobs for hundreds of people inland, and the impressive volume of timber taken from the region surrounding the Savannah River made Georgia the South's foremost lumber-producing state during the antebellum decades.⁸

⁷E. Merton Coulter, "The Great Savannah Fire of 1820," *GHQ* 23 (1939): 1-27; Joseph I. Waring, "The Yellow Fever Epidemic of Savannah in 1820," *GHQ* 52 (1968): 398-404; M. Foster Farley, "The Mighty Monarch of the South: Yellow Fever in Charleston and Savannah," *Georgia Review* 27 (1973): 56-70; Lawrence H. Larsen, *The Urban South: A History* (Lexington, 1990), 42-43.

⁸John A. Eisterhold, "Savannah: Lumber Center of the South Atlantic," *GHQ* 57 (1973): 526, 538; Clement Eaton, *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860* (New York, 1961), 230.

In addition, although a substantial amount of the Georgia lumber leaving the city went to the domestic market, much was exported to the West Indies, Canada, and Great Britain. Thus by the 1840s the port could boast a thriving and expanding direct trade with Britain that decreased Savannah's dependence on northern shipping. Of course the idea of fostering direct trade between the ports of Europe and the South, espoused by the merchants of Charleston, Wilmington, and Norfolk, represented one of the most important goals of the region's business leaders. Indeed, the significance of this issue was evinced by the anxious discussions of direct trade that punctuated virtually every commercial convention of the antebellum era. For Savannah this realization of direct trade, the growth of Georgia's lumber industry, and the resulting development of a substantial mercantile business no doubt proved responsible for the prosperity that would fuel the local railroad investments of the 1840s and 1850s.⁹

Although the growing lumber industry obviously made recovery possible after 1820, the development of Georgia's extensive railroad network, with over 1,000 miles of track linking Savannah to neighboring states, gave the port its preeminent position in the southern cotton trade. Between 1844 and 1850, the number of cotton bales arriving in the port by railroad increased from 77,437 to 176,031. Yet even the appearance of the railroad, so often responsible for a decline in the fortunes of river and canal trade, did not diminish the commercial significance of the Savannah River. In fact, by the early 1850s, Savannah's

⁹Eisterhold, "Savannah: Lumber Center," 540; Johnson, *Men and the Vision*, 16-17; "Commercial Cities and Towns," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, 59-60.

authorities looked to the federal government to fund improvement of the river in order to accommodate an increasing volume of traffic better.¹⁰

Savannah's citizens undoubtedly enjoyed the commercial prosperity generated by the Central Railroad and its surrounding network of lines. Nevertheless, some residents likely regarded Georgia's transportation revolution as a mixed blessing for the port. The initial lure of employment in railroad construction, and the later promise of jobs along Savannah's wharves, contributed to a dramatic rise in the city's population (see Table 5-1). In fact, after several decades of slow growth, Savannah's population nearly tripled during the thirty years prior to the Civil War. While some of this increase might be attributed to the expected natural expansion of the population, the primary source of Savannah's rapidly multiplying populace was immigration (see Table 5-2). In his brief study of the impact of foreigners in antebellum Savannah, Herbert Weaver noted that "two-thirds of the increase in white population between 1850 and 1860 consisted either of newly arrived immigrants or children born to foreign parents during the decade."¹¹

¹⁰"City of Savannah," *DeBow's Review*, 106; Phillips, *Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt*, 253-54; "Commercial Cities and Towns," *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, 62-63; Larsen, *Urban South*, 33;

¹¹In 1850 there were 2,434 foreign-born residents of Savannah, representing approximately 16% of the town's total population (15,312) and 29% of the white populace (8,395). By 1860 that figure had climbed to 4,652 foreign-born who made up 21% of Savannah's total population (22,292) and 33.5% of the white populace (13,875). Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 1-2; Edward M. Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens: The Irish Immigrant Community of Savannah, 1837-1861" (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1990), 15; Haunton, "Law and Order," 19; Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York, 1964), 327.

Table 5-2

**Foreign-Born Population of Savannah,
Georgia, 1840-1860**

Census Year	White Population	Foreign-born Population	% of White Pop.
1840	5,888	1,184	20%
1850	8,395	2,434	29%
1860	13,875	4,652	33.5%

Obviously this kind of urban population increase, fueled by immigration, was not unprecedented in the antebellum period. Several hundred thousand newcomers, a majority of whom were German and Irish immigrants, arrived in northern ports every year during the 1840s and 1850s. Moreover, this wave of immigration had an obvious and profound effect on the character of life in cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.¹² And, significantly, one also saw the coincidental development of nativism and "Native American" political

¹²During the 1830s around 600,000 people came to the United States, a fourfold increase over the previous decade. In the next decade this figure rose to 1,700,000, and then to 2,600,000 in the 1850s. New York City's population rose dramatically as a result of immigration. Between 1847 and 1854 roughly 1.8 million immigrants arrived in New York City. This figure represents nearly 70 percent of the total immigration to the United States during that period. While many of these newcomers traveled to other cities, those who remained swelled the city's population. In 1840, New York City had a population of just over 300,000 citizens. By 1850 that figure had grown to 500,000; the 1860 census revealed that the city's population had climbed to over 800,000 residents. Irish immigrants, making up about 30 percent of New York City's population by the 1850s, accounted for 60 percent of the almshouse population and nearly 70 percent of the recipients of charity. During the same period Philadelphia's population climbed to over 500,000 while Boston surpassed 130,000 residents. Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York, 1981), 23-26, 430; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), 67; Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 49-50.

organizations in many campaigns of the mid-1840s. Yet with the exceptions of Baltimore--the South's largest city with nearly 170,000 residents in 1850--and New Orleans--with over 116,000 inhabitants in 1850--the southern states did not attract large numbers of immigrants in the decades prior to the Civil War.¹³

Armed with this knowledge, one might conclude that the dearth of German and Irish laborers in the southern urban landscape supports the thesis that the South's cities were somehow unique or different from their northern counterparts. As noted earlier, this concept of a distinctively southern urban experience--in opposition to that posited by Leonard Curry¹⁴--has been ably argued by Blaine Brownell and David Goldfield and seems consistent with the contemporary descriptions of life in Savannah, Charleston, and neighboring cities. But this conclusion unfortunately ignores the experience and impact of those immigrants who arrived in the South and made their homes in cities throughout the region. Indeed, one could argue that the unique experience of a foreign-born laborer--delimited by the complex socio-economic matrix formed in the relationship between immigrant, slave, and free black--represented a further difference which bears emphasis in comparative analyses of northern and southern cities. As Randall Miller concluded in his study of immigrants in the

¹³Larsen, *Urban South*, 47; Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York, 1978), 5; Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 15.

¹⁴In his overview of the urban South, Curry suggests that the region's cities were not "peculiarly southern," but were very much like their northern counterparts. Basing this conclusion on a structural and qualitative framework, he notes that cities North and South were similar in terms of their problems, patterns of government, and non-official institutions. "Urbanization and Urbanism in the Old South: A Comparative View," *Journal of Southern History* 38 (1972): 52-57.

South, the influx of Irish and German workers between 1840 and 1860 "injected a new and somewhat dangerous dynamic into the urban workplace." Closer scrutiny of Savannah supports this conclusion. Furthermore, the result of such interaction between recently-arrived immigrants and local residents helps to explain the rise of the American party in the port.¹⁵

Although Savannah had always attracted its share of immigrants--an inevitable consequence of the port's commercial links with the Northeast and Europe--the city had welcomed only a small group of foreign-born each year prior to the 1840s. In fact, from its founding in the late colonial period through the first decades of the nineteenth century, Savannah maintained a relatively homogeneous Protestant population. In terms of the social stresses which could disrupt the routine of the typical port city, the long history of cordial relations between the few newcomers and established citizens usually overshadowed the difficulties such residents might encounter in their attempts to settle, find employment, and play a role in shaping the development of their community. As for the presence of Catholics in Savannah society, few arrived in the first three decades of the century. The town barely supported a Catholic congregation

¹⁵Blaine A. Brownell, "Urbanization in the South: A Unique Experience?" *Mississippi Quarterly* 26 (1973): 105; Goldfield, "The Urban South," 1013-1014; Randall M. Miller, "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities," *Southern Studies* 24 (1985): 34.

before the 1820s; local communicants were served by a priest whose duties also included ministering to the faithful in Augusta and Charleston.¹⁶

The first hints of change appeared in the 1820s when digging began on a canal system designed to link the Savannah River with other Georgia towns and waterways. Although unsuccessful, this venture attracted the first trickle of foreign-born laborers to the Georgia countryside. More often than not these workers returned to the northern cities from which they had arrived, but a few found regular work in the timber industry or made their way to Savannah and secured jobs at the port's docks. However, in the 1840s the Central Railroad of Georgia and its promise of employment would bring a steady flow of foreign-born, predominantly Irish, laborers who did not return to the crowded urban centers of the North. Reaping the benefits of the attendant commercial expansion, they toiled not only under the harsh conditions that railroad construction demanded, but also worked in the expanding building and mercantile trades that accompanied the city's rising fortunes.¹⁷

One could find the unskilled Irish workers on Savannah's wharves, hauling bulk cargoes into warehouses; at the yards of the Central Railroad on the western edge of the town, unloading the cotton and lumber that poured out of the Georgia interior; or the more prosperous Germans at their shops in the

¹⁶Weaver, "Foreigners in Antebellum Savannah," 1; J. J. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of its History* (1879; reprint, Westminster, Md., 1964), 501-03; Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 15-18.

¹⁷Phillips, *Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt*, 253-54; Weaver, "Foreigners in Antebellum Savannah," 1.

Yamacraw section of the city, selling meats, dry goods, and liquor to the immigrant and free black residents of the neighborhood. But if these eager workers satisfied the region's great demand for labor and doubtless contributed to the overall prosperity of the local economy, why did their arrival produce such anxiety within the community? Moreover, how might the appearance of Know Nothingism in the mid-1850s be regarded as the culmination of the city's maturation as one of the southeast's primary commercial entrepôts?¹⁸

Whereas earlier immigrants to Savannah had made little impact on the social or political character of the city, the mid-century influx of impoverished and unskilled Irish Catholics had an immediate effect on the community. Of course, the actual number of immigrants descending on Savannah represented a small sum compared to the staggering volume encountered in northern cities. Indeed, each year during the two decades before the Civil War would bring only several hundred to Savannah, whereas New York might receive several thousand. Nevertheless, from a qualitative standpoint the dramatic increase in Savannah's population strained the city's resources and severely tested the effectiveness of the municipal government. In essence, Savannah's municipal leaders faced the same vexing issues--albeit not on the same scale--that plagued their northern counterparts.¹⁹

¹⁸Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 16; Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 1; Haunton, "Law and Order," 1; Fred Siegel, "Artisans and Immigrants in the Politics of Late Antebellum Georgia," *Civil War History* 27 (1981): 225-26.

¹⁹Haunton, "Law and Order," 2-3; Miller, "The Enemy Within," 34-35; Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 2-4; Shoemaker, "Stranger and Citizens," 17-19, 261.

The majority of these new residents clustered in neighborhoods on the fringes of town, beyond the reach of gas lighting, an adequate water supply, properly-drained sewers, and the controlling influence of sufficient law enforcement authorities. Such conditions therefore made the periphery of Savannah a breeding ground for vice and lawlessness. By the early 1850s one local newspaper, taking note of the poor state of the immigrants' neighborhoods, concluded that this city of "thrifty enterprise" would soon "become quite as notorious in character for crime."²⁰

Most infamous of the immigrant districts was the Oglethorpe Ward in the western section of the city, home to roughly 2,000 of Savannah's citizens. This ward also included a neighborhood known as Yamacraw, a swampy area at the northwest edge of Savannah that had traditionally been reserved for the town's free black population. The *Savannah Daily Morning News* observed that "the condition of most, if not all this region, is lamentably filthy and offensive to the optics and olfactories." According to the condemnatory editorial, one was "daily refreshed with gases escaping from the bodies of dead dogs, dead cows, rotten eggs, and a villainous compost of scavenger's material collected from streets, stables, and every unclean place." Not surprisingly, the city's poorest residents resided in Yamacraw and crowded into the ramshackle wooden boarding establishments and businesses that provided inexpensive housing.²¹

²⁰Siegel, "Artisans and Immigrants," 225-26; *Savannah Daily Georgian*, May 16, 1854.

²¹*Savannah Daily Morning News*, May 7, 1855; Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 2.

Unfortunately, the squalor of these tenements, exacerbated by overcrowding, narrow, garbage-filled alleys, and poorly drained streets, made the immigrant residents more susceptible to outbreaks of typhus, dysentery, cholera, and yellow fever.²² The fact that many of Savannah's Irish citizens arrived already in poor health only increased the likelihood of epidemics. In addition, the inferior construction and inadequate maintenance of buildings in the city's poorer sections increased the chances that Savannah could experience another devastating fire akin to the disastrous conflagration of 1820. The municipal government, through its Board of Health, had tried to maintain adequate sanitation and fire safety in the city, but found such efforts more difficult to enforce in the crowded immigrant community.²³ Despite growing public

²²In 1854, for example, just as the American party began to mobilize in Savannah, the port suffered through a major yellow fever epidemic. According to the *Savannah Daily Morning News*, the illness began in "the Eastern District of the city among the Irish population." The *Republican*, acknowledging the presence of yellow fever in the city in late August, speculated that the epidemic started among the Irish who "unfortunately were in the most filthy condition . . . living in crowded and unhealthy quarters." By September many citizens had left the city, prompting Dr. Richard Arnold to observe that Savannah was "almost deserted." Even the mayor, John E. Ward, was stricken with the fever; unable to discharge the duties of his office, Ward temporarily relinquished his authority to Dr. Arnold. By the time the epidemic abated in October, an estimated 1,040 citizens had fallen victim to the fever. Reflecting on the causes of the yellow fever, Savannah's Board of Health concluded that "the unaccountable amount of filth about the domiciles in the eastern part of the city is believed to have been a fruitful source of disease." *Savannah Daily Morning News*, November 11, 1854; *Savannah Republican*, August 23, 1854; Richard D. Arnold to Miss Ellen Arnold, September 2, 17, 1854, Richard D. Arnold to Octavus Cohen, October 5, 1854, *Letters of Richard D. Arnold, M.D., 1808-1876*, ed. Richard H. Shryock (New York, 1929), 68-71; Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 141-44; Thomas R. Gamble, *A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia, From 1790 to 1901* (Savannah, 1901), 232-34; *Report of John E. Ward, Mayor of the City of Savannah* (Savannah, 1854), 9-12; William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia* (Atlanta, 1981), 411-12.

²³Following the yellow fever epidemic of 1820, Savannah's city officials had created the Board of Health and subsidiary ward committees to guard against future outbreaks of disease. The Board was responsible for enforcing the port's quarantine laws and educating the local citizenry on proper hygiene and sanitation; ward committees ostensibly maintained a watch over conditions in homes and businesses throughout the city. Obviously such efforts only met with limited success,

concern, by 1860 roughly three-fourths of Savannah's white laborers resided in tenements around the city.²⁴

Much to the consternation of city officials, one could find scattered about the Yamacraw district numerous liquor shops (over one hundred according to the estimates of the Savannah police chief), taverns, boarding houses for sailors, and "five large houses of ill fame, besides numerous small ones." The local press even warned that vacant homes and businesses had fallen victim to "looting rogues" who wandered the city's streets in search of plunder. Yet while the Irish might be blamed for a majority of the violent acts reported in the city, they certainly did not maintain a monopoly on the disorderly conduct that captured the attention of Savannah's citizens and the news-hungry press. For example, in 1854 the *Daily Morning News* highlighted a "civil war" that raged between the several Chinese families in the city.²⁵

Clearly, then, the port faced significant crises that represented the most problematic results of the area's prosperity and commercial success. Moreover, Savannah's authorities had no prior experience managing an increasingly unruly

considering the yellow fever epidemic of 1854. Municipal authorities also passed ordinances in an attempt to diminish the likelihood of fire. For example, the aldermen enacted laws which prohibited fireworks, tried to limit the erection of wooden buildings, and placed slaves under the control of the city fire companies during times of emergency. Charles S. Henry, *A Digest of all the Ordinances of the City of Savannah Which Were in Force on July 1, 1854* (Savannah, 1854), 181, 195-96, 206; Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 45-46.

²⁴Haunton, "Law and Order," 2; Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 117-18, 135-36; Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 2.

²⁵*Savannah Daily Republican*, March 24, 1855; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, September 29, October 13, 1854.

population. Like the leaders of many growing urban areas, Savannah mayors and councilmen attempted to reform the city watch during the 1840s and 1850s. These efforts included creation of a mounted watch to patrol outlying districts, higher pay for privates, and additional noncommissioned officers. In 1849 the Georgia legislature created the Savannah Police Court which heard cases against rioters, disorderly or drunk citizens, and violators of city ordinances. The mayor, who presided over this court, had the power to impose fines on offenders. The most concerted effort to improve the city's police force came in 1854 under the leadership of Democratic mayor John E. Ward. While Savannah's reform of its police force did not equal the substantial endeavors of William Porcher Miles and Charleston's municipal authorities, Savannah's efforts demonstrate that the city had at least recognized the need for more efficient law enforcement for its growing population. Significantly, control of these agencies, and of the Police Court in particular, would become key elements in the struggle between Savannah's Know Nothing mayor and Democratic aldermen in 1856.²⁶

As the Know Nothing movement took shape in the wake of political turmoil and the resurgent nativism of the 1850s, some of Savannah's disaffected residents doubtless became more keenly aware of the changes wrought by increased immigration. Eventually, local organizers of the American party--recognizing the relevance of this new partisan message to the situation in Savannah--would employ the rhetoric of Know Nothingism to argue against the

²⁶Gamble, *City Government of Savannah*, 239; Henry, *Digest of all the Ordinances . . . 1854*, 446-47, 455; *Report of John E. Ward*, 4-5; Haunton, "Law and Order," 14-15.

presumably detrimental effects of unchecked immigration and the reportedly improper naturalization of foreign-born residents. Yet this catalog of lawless behavior and deplorable living conditions, presented regularly by the press, does not describe fully one of the most troubling aspects of Savannah's transformation, however.²⁷

Particularly offensive to nearly all citizens of the port was the relationship which developed between the immigrants of the Oglethorpe ward and the district's free black and slave residents. Like Charleston and Norfolk, Savannah had a sizable slave population that made up roughly one-third of the total populace in 1860.²⁸ In addition, about 700 free blacks lived in the city, competing with both slaves and foreign-born laborers for employment. As one would expect, Savannah's authorities had, over the decades, passed numerous ordinances regulating the conduct of the city's African-American residents, slave and free. For example, all free blacks were required to register their names with the clerk of the city council each year. In addition, black residents could not assemble in groups of more than seven without a white citizen present. Of special concern were those measures designed to curb the traffic in illicit liquor sales made to slaves. These ordinances, including those requiring licenses and badges for slaves who were "hired out" by their masters, presumably held a tight rein on

²⁷Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 248-49.

²⁸According to the 1850 census there were 6,231 slaves and 686 free blacks in Savannah. By 1860 Savannah's African-American population was made up of 7,712 slaves and 705 free black citizens.

the conduct of Savannah's black residents. The reality, however, offered an altogether different picture.²⁹

Reports of offenses against these codes were frequent; slaves and free blacks, often ignored by white citizens, disregarded the law and engaged in a host of illegal activities. Indeed, slaveowners themselves often proved negligent in their efforts to maintain accountability among slaves "living out" or "hired out." As Richard Wade has pointed out in his discussion of this system through which slaves were allowed to "hire their own time," the practice made slavery a more flexible and profitable institution within the urban environment. At the same time, this practice gave the urban slave a degree of freedom not enjoyed by his rural counterpart. By all accounts, Savannah possessed a sizable number of slaves who lived and were employed away from any direct supervision from their masters. But if Savannah, through its concern over slave discipline, did not evoke images of a besieged city under arms--as Frederick Law Olmsted had described Charleston--the law preserved order within the African-American community and the port's authorities did not hesitate to punish severely those slaves who violated city ordinances.³⁰

²⁹Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 326-27; Henry, *Digest of all the Ordinances . . . 1854*, passim; Edward G. Wilson, *A Digest of All the Ordinances of the City of Savannah, and Various Laws of the State of Georgia, Relative to Said City, Which were of Force on the 1st January, 1858* (Savannah, 1858), passim; Haunton, "Law and Order," 3-5; Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 7-9; Olmsted, *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States*, 404.

³⁰Ibid., 404; Siegel, "Artisans and Immigrants," 226-28; Miller, "The Enemy Within," 34-35; Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, 41, 48-49.

Complicating the difficult task of enforcement, however, was the arrival of thousands of foreign-born laborers who upset the delicate balance of race relations that existed in the city. New arrivals to Savannah, often unfamiliar with the "peculiar institution" and the complex system of rules--written and unwritten--that defined relations between white citizens and slaves, were prone to violate the law. For example, physician and Democratic politician Richard D. Arnold observed in 1850 that numerous foreign-born shopowners engaged in a profitable traffic in stolen goods, most often provided by slaves, and generally paid for such articles with liquor. Arnold, declaring that "these men are pests and corrupt our negroes terribly," noted that city authorities had attempted to regulate and license these businesses while enforcing measures which prohibited the sale of liquor to slaves.³¹

Despite such efforts, however, this issue remained a persistent problem throughout the decade. Indeed, Arnold himself argued that lax enforcement of the law was politically motivated. "The Mayor & Marshall [*sic*]," he concluded, "regulate the shopkeepers politically by *not* regulating them as to the Law." As one would expect, these violations of the law would form an important element in the rhetoric of Savannah's Know Nothing movement. In fact, such conditions apparently offered fertile ground for the growth of the American party in

³¹Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 7; Richard D. Arnold to Mrs. Louisa McAllister, December 6, 1850, Richard D. Arnold to Col. John W. Forney, December 18, 1850, *Letters of Richard D. Arnold*, 44; Haunton, "Law and Order," 6-7.

Savannah. Yet such conditions do not explain entirely the political environment in which Know Nothingism got its start.³²

As witnessed in Norfolk and Wilmington, the slow demise of the Whig party at the national and state levels in part occasioned the rise of Know Nothingism in Georgia and, more importantly, in Savannah. Passage of the Compromise of 1850 and the acceptance of its measures, embodied in the Georgia Platform, severely weakened party loyalty. Moreover, the formation of a weak Unionist party, combining both pro-Compromise Democrats and Whigs in Georgia, doubtless hastened the demise of Whiggery as an identifiable and united political organization within the state. Although Whig leaders returned to their party and briefly rallied supporters for the upcoming presidential campaign, the contest of 1852 would effectively herald the end of the party's life. At the same time, defeat of the Whig candidate in Georgia's gubernatorial campaign of the same year only served to underscore the failure of the party.³³

Over the next two years, Georgia's defeated Whigs sought to redefine their political loyalties. While a few, swallowing their pride, undoubtedly joined the

³²*Letters of Richard D. Arnold*, 44.

³³While more moderate Georgia Whigs--fearing a Democratic victory for Franklin Pierce and refusing to merge with the supporters of "locofocoism"--campaign half-heartedly for Scott and dutifully went to the polls for the candidate, no doubt many Whig voters stayed at home. Pierce and the Democrats, winning easily in Georgia, enjoyed majorities of 60 to 75 percent in many counties. Although Savannah and surrounding Chatham county had voted for Zachary Taylor and the Whigs in 1848, Pierce and the Democratic ticket easily reversed the defeat of the previous presidential contest. Of the 1501 votes cast in Chatham county, 1175 went to Franklin Pierce; Winfield Scott polled only 305 votes, while several other candidates, including the deceased Daniel Webster, received the remainder. Arthur C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, 1913), 264, 274; W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 15, 45-46; Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 224.

Democracy, many of the state's Whigs languished in a sort of partisan limbo. Refusing to surrender to their old political enemies, more optimistic Whigs sifted through the wreckage of their party and attempted in vain to mobilize their scattered supporters. Those who had followed Robert Toombs and Alexander Stephens in the wake of the partisan ferment of 1850 hoped to revive the energy of the unionist movement. Reform-minded Whigs even backed a temperance party that emerged in 1854. Ultimately, however, the American party would offer the most promising alternative to Georgia's former Whigs.³⁴

At the state level, Know Nothingism (or at least the nativist rhetoric of the movement) ostensibly appeared for the first time in 1853. Robert Toombs, addressing a non-partisan, Unionist gubernatorial convention, attacked the Democratic party and blamed Pierce's administration for the ill effects of immigration. While the gubernatorial contest, pitting independent candidate Charles J. Jenkins against incumbent Democrat Herschel V. Johnson, did not represent the formal arrival of "Sam" in the Georgia political arena, the contest certainly demonstrated the potency of a nativist platform. During the campaign traditionally Whig journals attacked the Democratic party's alleged alliance with foreign-born voters, and, echoing Toombs' convention rhetoric, accused Franklin Pierce's administration of "discriminating in favor of foreigners" in the dispensation of federal patronage. With approximately 95,000 Georgians going to

³⁴Royce McCrary, "John Macpherson Berrien and the Know-Nothing Movement in Georgia," *GHQ* 61 (1977): 35-36; Horace Montgomery, *Cracker Parties* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 135-36; Cole, *Whig Party*, 315; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 62-63.

the polls, Johnson triumphed over Jenkins and the Whigs by a thin majority of only 510 votes. The tenor of political debate in Georgia's gubernatorial campaign of 1853 and the electoral support for Jenkins' independent candidacy certainly heralded the imminent arrival of Know Nothingism in the state.³⁵

Throughout 1854, as the new political order mobilized quickly in the Northeast, former Whigs, political misfits, and a few dissident Democrats like Francis H. Cone, would join the first Know Nothing lodges forming in Georgia. By the end of 1854, the new party had recorded its first victories at the polls, electing municipal officials in Griffin, Dalton, and Milledgeville. To some observers, these successes only represented the last gasp of diseased Whiggery. In addition, the Democratic press immediately lambasted the free-soil proclivities of some northern American party adherents and thus brought into question the loyalties of the Know Nothing faithful in the South. By contrast, however, to many of Georgia's Whigs the new party's promising start must have appeared as the harbinger of their political resurgence.³⁶

The following year, this nascent American party emerged in Georgia to score additional electoral triumphs. In April, Know Nothing candidates captured eleven of twelve seats in Augusta's city council and voters elected a Know Nothing mayor by a two to one majority. By May, Georgia's American party leaders held their first secret meeting in Macon to discuss the approaching

³⁵Montgomery, *Cracker Parties*, 126-27.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 126-27.

gubernatorial campaign. Although the convention published no platform,³⁷ rumor suggested that John Macpherson Berrien was a popular favorite to represent the new party in its first statewide contest. With Berrien's stature and leadership, party organizers likely reasoned, Know Nothingism could possibly wed Georgia's political factions--including unionist and southern rights supporters--in a powerful new organization. But if the American party enjoyed an initial surge of good fortune in late 1854 and early 1855, the succeeding two years would demonstrate the weakness of the order and its inability to control more than a few municipal offices. In Savannah, for example, Know Nothingism would have to labor mightily to overcome a well-established Democratic party that found its strength enhanced by immigration.³⁸

Savannah was, in fact, a Democratic stronghold through most of the antebellum period. The city, and surrounding Chatham County had returned majorities for Jackson, Van Buren, and Polk. On only one occasion before the

³⁷Although the American party's Macon convention did not issue a formal platform for the future gubernatorial contest, the state council did issue a statement to clarify its stance on the slavery issue.

Resolved, That slavery and slave institutions are protected by the Constitution of the United States, and the obligation to maintain them is not sectional but national; that the right to establish them in the organization of State governments belongs to the native and naturalized citizens, and that Congress has no constitutional power to intervene, by excluding a new State applying for admission to the Union, upon the ground that the constitution of such State recognises slavery.

The *Republican* observed that "there is some difference in the Northern and Southern planks of Sam's platform. But Sam would be a bungler in politics if he did not adapt his principles to suit every latitude of 'our great and glorious confederacy,' the destinies of which he patriotically aspires to direct and control." *Savannah Republican*, May 7, 1855.

³⁸McCrary, "John Macpherson Berrien," 36; Montgomery, *Cracker Parties*, 136.

Civil War did Savannah's voters, casting their ballots for Zachary Taylor in 1848, shift their loyalties to a Whig presidential candidate. In municipal politics, Democrats also enjoyed incredible success against strong Whig opposition. Occasionally the party suffered the effects of divisive factionalism as the arguments of unionist and southern rights Democrats disrupted partisan harmony and thus yielded control of local affairs to Whig officials. Yet by and large, Savannah's Democrats tried to portray themselves and their party as the true conservators of southern institutions within the framework of the existing Union. By the 1850s entrenched Democratic leaders had clearly demonstrated their ability to manage city affairs and oversee the port's commercial success. In fact, most of the public works and internal improvement projects completed in Savannah in the three decades prior to secession were accomplished by Democratic municipal administrations. These projects included: gasworks, waterworks, improved drainage systems, police reform, and nearly every bond issue for internal improvements, from the Central Railroad of the 1830s to the Savannah, Albany, and Gulf Railroad of the 1850s. Neither the Whigs nor any newly-formed opposition party could accuse Savannah's Democrats of contributing to the port's stagnation.³⁹

Yet the events of the 1850s would demonstrate that the local Democratic party, despite its strength and record of achievement, was vulnerable to attack and even intraparty dissension. For example, passage of the Compromise of 1850

³⁹Richard H. Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1968), 207-208; Richard H. Shryock, *Georgia and the Union in 1850* (Durham, 1926), 105.

nearly divided the party between its unionist and southern rights factions. State party leaders only managed to effect a partial reconciliation of these factions in the face of the presidential contest of 1852. In Savannah, however, Democrats retained enough unity and popular support to maintain control of the city government. Savannah's Whigs fared even worse.⁴⁰

Rarely a powerful force in local politics, Savannah's Whig party was in shambles following Franklin Pierce's victory in 1852. In the municipal contest that quickly followed the national election, disheartened Whigs attempted to take refuge in a pro-reform Citizens' Ticket. However, this effort to remove "the fell spirit of party" from municipal government failed to unseat the incumbent Democrats. In 1853 organizers of the Citizens' Ticket campaigned under the old Whig label and again proved unsuccessful. In the mayoral election of December 1853, John E. Ward secured 728 votes to defeat Whig candidate R. A. Lewis, who received only 328 votes (See Table 5-3). Moreover, local Whigs even failed to nominate a ticket for the Georgia legislature in the state elections of 1853. As a result, appearance of the Know Nothing movement in 1854 no doubt offered a tempting partisan alternative to the bankrupt Whig organization. As localities in the nation, North and South, established lodges and scored their first electoral triumphs in early 1854, supporters of the movement in Savannah wasted little time in joining the order.⁴¹

⁴⁰Montgomery, *Cracker Parties*, passim; Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 221-22.

⁴¹Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 224-25; Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 351; Savannah *Daily Morning News*, December 3, 1853.

In the spring of that year, Savannah's Democratic press announced the formation of the city's first Know Nothing lodges. On April 1, for example, the *Savannah Daily Morning News* disclosed that a new "lodge of the *Know-Nothing* brotherhood" would initiate members at a local theater that evening. The announcement of the *News* likely upset local organizers who wished to maintain the mystery of Know Nothingism that acted as a lure for new members. Within just a few months, however, the *Republican*--traditionally the city's Whig paper but soon to become the organ for the American party--reported that Savannah now possessed a strong contingent of Know Nothings. Unfortunately no evidence exists which might suggest the strength of the movement in 1854 or provide some hint of the party's rate of growth in Savannah. Indeed, the existence of American party lodges seemed not to have had an immediate effect on municipal politics. In fact, the American party did not compete in the contest for Savannah's mayor and aldermen scheduled for December of 1854. Evidently, local lodges were not prepared to enter the political arena with a full slate of candidates. This hesitance also suggests that, in the absence of estimates of American party growth in Savannah, the embryonic local party had not developed sufficiently to command electoral support and threaten Democratic hegemony.⁴²

Nevertheless, the mere hint of Know Nothing activity in the city brought down the caustic rhetoric of Democrats who opposed the new party and its ideals. In November 1854, for example, Savannah Democrat Joseph Ganahl delivered an

⁴²*Savannah Daily Morning News*, April 1, 1854; *Savannah Republican*, July 19, 1854.

address on Know Nothingism in which he declared that Know Nothingism was analogous to the mushroom which grew beneath the oak. The mushroom, he noted, sprang from "the darkness of a night to a pale and sickly vigor from a soil rank with the corruption of politicians and the disaffection of office seekers." The oak, "in whose crown the American Eagle builds her nest," symbolized the Democratic party which sheltered and protected the nation. But despite Ganahl's concern, as 1854 ended the city's dominant Democratic party appeared to have avoided the Know Nothing onslaught that had unseated incumbent candidates across the country.⁴³

Still, the results of that municipal contest revealed that not all residents were entirely satisfied with the conduct of the city's Democratic administrations. Moreover, the election indicated that Savannah's prosperity and growth, albeit welcome results of the city's commercial expansion, had spawned a new and unexpected political challenger for local office. For three years Savannah's Democrats would have to redouble their efforts to guarantee the party's dominance in municipal affairs.

Nominating prominent physician Dr. Richard Wayne⁴⁴ for the mayoralty, the city's Democratic leadership offered an impressive slate of prestigious aldermanic candidates that reflected the diverse mercantile character of the town

⁴³Scrapbook of Joseph Ganahl, Alexander Stovall Papers, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah. The scrapbook consists of undated newspaper clippings--covering life in Savannah--interspersed with Ganahl's annotations. In addition, Ganahl's scrapbook included neither page or entry numbers.

⁴⁴Between 1844 and 1858, Wayne served six terms as mayor of Savannah.

and, significantly, recognized the importance of the foreign-born segment of the electorate.⁴⁵ By including members of Savannah's German Friendly Society and Hibernian Society on the ticket, Democrats counted on attracting significant Irish and German support, particularly from those foreign-born voters who had either benefitted from the charitable efforts of these societies or expected the reward of employment on the city watch or public works. Confident of continued success at the polls, the Democrats likely assumed that Dr. Wayne would secure a comfortable margin of victory to succeed mayor John E. Ward. Ward, a successful attorney, member of the Hibernian Society, and director of the Mechanics' Savings Bank, had distinguished himself for his efforts to reform the city's police system. At the same time, however, Ward's efforts had succeeded in alienating the Democratic leadership and their shopkeeper constituents who protested the regulation and strict licensing of their businesses. Although the council's reforms elicited accusations of overzealous enforcement of the city's laws, clearly a substantial body of Savannah residents welcomed the changes and supported the nomination of a reform ticket that included the incumbent mayor. Yet for Ward the promise of popular support and another term in office held

⁴⁵The Democratic ticket included: John Boston, who served as collector of the port of Savannah; Thomas Purse, appraiser of the port, a charter member of the German Friendly Society and director of the Central Railroad; Thomas M. Turner, druggist; Thomas Holcombe, wholesale grocer; Jesse Mount, occupation unknown; Robert H. Griffin, attorney and member of the Hibernian Society; Dominick A. O'Byrne, attorney and member of the Hibernian Society; Dr. Charles A. Ganahl, physician and member of the German Friendly Society; and Edward L. Hollis, merchant; Joseph Lipman, dry goods merchant. *Directory and Census of the City of Savannah for the year 1853* (Savannah, 1853), passim; *Directory of the City of Savannah, for 1858* (Savannah, 1858), passim.

little appeal; having suffered through the yellow fever epidemic of the previous summer, he would not seek reelection.⁴⁶

Opposing Richard Wayne's Democratic ticket was a new reform-oriented political organization, the People's Ticket, that had coalesced shortly before the campaign. The circumstances surrounding the development of the People's Ticket highlight the volatility of urban politics during periods of extreme social and economic change. Running on a "law and order" platform, the People's Ticket pledged to preserve the new police system, continue the reform programs of John Ward's previous Democratic municipal administration, and strictly enforce city ordinances regulating shopkeepers, crime, Sunday blue laws, and disorderly public conduct. What proves so unusual about the People's Ticket is that it ostensibly represented a bipartisan demonstration of public support for the reforms of Democrat John Ward and a repudiation of the new Democratic slate led by Dr. Wayne. Indeed, according to Richard Haunton's analysis of the contest, Ward and a majority of his Democratic councilmen rejected the new Democratic slate, "voted for correct principles," and went to the polls in support of the People's Ticket.⁴⁷

Organizers of the People's Ticket nominated for the mayoralty attorney Edward C. Anderson, a member of the St. Andrews Society, director of the

⁴⁶*Savannah Daily Morning News*, December 4, 5, 1854; *Savannah Republican*, December 2, 4, 5, 1854; Reverend C. A. Linn, *The History of the German Friendly Society of Savannah, Georgia, 1837-1937* (Savannah, 1937), 19; *Letters of Richard D. Arnold*, 39.

⁴⁷*Savannah Republican*, November 20, December 4, 1854; Haunton, "Law and Order," 13.

Planters' Bank, and boardmember of the Savannah, Albany, & Gulf Railroad.

Anderson's prominence within the community certainly added legitimacy to the movement. Furthermore, the People's Ticket proved every bit as balanced as that of the Democrats, at least in terms of its representing the diversity of the commercial community. However, further comparison of the two slates reveals some important differences between the candidates. While the Democratic officeseekers included conspicuous representatives of Savannah's Irish and German communities, the People's Ticket did not overtly enlist such support through its choices of candidates. The vocational background and institutional affiliations of the Democratic candidates also suggest that they represented Savannah's more prosperous and prominent citizenry. In terms of the *Republican's* claims that the People's Ticket constituted a nonpartisan effort enlisting both Democrats and Whigs, one must observe that only a single candidate, Alvin N. Miller, could be identified as a Democrat. The remainder of the ticket, including the mayoral hopeful Edward C. Anderson, was comprised of former Whigs. Indeed, with the exception of Miller, the nominees of the People's Ticket would ultimately support Savannah's American party in the coming year.⁴⁸

⁴⁸The People's Ticket included: John N. Lewis, a bookkeeper and member of the Young America Fire Co.; Dr. Charles W. West, physician; George W. Garmany, merchant; Robert A. Allen, cotton factor and a director of the Augusta and Waynesboro Railroad; Gilbert Butler, owner of a carpentry business and director of the Mechanics' Savings Bank; Thomas H. Harden, a teller at the Planters' Bank; P. W. Alexander, assistant editor of the *Savannah Republican*; Edwin F. Hertz, occupation unknown; Alvin N. Miller, founder and machinist; James G. Rodgers, merchant; and John Mallery, tailor. *Directory . . . of Savannah for the year 1853*, passim; *Directory . . . of Savannah, for 1858*, passim; *Savannah Republican*, December 2, 1854.

This development supports the idea that the candidates of the People's Ticket were merely "incubational Know Nothings" who, in the absence of a well-defined American party movement in the port, briefly found a partisan alternative that proved ideologically compatible with their own views and offered a temporary political home. They could couch their nativist/reformist rhetoric in more palatable, nonpartisan terms, and instead portray themselves as champions of "law and order" without explicit references to Know Nothingism and the development of the order's Savannah lodges. Still, some observers could not avoid connecting the mobilization of the People's Ticket with the growth of local American party lodges. Just days after the election, for example, the *Daily Morning News* alleged that the candidates of the People's Ticket were in reality Know Nothings.⁴⁹

Prior to the contest, the Democratic press voiced anxiety that election day would bring violence to the polls. Apparently, Savannah's voters had significant cause for worry. Just four years earlier, Dr. Richard D. Arnold, commenting on the conduct of the 1850 municipal election, noted that "the polls were blocked up by gangs of Irishmen armed with bludgeons, & a man voted at the risk of a broken head." One local observer even remarked that "a pervasive atmosphere of violence led young men to carry sticks, canes, and even bowie knives in the streets." Yet despite such concern, Savannah's citizens conducted the election of 1854 in "a quiet and orderly manner," according to the *Daily Morning News*. In the mayoral contest Edward C. Anderson of the People's Ticket polled 875 votes

⁴⁹Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 225; Savannah *Daily Morning News*, December 8, 1854.

to only 625 for Dr. Richard Wayne. In addition, the aldermanic candidates for the People's Ticket averaged some 860 ballots, while their Democratic opponents received only an average of 640 votes. The total voter turnout for the contest, with 1500 citizens going to the polls, reflected the excitement of the campaign; nearly 450 more citizens voted in 1854 than in 1853. Moreover, the non-Democratic vote increased by more than 500. The People's Ticket campaign had clearly touched a sensitive nerve among Savannah's voters. The election swept the incumbent Democrats from office (they had won easily in 1853; see Table 5-3) and paved the way for a year of intense political controversy that would culminate in the emergence of the American party as a force in local affairs.⁵⁰

Table 5-3
Voter Turnout, Savannah elections, 1853-1857

Date	Election	Party		Total
		Democrats	Opponents	
Dec. 1853	Mayoral	728	328 (Whig)	1056
Dec. 1854	Mayoral	625	875 (People's)	1500
Oct. 1855	Ga. Senate	967	931 (American)	1898
Dec. 1855	Mayoral	822	846 (American)	1668
Oct. 1856	Mayoral	1101	971 (American)	2072
*Nov. 1856	Presidential	1444	971 (American)	2415
Oct. 1857	Mayoral	999	564 (Young Men's)	1563

*County election results.

⁵⁰Richard Arnold to Mrs. Louisa McAllister, December 6, 1850, in Shryock, ed., *Letters of Richard D. Arnold*, 39; Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 213; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, December 4, 5, 1854.

Within days of taking office the new mayor and council proposed ordinances to enforce "observance of the Sabbath" and tighten control of the sale of "Spiritous Liquors." Such measures were not without precedent in Savannah, however. As early as the 1830s, the city council had passed measures to restrict labor and commercial activity on the Sabbath and added \$30 fines to force compliance. Yet prior to the 1850s these measures were largely ignored by the citizenry and only occasionally enforced by the city council. That Savannah's residents proved concerned about drinking and the resulting disorderly conduct should not seem surprising; by 1855 the port could claim over 200 licensed liquor shops and taverns. This figure, of course, does not include the numerous unlicensed "grog shops" which ostensibly engaged in illicit sales of liquor to slaves and Irish laborers. Although outraged citizens had involved themselves in the popular temperance movement of the antebellum period, forming groups such as the Savannah Temperance Society and the Catholic Total Abstinence Society, these reform associations had apparently done little to curb residents' thirst. Nevertheless, mayor Anderson and the council did not seem discouraged.⁵¹

By January of 1855 the new council had demonstrated its resolve to administer justice to those profligate citizens caught violating the law. In its January 12 publication of the "Proceedings of Council," for example, the *Daily Morning News* noted that city authorities had already meted out punishments to several guilty citizens, including one gentleman who simply entered his shop. The

⁵¹Ibid., December 15, 1854; Henry, *Digest of all the Ordinances . . . 1854*, 310-11, 314; Shoemaker, "Strangers and Citizens," 218.

Daily Journal & Courier also complained bitterly that the mayor and council had been a bit overzealous in their prosecution of those accused of opening their businesses on Sunday, particularly in the case of one shopkeeper who entered his store merely to feed his cats. Even the *Savannah Daily Georgian* mused that "ere long it will be considered in the Council Chamber a finable misdemeanor for a man to kiss his wife on that holy day."⁵²

Yet the most damning charges came under the *News's* editorial headline "The Autocrat Is Out." Claiming that the mayor and councilmen were autocrats perverting the law, the editorial observed that city officials engaged in "an ill-judged and tyrannical use of the power entrusted in their hands." The *News* argued that this harsh interpretation of the law was "crushing the friendly feeling" that typically existed between the town's residents, and called for a public meeting to "change the present state of affairs." A letter from one outraged citizen, appearing in the same issue, observed:

Through preceding years, it was the high privilege of an American citizen, when a charge was brought against him, to bring forward any defence that he might be able: but *now*, that privilege seems no longer to be allowed, at least, *in the city of Savannah!* The mere statement of a policeman is a sealed verdict against us, and we must submissively bow our necks, and bare our backs to the "rope's end."⁵³

Opposition to such conditions would continue through 1855 as residents complained in letters to the press, appealed the decisions of the Police Court, and

⁵²*Savannah Daily Morning News*, January 12, 1855; *Savannah Daily Journal & Courier*, January 17, 1855; *Savannah Daily Georgian*, January 14, 1855.

⁵³*Savannah Daily Morning News*, January 18, 1855.

even formed a Citizens' Protective Association. An April editorial in the *News* entitled "Fair Play" declared that the mayor and council were "legislating without any knowledge of what they are doing, or without feeling the weight of the burden that they so willingly place on the shoulders of others." Not surprisingly, then, voters, intent upon curbing some of the excesses of municipal officials, would return a Democratic majority to the city council in the election of December 1855.⁵⁴

To secure that victory, however, the Democracy had to labor against a new partisan adversary. Although the People's Ticket would not be revived in 1855, Savannah's developing American party entered the political fray to challenge Democratic opponents in both state and local contests. Ready to offer candidates for the state legislature as well as the mayoralty and city council, Savannah's Know Nothings battled to establish a foothold. This task, formidable against an established Democratic majority, would prove even more trying as Democrats equated the new order with Whiggery or, even worse, northern free-soilism.

Although the Whig/Know Nothing *Republican* professed that there were, in fact, perceptible differences between Know Nothings in the North and South, the American party in Savannah--as in Norfolk, Wilmington, and Charleston--struggled in vain to avoid identification with abolitionism and "Black Republicanism." The results of the American party's national convention of June 1855, far from inspiring confidence among local Know Nothing leaders, likely

⁵⁴Ibid., April 5, 1855;

armed the Democratic opposition with ample ammunition with which to attack the new party's stance on the slavery question. Even before the Know Nothing convention and its politically embarrassing division over slavery, Savannah's Democrats publicly attacked Know Nothing principles. At a May 15 meeting, for example, local supporters of the Democracy, led by attorney and Hibernian Robert H. Griffin, passed resolutions condemning the nativism and secret rituals of Know Nothingism. Yet the most serious political conflict of 1855 occurred in the state election of October and councilmanic contest of December when Savannah's voters went to the polls to select not only their municipal officers, but also representatives for the Georgia legislature. In fact, the state election was particularly crucial to Know Nothing fortunes in the city because it represented the party's first foray into the Savannah political arena and provided a means of measuring the party's potential support for the upcoming municipal contest.⁵⁵

For several weeks prior to the October 1 vote, Democratic and American party adherents, backed by their respective presses, speculated on the outcome of the election and battled to win the support of any uncommitted citizens. This segment of the electorate had long proved important in an age in which political loyalties were rigidly defined and partisan apostasy among voters rarely occurred. Indeed, partisan fidelity prior to the 1850s proved so strong that voters who disliked their party's candidates more often than not stayed at home, rather than

⁵⁵Savannah Republican, May 8, 1855; Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York, 1992), 168-70; Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 128-31; Savannah Daily Morning News, May 16, 1855.

transfer their loyalties and their ballots to the opposition. Yet the volatility of partisan politics after 1852 and the breakdown of such traditional loyalties changed the stakes at every level of competition. In particular, Democratic and Know Nothing operatives in Savannah likely scrambled to capture the substantial Whig constituency, adrift since Winfield Scott's presidential candidacy.⁵⁶

Moreover, as witnessed in other cities, Know Nothings in Savannah claimed that corrupt officials had engaged regularly in the falsification of naturalization records and continued to do so in preparation for the upcoming elections. The Democratic *Daily Morning News*, attempting to quell fear in the immigrant community that naturalization papers would be required at the polls, argued that no election official could demand such papers. In addition, Democrats continued to proclaim loudly that Know Nothings were traitors to the South because of their "fusion with Black Republicans."⁵⁷

At the same time, Savannah's American party leaders, continuing to proclaim their devotion to the Union and to the South's "peculiar institution," portrayed themselves as the most committed supporters of the Georgia Platform. In addition, by posing as a "Law and Order Party," local Know Nothings surely made a strong appeal to the anti-foreign sentiments of many established, native-born residents and likewise counted on support from those citizens who had

⁵⁶Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York, 1990), 232-33.

⁵⁷*Savannah Republican*, September 16, 1855; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, September 19, 26, 1855.

backed the People's Ticket in 1854. The editors of the *Republican*, copying Know Nothing journals throughout the South, argued that Savannah's disease, poverty, crime, and political corruption could be blamed on immigration. Singled out for the harshest condemnation, Irish immigrants were blamed for Savannah's increasing incidents of larceny, buying and receiving stolen property, illegal voting, assault, and murder. Ironically, even the Democratic *Morning News*, in an editorial entitled "Pauper Labor," questioned the propriety of unchecked immigration within the context of southern institutions. The *News* reasoned:

Of the disturbances and disasters likely to result to our Southern States from the introduction of pauper labor from abroad, there can be no question. The white laborer, without the wealth to purchase a slave, or the intelligence to understand our institutions, is an abolitionist. He not only competes with the slave for the necessities of subsistence, but the discipline of slavery reduces the value of labor to a point at which he finds it difficult to live. He does oppose it, and he must oppose it. His instincts of interest and existence are against it. He must proscribe the negro from employment, and he does proscribe him from employment.

This editorial echoes a popular theme in Know Nothing rhetoric and clearly illustrates that even among Democrats there was some anxiety over the results of competition between foreign-born and slave labor. Indeed, many southerners feared that militant working class Irishmen, because of competition with slave labor, would ally themselves with northern Republicans to protect their economic status at the ballot box. In Savannah, the fact that slaves and immigrants lived and worked in close proximity likely exacerbated such worry. Despite this brief

lapse, however, Savannah's Democracy vociferously attacked the Know Nothing creed and defended the rights and reputations of the city's naturalized citizens.⁵⁸

In the wake of growing Democratic criticism, American party adherents in Savannah and throughout Georgia were no doubt elated by the rhetoric of John Macpherson Berrien, reported to be a future standard-bearer for the American party in the state. The combination of public pressure and rumor finally forced Berrien to address his critics and supporters in a published letter entitled, "To the People of Georgia." While he would not explicitly endorse the American party, his remarks demonstrated that he sympathized with many of the new party's principles. For example, although he noted the unconstitutionality of religious qualifications for office-holding and franchise requirements, he acknowledged that voters should consider a candidate's religion when going to the polls. Moreover, he observed that voters had a responsibility to cast their ballots against office seekers whose religion might prove "to be unsound and dangerous, to an extent that would induce distrust in the ordinary transactions of life." Voicing his own reservations about supporting a naturalized Roman Catholic candidate, Berrien implied that he agreed with the American party's idea that "Americans shall govern America." Although he insisted that the nation's legislative councils could not affect the status of naturalized citizens, he believed that the naturalization process needed to be lengthened to reserve citizenship for the truly "worthy" who

⁵⁸Savannah *Republican*, June 28, August 29, 1855; Dennis Clark, "The South's Irish Catholics: A Case of Cultural Confinement," in *Catholics in the Old South: Essays on Church and Culture*, eds. Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn (Macon, Georgia, 1983), 200; Savannah *Daily Morning News*, March 16, 1855; Siegel, "Artisans and Immigrants," 228; Miller, "The Enemy Within," 39-43.

would not sell their votes to the highest bidder. Nevertheless, Berrien appeared most committed to the goal of perserving the Union, and on one occasion registered his willingness to support any political party that could "exorcise the demon of disunion."⁵⁹

Even without Berrien's endorsement of the party, his remarks elicited enthusiastic praise in Georgia's Know Nothing journals. The Savannah *Republican*, which published the full text of Berrien's letter, proclaimed that his remarks represented "a powerful vindication of the principles and objects of the American party." The *Republican's* editors ventured that the force of Berrien's arguments would crush "as with the hand of a giant, the shallow sophistries and windy objections of pettifrogging lawyers and peripatetic stump speakers." Still, the American party in Savannah, while certainly bolstered by Berrien's statements, faced a difficult series of campaigns in the autumn of 1855.⁶⁰

On September 24 a Democratic nominating committee selected its candidates for state senator and representatives. The committee, led by former mayor Dr. Richard D. Arnold, picked Dr. James P. Screven, a noted Savannah physician who had retired from his medical practice to devote more time to his business and political interests. As chairman of the Commissioners of the Savannah Water Works and president of the Savannah, Albany, & Gulf Railroad, Screven could be readily identified as one of the principal architects and

⁵⁹McCrary, "John Macpherson Berrien," 36-37; Savannah *Republican*, September 10, 1855.

⁶⁰Ibid., September 10, 1855.

supporters of the city's growth and improvement, and would therefore prove a formidable candidate. Running with Screven as candidates for the Georgia house were William H. Stiles and attorney Alexander R. Lawton.⁶¹

Only four days earlier local Know Nothings, convening for the first time to nominate candidates for a Savannah election, offered a full ticket for the city's legislative seats. Heading the slate was mayor Edward C. Anderson, who was tapped to challenge Screven for the senatorial position. Obviously the Know Nothing leadership, with the assent of the assembled party supporters, believed Anderson had demonstrated his fitness to represent Savannah in the Georgia legislature because his mayoral administration reflected the reform agenda of the party. Anderson's efforts over the preceding months, particularly in the context of law enforcement and Sabbath ordinances, had addressed problems that local Know Nothings were quick to lay at the doorstep of the city's foreign-born community. In addition to mayor Anderson, the American party nominated attorney Francis S. Bartow and successful cotton factor and commission merchant Charles A. L. Lamar. In the face of an established Democratic majority, American party leaders could only hope that their order's message would resonate with sufficient numbers of undecided or ambivalent voters to capture the election.⁶²

⁶¹Dr. Richard D. Arnold to James Buchanan, June 12, 1855, Dr. Richard D. Arnold to Col. A. R. Lawton, September 24, 1855, Shryock, ed., *Letters of Richard D. Arnold*, 74, 76; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, September 25, 1855; *Directory . . . of Savannah for the Year 1853*, passim; *Directory . . . of Savannah, for 1858*, passim.

⁶²*Savannah Republican*, September 21, 1855.

Yet despite the best efforts of their party, Savannah's American party candidates failed to defeat the Democratic opposition. In the contest for state senator, Edward C. Anderson polled 931 votes, representing a gain of more than fifty ballots over his total in the mayoral contest of 1854. Although such an increase might otherwise have encouraged party organizers in an age of strict partisan loyalties, Anderson's gain proved insufficient in 1855. His opponent, Dr. James P. Screven, received 967 votes and captured the election with a margin of only 46 ballots (see Table 5-3). In the contest to choose state representatives, Democrats William H. Stiles and Alexander R. Lawton, receiving 972 and 967 votes respectively, defeated their Know Nothing opponents by narrow margins (Charles A. L. Lamar secured 924 votes, while Francis S. Bartow polled 921).⁶³

The results of the campaign show that in less than a year voter participation had increased by nearly 400 ballots. Representing the American party, Edward C. Anderson had increased his support at the polls by 56 votes over the number he had received as People's Ticket candidate in the mayoral contest of the previous year. Nevertheless, the fact that James P. Screven, in defeating Anderson, captured nearly 350 more votes than the Democratic ticket had polled in the 1854 mayoral election, suggests that although the Savannah Democracy had fractured over the People's Ticket it had regrouped to meet the Know Nothing challenge.

⁶³Savannah *Daily Morning News*, October 2, 1855.

Based on the slim victories earned by the candidates in this contest, one must conclude that the American party, although unsuccessful, had offered a strong challenge to Democratic hegemony in Savannah's municipal affairs. Democrats and Know Nothings alike looked with guarded optimism to the approaching municipal election as a referendum on the Know Nothing movement. A substantial defeat for the American party, coming so closely on the heels of the Democratic victory in the campaign for the legislature, could deal the movement a crippling blow. A substantial victory, on the other hand, would put Savannah's American party in a strong position to campaign in the presidential contest of the following year.

Through October and November of 1855 both parties continued to fire rhetorical volleys in preparation for the election. To the *Republican's* charges that immigrants to the South possessed a natural antipathy towards slavery and therefore were more likely to support the Republican party, the *Daily Morning News* offered the example of the Savannah Turnverein, a German gymnastics and social club noted also for its charitable work within the community. In response to antislavery resolutions passed at a national convention of its order, the Savannah Turnverein assembled to assess the impact of such a stance. Concluding that "it becomes utterly impossible . . . to remain as a branch of the

order," the Turnverein adopted a resolution withdrawing from the order and proposing a union of southern societies.⁶⁴

By late November, Democrats and Know Nothings gathered to choose their candidates for the municipal contest. Convening on the evening of November 28, the enthusiastic supporters of the American party tendered the nomination of incumbent mayor Edward C. Anderson, despite his defeat in the recent legislative election. They likely reasoned that his experience, prominence within the community, as well as a strong showing in the October campaign would pave the way to success against a Democratic mayoral opponent. In addition, six of the American party's twelve aldermanic candidates were incumbents who had triumphed under the banner of the People's Ticket in December 1854, while none of the candidates came from the ranks of the Democracy. In Savannah, as in so many other communities the American party appeared to be a form of

⁶⁴The assembly of the Savannah Turnverein passed the following declaration:

Resolved, That we regard the platform laid down by the Convention as impracticable and in direct conflict with Southern rights and Southern interests, and showing a gross ignorance of Southern life on the part of the Convention. . . . That we withdraw from the Order, and form an independent Society. . . . That we recommend to all the Southern Branches of the Order "Secession from the same," as the only means against the assumption of "Northern Abolitionists," and recommend strongly a union of all the seceding [*sic*] Societies on a thorough Southern Platform.

Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 15; Savannah *Daily Morning News*, November 10, 1855.

reconstituted Whiggery bent on discovering some new means of defeating the Democratic opposition.⁶⁵

When the *Daily Morning News* announced the nominees of the Democratic and Anti-Know Nothing Ticket on November 29, the selection of the Democrats' mayoral candidate doubtless shocked American party supporters. The Democrats, in what might be deemed an act motivated by fear, nominated James P. Screven, despite his recent election to the Georgia Senate. Screven led a slate of candidates that included two former mayors, Richard D. Arnold and Richard Wayne, and a distinguished assemblage of some of Savannah's most respected citizens. Yet the Democratic candidates--a majority of whom were physicians, attorneys, or merchants who had a significant stake in the city's fortunes--were also selected for their affiliation with those organizations which played a key role within the immigrant community. By nominating mechanics and members of the Hibernian or German Friendly Societies, the Democrats offered tangible evidence to the foreign-born populace that their party, firmly in the Jacksonian tradition, truly represented the artisan as well as the unskilled German or Irish laborer.

⁶⁵In addition, the American party nominated for city council: John N. Lewis, bookkeeper; James Rogers, occupation unknown; John B. Gallie, merchant and member of the St. Andrews Society; Robert A. Allen, cotton factor and director of the Augusta & Waynesboro Railroad; Dr. Charles W. West, physician; Dr. Solomon Sheftall, physician; Gilbert Butler, a director of the Mechanics' Savings Bank; Charles H. Mills, occupation unknown; John Mallery, tailor; A. N. Wilder, occupation unknown; Thomas S. Wayne, commission merchant; and Richard Bradley, occupation unknown. Of these candidates, Lewis, Rogers, Allen, West, Butler, and Mallery were incumbent alderman who had campaigned the previous year for the People's Ticket. *Directory . . . of Savannah for 1853*, passim; *Directory of Savannah, for 1858*, passim; *Savannah Republican*, November 29, 1855.

With such a strong ticket, the Democrats seemed poised to reassert their dominance and reclaim control of the city government.⁶⁶

As the December 3 election approached some citizens apparently worried about the threat of violence at the polls, despite the fact that no such incidents had been reported during the October election for the state legislature. Observing that the Irish were "the grand movers in all disturbances," Know Nothings hinted that groups of club-wielding Irishmen planned to patrol the streets on election day. The *Daily Morning News* reminded readers that the chief of police and county sheriff, charged to maintain order, could arrest and imprison any person guilty of disturbing the peace. Yet because of this anxiety, Democrats created a special committee of seventy-five men to assist in the preservation of order at the polls. In addition, the Executive Committee of the Democratic party, in an unprecedented attempt to limit traffic in the vicinity of the polls, convinced grocers and shopkeepers near the courthouse to close their establishments on the day of the election. Aware that the Know Nothings would attempt to exploit any

⁶⁶The Democratic and Anti-Know Nothing Ticket included: Dr. Richard D. Arnold; Dr. Richard Wayne; Solomon Cohen, postmaster of Savannah and a director of the Savannah, Albany, and Gulf Railroad; John M. Cooper, stationer and member of the German Friendly Society; William S. Basinger, attorney; Dr. John F. Posey, physician and member of the German Friendly Society; Dominick W. O'Byrne, attorney and member of the Hibernian Society; Alexander R. Lawton, attorney, member of the Hibernian Society, and victor in the most recent campaign for the state legislature; John G. Falligant, painter; Robert D. Walker, a stonecutter and member of the St. Andrews Society; Robert Lachlison, an engineer, machinist, and member of the St. Andrews Society; and John J. Kelly, a member of the Hibernian Society. *Directory . . . of Savannah for the Year 1853*, passim; *Directory . . . of Savannah, for 1858*, passim; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, November 29, 1855.

hint of unrest at the polling places, Democrats were determined to insure that election day was not punctuated by any examples of unrest.⁶⁷

On December 3, even as voters went to the polls, the two parties continued to lobby for support. The *Morning News*, highlighting the Democratic party's record of achievements in the city, reminded citizens that the Democracy was responsible for internal improvement projects such as the Central Railroad, police reform, development of the gas and water works, and improvement of the river and wharves. The *Morning News* enthused:

Citizens! Be not thus cajoled by political tricksters. Remember, that every valuable, every important public enterprise of recent years, has been inaugurated by purely Democratic councils. The present Board has not inaugurated a single measure of the slightest importance to your interests.

The *Morning News's* editorial also underscored James P. Screven's record of service to the city as a physician and municipal officer. Indeed, the Democratic press noted that at the height of the yellow fever epidemic of 1854, Screven had selflessly devoted his efforts to both vocations by ministering to the sick and serving as interim mayor during the illness of Richard Wayne.

See, citizens, see who stood guardian of Savannah in the fearful days of her pestilence, regardless of himself, devoted only to his duty. Do the poor remember him? Can the rich deny him? It was James P. Screven, the Democrat.

⁶⁷Clark, "The South's Irish Catholics," 200-201; *Savannah Republican*, December 1, 1855; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, December 1, 3, 1855.

Like William Porcher Miles in Charleston, Screven no doubt benefitted politically from such publicity.⁶⁸

By contrast, the Know Nothings emphasized the merits of incumbent mayor Edward C. Anderson and noted his record over the preceding year. The *Republican* identified Anderson as the candidate of "Law and Order," observing that his vigilance as mayor had curbed lawlessness in the city. Anderson himself, attempting to refute Democrats' charges of overzealous conduct, stressed the importance of more vigilant law enforcement in his annual report to the city and suggested that it represented the most significant accomplishment of his administration. Anderson observed:

The great value of their services in the detection of offenders, the suppression of crime, the protection of the property and persons of our citizens, and the preservation of peace and good order in the City, cannot fail to commend this system to the special good will of the citizens of Savannah.⁶⁹

Still, by the end of election day, such arguments meant little in the wake of the contest's wholly unexpected result: the Democrats succeeded in regaining their majority in the city government. But the elation of victory must have belied a keen sense of disappointment over having failed to capture every office. The American party, while failing to gain control of the city council, captured the mayoralty with the reelection of Edward C. Anderson. Although his administration under the People's Ticket had no doubt alienated many citizens, he

⁶⁸Ibid., December 3, 1855.

⁶⁹*Savannah Republican*, December 3, 1855; *Report of Edward C. Anderson, Mayor of the City of Savannah, For the Year Ending October 31, 1855* (Savannah, 1855), 5.

retained enough support to eke out a narrow margin of victory over his Democratic opponent. Anderson, receiving 846 votes (twenty-nine fewer than he garnered in 1854 and nearly 100 fewer than polled in October), defeated James P. Screven by only 24 ballots (see Table 5-3). Screven polled almost exactly two hundred more votes in December 1855 than had the Democratic mayoral candidate in 1854. In the campaign for Savannah's twelve aldermanic positions, the Democrats won ten seats while Know Nothing candidates Robert A. Allen and Richard Bradley, victorious by a mere five votes, stood as their party's only representatives on the council.⁷⁰

Considering the slim margin of victory for Anderson and the Know Nothings, it was hardly surprising that some observers would regard the results suspiciously. Although the *Morning News* leveled no explicit accusations of fraud in the contest, the Democratic press observed that "unlawful proceedings" were an unfortunate feature of local politics. Implying that such "proceedings" played a role in this closely contested election, the *News* called for increase in the number of polling places as well as election officials. The *News* argued that such measures would prove conducive to public order and might also facilitate the

⁷⁰Although the mayoral election of December 1855 failed to attract as many voters as the October contest for the Georgia legislature, the results of the municipal campaign reflect an increase in voter turnout over the mayoral election of 1854. Edward C. Anderson polled 29 fewer votes in 1855 than he had received in 1854, as the Know Nothings controlled only 51% of the vote compared to the 58% secured by Anderson as People's Ticket candidate. At the same time, the defeated Democrats, increasing their support at the polls by nearly 150 votes, claimed 49% of the ballots compared to only 42% the year before. *Savannah Republican*, December 4, 1855; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, December 4, 1855.

detection of illegal voters. Not surprisingly, the American party press echoed the Democrats' observations.⁷¹

Through 1855, Savannah's American party had obviously labored to increase its support in the community. But to have secured only the mayoralty and two council seats after a year of mobilization surely constituted a serious disappointment for the new party. Moreover, the decrease in electoral support between the October and December contests (from 931 votes in the former to 846 in the latter) signaled that the absolute limits of American party strength in local politics had been reached. In fact, voter turnout for both parties declined in December; for the mayoral contest, 230 fewer citizens appeared at the courthouse than had voted in the previous contest between Screven and Anderson (see Table 5-3). James P. Screven, no doubt popular with the Democratic electorate, won nearly 150 fewer votes than he had received in his successful campaign for the Georgia Senate. Perhaps these results reflect Democrats' desire to keep Screven in the legislature. They also indicate some remaining public satisfaction with the efforts of Edward C. Anderson, despite his identification with the rejected American party. Nevertheless, a restored Democratic majority in the council attested to the great strength of that party in Savannah and reflected several months of vehement attacks against Know Nothingism.

That a division of Savannah's political spoils between Democrats and Know Nothings would produce controversy between the mayor and council should come

⁷¹*Savannah Daily Morning News*, December 4, 1855; *Savannah Republican*, December 4, 1855.

as no surprise. Within just a few months, the *Republican* accused the Democratic-led council of reversing those measures enacted by the previous administration. Most noticeable, for example, was a decline in the number of cases heard by the Police Court. Indeed, income from fines imposed in the Police Court dropped from \$2,660 for the year ending October 31, 1855, to \$1,321 for the year ending October 31, 1856.⁷²

Ultimately, discord between the mayor and his two American party councilmen, on the one hand, and the remaining ten Democratic members of the Council, on the other hand, would erupt over the authority of the Savannah Police Court. On several occasions, the Democratic aldermen, hearing appeals from the Police Court, overturned mayor Anderson's convictions. They argued in one case, for example, that "the letter and not the spirit" of the law had been violated. In April 1856, the Council, by appointing a loyal Democrat to fill the vacant post of police sergeant, ignored the candidate recommended by Anderson and the Know Nothing police chief Joseph Bryan. Addressing a meeting of the Council on April 3, 1856, Anderson admonished his Democratic adversaries:

I express my regret and protest against the election you have made of Private McGee to the post of sergeant. You have in so doing set aside an officer selected by me highly commended by his commanding officers. It must be injurious to the spirit and good tone of the Corps and cannot fail to be productive of insubordination and discord.

⁷²*Savannah Republican*, April 22, 1856; Haunton, "Law and Order," 14.

Responding to Anderson's protestations, the Council passed a resolution condemning the mayor's conduct and challenging his authority over law enforcement efforts in the city.

Be it therefore resolved, that we do not regard the Mayor as any more entrusted with a supervision of the Police than with all other City Officers, nor do we acknowledge his right to dictate to us whom we shall elect to office.⁷³

As a result of this Democratic opposition, Edward C. Anderson could accomplish little during his tenure in office. Before the end of his term in October,⁷⁴ Anderson would see the Council censure his conduct and accept the resignation of his chief of police, Joseph Bryan, who noted at his departure that he could not prevent the appointment of "imbecile party fools" or "save a worthy officer from the fang of party venom." Still, Anderson prepared to carry the American party's standard in one last municipal contest.⁷⁵

Through the summer and autumn of 1856, both the Democrats and Know Nothings continued to spar while marshaling their resources for the upcoming municipal and presidential contests. In July, supporters of the American party called a meeting of the Friends of Fillmore and organized a "Fillmore & Donelson Club" to rally popular support for the Know Nothing ticket. Issuing the call of "Frémont & Disunion, Buchanan & Party Rule, Fillmore and the

⁷³Savannah *Daily Morning News*, April 18, 1856; Savannah City Council, *Minutes*, March 6, April 3, 17, May 29, 1856; Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 229-30.

⁷⁴In 1856 the Georgia legislature passed a law which moved the date of Savannah's municipal elections from December to October.

⁷⁵Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 229-30; Savannah *Daily Morning News*, October 13, 1856.

Constitution," the *Republican* ratified the state Know Nothing convention's acceptance of the Fillmore nomination.⁷⁶

Democrats, on the other hand, responded with the formation of a "Buchanan & Breckinridge Club" and attacked the Fillmore candidacy.

Impugning the American party ticket, the *Daily Morning News* noted:

In the South, they have set up Millard Fillmore as their great idol, and are groping blindly about among the rubbish of his administration, for disjointed fragments to build up a pedestal withal, on which to place him.

Moreover, the Democratic press lambasted Andrew Jackson Donelson's nomination because of his former relationship with the Democratic party and its patriarch, Andrew Jackson. Yet the most potent weapon in the Democratic arsenal was the charge that a vote for Fillmore and the Know Nothings could contribute to the victory of Frémont and the Republicans. To such charges the Know Nothings could do no more than highlight the merits of their candidate and promise that a vote for Fillmore would defeat the Republicans.⁷⁷

Yet as American party organizers looked ahead to the November vote for presidential candidates, they must have realized the great significance of the municipal contest in terms of the order's political future. Without a victory in the

⁷⁶Meeting in Macon on July 8, the state council of Georgia's American party passed resolutions affirming the national party convention's choice of Fillmore and Donelson, rejecting the doctrine of popular sovereignty, and condemning the Republican party. By adopting an anti-Republican, pro-southern rights platform, the Georgia council hoped to stop the defection of Know Nothing supporters to the Democracy. Attorneys Francis S. Bartow and William Law represented Savannah in the state council. *Savannah Republican*, July 10, 19, 26, 1856; Montgomery, *Cracker Parties*, 169.

⁷⁷*Savannah Daily Morning News*, July 19, 29, 1856.

election for mayor and councilmen, the party would be crippled before it even reached the presidential contest. Accordingly, Know Nothing supporters met on September 24 to choose their candidates for city government. Edward C. Anderson again received the mayoral nomination of his party. Although Anderson had fared badly during the year against strong Democratic opposition in the city council, perhaps American party leaders reasoned that his reputation, as well as his pro-reform record and experience after two terms in office, would guarantee substantial support.⁷⁸

By contrast, the Democrats nominated a diverse and formidable slate of candidates led once again by Dr. James P. Screven, still serving as a Georgia state senator. By deviating little from their tickets of previous elections, the Democrats offered nominees who were recognized in the community and had established a record of service in city affairs. Not surprisingly, the Democratic press attacked Edward C. Anderson's record as mayor of Savannah. A letter from "An-Eye-On-Em" suggested that the mayor, far from being vigilant in the enforcement of local laws, had eased up considerably in his prosecution of citizens. Of course not

⁷⁸In addition, the American party nominated Edward Padelford, Sr., a shipping and commission merchant; John Mallery, tailor; Edwin E. Hertz, occupation unknown; Robert A. Allen, cotton factor and a director of the Augusta & Waynesboro Railroad; Richard Bradley, occupation unknown; Thomas Wayne, commission merchant; John N. Lewis, bookkeeper; James G. Rogers, occupation unknown; George W. Stiles, occupation unknown; William H. Davis, butcher; H. F. Willink, Jr., shipwright; and John F. Tucker, occupation unknown. *Savannah Republican*, September 25, 1856; *Directory . . . of Savannah for the Year 1853*, passim; *Directory . . . of Savannah, for 1858*, passim.

mentioned in the letter was Anderson's frustration over finding his Police Court decisions overturned by the Democratic council.⁷⁹

Still, the Democrats hardly scored an easy triumph over their American party opponents. Instead, Anderson and his fellow Know Nothing candidates increased their electoral support over the previous year's municipal contest by more than 100 votes. Unfortunately, the Democrats as well had secured a higher turnout (nearly three hundred more) than witnessed in 1855. Dr. Screven, receiving 1101 votes, defeated Edward C. Anderson by only 130 ballots out of 2,072 cast (see Table 5-3). In the race for Savannah's council seats, the dozen Democratic candidates polled an average of 1125 votes, while their American party opponents received only 947. The significant rise in voter turnout over the previous year's mayoral contest--with an increase of 404 ballots--is not that surprising. Both parties doubtless benefitted from the heightened partisan enthusiasm typically generated by the presidential campaigns of this period. Similar increases in voter participation were seen in Norfolk and Wilmington as well.⁸⁰

⁷⁹The Democratic ticket included Dr. Richard D. Arnold; William S. Basinger, attorney; Aaron Champion, grocer; Solomon Cohen, postmaster and a director of the Savannah, Albany, & Gulf Railroad; Robert Lachlison, engineer and member of the St. Andrews Society; Dr. J. F. Posey, member of the German Friendly Society; Robert D. Walker, a stonecutter and member of the St. Andrews Society; John G. Falligant, painter; James B. Foley, hotel proprietor and member of the Hibernian Society; George A. Gordon, attorney and member of the St. Andrews Society; Alvin N. Miller, engineer and former candidate of the People's Ticket; and Thomas Purse, appraiser for the port of Savannah, member of the German Friendly Society, and a director of the Central Railroad. *Directory . . . of Savannah for the Year 1853*, passim; *Directory . . . of Savannah, for 1858*, passim; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, October 8, 1856.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, October 14, 1856.

The Know Nothing party in Savannah continued to campaign for Fillmore, as demonstrated in a large American party rally staged on October 24. Even on the evening prior to presidential balloting ardent supporters of the American party swarmed into the streets for a torchlight procession. One banner proclaimed:

Freedom for Foreigners
But
Supremacy for Ourselves.
Foreigners may Ride
But Sam must Drive.

Despite such enthusiasm, however, more pragmatic observers must have sensed the approaching demise of Know Nothingism. Indeed, the defeat of the order in the municipal campaign of 1856 effectively ended American party activity in municipal politics. When Savannah's voters went to the polls to cast their ballots in the presidential contest the American party faithful supported their candidate, giving Fillmore the same vote (971) that Edward C. Anderson had received in the recent mayoral contest. But an even larger number of voters, in an effort to insure the defeat of Frémont and the Republicans, gave their support to James Buchanan and the Democratic ticket. Over 1400 citizens supported Buchanan in an election that drew over 300 more voters than the October campaign for municipal government (see Table 5-3).⁸¹

⁸¹In publishing the results of the 1856 presidential contest, the Savannah press did not report separate return for the city. Instead, the papers gave results for Chatham County as a whole. Buchanan received 1,444 votes, while Fillmore, polled only 971. *Savannah Republican*, October 25, November 4, 5, 1856; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, November 5, 1855.

In retrospect, the American party in Savannah--like that in Norfolk, Wilmington, and Charleston--left an indefinite legacy to the local political system. As witnessed in Wilmington, the arrival of Know Nothingism clearly increased voter interest and at least temporarily offered a very strong challenge to Democratic hegemony. Yet by the municipal elections of 1857, the Know Nothings had disappeared altogether, although the *Daily Morning News* hinted that some citizens were making an effort to resuscitate "Sam." Thereafter, the local Democratic party would control city affairs with virtually no opposition through the remainder of the decade. A Young Men's Independent Ticket made a feeble effort to challenge the Democracy in 1857, but could do little to penetrate the sturdy armor of Democratic hegemony. The Young Men's Independent ticket, composed of a dozen political novices and mayoral candidate George W. Stiles (a former American party nominee for the city council), polled fewer than 600 ballots; in winning their facile victory the Democratic candidates received an average of 900 to 1,000 votes. Dr. Richard Wayne, defeated in 1854 as a result of popular support for the People's Ticket, was returned to the mayoralty by a comfortable margin over Stiles (see Table 5-3). It would appear, then, that a majority of Savannah's citizens was content to restore the partisan status quo and trust the city's established leadership; moreover, hundreds of voters had obviously stayed at home on election day.⁸²

⁸²Savannah *Daily Morning News*, October 12, 13, 1857; Haunton, "Savannah in the 1850s," 227.

Still, the years immediately following the demise of Know Nothingism would reveal the continued importance of issues that had formed an important segment of the American party agenda in 1855. For example, concern over law and order in Savannah would reappear at the end of the decade in the form of continued appeals for reform. Ironically, however, the public outcry prompted an unforeseen split in the Democratic party through which a renegade People's Democratic Ticket, led by Dr. Richard Arnold, successfully challenged party leaders and the incumbent municipal administration to gain control of the council and mayoralty in 1859. In addition, the animosity engendered by the People's Ticket and American party movements prompted some citizens to decry the divisive forces of "partyism" and national political issues in local affairs. Indeed, in the municipal contest of 1860, a Citizens Ticket, made up of pro-union Democrats and Constitutional Unionists, gained control of Savannah's council and mayoralty on a platform that promised to exclude national politics from city government.⁸³

Against this backdrop of municipal political turmoil and frequent public calls for municipal reform, the city's brief flirtation with the politics of Know Nothingism might appear insignificant. Yet the appearance of "Sam" in Savannah stands as an important benchmark in the history of the port's development. As witnessed in Charleston, the American party in Savannah had little opportunity for significant or sustained success in a city that possessed only a fragile foundation of Whig party support. In that respect, then, the traditional

⁸³Ibid., 230-31; *Savannah Daily Morning News*, October 5, 1859.

scholarship on Know Nothingism appears correct; the American party in the South, as a rule, could only find fertile soil for growth in those areas in which the Whigs had established themselves as strong participants in local partisan discourse. The achievements of the Savannah Democracy, joined with an expanding electorate of foreign-born and typically Democratic voters, created a powerful political machine not easily defeated. Moreover, according to Herbert Weaver, an established record of cooperation between the city's Catholics and Protestants, foreign-born and native-born, limited the effects of the nativist sentiment that appeared in the 1840s and 1850s. This attitude was evinced, for example, by citizens' efforts in the ethnically diverse Union Society, a charitable organization responsible for maintaining the local orphanage. In addition, the membership of Catholics and Protestants in the Hibernian and German Friendly societies, both among the most prominent of Savannah's socio-political orders, offered an important and highly visible manifestation of "community" that transcended sectarian differences. Consequently, many citizens, expressing their views in the pages of the Democratic press, were outraged over the dissemination of the anti-Catholic or nativist bombast that most often accompanied American party activity. When Savannah's American party did attempt to exploit the anti-foreign or anti-Catholic feelings of local citizens, such attacks invariably elicited the ire of Democratic leaders. For example, Joseph Ganahl observed:

The cultivation of an intensely American sentiment is one of those sophomoric generalities, which is of use for declamation, and nothing else. It may mean anything and every thing, and is unworthy the language of a statesman or of an enlightened

politician. The term that Americans shall rule America, is another form of balderdash rhetoric, and nothing else.

Yet considering the demographic character of Savannah, the Know Nothings' use of nativism more clearly reflected the reality of socio-economic development in that city than was witnessed in Norfolk, Wilmington, or Charleston. More than the other communities addressed in this study, Savannah more closely resembled northern cities in which rapid population growth, immigration, and the resulting social problems aided in the development of an American party movement.⁸⁴

Despite its failure to capture no more than the mayoralty and two council seats in the 1855 election, the American party in Savannah succeeded in mobilizing impressive support at the polls. The fact that Know Nothing aldermanic candidates in 1855 lost by only narrow margins to their Democratic opponents suggests, for example, that many voters sympathized with the law and order emphasis of the American party. The triumph of the People's Ticket in the 1854 municipal campaign clearly underscored the potency of this issue. As the local movement coalesced through 1854, supporters of the People's Ticket, unionists, Sabbatarians, temperance advocates, Protestant evangelicals, Whigs, and perhaps even a few maverick Democrats, saw in the American party a chance to gamble their political fortunes on a national order that presumably reflected their republican mindset and assured success at the polls. Edward C. Anderson's victory in the 1855 mayoral campaign was likely a function of his prominence and

⁸⁴Weaver, "Foreigners in Ante-Bellum Savannah," 12; Shoemaker, "Stranger and Citizens," 175; Scrapbook of Joseph Ganahl, Georgia Historical Society.

experience in office. Still, that the American party proved unable to follow the victorious People's Ticket with a nearly identical slate of candidates, leads one to suspect that by late 1855 Know Nothingism simply carried too many liabilities to erase the Democratic majority entirely. Although nativism appealed to a substantial number of citizens who perceived a threat in Savannah's burgeoning foreign-born population, a majority of voters, echoing Joseph Ganahl, found such rhetoric distasteful and thoroughly anti-democratic. Thus by 1856, even Edward C. Anderson could not win on an American party ticket.⁸⁵

Finally, the mobilization of the American party in Savannah can offer valuable testimony on the maturation of the port. For example, the appearance of Know Nothingism, observed in the same context as the People's Ticket of 1854 and the People's Democratic Ticket of 1859, represented the culmination of citizens' efforts to come to terms with three decades of dramatic growth and demographic change in Savannah. Whether or not these reform-oriented groups would have appeared in the absence of the political crises that defined the 1850s is certainly debatable. One cannot deny, however, that the political strife of the decade provided a crucible for such partisan activity. More importantly, the brief sojourn of "Sam" in Savannah reveals that this southern city was not immune to

⁸⁵James H. Broussard, "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South," *Louisiana History* 7 (1966): 16.

what Michael Holt calls the "politics of impatience," the "malaise and sense of dislocation caused by rapid social and economic change."⁸⁶

Yet to contemporary observers, laboring to defeat the "insidious shadow of Know Nothingism," such explanations would have meant little. To southern Democratic partisans at least, the contest against the American party had little to do with social or economic dislocation. It was, in the most grandiose or patriot language of the age, a battle over two competing interpretations of the republican ideal. On a more personal level, however, most opponents of Know Nothingism likely cast a more pragmatic eye on the situation. Regarding the Know Nothing challenge as only a quest for political power, they would no doubt have understood Savannah's Joseph Ganahl, who remarked in the yellowed margin of his scrapbook that "the first, main, and distinct object of the American party is to regulate the affairs of our city."⁸⁷

⁸⁶Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History* 60 (1973-74): 313.

⁸⁷Scrapbook of Joseph Ganahl, Georgia Historical Society.

Chapter VI

The Legacy of the American Party

When the nation's voters went to the polls in November of 1856, they faced an altogether new partisan landscape that had been reshaped in dramatic fashion since the election of Franklin Pierce four years earlier. The once-powerful Whig machine--divided by opposition to the Compromise of 1850, further weakened by the defeat of presidential hopeful Winfield Scott, and almost fully abandoned for the politics of nativism and antislavery after passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854--could not even function as a national party. The deaths in 1852 of both Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, the party's principal spokesmen and architects, further weakened the Whigs and left them without the strong voices of compromise. The national party quickly collapsed by the mid-1850s, leaving only its bewildered adherents--North and South--scrambling for partisan alternatives. Indeed, by 1856 the Whig party existed only at the state and local levels among the few voters and politicians unwilling to cast aside so readily their traditional partisan loyalties. Surveying the Whig wreckage, more optimistic Democrats possibly likened their enviable situation to that of James Monroe and the Jeffersonian Republicans in 1820; they naively reasoned that the demise of

their partisan opponents heralded a new era of political hegemony. The Democrats of the 1850s, however, would never realize their own "era of good feelings."¹

Still intact as a national party, the Democracy, facing opposition from nativist, antislavery, and temperance political factions, had suffered numerous defeats at every level of electoral competition since the presidential triumph of 1852 and hardly seemed unified for the approaching presidential contest. Although many Democratic leaders--having hailed Franklin Pierce's election as evidence of party harmony--believed the new administration could unite North and South behind the Compromise of 1850, and thus blunt the divisiveness of sectional controversy, the president quickly proved incapable of providing strong leadership for either the nation or his party. Pierce's attempts, for example, to distribute federal patronage equally among the various antagonistic Democratic factions only exacerbated such divisions. And, significantly, his effort to use support for the Compromise of 1850 as a test of Democratic loyalty, as well as his administration's ineffectual handling of the Kansas-Nebraska controversy, subjected the Democracy to the damaging effects of sectionalism and further alienated those individuals sympathetic to the nascent Republican party. As a result, by 1856 Franklin Pierce could muster little support for renomination; his

¹David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York, 1976), 240; Arthur C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, D.C., 1913), 303-05, 328-30; Michael F. Holt, "The Mysterious Disappearance of the American Whig Party," in *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 246-47.

party instead turned to Pennsylvanian James Buchanan, who had long awaited the opportunity to assume the mantle of Democratic leadership.²

Opposing Buchanan were Republican John C. Frémont and the American party nominee, former president Millard Fillmore. Although Buchanan and the Democrats ultimately retained control of the presidency, polling 174 electoral votes with just over 45 percent of the popular vote, the results of the 1856 presidential contest reflected clearly the momentous political changes which had occurred over the previous two years. The fledgling Republican party, coalescing around opposition to both the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the doctrine of popular sovereignty, secured considerable support throughout the Northeast and Midwest, even in districts only recently controlled by the American party. Taking advantage of the highly publicized incidents of violence in Kansas and exploiting the public outrage precipitated by Preston Brooks' caning of Senator Charles Sumner, the new party emphasized the threat of a "slave power conspiracy" and received 114 electoral votes with over 33 percent of the popular vote in its initial foray into the arena of presidential politics. The Republicans, easily surpassing the record of their Liberty and Free Soil party antecedents, won majorities over Buchanan and the Democrats in eleven northern states (Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Wisconsin), thus demonstrating the potential strength of a purely sectional party. Despite the Democratic victory, Republicans were

²Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978), 140-43; Potter, *Impending Crisis*, 230-32; Larry Gara, *The Presidency of Franklin Pierce* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1991), 50, 160-61.

doubtless inspired by the level of popular support for Frémont and, more importantly, for a political platform constructed on a foundation of free-soilism.³

At the same time, the presidential vote in 1856--representing what some historians have called a "victorious defeat" for the Republican party--demonstrated the waning potency of Know Nothingism, particularly in the North. Unable to accept a platform that equivocated on the slavery question and unwilling to sanction the nomination of Millard Fillmore, a majority of once-zealous American party supporters abandoned the order to support the new Republican party. As a result, the Know Nothing presidential ticket fared poorly in areas once identified as strongholds of American party support. Massachusetts, for example, had given American party candidates substantial majorities in the state elections of 1854 and the Know Nothings controlled the legislature and governorship. Nevertheless, in the 1856 presidential contest, Fillmore and the American party mustered only 11.5 percent of the popular vote in the state.⁴

Yet while Know Nothingism was most often identified as a northern movement, associated with the obvious increase in immigration during the antebellum decades, the party still enjoyed considerable support in the South,

³Robert A. Diamond, ed., *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections* (Washington, D.C., 1975), 270.

⁴William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York, 1987), 413-14, 441-42; John R. Mulkern, *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement* (Boston, 1990), 4; *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 270.

even by 1856. In fact, the South yielded Fillmore's only majority⁵ and the American party ticket polled over 40 percent of the popular vote in nearly every state in the region. Yet what effect did Fillmore's candidacy have on the campaign and why did the American party's efforts fail in 1856?⁶

The stunning collapse of the national Know Nothing movement following the defeat of Millard Fillmore offered a stark contrast to the party's amazing electoral successes of 1854. As American party supporters--reflecting on the rapid growth of their order--looked optimistically to the next presidential campaign, many speculated that the movement could even secure the White House in 1856, given the demonstrated potency of the Know Nothing message in state and municipal contests. The American party at least appeared responsive to rank-and-file voters and seemed prepared to address some of the more problematic social issues of the period. Moreover, the new order promised to combat the inertia which had ostensibly defined politics under the old party

⁵In Maryland, the American party secured nearly 55% of the popular vote, while Buchanan and the Democracy polled only 45%. The Know Nothings' success in Maryland can be attributed to the long-established support for the nativism issue. *Guide to U.S. Elections*, 270; Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 15-17.

⁶*Ibid.*, 270.

system.⁷ In the end, however, Millard Fillmore and the Know Nothings could do little more than act as a thorn in the side of the new Republican party.⁸

As expected, the Fillmore candidacy clearly divided opposition to the Democratic party which effectively handed several states, and the election, to James Buchanan. But although the Know Nothings still had enough life for this national political contest, the Republicans had mortally wounded the American party by coopting much of its platform and by fusing with many local Know Nothing organizations during 1855 and 1856. Indeed, partisan competition between Republicans and Know Nothings at the state and local levels had already presaged the defeat of the American party in the national campaign of 1856.⁹

In the South, on the other hand, the Know Nothings obviously pursued a different course as the developing Republican party produced significant political reverberations throughout the region. While much of the support for the American party in the North would eventually be mustered behind Frémont and the Republicans, in the South, of course, no such alliance could ever take place.

⁷In one of the more compelling and controversial interpretations of the rise of Know Nothingism, Michael Holt suggests that a growing consensus between the existing parties contributed to a breakdown in traditional partisan loyalties and thus paved the way for the Know Nothing movement. "The evident bankruptcy of the two-party system," Holt argues, "combined with the sudden change produced by massive immigration, rapid urban growth, and dislocating economic transformation fostered a widespread sense of malaise." William Gienapp, however, counters that Holt's analysis does not explain fully the pervasiveness of anti-party sentiment that toppled the second party system. The existing political order fractured not so much because of a consensus on old issues, but as a result of the parties' inability to handle the new crises which developed during the 1850s. The American party pledged to address those issues. Holt, *Political Crisis*, 136-38; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 66-67.

⁸Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York, 1992), 202.

⁹Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 440-41.

As witnessed in Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah, local American party leaders struggled in vain after 1855 to avoid identification with abolitionism and the Republican party. In each of these cities, the Democratic press employed such allegations with great effect to blunt successfully the impact of the Know Nothing message and therefore strengthen the popular appeal of the Democracy as the chief protector of southern institutions and liberties.¹⁰

Once identified with "black republicanism" and free-soilism, "Sam" and the American party had scant hope for long-term success in the South. Also, the threat of the Republican presidential campaign, indeed a widespread fear of a possible Republican victory, prompted many loyal Know Nothings in the South to reevaluate their support for Fillmore, and, in more extreme cases, they even cast their ballots for Buchanan and the Democrats. The fact that Fillmore still did so well in the South, however, reflected the continued vitality of anti-Democratic sentiment among Know Nothings and traditionally Whig voters and confirmed the close relationship which obviously existed between the two parties. At the same time, Fillmore's strength at the polls, particularly in the Upper South, demonstrated the appeal of the American party's unionist platform. Dedicated unionists like Kenneth Rayner never wavered in their belief that the American party provided the surest means of avoiding sectional controversy and preserving the republic. Indeed, as Daniel Crofts has illustrated in his analysis of the unionist movement on the eve of the Civil War, the Constitutional Union

¹⁰Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 336-37.

movement of 1860 was built in part on the ruins of the unionist elements of the defunct American party.¹¹

Yet what did the attraction of the American party in the southern states reveal about the breakup of the second party system in that region? Although Tyler Anbinder contends that the development of Know Nothingism in the South "does not shed light on the collapse of the second party system," his conclusion hardly makes sense when one recognizes that the demise of the national Whig party and the growing factionalism within the ranks of the Democracy had as much effect on southerners as upon citizens of the North.¹²

On the surface, the advent of Know Nothingism in the South appears to be linked exclusively to the demise of Whiggery. To be sure, former Whigs did, in fact, stand out in the southern American party. Although a roll call of candidates in Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah, reveals only a very few Democrats transferring their loyalties to the American party, one can safely conclude that any Democratic apostasy proved quite limited. As a result of this trend, few scholars have dared look beyond such an obvious correlation nor have they attempted to understand Know Nothingism beyond the context of national partisan competition and the presidential election of 1856.¹³ Indeed, for a

¹¹Gregg Cantrell, *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent* (Urbana, 1993), 84-85; Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 51-52.

¹²Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, xii.

¹³One of the best examples of this type of study is James Broussard's journal article on American party electoral strength during the presidential campaign of 1856. Comparing voter turnout for Whig and American party candidates in the 1852 and 1856 elections, Broussard

majority of students focusing their attention on the political ferment of the 1850s, the American party in the South stands at the periphery of the historical scholarship concerned with the region's path to secession and civil war. Not surprisingly, therefore, such circumscribed efforts to come to terms with the full scope of the movement in the South have led to sweeping generalizations about Know Nothingism that demand closer scrutiny.¹⁴

For example, as noted earlier in this study, some historians have alluded to the ideological impotence of southern Know Nothingism in an effort to make the party conform to some rigidly defined model employed to analyze the region's antebellum political economy. William J. Cooper's dismissal of the American party's significance vis-à-vis the "politics of slavery" certainly stands as the most obvious illustration of this school of thought. At the same time, scholars have attempted to draw a line between the sectional wings of the party and suggest, as does Tyler Anbinder in the most recent study of the American party in the North, that "southern Know Nothingism bore little resemblance to its northern counterpart." Of course, analysis of each of the cities considered in this study reveals that local American party organizations--even the pro-southern rights Know Nothings in Charleston--strived to adopt the nativist, reform-oriented posture of the national party. Also, while one might doubt southerners'

concludes that traditionally Whig counties throughout the South were much more likely to support Fillmore and the American party ticket in 1856. "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South," *Louisiana History* 7 (1966): 8-14.

¹⁴Cole, *Whig Party in the South*, 308-09.

commitment to the nativist tenets of the order, they undoubtedly perceived a threat in unchecked immigration, even when foreign-born residents accounted for less than 10 percent of the total population in most areas. Although nativism in the South did not rest on a well-established institutional foundation of secret societies and fraternal orders, such sentiments nevertheless proved popular. And, as witnessed in Savannah, nativism could find expression in ordinances implicitly designed to check the behavior of foreign-born citizens.¹⁵

Further examination of the American party's brief life in these communities likewise reveals a great deal about the nature of urban life and development in the antebellum South. Clearly these cities struggled mightily to improve their economic status, particularly in terms of sponsoring internal improvement projects which might foster the development of larger regional markets. Norfolk's leadership, for example, engaged in an unremitting battle against Petersburg and Richmond for control of the commercial traffic which plied the James River, Virginia's principal transportation artery. At the same time, Wilmingtonians embarked on a bold program of railroad construction that would facilitate increased commerce with the interior of North Carolina and enhance the port's position as a leading center for the exportation of naval stores. Farther south, municipal authorities in Charleston and rival Savannah labored against each other to establish improved commercial ties with the upcountry

¹⁵Broussard, "Know-Nothing Electoral Strength," 6-7; William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 1978), 364-65; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, xii.

districts of Georgia and South Carolina while subsidizing construction of a regional railroad system.

In addition, the citizens of Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah, particularly eager to make their ports significant centers of trade, even welcomed delegates to major commercial conventions during the decade prior to secession in an effort to stimulate regional *and* local economic development. The fact that by the 1850s both Whigs and Democrats generally agreed on the necessity of such schemes underscores Michael Holt's conclusion that consensus more often than not defined partisan relations on economic issues during this period. Not surprisingly, then, the American party's leaders could scarcely deviate from the rhetoric of boosterism offered by their political opponents. Local Know Nothing candidates could only suggest that they would prove more capable servants of their communities' commercial interests. On occasion, as witnessed in Charleston, the American party press attempted to blame incumbent municipal officials for fiscal mismanagement and commercial stagnation. Yet campaign rhetoric of this nature could never be supported by any evidence. Thus, in the case of Charleston's John Cunningham, such attacks were merely employed to exploit any popular dissatisfaction with the city's economic course.¹⁶

It also appears obvious that these cities, despite ample evidence supporting the distinctiveness or uniqueness of southern urban areas, still faced the same sorts of challenges--albeit on a smaller scale--that affected cities in the North

¹⁶Vicki Vaughn Johnson *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871* (Columbia, Missouri, 1992), 94-95.

during the antebellum decades. Municipal authorities in Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah battled rising crime, poorly drained streets with inadequate lighting, overburdened and unhealthy sewers, overcrowding in working class districts, and the ever-present fear of a yellow fever, cholera, or typhoid epidemic. Not surprisingly, American party organizers in these communities, adopting the anti-party stance typical of the Know Nothing movement, attempted to convince voters that the established local parties and factions, in addition to being enemies of republicanism, had failed to address such issues and therefore cared little for the well-being of their cities. In both Charleston and Savannah, for example, the American party press targeted the inability of local officials to enforce town ordinances and preserve law and order. Savannah's citizens, focusing on the harsh conditions prevailing in the Yamacraw district of their city, protested the increasingly close relationship developing among immigrants, slaves, and free black residents. And, as witnessed in Charleston, such sentiment could apparently alter partisan behavior. Although unsuccessful in their battle for control of the town council, John Cunningham and Charleston's Know Nothings doubtless produced enough anxiety among leaders of the dominant Southern Rights party to occasion the unexpected mayoral nomination of William Porcher Miles, whose background did not reflect an alliance with the commercial interests of the party's leaders. As already noted, Miles' administration, adopting much of the local American party's proposed reforms, ultimately sponsored the dramatic transformation of Charleston's police force.

Yet scrape away the veneer of republican rhetoric, urban boosterism, and support for party reform and one can suggest that there were significant similarities among these municipal politicians. They often claimed membership on the boards of directors of competing banks and railroads. For example, in Savannah the Democratic press suggested that the Know Nothing ticket represented the interests of the board of directors for the Savannah, Albany, & Gulf Railroad (of which mayoral candidate Edward C. Anderson was a member), while the American party organ charged that their Democratic opponents were controlled by the Central Railroad of Georgia. But in Norfolk, Wilmington, and Savannah,¹⁷ politicians from both the Democratic and American parties tended to represent the more prosperous and prominent families within their respective communities. They usually had established records of service in local office and, as one might expect, a large number of these local officials engaged in the mercantile life of their cities as shopkeepers, commission merchants, cotton factors, grocers, shippers, and brokers. Indeed, more than 30 percent of the political candidates in these communities, regardless of party affiliation, were involved in commerce. At the same time, local professionals--attorneys,

¹⁷As pointed out in Chapter 4, members of Charleston's dominant Southern Rights party represented the more prosperous commercial and professional interests in the port. Moreover, these political leaders shared membership in Charleston's benevolent societies, Hibernian and German Friendly societies, occupied prominent places on the boards of directors for local banks and railroad companies, and sponsored the city's cultural activities through participation in the library, historical, and drama societies. Conversely, Know Nothing organizers in Charleston (with the exception of John Cunningham, editor of the *Evening News*) were newcomers to the local political arena, did not occupy prominent positions within the city's mercantile community, and could not boast of membership in the societies and boards that defined Charleston's socio-economic life.

physicians, bankers, and accountants, for example--played prominent roles in the political life of these cities and represented more than 30 percent of local politicians. Examining the aggregate data for these four cities, one finds that 60.5% of American party candidates and 65% of Democratic municipal candidates could be grouped in the professional and commercial classes, hardly a significant difference. Both Democrats and Know Nothings recruited a small number of artisans to represent their working class constituents on the various local election tickets. But their numbers--representing a mere 13.5% of all candidates for office--suggest that these individuals played only a very limited role in the American and Democratic parties. Only rarely could one find the non-skilled laborer as a candidate for municipal office (see Tables A-1 through A-5, Appendix). Even the American party, which regularly stressed the egalitarian spirit of local lodge meetings and the democratic process of nominating its candidates, adhered to the practice of selecting only the most prominent citizens for public office. Yet without further evidence--for example, comparisons of wealth, church affiliation, and residence patterns--any assessment of the differences or similarities between American party and Democratic candidates must remain tentative. Only after incorporating such data can one determine fully the factors which divided politicians in these communities.¹⁸

By all accounts, the American party organizations in each of these cities, reflecting grassroots organization and decentralized administration through

¹⁸For a complete occupational survey of urban leadership in each city, see tables A-1 through A-5 in the Appendix.

neighborhood lodges, functioned as relatively democratic units in an age in which political parties were most often defined by the caucus, committee, and convention. At its genesis in 1854, Know Nothingism on a national scale represented an expression of the democratization which had played such an important role in the formation of the second party system. But when the American party at every level confronted its Republican and Democratic opposition in the scramble for political offices, even newly empowered rank and file voters, choosing their candidates by popular acclamation, nominated established politicians and prominent citizens for municipal governmental councils. Thus the American party leadership of Simon Stubbs in Norfolk, O. G. Parsley in Wilmington, John Cunningham in Charleston, and Edward C. Anderson in Savannah, merely reflected the exigencies of local partisan competition. Indeed, local lodge members selected these same individuals to represent them in the American party's state and national councils, as the example of John Cunningham demonstrated.

Beyond their occupational similarities, these local politicians were distinguished further through their affiliation with the various fraternal societies and benevolent orders which functioned as the preserve of the most noted and respectable gentlemen in these ports. According to historian David R. Goldfield, these men formed an "interlocking directorate in . . . social, economic, and political life" that oversaw most affairs in these communities. Although the annual municipal campaigns for mayors, boards of aldermen, and city councils

highlighted the ideological differences between candidates of opposing parties or stressed the fitness and competence of one ticket over another, beyond such electioneering--most of which was carried out by the party presses--partisan affiliation could not explain entirely the development of partisan factions at the local level. Naturally, devoted service to a political party proved important, particularly if one had a stake in dispensing patronage at the local custom house or post office. The dutiful municipal leader likewise supported his party's nominees for state legislature, congress, and the presidency. Yet what impact did the American party ultimately have on Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah? Indeed, to what extent did Know Nothing officials actually change their cities?¹⁹

In the end, American party officials in these four cities were no more able or willing to effect radical or widespread change than their opponents or predecessors. One can, of course, cite the example of Charleston, in which the mobilization of the American party acted as a powerful catalyst for reform as reflected in the achievements of William Porcher Miles' mayoral administration. And, one should not ignore the attempts of Edward C. Anderson, mayor of Savannah for the American party and People's Ticket, to strengthen the local police force and execute those ordinances which regulated shopkeepers and the sale of liquor on the Sabbath.

¹⁹David R. Goldfield, "The Business of Health Planning," *Journal of Southern History* 42 (1976): 555-65.

Still, once in power, the Know Nothings who served in municipal government in Norfolk, Wilmington, and Savannah actually did little to implement the specific tenets of the Know Nothing order. Edward C. Anderson discovered that, although supported by many citizens, any zealous attempt to appease local Sabbatarian and temperance advocates through enforcement of the law quickly alienated voters. This should not suggest, however, that local American party leaders were somehow less committed to the nativist or reformist principles of the national movement. Surveying their communities these gentlemen doubtless identified problems which, considering the anti-Catholic and nativist prejudices of the day, might easily be attributed to an influx of foreign-born residents. But as pragmatic politicians, they likely reasoned that such actions could only be undertaken *after* the local party broadened its base of support and secured a substantial majority over the Democratic opposition. Yet in none of these communities did the American party enjoy a comfortable advantage against the Democracy. Know Nothing candidates clearly struggled to maintain their popular support amongst the local electorate; at the same time, the Democratic party successfully rallied increasing support at the polls. But what was the ultimate legacy of Know Nothingism in these four cities?

Perhaps more than anything else, the appearance of "Sam" and the American party energized municipal politics and, in most cases, brought a growing number of voters to the polls, including citizens who had not participated in recent elections. This pattern of increasing voter turnout, for example, was most

clearly witnessed in Wilmington, where the arrival of the Know Nothing movement quickly politicized once nonpartisan municipal contests. Numerous voters, once ambivalent about local elections, turned out to support enthusiastically the American party. One also witnessed the same increase in Savannah, where voters rallied to support the Know Nothings. Although John Mulkern's conclusion that Know Nothingism functioned primarily as a populist political movement seems unconvincing in light of the great complexity of the American party movement, clearly the order held a strong attraction among many citizens who felt isolated from the established partisan councils and caucuses. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that the arrival of "Sam" ultimately precipitated a corresponding rise in popular support for local Democratic candidates. Democratic strategists, in fact, proved equally adept at mustering support from voters who usually ignored municipal campaigns. In Savannah, for example, after initially losing to Know Nothing candidates in 1854, the Democratic party gradually increased its support at the polls to surpass the American party by 1856 (see Table 5-3).²⁰

Moreover, because the local Democratic press quickly associated Know Nothingism with the advent of the Republican party in the North, and thus identified Republican antipathy towards slavery and the South, such rhetoric certainly heightened local citizens' awareness of and revulsion against Republicanism. In fact, in this context, the appearance of the American party in

²⁰Mulkern, *Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts*, 4-5.

the South played a major role in galvanizing public opinion against the Republican party even before the presidential campaign of 1856. Also, the unification of the many Democratic factions in the South, a product of Know Nothing mobilization in the region, doubtless contributed to James Buchanan's majorities in the southern states and to his electoral triumph in general.

Finally, the development of Know Nothingism in Norfolk, Wilmington, Savannah, and even Charleston, with its ever-present concern over slavery and southern rights, demonstrated that these cities were hardly immune to or isolated from the ethnocultural issues which defined the tenor of political dialogue in other sections of the republic and contributed to the ultimate demise of the second party system. Residents of these cities expressed loudly their dissatisfaction with the existing political order and its reluctance to deal with what were perceived to be the most distressing socio-economic problems of the day. For many voters and union-minded politicians in the South, the Know Nothing movement at the local level also briefly deflected interest in sectional issues and refocused popular attention on local problems. As a result, the development of Know Nothingism, accompanying the demise of the second party system and its system of rigid partisan loyalty, heralded a proliferation of partisan factions that continued even after the dissolution of the American party. With greater frequency after 1854, independent factions of mechanics, merchants, unionists, and temperance advocates entered the municipal political fray in an effort to unseat established leaders. The most obvious example in this study is the case of

Charleston in which the dominant Southern Rights party faced a diverse group of opposition factions after 1855.

Additionally, just as the birth and rapid demise of Know Nothingism in the North had signalled a reassessment of priorities for many voters, so too the appearance of the American party in the South heralded a major change in the attitudes of southern citizens. On the one hand, the brief visit of "Sam" highlighted the presence of a substantial unionist element in these cities and demonstrated that voters in both sections shared a common interest in the more popular reform movements of the era. At the same time, the example of Savannah demonstrated that under the right conditions nativism could prove a potent issue capable of generating substantial electoral support even in the South. But, more significantly, the American party's hasty exit from the political stage in the region underscored the South's growing resistance to individuals or groups which might threaten the southern way of life, and, more specifically, the peculiar institution. While the Know Nothing movement obviously touched a nerve in these communities, its appeal by 1856 proved too weak to overcome the fear occasioned by the Republican ascendancy.²¹

In the end, however, the American party in the South still played an important role in shaping the dynamics of partisan competition during the 1850s. Although the order could not establish itself as a permanent fixture in the southern political arena, the Know Nothings temporarily filled the vacuum

²¹Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 66.

created by the Whig party's dissolution and, for a time at least, preserved some measure of the strong two-party tradition that had characterized political competition in most areas of the South. The appeal of Know Nothingism revealed the continued strength of the established anti-Democratic party in southern politics. In that sense, the divisions which had punctuated partisan competition under the second party system continued even after that system's demise. Hardly isolated to just these cities, the anti-Democratic thread in the southern political fabric was visible in communities like Nashville, Mobile, Richmond, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore. It represented a key element in the foundation of Know Nothingism and, following the American party's dissolution in 1856, continued to function under the banner of generically labeled "Opposition" parties and reconstituted Whiggery.

By offering a popular alternative to many former Whigs and a small number of disaffected Democrats, the American party's rise temporarily postponed the ascendancy of the Democratic party as the controlling force in southern politics. And, as Michael Holt contends, the appearance of the Know Nothings likewise made these besieged Democrats more cohesive as a regional bloc and more overtly pro-southern in their attitude. By 1856, the challenge of Know Nothingism had in effect united much of the southern Democratic party as demonstrated in its substantial support for James Buchanan. By 1857, the

American party, with the exception of a few weakened and isolated enclaves, had expired.²²

²²Michael F. Holt, "The Democratic Party, 1828-1860," in *Political Parties and American Political Development*, 78-79.

Bibliography

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Materials

Municipal Records

City Council. *Minutes*. Savannah, Georgia, 1854-1858.

County Court Minutes. New Hanover County, North Carolina, 1850-56.

Henry, Charles S., ed. *A Digest of all the Ordinances of the City of Savannah Which Were in Force on July 1, 1854*. Savannah: Purse's Press, 1854.

Minutes of the Town Commissioners. Wilmington, North Carolina, 1850-55.

Minutes of the Wardens of the Poor. New Hanover County, North Carolina, 1850-1868.

Norfolk Ordinances. Norfolk, Virginia, 1840-1857.

Ordinances of the City of Charleston: 1854 to 1859. Charleston: Walker, Evans and Company, 1859.

Record of Common Council. Norfolk, Virginia, 1854-1858.

Record of Select Council. Norfolk, Virginia, 1854-1858.

Wilson, Edward G. *A Digest of All the Ordinances of the City of Savannah, and Various Laws of the State of Georgia, Relative to Said City, Which were of Force on the 1st January, 1858*. Savannah: John M. Cooper & Co., 1858.

Newspapers

Charleston Courier. 1851-1859.

Charleston Daily Standard. 1854.

Charleston *Evening News*. 1854-1856.

Charleston *Mercury*. 1854-1857.

Norfolk *American Beacon*. 1853-1856.

Norfolk *Herald*. 1853-1856.

Norfolk *Southern Argus*. 1854-1857.

Savannah *Daily Journal & Courier*. 1854-1856.

Savannah *Daily Morning News*. 1853-1859.

Savannah *Georgian*. 1854.

Savannah *Republican*. 1854-1856.

Washington, D.C. *American Organ*. 1854-1856.

Wilmington *Daily Herald*. 1853-1857.

Wilmington *Daily Journal*. 1853-1859.

City Directories

Charleston City and General Business Directory for 1855. Charleston: David M. Gazlay, 1855.

Charleston City Directory & Strangers Guide for 1856. New York: J. F. Trow, 1856.

Directory and Census of the City of Savannah for the year 1853. Savannah: David H. Galloway, 1853.

Directory of the City of Savannah, for 1858. Savannah: George N. Nichols, Printer, 1858.

Kelley's Wilmington Directory, 1860. Wilmington, N.C.: George H. Kelley, 1860.

Norfolk Directory, For 1851-1852. Norfolk: William S. Forrest, 1851.

Vickery's Directory for the City of Norfolk, To Which is added A Business Directory for 1859. Norfolk: Vickery & Company, 1859.

Government Documents

Report of Edward C. Anderson, Mayor of the City of Savannah, For the Year Ending October 31, 1855. Savannah: George R. Nichols, 1855.

Report of Edward C. Anderson, Mayor of the City of Savannah, For the Year Ending October 31, 1856. Savannah: George R. Nichols, 1856.

Report of John E. Ward, Mayor of the City of Savannah. Savannah: Purse's Press, 1854.

United States. *Population of the United States in 1860: Compiled from the Original Returns of the Eighth Census.* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1864.

_____. *Seventh Census of the United States.* Washington, D.C.: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853.

_____. *Statistical View of the United States . . . A Compendium of the Seventh Census.* Washington, D.C.: A.O.P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1854.

Published Works

Armstrong, George A. *The Summer of Pestilence: A History of the Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk, Virginia, A.D. 1855.* Second Edition. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1856.

Carroll, Anna Ella. *The Great American Battle, or the Contest Between Christianity & Political Romanism.* New York: Miller, Orton, & Mulligan, 1856.

DeBow, J. D. B. *The Industrial Resources, etc., of the Southern and Western States.* New Orleans, 1853.

DeBow's Review. New Orleans: J. D. B. DeBow, 1853-1857.

Forrest, William S. *The Great Pestilence in Virginia; Being An Historical Account of the Origin, General Character, and Ravages of the Yellow Fever in Norfolk and Portsmouth in 1855*. New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856.

_____. *Historical and Descriptive Sketches of Norfolk and Vicinity*. Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakeston, 1856.

Hamilton, J. G. de Roulhac, and Max R. Williams, eds. *The Papers of William Alexander Graham*. 7 vols. Raleigh: State Department of Archives and History, 1957.

Hunt's Merchant's Magazine & Commercial Review. New York: Freeman Hunt, 1853-1858.

Journal of the Proceedings of the Commercial Convention of the Southern and Western States, Held in the City of Charleston, South-Carolina. Charleston: Walker & Evans, 1854.

Journal of the State Convention, Held in Milledgeville, in December, 1850. Milledgeville, Georgia: R.M. Orme, 1850.

The Know Nothing Almanac and True American's Manual for 1855. New York, 1855.

Miles, William Porcher. *Mayor's Report on City Affairs*. Charleston: Walker, Evans & Co., 1857.

Olmsted, Frederick Law. *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States; with Remarks on Their Economy*. New York: Dix and Edwards, 1856.

Report of the Howard Association of Norfolk, Virginia. Philadelphia: Inquirer Printing Office, 1857.

Shryock, Richard H., ed. *Letters of Richard D. Arnold, M.D., 1808-1876*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1929.

Manuscripts

Diary of Henry W. Conner, 1855-1856. Conner Family Papers. South Carolina Historical Society. Charleston, South Carolina.

Diary of Jacob F. Schirmer, 1853-1860. South Carolina Historical Society. Charleston, South Carolina.

Lane Papers. Lower Cape Fear Historical Society. Wilmington, North Carolina.

Minutes of the Charleston Hibernian Society, 1855-1859. South Carolina Historical Society. Charleston, South Carolina.

Scrapbook of Joseph Ganahl. Alexander Stovall Papers. Georgia Historical Society. Savannah Georgia.

Stuart Family Papers. South Carolina Historical Society. Charleston, South Carolina.

Secondary Materials

Books

Ambler, Charles H. *Sectionalism in Virginia From 1776 to 1861*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1910.

Anbinder, Tyler. *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Baker, Jean H. *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.

Billington, Ray Allen. *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study in the Origins of American Nativism*. New York: Macmillan, 1938; reprint, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964.

Boyer, Paul. *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978.

Burton, Harrison W. *The History of Norfolk, Virginia: A Review of Important Events and Incidents Which Occurred from 1736 to 1877; Also a Record of Personal Reminiscences and Political, Commercial, and Curious Facts*. Norfolk: Norfolk Virginian Job Print, 1877.

Cantrell, Gregg. *Kenneth and John B. Rayner and the Limits of Southern Dissent*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Cole, Arthur C. *The Whig Party in the South*. Washington, D.C.: The American Historical Association, 1913.

- Coleman, Kenneth, ed. *A History of Georgia*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1977.
- Cooper, William J., Jr. *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1820-1856*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978.
- Cooper, William J., Jr., and Thomas E. Terrill. *The American South: A History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
- Crofts, Daniel W. *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989.
- Curry, Leonard P. *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Cyclopaedia of Eminent and Representative Men of the Carolinas of the Nineteenth Century*. Vol. 1, *South Carolina*. Madison, Wisconsin: Brant & Fuller, 1892.
- Eaton, Clement. *The Growth of Southern Civilization, 1790-1860*. New York: Harper, 1961.
- Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Formisano, Ronald P. *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.
- _____. *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Fraser, Walter J., Jr. *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989.
- Freehling, William W. *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Gamble, Thomas R. *A History of the City Government of Savannah, Georgia, From 1790 to 1901*. Savannah, 1901.
- Gienapp, William E. *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

Gilje, Paul A. *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

Goldfield, David R. *Urban Growth in the Age of Sectionalism: Virginia, 1847-1861*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.

Heath, Milton S. *Constructive Liberalism: The Role of the State in Economic Development in Georgia to 1860*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Hoffmann, Charles and Tess. *North by South: The Two Lives of Richard James Arnold*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988.

Holt, Michael F. *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969.

_____. *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978.

_____. *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.

Howe, Daniel Walker. *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Howell, Andrew J. *The Book of Wilmington*. Wilmington, North Carolina: Wilmington Printing Co., 1930.

Jackson, Luther Porter. *Free Negro Labor & Property Holding in Virginia, 1830-1860*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1942.

Jeffrey, Thomas E. *State Parties and National Politics: North Carolina, 1815-1861*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989.

Johnson, Guion G. *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1937.

Johnson, Michael P. and James L. Roark. *Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1984.

_____. *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston's Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

- Johnson, Michael P. *Toward A Patriarchal Republic: The Secession of Georgia*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977.
- Johnson, Vicki V. *The Men and the Vision of the Southern Commercial Conventions, 1845-1871*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992.
- Knobel, Dale T. *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1986.
- Kruman, Marc W. *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.
- Larsen, Lawrence H. *The Urban South: A History*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990.
- Lee, Lawrence. *New Hanover County: A Brief History*. Raleigh, N.C.: State Department of Archives & History, 1971.
- Linn, Reverend C. A. *The History of the German Friendly Society of Savannah, Georgia, 1837-1937*. Savannah: The German Friendly Society, 1937.
- Maizlish, Stephen E. and Joel H. Silbey, eds. *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*. College Station, Texas: Texas A & M University Press, 1982.
- Montgomery, Horace. *Cracker Parties*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950.
- Mulkern, John R. *The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts: The Rise and Fall of a People's Movement*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1990.
- Norton, Clarence C. *The Democratic Party in Antebellum North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930.
- O'Connell, Rev. J. J. *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of its History*. Sadlier, 1879; reprint, Westminster, Md.: Ars Sacra, 1964.
- Overdyke, W. Darrell. *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950.
- Pegg, Herbert D. *The Whig Party in North Carolina*. Chapel Hill: Colonial Press, 1968.

- Phillips, Ulrich B. *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1908.
- Potter, David M. *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- Ross, Malcolm. *The Cape Fear*. New York: Holt, Rhinehart, and Winston, 1965.
- Shanks, Henry T. *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861*. Richmond: Garrett and Massie, Inc., 1934.
- Shryock, Richard H. *Georgia & the Union in 1850*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1926.
- Schultz, Harold S. *Nationalism and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1852-1860: A Study of the Movement for Southern Independence*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1950.
- Schweikart, Larry. *Banking in the American South from the Age of Jackson to Reconstruction*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987.
- Silbey, Joel H. *The Transformation of American Politics, 1840-1860*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.
- Soulé, Leon C. *The Know-Nothing Party in New Orleans*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961.
- Spann, Edward K. *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.
- Sprunt, James. *Chronicles of the Cape Fear River; Being Some Account of Historic Events on the Cape Fear River*. Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1914.
- Squires, W. H. T. *Through the Years in Norfolk*. Norfolk, Va.: Norfolk Advertising Board, 1936.
- Tucker, George Holbert. *Norfolk Highlights, 1584-1881*. Norfolk, Va.: Norfolk Historical Society, 1972.
- Van Deusen, John G. *The Antebellum Southern Commercial Conventions*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1926.

- Wade, Richard C. *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Walters, Ronald G. *American Reformers, 1815-1860*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.
- Warner, Sam Bass, Jr. *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968.
- Watson, Alan D. *Wilmington: Port of North Carolina*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992.
- Watson, Harry L. *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981.
- Wender, Herbert. *Southern Commercial Conventions, 1837-1859*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1930.
- Wertenbaker, Thomas J. *Norfolk: Historic Southern Port*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1931.
- Williams, Jack Kenny. *Vogues in Villainy: Crime and Retribution in Ante-Bellum South Carolina*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1959.
- Wust, Klaus. *The Virginia Germans*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1969.

Articles

- Berlin, Ira and Herbert Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South." *American Historical Review* 88 (1983): 1175-2000.
- Broussard, James H. "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South." *Louisiana History* 7 (1966): 5-20.
- Brownell, Blaine A. "Urbanization in the South: A Unique Experience?" *Mississippi Quarterly* 26 (1973): 105-119.
- Cantrell, Gregg. "Southern and Nativist: Kenneth Rayner and the Ideology of 'Americanism.'" *North Carolina Historical Review* 69 (1992): 131-147.

- Carlson, A. Cheree. "The Rhetoric of the Know-Nothing Party: Nativism as a Response to the Rhetorical Situation." *Southern Communication Journal* 54 (1989): 364-383.
- Coulter, E. Merton. "The Great Savannah Fire of 1820." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 23 (1939): 1-27.
- Curry, Leonard P. "Urbanization and Urbanism in the Old South: A Comparative View." *Journal of Southern History* 38 (1972): 43-60.
- Dorsett, Lyle W. and Arthur H. Shaffer. "Was the Antebellum South Antiurban? A Suggestion." *The Journal of Southern History* 38 (1972): 93-100.
- Easterby, J. H. "The Charleston Commercial Convention of 1854." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 25 (1926): 181-197.
- Eisterhold, John A. "Savannah: Lumber Center of the South Atlantic." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57 (1973): 526-543.
- Farley, M. Foster. "The Mighty Monarch of the South: Yellow Fever in Charleston and Savannah." *Georgia Review* 27 (1973): 56-70.
- Goldfield, David R. "The Business of Health Planning." *Journal of Southern History* 42 (1976): 555-565.
- _____. "The Urban South: A Regional Framework." *American Historical Review* 86 (1981): 1009-1034.
- Haunton, Richard H. "Law and Order in Savannah, 1850-1860." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56 (1972): 1-24.
- Hemperley, Marion R., ed. "Federal Naturalization Oaths, Savannah, Georgia, 1790-1890." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 51 (1967): 454-487.
- Holt, Michael F. "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism." *Journal of American History* 60 (1973/74): 309-331.
- Jaher, Frederick C. "Antebellum Charleston: An Anatomy of an Economic Failure." In Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath, Jr., eds., *Class, Conflict and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies*, pp. 207-231. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982.

- Jeffrey, Thomas E. "Internal Improvements and Political Parties in Antebellum North Carolina, 1836-1860." *North Carolina Historical Review* 55 (1978): 111-156.
- _____. "National Interests, Local Interests, and the Transformation of Antebellum North Carolina Politics." *Journal of Southern History* 50 (1984): 43-74.
- Jordan, Layton Wayne. "Police Power and Public Safety in Antebellum Charleston: The Emergence of a New Police, 1800-1860." In Samuel M. Hines and George W. Hopkins, eds., *South Atlantic Urban Studies*, vol. 3, pp. 122-140. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1979.
- Klebaner, Benjamin. "Public Poor Relief in Charleston, 1800-1860." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 55 (1954): 210-220.
- Lander, Ernest M., Jr. "Charleston: Manufacturing Center of the Old South." *Journal of Southern History* 26 (1960): 330-351.
- Leonard, Ira M. "The Rise and Fall of the American Republican Party in New York City, 1843-1845." *New York Historical Society Quarterly* 50 (1966): 151-192.
- McCrary, Royce. "John MacPherson Berrien and the Know-Nothing Movement in Georgia." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 61 (1977): 35-42.
- Marchio, James. "Nativism in the Old South: Know-Nothingism in Antebellum South Carolina." *Southern Historian* 8 (1987): 39-53.
- Miller, Randall M. "The Enemy Within: Some Effects of Foreign Immigrants on Antebellum Southern Cities." *Southern Studies* 24 (1985): 30-53.
- Morris, Richard B. "Labor Militancy in the Old South." *Labor and Nation* (1948): 32-36.
- Rice, Philip Morrison. "The Know Nothing Party in Virginia, 1854-1856." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 55 (1947): 61-75.
- Schweikart, Larry. "Southern Banks and Economic Growth in the Antebellum Period: A Reassessment." *Journal of Southern History* 53 (1987): 19-36.
- Siegel, Fred. "Artisans & Immigrants in the Politics of Late Antebellum Georgia." *Civil War History* 27 (1981): 221-230.

- Silver, Christopher. "A New Look at Old South Urbanization: The Irish Worker in Charleston, South Carolina, 1840-1860." In Samuel M. Hines and George W. Hopkins, eds., *South Atlantic Urban Studies*, vol. 3, pp. 141-172. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1979.
- Smith, Clarence McKittrick, Jr. "William Porcher Miles, Progressive Mayor of Charleston, 1855-1857." South Carolina Historical Association. *Proceedings* (1942): 30-39.
- Smith, Harold T. "The Know Nothings in Arkansas." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 34 (1975): 291-303.
- Steen, Ivan D. "Charleston in the 1850s." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 71 (1970): 36-45.
- Waring, Joseph I. "The Yellow Fever Epidemic of Savannah in 1820." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 52 (1968): 398-404.
- Weaver, Herbert. "Foreigners in Antebellum Savannah." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 37 (1953): 1-17.
- White, Laura A. "The National Democrats in South Carolina, 1852-1860." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 28 (1929): 370-389.
- Wooster, Ralph A. "An Analysis of the Texas Know-Nothings." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 70 (1967): 414-423.
- Worsley, Stephen C. "Catholicism in Antebellum North Carolina." *North Carolina Historical Review* 60 (1983): 399-430.

Theses and Dissertations

- Ellis, Ann Wells. "The Know-Nothing Party in Georgia." M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1967.
- Greb, Gregory Allen. "Charleston, South Carolina Merchants, 1815-1816: Urban Leadership in the Antebellum South." Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1978.
- Haunton, Richard H. "Savannah in the 1850s." Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1968.

- Leath, Thomas H. "The Know-Nothing Party in North Carolina." M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1929.
- Shoemaker, Edward M. "Strangers and Citizens: The Irish Immigrant Community of Savannah, 1837-1861." Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1990.
- Stewart, Peter C. "The Commercial History of Hampton Roads, Virginia, 1815-1860." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1967.
- Taylor, John C. R. III. "Virginia Know-Nothings: Whigs in Search of a National Party. M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1974.
- Turner, John R. "The 1855 Gubernatorial Campaign in Virginia." M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1966.

Appendix

Appendix

Table A-1

Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Norfolk, 1854-1856

	<u>American</u>	<u>Democrat</u>
Professional ^a	15 (29.5%)	6 (15%)
Commercial ^b	16 (31%)	18 (45%)
Artisan	14 (27.5%)	9 (22.5%)
Non-Skilled	2 (4%)	1 (2.5%)
Planter	0	0
Unknown	4 (8%)	6 (15%)
Total	51	40

^aIncludes attorneys, physicians, bankers, and accountants.

^bIncludes factors, grocers, shopkeepers, shippers, and merchants.

Table A-2

Occupational Survey of Political Candidates, Wilmington, 1854-1856

	<u>American</u>	<u>Democrat</u>
Professional	9 (21.4%)	9 (36%)
Commercial	16 (38.1%)	6 (24%)
Artisan	1 (2.4%)	0
Non-Skilled	0	0
Planter	0	0
Unknown	16 (38.1%)	10 (40%)
Total	40	25

Table A-3

**Occupational Survey of Political Candidates,
Charleston, 1854-1856**

	<u>American</u>	<u>Democrat</u>
Professional	7 (24.1%)	50 (43.8%)
Commercial	9 (31%)	38 (33.3%)
Artisan	4 (13.9%)	14 (12.3%)
Non-Skilled	2 (6.9%)	1 (0.9%)
Planter	0	6 (5.3%)
Unknown	7 (24.1%)	5 (4.4%)
Total	<u>29</u>	<u>114</u>

Table A-4

**Occupational Survey of Political Candidates,
Savannah, 1854-1856**

	<u>American</u>	<u>Democrat</u>
Professional	14 (38.9%)	33 (34.7%)
Commercial	10 (27.8%)	19 (20%)
Artisan	4 (11.1%)	12 (12.6%)
Non-Skilled	2 (5.5%)	2 (2.1%)
Planter	0	1 (1.1%)
Unknown	6 (16.7%)	28 (29.5%)
Total	<u>36</u>	<u>95</u>

Table A-5
Occupational Survey of Political Candidates,
Aggregate, 1854-1856

	<u>American</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Total</u>
Professional	45 (28.5%)	98 (36%)	143 (33%)
Commercial	51 (32%)	81 (29%)	132 (30.6%)
Artisan	23 (14.5%)	35 (13%)	58 (13.5%)
Non-Skilled	6 (4%)	4 (1.5%)	10 (2.3%)
Planter	0	7 (2.5%)	7 (1.6%)
Unknown	33 (21%)	49 (18%)	82 (19%)
Total	<u>158</u>	<u>274</u>	<u>432</u>

VITA

Brian Edward Crowson was born in Portsmouth, Virginia on January 31, 1964. He attended the Nansemond-Suffolk Academy and graduated in June, 1982. He attended the Virginia Military Institute and in May, 1986, received the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History. Named a scholar with the Virginia Program at Oxford, he studied Tudor-Stuart history and literature at St. Anne's College, Oxford University, before entering James Madison University in September, 1986, to pursue a Master of Arts degree in history. Graduated in May, 1988, he entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville the following August to begin doctoral studies. In December, 1994, he received the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History.

He is currently employed as an assistant editor with the *Correspondence of James K. Polk* at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and is an adjunct instructor of history at Pellissippi State Technical Community College, Knoxville, Tennessee.