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THE GERMANS OF DAVENPORT

AND THE
CHICAGO CONVENTION
OF 1860

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE GERMANS OF DAVENPORT AND THE CHICAGO CONVENTION OF 1860—THE PART THOSE WHO OPPOSED KNOWNOTHINGISM PLAYED IN THE PARTY PRELIMINARIES LEADING UP TO THE REPUBLICAN NOMINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN—THE DAVENPORT RESOLUTIONS OF MARCH, 1860—GERMAN STRENGTH RECOGNIZED THROUGHOUT THE LAND—WITH BATES OUT OF THE RACE ABRAHAM LINCOLN THE STRONGEST COMPROMISE CANDIDATE.

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Among the decisive events in the history of the United States none excel in dramatic effect and few equal in vital consequences the action of the national republican convention at Chicago May 18, 1860, in selecting Abraham Lincoln as the candidate of the republican party for the presidency. In the party preliminaries in various states antecedent to the assembly of the delegates at Chicago and in the actual deliberations and decisions of that epoch-making convention, the Germans played a not inconsiderable part—a part that so far as the writer knows has never been particularly referred to or realized by either German or American historians or by biographers of the leading candidates. The national fame acquired by Mr. Carl Schurz in the preliminaries of 1859-1860 and the distinguished role played by him at Chicago have been frequently commented upon; but specific reference to, or appreciation of the definite, if not decisive influence of the Germans in determining the final action of the majority of the delegates in choosing the nominee, has been conspicuous by absence.

The reason for such nonappreciation among Germans as well as among Americans lies in the fact that the part played by the Germans at Chicago and before was indirect and negative rather than direct and positive. In the main they favored a candidate who was not successful and they actively opposed another candidate who was likewise unsuccessful. In the actual work of securing

[The writer desires to express his obligations to Dr. August P. Richter, editor of *Der Demokrat*, of Davenport, for innumerable courtesies and invaluable assistance in furthering his searches for data.]

Mr. Lincoln's nomination they apparently had but little part. In the writer's judgment, however, it was their decided, outspoken and irrepressible opposition to Horace Greeley's favorite candidate that forced the anti-Seward forces to entertain the nomination of Abraham Lincoln as a compromise. In the movements leading up to that conclusion at Chicago the Germans of Iowa had a considerable influence in which the Germans of Davenport were first and foremost.

I

On the evening of March 7, 1860, the German Republican Club of Davenport held a special meeting in the German theatre. It seems to have been somewhat of a mass meeting to which all Germans who affiliated with the republicans, or who concurred in opposition to the extension of slavery, were invited. The one chiefly moving in bringing about the meeting appears to have been a "forty-eighter," a one-time member of the Prussian parliament, Mr. Hans Reimer Claussen, one of the most forceful and influential citizens of Davenport, both before and after the Civil war. In general association with him, if not backing and immediately following him, were Messrs. Theodore Guelich, Henry Lischer, Theo. Olshausen and Henry Ramming—all closely connected with the publication of *Der Demokrat*. The presiding officer of the meeting was Mr. Ramming; the secretary was Mr. Christian Kauffman. A detailed account of the discussion or of the proceedings is not extant but the results thereof are indicated in an extended series of solemn "Whereases" constituting the Preamble to a short, pointed, unequivocal resolution, which was "unanimously" adopted. The substance of the action taken at the meeting is briefly indicated in the following summary:

"Whereas, the New York Tribune, a widely circulate newspaper of great influence, has recommended Edward Bates of Missouri as the most available republican candidate for the presidency;"

"But," the resolution proceeds to say, the career of Edward Bates has demonstrated that he was not and could not be regarded as a true and safe republican. He had in 1856 supported for president, Millard Fillmore—a candidate who had approved the 'American' platform which would have confined the honors and emoluments of government in this country entirely among the native born; a platform which would have extended the period of probation for foreigners antecedent to naturalization and American citizenship to twenty-one years. He had supported Fillmore when he knew or should have known that his candidacy was designed to defeat the election of John C. Frémont, the former's election being 'evidently impossible.' Moreover, but recently before, Mr. Bates had opposed, according to current report, the election to congress of Francis P. Blair, Jr., of St. Louis, and had cast his vote for a pro-slavery Know-Nothing.

Equally serious, Edward Bates was reported to have declared that he would "execute the fugitive slave law," a report that he had allowed to go uncontradicted, for the reason no doubt that as he had formerly owned slaves and lived in a slave state, the report fully accorded with his views. The "horrible crimes committed in Kansas" had outraged "the consciences of the people of the north" but Mr. Bates' course, his votes and his influence, had put to naught the "strenuous efforts" of the republicans to defeat the fruition of the schemes of the pro-slavery leaders respecting that territory.

Finally, because the convention in Missouri that proclaimed him a candidate for the nomination of the Chicago convention for the presidency had "an overwhelming majority" of the pro-slavery known-nothings therein who naturally would not have urged his nomination if his views were contrary to their wishes and as his advanced age (67) precluded the probability of any material modification of his views or conduct, should he attain the office of president, thus rendering him incapable of "faithfully and vigorously" executing "republican principles in the impending crisis, Therefore, be it"

"Resolved, that the nomination of Edward Bates as the republican candidate for the presidency would imply a desertion from republican principles, and that we, therefore, under no circumstances will vote for the Hon. Edward Bates."

Another section directed the officers of the meeting to communicate the resolutions to the republican papers of Davenport and to the Scott County Republican Club.

II

The significance of the action of the German republicans of Davenport at that meeting, March 7, 1860, and of the reception accorded it in Iowa and in other states will become apparent when the numbers and ratios of the native and foreign born in Iowa in 1860 are appreciated. Then, as now, the foreign born constituted a very important part of Iowa's population. The total number of the inhabitants amounted to only 674,913. The foreign born numbered 106,081, or 15 per cent. The Germans constituted 38,555, or 36.3 per cent of the foreign born or 5.7 per cent of the entire population; while the Irish numbered 28,072, or 26.4 per cent of the foreign born or 4.1 per cent of the whole population. The majority of the foreign born lived in the eastern portion of the state, chiefly in the river counties and for the most part in the cities. Thus they constituted 32 per cent of the population of Allamakee county, 42 per cent of Dubuque county, 28 per cent in Clinton county, 36 per cent in Scott county, 21 per cent in Des Moines county and 22 per cent in Lee county. It is obvious that if the political party in power in Iowa at that time had its lease of office by a close margin that the Germans and Irish easily held the balance of power and it behooved party managers to court their favor assiduously.

The republicans were in complete control of all departments of the state government, legislative, executive and judicial; and their champions represented the state in both houses of congress. But they maintained their supremacy by no secure grip. They had elected R. P. Lowe, governor in 1857, by a majority of only 2,949 votes. The next year the party majority increased to 3,349, but in 1859 after a most strenuous campaign Samuel J. Kirkwood was elected governor by a lessened majority of only 2,964, a decrease of 11.5 per cent. With such a narrow margin the support of the Germans was of vital consequence to the republican leaders of Iowa; and just then the sons of Germania were restless, suspicious and not disinclined to be contentious.

Prior to 1856 the Germans, like the Irish, on coming to this country generally joined the democratic party because its attitude toward the foreigner generally was liberal and ingratiating—the Martin Koszta affair in 1853 especially winning their admiration and adherence. The tide of virulent antiforeign prejudice and bigotry in the form of know-nothingism that swept over the northern states be-

tween 1853 and 1856 naturally confirmed them in their inclinations toward the party in power at Washington. The aggressions and arrogance of the slavocrats however, the enforcement of the fugitive slave law, the Kansas-Nebraska bill in 1854 whereby the Missouri Compromise was repealed, the atrocities in Kansas and the Lecompton frauds and the persistent opposition of the democratic party to the passage of the Homestead bill with liberal provisions for unnaturalized foreigners caused the Germans great distress. They had left the fatherland largely because of governmental oppression. Slavery was abhorrent to their prejudices and they began to desert the democratic colors and ally themselves with the new and waxing antislavery party that gathered under the republican standards.

But the Germans were far from blind adherents of the republican party; nor were they zealous partisans who follow party dictation, right or wrong, nevertheless. On sundry matters they were prone to take instant alarm. The republican party chiefly contained the advocates and promoters of "temperance" legislation prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. The party in Iowa stood sponsor for the "Maine" law of 1855 against which the Germans stood solid in opposition. Because of their insistent attacks the law had been slowly "weakened" but in 1860 it was still obnoxious to their notions of personal liberty and their dearly prized customs. Again the republican party contained the majority of the "Know-Nothings" of "Americans" whose racial and religious prejudices had done them such gross injury in the middle of that decade. The Germans in particular were far from disposed to take things for granted.

In the congressional canvass in 1858 "American" notions were bandied about so commonly in eastern and northern Iowa that Mr. Hans Reimer Claussen (Sept. 8) addressed Mr. Wm. Vandever of Dubuque, the republican candidate for congress, an open letter in which he bluntly asked some pointed questions as to the latter's attitude toward the proposal to make the process of naturalization more rigorous. He secured satisfactory responses. In the forepart of 1859 when the tide of anti-foreign feeling was apparently receding the Germans of the middle and western states were thrown into violent agitation by a constitutional amendment adopted in Massachusetts that increased the probationary period for naturalization by two years. A German farmer of Iowa (who, the writer suspects, was Nicholas J. Rusch of Scott county) wrote a stout letter to Horace Greeley's *Tribune* in which he served notice on republicans that if they did not repudiate, in unequivocal terms, the Massachusetts amendment their supremacy was no longer possible. He reminded them that "Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, New York, and perhaps Pennsylvania can be counted republican through the strength of the German republican vote;" and he pointedly suggested that the republicans should not forget that "Cæsar's legions were smashed in the woods of Germany." The letter drew an extended editorial from the *Tribune*.

The fires of adverse discussion spread furiously all over the western states. The Germans of Dubuque, Davenport, Burlington and Keokuk submitted a series of specific questions to Senators James Harlan and James W. Grimes and to Representatives Wm. Vandever and S. R. Curtis respecting their attitude toward the action of Massachusetts. Each and all responded explicitly repudiating the

policy of the republicans of Massachusetts. About the same time Abraham Lincoln in Illinois wrote his much quoted letter to Dr. Canisius of Springfield likewise repudiating the Massachusetts amendment—a letter that was reprinted in *Der Demokrat* and given extensive circulation in the republican press of Iowa. So alarmed were the republican party leaders of the state at the belligerent tone of the Germans anent the matter that their state central committee, of which Mr. John A. Kasson was then chairman, issued a manifesto formally pronouncing the act of Massachusetts anathema. Their declaration was reprinted in the editorial pages of Greeley's paper with implied approval. Mr. Kasson, as chairman, also addressed an open letter to the republicans of Massachusetts deploring their action and asking them to reject the proposed amendment at the polls. As an earnest of their sincerity the republicans of Iowa nominated for lieutenant governor, Mr. Nicholas J. Rusch, a leader of the German republicans of Scott county, then a state senator, who had been foremost in promoting the legislation making less rigorous the exactions of the "Maine" prohibition law. The "Americans" and prohibitionists indicated their adverse disposition by reducing his majority 694 votes, a reduction of 23.6 per cent below that of Kirkwood's majority—a fact that had the same sort of an effect upon the feelings of the Germans of eastern Iowa that the defeat of Carl Schurz two years before for lieutenant governor of Wisconsin by 107 votes had upon the Germans of that state.

When the legislature of Iowa convened January 9, 1860, both outgoing and incoming governors recommended a "Registry" law designed to restrict promiscuous voting but the foreign born looked askance at such proposals because usually they alone were contemplated and particularized and adversely affected; and the measure introduced was desperately opposed and defeated. The friends of the "Maine" law about the same time were making a vigorous push in that legislative assembly to strengthen its "weakened" provisions. The bill was no less vigorously resisted. So evenly drawn was the contest in the state senate that on the crucial test a tie vote resulted. Informing its readers that the bill was "begraben" *Der Demokrat* stated that its burial was due to the casting vote of Lt. Gov. Rusch.

III

It was thus amidst conditions that harass party leaders and make political campaigns a ticklish business that the Germans of Davenport formulated their resolutions adopted March 7th, proclaiming their intense and unalterable opposition to the selection of Judge Bates of St. Louis as the republican candidate for the presidency and their determination to vote against him if the national convention at Chicago should nominate him despite their protest.

The reception accorded their action was various but instructive. The party press could not denounce the action for fear of alienating an essential element of their party strength; and they could not safely concur or commend enthusiastically lest radical "Americans" or "teetotalers" or "conservatives" on the slavery question shy and fly the track. For the most part the leading party papers of Iowa maintained a discreet and masterly silence. Some ventured to criticize. The editors of the republican organ of Davenport, *The Daily Gazette*, Alfred and Add. H. Sanders, had perforce to take notice of the action of their influential fellow citizens. They reprinted the entire preamble and the resolutions. In an ex-

tended editorial they, conceding them freely the right to free expression of divergent opinions on matters of common interest, venture to deny many of the allegations against Judge Bates and frankly state that, although he is not their first choice, they prefer success with him as the nominee to defeat with Chase or Seward. In a similar fashion, Mr. John Teesdale, another influential republican editor, expressed himself in the columns of *The Iowa State Register* at Des Moines. The democratic editors of the state, of course, were not indisposed to make much of the matter. Mr. J. B. Dorr reprinted the vital portions in *The Dubuque Herald* and joyfully pointed out to republicans the prospects for "war in camp."

Mr. Claussen and his confreres struck at the psychological moment. Judge Bates had been prominently mentioned for the presidency and he was a candidate of high potential. Many of the leading party papers had urgently commended him to the national convention. His nomination was promoted by King-makers, by the Blairs of Maryland and Missouri, by Charles A. Dana, Dudley Field and Horace Greeley of New York, by John D. DeFrees and Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, by John A. Kasson of Iowa. The immense continental circulation of the *New York Tribune* had given his candidacy a tremendous impetus, a fact which the Germans of Davenport accurately discerned.

The German press of the country, however, was almost universally critical and antagonistic. Judge Bates' support of Fillmore, his "Americanistic" affiliations and views thereby signified, his views respecting the Fugitive Slave law they could not stomach.

Mr. Claussen and his associates communicated the Davenport resolutions to German leaders and organizations outside of Iowa especially in the eastern states. He wrote Senator Harlan that general approval was accorded it. It was copied by the German papers of Milwaukee and St. Louis. *The Press and Tribune* of Chicago realized their pith and point and, while deploring the declaration of war on Judge Bates as unwise, observed "there is no disguising the fact that the nomination of Mr. Bates would give much offense not only to German republicans but to the entire political element of the party, and this fact will undoubtedly be duly considered by the Chicago convention." That paper was at the time an open advocate of the nomination of Mr. Lincoln and its sentiments were probably not without prejudice and design; nevertheless they indicate a clear recognition of the widespread hostility among the Germans to the consideration of the Missourian.

The German republicans of Cincinnati, Ohio, were alert and active in the furtherance of "straightout" doctrine and in downright fashion. At the instigation of such leaders as Frederich Hassaurek, George Lindeman, Gustav Tafel and Judge John Bernhardt Stallo a meeting of the German republicans took place in their Turner hall, on the evening of March 21. A series of resolutions expressing the views of the Germans on national issues were passed. Mr. Tafel then presented at the request of Judge Stallo a communication the latter had received that afternoon from Davenport containing the resolutions of March 7th. The communication was read in both German and English; whereupon a motion was introduced and carried "that they heartily endorse them."

About the middle of March a call was issued from a German republican club of New York asking the German republicans of the northern free states to be represented at the national republican convention in May, to send delegates to a conference of German republicans in Chicago to be held on the eve of the national republican convention. The object in general was to counsel with the duly accredited German delegates to the national convention with a view to advancing the principles they so ardently desired to promote:—which, in brief, were the reaffirmation of the republican platform adopted at Philadelphia, the restriction and extinction of human slavery, liberal and just treatment of the immigrant, economy and equity in the disposition of the public lands and the nomination of candidates for president and vice president who stood specifically for their principles.

The conference took place as designed. It was not a numerous gathering but it included many of the most influential German leaders in the country among its membership. Among those who were present either as delegates or as attendants were Frederich Hassaurek and Dr. C. Brodbeck of Ohio, R. Wagner of Minnesota, Messrs. A. Kreckel, Frederich Wenzel, John C. Vogel and others of Missouri, Gustav Koerner of Illinois, Nicholas J. Ruschi of Iowa and Carl Schurz of Wisconsin. Their discussions and deliberations were watched with keen interest by the partisans of various candidates before the larger convention; and considerable space given reports thereof in the despatches to sundry papers.

Generally speaking the German republicans secured what they most desired at Chicago, namely, definite and satisfactory declarations in the platform. They had not a little to do with it. Messrs. Koerner and Schurz were both on the committee on resolutions and Mr. John A. Kasson represented Iowa therein and he was the one who, according to Horace Greeley also a member, brought sundry divergent members to a common agreement and was empowered to prepare the final draft for the convention which was adopted amidst tremendous applause and approval with almost no material modification. In respect of their choice for the nomination of the party candidates the Germans on the whole failed to realize their primary preferences. Senator Seward was the choice of the major number of German republicans. Governor Chase came next probably, and Mr. Lincoln came third although probably a second choice with all.

IV

Precisely what direct, positive influence, if any, the resolutions adopted and proclaimed by the German republicans of Davenport on March 7, 1860, had in bringing about the conference of the Germans at Chicago on May 14th and the particular effect they may have had upon the ultimate decision of the national republican convention in the matter of the platform and the choice of the nominee, one cannot say with much assurance. But more or less influence they certainly exerted. They certainly signalized and typified a general discontent and belligerency common among German republicans all through the north respecting Judge Bates. Certain it is that his candidacy attained the zenith of public favor on or about March 1st. No less certain is it that quickly following the action of the Germans at Davenport there was widespread expression of opinion both by the German press and by German organizations adverse to his candidacy and his chances of securing the nomination rapidly and steadily declined. The pow-

erful party chiefs who urged the nomination of Judge Bates for the primary purpose of defeating radicalism as exemplified by Senator Seward, found it impossible to mollify the Germans. They had to make a change of front.

Abraham Lincoln, the dauntless antagonist of the "Little Giant" and author of the letter to Dr. Canisius was satisfactory to Frederick Hassaurek, Gustav Koerner, Nicholas J. Rusch and Carl Schurz. Seward was *persona non grata* to "conservatives" on the slavery question and obnoxious to radical "Americans" because of his course as governor of New York. Bates was no less disagreeable, if not impossible, as a candidate to abolitionists and the naturalized citizens. The German immigrant and his contentiousness anent his personal freedom and political status was, in the writer's judgment, one of the chief rocks on which the plans and hopes of both Greeley and Weed wrecked at Chicago on May 18, 1860, and whereby resulted the compromise that first made Abraham Lincoln the candidate of the republican party for president of the United States.

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