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## 1855: THE KNOW-NOTHING CHALLENGE IN EAST TEXAS

by  
Waymon L. McClellan

In 1855 the nativistic American (Know-Nothing) Party burst into Texas with the suddenness of a thunderstorm, stirred the state politically, and carried a number of men into office before being permanently defeated in 1856 by a hastily organized Democratic party. Prior to 1855 few ripples had disturbed the quiet surface of Lone Star politics. But beneath the surface currents moved. As the state elections of 1855 neared, Americans prepared to challenge Democratic supremacy.

As Know-Nothings readied to make their bid for power, unsuspecting Democrats plodded on, heedless of warnings by Democratic newspapermen that party organization was essential. Alarmed by the increase in the Whig vote in 1853, R. W. Loughery, well-known editor of the *Marshall Texas Republican*, urged Democratic organization, remarking that "the supineness of the people, the extent of our state, and the want of cheap travelling facilities," made early pleas for a state convention of 1855 necessary. Primarily to nominate candidates for state offices, the convention was to have the secondary role of reconciling the party's Unionist and States Rights' factions.<sup>1</sup> But when the convention met at Huntsville on April 21, delegates from only twelve counties attended, endorsing E. M. Pease and D. C. Dickson as incumbents for governor and lieutenant-governor. The editor of the *Texas State Gazette* promptly posted the two names for re-election.<sup>2</sup>

Then came the Know-Nothings.

Posing as a river improvement convention, the Texas Grand Council of the American Party met June 11, 1855, at Washington-on-the-Brazos and adopted two resolutions. The first authorized the grand secretary to inform each subcouncil of the party's nominees and made each subcouncil responsible for appointing a five member vigilance committee to advance the order's principles and to secure the election of the Know-Nothing ticket. A second resolution charged each council with choosing county electors to defend Know-Nothing principles and to publicize candidates.<sup>3</sup> The convention neither outlined party policies nor drew up a platform.

Know-Nothing nominees for political offices were men of prestige and experience. For governor the convention nominated D. C. Dickson, a medical doctor from Grimes County who had emigrated to Texas in 1841 and had served several terms in the legislature. At the time of his Know-Nothing nomination Dickson was serving as lieutenant-governor.<sup>4</sup> Dickson's opposition to the state system of internal improvements—a plan calling for the state to build, own, and operate railroads—clashed with Governor Pease's views and probably helped him gain the nomination.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to nominating a candidate for governor, the convention chose candidates for lieutenant-governor, land commissioner, Congressman from the Western District, and Congressman from the Eastern District. W. G. W. Jowers, an Anderson County resident and state senator, received the nomination for lieutenant-governor. As candidate for land commissioner the Know-Nothings selected Stephen Crosby, a resident of Travis County serving as chief clerk in the Land Office. John Hancock, a Travis County lawyer and district judge, was selected as the Congressional candidate for the Western District.<sup>6</sup>

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For Congressional candidate from the Eastern District (the area east of the Trinity River), the convention chose Lemuel D. Evans of Harrison County over W. B. Ochiltree of Nacogdoches County, an old-line and well-known Whig passed over because of his lack of appeal to Democrats.<sup>7</sup> Evans, a lawyer, had arrived in Texas in 1843 and settled in Fannin County, which he represented in the Annexation Convention in 1845. In 1853 Evans had been a strong contender in the governor's race, particularly in the East.<sup>8</sup>

Word of the Know-Nothing convention swept the state, alarming the Democratic party and prompting a "bombshell" convention which met on June 16. Governor Pease, who had argued that railroads would have to be built at the expense of the state, attended the convention and waived his views on the state system of internal improvements, vaguely promising to cooperate with the people.<sup>9</sup> Members of the convention denounced all secret political factions, specifically condemning the Know-Nothings as enemies of the government. Secrecy, Democrats declared, was the only issue—an issue determined by the American Party's "midnight caucus."<sup>10</sup>

Pease's state system met hot opposition. Easterners felt that they paid the bulk of tax monies,<sup>11</sup> but received scant attention in the building of railroads. Initially, no East Texas papers supported Pease because of his state plan. E. W. Cave, editor of the *Nacogdoches Chronicle*, wanted to support G. W. Smyth of Jasper County, and if Smyth did not run, to back Dickson. Loughery, claiming that the state system would burden the state with debt and taxes, felt that most Texans contested Pease's policies, and, like Cave, wanted to oppose him.<sup>12</sup> Know-Nothing journals, pushing the unpopular state plan as an issue, remarked that all friends of the state system—Democrat, Whig, Know-Nothing, or Nullifier—wanted Pease.<sup>13</sup>

In a circular in which he formally presented himself as a candidate, Pease stressed that he would support any practical plan for railroad construction, reiterating his earlier statement that the state plan would not be an issue. If the state plan were an issue, it would be because the Know-Nothings were making it one. Reassured, Loughery supported Pease, feeling it vital that all Democrats unite behind one candidate in order to defeat Dickson, the Know-Nothing nominee.<sup>14</sup>

Dickson, ignoring nativism and taking a popular stand on the issues of the state plan and the debt bill, a proposal providing for the payment of the Republic's debt with funds received from the sale of public lands, left little for Democrats to attack other than his move from the Democrats to the Know-Nothings. Democrats denounced Dickson as a political opportunist who had once accepted Pease's state plan.<sup>15</sup>

The *Texas State Gazette* had carried Dickson's name as the Democratic candidate for lieutenant-governor, but when his Know-Nothing affiliation became known, Democrats were left without a candidate. Soon, however, county organizations began to advance the name of H. R. Runnels, a wealthy East Texas planter from Bowie County. Democrats considered Runnels sound and reliable on the Know-Nothing question, as he had denied any Know-Nothing affiliation in answering a letter from San Antonio citizens. After the editors of the *Texas State Gazette* gave support to his candidacy in their June 30 issue, Runnels was acknowledged as the official Democratic candidate.<sup>16</sup>

Runnels' opponent, W. G. W. Jowers, the Know-Nothing nominee for lieutenant-governor, campaigned around his home county, preceding his speeches in some areas with anti-Catholic tirades from Baptist ministers.<sup>17</sup> Neither did Jowers escape the charge of opportunism. The *Texas State Gazette* maintained that he would have left the Know-Nothings had he not received the lieutenant-governor's nomination.<sup>18</sup>

Confusion surrounded the candidates for land commissioner. Stephen Crosby, the Know-Nothing nominee, announced shortly before the election that he no longer belonged to the order.<sup>19</sup> Fields, a member of the legislature from Liberty County and a printer by trade, was the Democratic candidate, but controversy surrounded his candidacy also. Some Democratic editors praised him as a faithful Democrat; others suspected him of being a Know-Nothing.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the excitement and controversy of the 1855 election centered around the contest for Congressman from the Eastern District. East Texas Democrats had held a convention in Tyler more than a month before the Know-Nothing state convention, but delegates from only three counties had attended, failing to name a candidate. A week after the state Know-Nothing meeting, a hastily called Democratic convention met in Henderson, likewise producing delegations from only three counties and failing to select a candidate.<sup>21</sup>

Candidates, instead, announced through the press as usual. When three Democrats put their names in contention, observers feared that a spreading of Democratic votes would insure Know-Nothing victory. As insufficient time remained for another convention, the practical solution was the withdrawal of two of the candidates. After consulting friends, Democrats reported, George W. Chilton of Smith County and John T. Mills of Lamar County had decided to abandon the contest in favor of Cass County's Matt Ward.<sup>22</sup>

Both Mills and Chilton published statements giving reasons for their withdrawals. Mills reported that he had foreseen no political emergency, as the Whigs lacked a candidate. Only after beginning his campaign had he heard of the Know-Nothing action at Washington-on-the-Brazos. All three Democratic candidates agreed that a Know-Nothing defeat was the primary objective, Mills wrote, and as a result of a Democratic meeting, he was withdrawing "more than willingly" in order to avoid confusion.<sup>23</sup> In a similar announcement, Chilton placed utmost priority on vanquishing the Know-Nothings, who, he felt, wanted to establish federalism. The party had to be driven "back to the dens of abolitionism." To accomplish the Know-Nothing defeat, he yielded to Ward.<sup>24</sup>

Americans quickly retorted. Evans used the withdrawals of Mills and Chilton to his advantage, capably reversing the burden of secrecy from the Know-Nothings to the Democrats. Three prominent East Texas Democrats, Evans claimed, had met secretly at night in a hotel to decide on a candidate, choosing Ward. The next morning Chilton and Mills had withdrawn.<sup>25</sup> Evans stated that Chilton had been a Know-Nothing for eight months, but had left the order when he could not gain office.<sup>26</sup> Attempting to neutralize the effect of the withdrawals, the Know-Nothing press impugned Ward as the product of a "disunion clique."<sup>27</sup>

Evans disclaimed Know-Nothing membership in speech after speech, stating that he was a conservative Union Democrat.<sup>28</sup> "It has been charged," Evans stated, "that I am the Know Nothing's candidate. It is false and the tongue that uttered it knew it was false." Evans' statements were printed in circular form and distributed, two or three thousand copies going into counties northwest and southeast of Palestine.<sup>28</sup>

Speaking in Marshall, his home, Evans denied membership in any secret society, party, or clique. But, R. W. Loughery countered, a "good source" had declared Evans to be a member of the Marshall Know-Nothing council who had withdrawn in order to state truthfully that he was not a member of any secret society.<sup>30</sup> The "good source" Loughery referred to was Josiah Marshall, the Whig editor of the Marshall *Meredian*, who had switched to the Know-Nothings. In a letter published in the *Texas Republican*, Marshall wrote that he did not say that Evans' name could be found on the books of the

Know-Nothings, but that he had no doubt Evans was a member. Marshall denied saying that Evans had withdrawn. Though complimenting Evans as an "honest, upright, patriotic man," Marshall lacked sympathy for him because of old party loyalties.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the Marshall *Meridian*, along with the Henderson *Star Spangled Banner* and the Clarksville *Messenger*, supported Evans in the election.<sup>32</sup>

Loughery, seeking to prove Evans the Know-Nothing nominee, cited four proofs: (1) All parts of the state had received the notice of his candidacy about the same time; (2) The men nominated by the convention had all announced; (3) Know-Nothing newspapers supported him; and (4) Evans advocated Know-Nothing principles. Democratic papers, in deciding Evans' status, recalled a conversation in which Evans had told two Tylerites that he had agreed to state Know-Nothing principles in order to get the nomination.<sup>33</sup> Finally, speaking in Palestine, Evans admitted that he had allowed the Know-Nothings to use his name, but only after attending the Democratic fiascoes at Tyler and Henderson and seeing that no Congressional candidate had been chosen.<sup>34</sup>

Confused by Evans' statements, Democratic papers at first seemed ambivalent about opposing him.<sup>35</sup> Loughery had backed Evans until hearing of his participation in the Know-Nothing convention, but, learning of Evans' actions, he was the first to support Ward, doing so because of duty to States' Rights Democrats and to the country.<sup>36</sup> The Jefferson *Herald* and the Henderson *Democrat* pronounced Evans the convention selected nominee.<sup>37</sup> Charles De Morse, long-time editor of the Clarksville *Standard*, emphasized the need to concentrate on one man to beat the "unreliable" who had entered the opposition, but did not name a favorite. Later, hardly a month before the election, De Morse announced that Ward was his choice.<sup>38</sup>

Democratic papers belatedly praised Ward, declaring him the accepted Democratic candidate.<sup>39</sup> Ward, editors wrote, was not only a staunch believer in religious and political freedom, but also a sterling Southerner who would give no favors to abolitionists and freesoilers. In predicting that Ward would go with the South when the "hour of resistance" came and calling for the support of States' Righters,<sup>40</sup> Loughery spelled out the basis for the looming political battles in Texas—a struggle between States' Right proslavers and Unionists.

Evans sought to pass himself off as a Union Democrat who accepted the nativistic attitudes of Know-Nothings. In many instances, especially in the northern counties, Evans reportedly started his addresses by reading and lauding the National Democratic Platform of 1852, then adding his denunciations of Catholics and foreigners "as a sort of graft."<sup>41</sup> Attempting to appeal to the voters' individualism, Evans warned that Democratic editors were trying to dictate to the electorate. While seeking favor with Whigs by acknowledging debt to the great Unionists, Clay and Webster, Evans safely based his philosophy on the revered patriots Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson.<sup>42</sup>

Early favorable comments softened Democratic attacks against Evans. De Morse, for example, had stated that Evans was a long and intimate friend, a gentleman of pure character who should be believed if he said he was not a member of the Know-Nothings.<sup>43</sup> The best attack Democrats could muster was to charge Evans with advocating the voting of foreigners at the National Democratic Convention of 1852, but opposing foreigners in 1855; for being anti-Catholic, but supporting the acquisition of Catholic Cuba; for being enthusiastic for railroads while running for office, but apathetic at other times.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, Matt Ward, Evans' opponent, took a mild stand against the Know-Nothings and emphasized state issues. Calling Know-Nothing secrecy a "flagrant violation of the principles of Republican Government," Ward, nevertheless, felt that the order contained many patriots. Though not Evans' equal as a speaker, the Democratic

candidate possessed a thorough knowledge of the state's business.<sup>45</sup> Calling himself a strict constructionist, he opposed several measures: internal improvements by the Federal government; Pease's state system for internal improvements, as the people did not want increased taxes and the resultant railroads might be sectional; the protective tariff; and the Texas Debt Bill, because the Federal government had no right to dictate the terms of payment. The only positive feature of Ward's presentation was a solid approval of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.<sup>46</sup> The Know-Nothing press tried to link Ward to the Texas and Pacific Railroad and the financial operations of Easterners who were enlisting foreign capital to build a Texas railroad.<sup>47</sup>

Because of illness that confined him during the first part of July and prevented his traveling for several days, Ward had been unable to conduct an extensive campaign, losing two-thirds of the crucial month of July. J. H. Reagan, later Postmaster General of the Confederacy, lamented in a letter from Palestine that Evans' friends were "moving heaven and earth," having the campaign almost entirely in their hands. Reagan, returning from a trip, feared that he was too late to help Ward, though he had answered Evans at Palestine and Crockett.<sup>48</sup>

State legislators and senators were to be elected in August, also, and Know-Nothing candidates were active. In Marshall, home of East Texas' most powerful Know-Nothing organization, Americans met and nominated three men to represent Harrison County in the legislature. Several "abler men" had been passed over, Democrats reported, as they were ex-Whigs, and Marshall Know-Nothings were trying to avoid the stigma of Whiggery.<sup>49</sup> Know-Nothings were said to be claiming eight hundred of Harrison County's eleven hundred votes.<sup>50</sup>

One of the Know-Nothing nominees, A. D. Burress, wrote a letter to the people in which he discussed state issues, illustrating the Know-Nothing attempt to avoid nativism and deal with state topics. Like most East Texans, Burress voiced his opposition to the state plan for internal improvements, criticizing it as a tax-raising idea "fraught with mischief." Neither did Burress condone the railroads being controlled by outsiders, wanting counties to build their own roads. Nor did Burress support the debt bill, writing that Texas should settle the debt in its own way, free from Federal interference.<sup>51</sup>

Because Know-Nothing candidates were in harmony with the people in their opinions on state issues, Democrats generally ignored state topics and tried to turn the campaign into a moral crusade. While Americans strove to trace origins to Washington, Jefferson, and Jackson, Democrats sneeringly linked them to the Alien and Sedition Acts and the Hartford Convention.<sup>52</sup> While Americans sought to escape charges of religious intolerance, Democrats jeered them as bigots. While Americans called themselves Unionists seeking to heal sectional divisions, Democrats called attention to the fusion of Abolitionists and Know-Nothings in the North.

Democrats equated unionism with federalism, attacking both as antagonistic to states' rights. De Morse and Loughery, two of the most influential editors in East Texas, labeled the Know-Nothings federalists, Loughery calling the party "federalism in its most odious form." George Chilton, in yielding to Ward, interpreted the Know-Nothing movement as an attempt to establish federalism.<sup>53</sup> Democratic speakers echoed Chilton's allegation. The Texas hero J. P. Henderson, speaking in Marshall, castigated the Americans as a party based on a concentration of power in the Federal government at the cost of states' rights. To Henderson, the choice was between a party stemming from the Constitution and one attacking the sovereignty of the states.<sup>54</sup> Know-Nothing support of states' rights was ridiculed as an attempt to make the party palatable to the South.<sup>55</sup>

Adroitly, Democratic editors gave life to the Satanic Know-Nothing image they had helped create. Know-Nothings, Democrats stated, were disappointed office seekers, Whigs, Abolitionists, and disaffected Democrats joined in fragile alliance.<sup>56</sup> Know-Nothings running for state offices were attacked as bent on self-aggrandizement. Evans was consistently condemned as an "unreliable" who had an "inordinate thirst for office."<sup>57</sup>

The American Party, De Morse scoffed, was the "misnamed successor of the Spanish Inquisition." Not to be outdone, Loughery flayed the Know-Nothings as "the old, wrinkled caste of prostitutes of party, with no more pretension to piety than an unrepentant Magdalen."<sup>58</sup> Democratic spokesmen reduced issues to simple terms—Abolitionists, Free Soilers, and Know-Nothings of the North arrayed against national men of all parties and states. Issues were psychological: free, manly, independent, open discussion opposed by mystery, secrecy, oath-taking, and bigotry. The political duel was "a clear field and a fair contest between intolerance, federalism, and concealment, and deception . . . and open handed, free hearted, and straight-forward Republicanism."<sup>59</sup> Democrats were clearly in the will of God:

To do is to succeed—our fight  
Is wag'd in Heaven's approving sight—  
The smile of God is victory!<sup>60</sup>

Optimistic Democrats predicted victory, declaring that Ward would be elected over Evans by a majority of five thousand to six thousand votes, gaining the middle and southern counties, much of the Whig vote, and a large portion of the vote in the northern counties, where he had the support of the *Clarksville Standard* and the *Dallas Herald*.<sup>61</sup> De Morse, editor of the *Standard*, believed that Ward's home county, Cass, would vote Democratic, although Evans was the presiding judge there. Bowie, where Ward had first lived, was credited with being a Democratic county, but Ward's edge in Bowie County was offset by a predicted Know-Nothing majority in Fannin County, Evans' first home.<sup>62</sup> R. W. Loughery, editor of the *Texas Republican*, argued that Ward could not lose. The support of the entire Democratic press,<sup>63</sup> along with Ward's great personal popularity and the fact that in order to win Evans would have to poll the entire Whig vote as well as three thousand Democratic votes, assured Ward's victory.<sup>64</sup>

Democrats, said to make up a large part of the Know-Nothings, were reportedly deserting Know-Nothing ranks in large numbers in Marshall, Henderson, and Rusk. Senator T. J. Rusk, more than a month before the election, announced that he regarded the "battle with the Know-Nothings as over and the victory won." De Morse professed not a "particle of fear for the result," predicting that "the [Know-Nothing] animal will die, and his carcass be left to putrefy" shortly after the election.<sup>65</sup>

As election day neared, unusual excitement gripped Texans, seeming to amount "to almost a frenzy" with some, and voting was followed by confusion rampant with conflicting reports. "Never have we known in an election, so many incorrect returns set afloat," Loughery wrote.<sup>66</sup> People thirsted for news, the election barometer was jokingly said to be a stage driver from Jefferson. If he arrived in Marshall smiling, Evans' supporters rejoiced; if he came in frowning, Ward's enthusiasts celebrated. A story circulated about a Know-Nothing who wanted information concerning the voting in the counties along the Red River. Meeting a wagoner from Lamar, the Know-Nothing asked about the election in the upper counties. Solemnly assuring the Know-Nothing of his knowledge, the wagoner said that Evans had received a majority of seven hundred or seven thousand votes; he could not remember which.<sup>67</sup>

When an extra from the *Texas State Times* reached Marshall announcing Evans' victory by thirty-one votes, Marshall Americans lit their homes and the courthouse.

Candles were placed on telegraph wires and in trees. Boys with blazing turpentine balls scurried about the square, and "considerable power was burnt."<sup>68</sup>

Next, Loughery carried a story asserting that Ward, with a majority of 153 votes, had been issued a Certificate of Election. The votes from Liberty County, which had given Evans a majority, had been thrown out, Loughery reported, because they had been for M. L. Evans rather than L. D. Evans.<sup>69</sup> Counterbalancing the announcement of Ward's victory was the complaint in the next issue of the *Republican* that returns from Orange County left Ward with a margin of only fourteen votes, dimming hope of a Democratic victory in the East.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, Loughery published the "official vote." No returns were listed for Jefferson and Orange Counties, and no vote was given for Evans in Liberty County. Evans, Loughery announced, had carried the East by a majority of twenty-six votes.<sup>71</sup> Writing from Austin, Loughery reported that Evans had received the election certificate.<sup>72</sup>

The races for governor and lieutenant-governor form the best measures of Democratic and Know-Nothing powers in the East. Pease and Dickson, the gubernatorial candidates, were both West Texans. Of the counties from which returns were located,<sup>73</sup> Pease triumphed with 53 per cent of the vote to Dickson's 41 per cent. Pease carried twenty-two of the twenty-nine counties. Thus, in the election most detached from local prejudices and politics, the Democrats were overwhelmingly victorious.

Both candidates for lieutenant-governor were from East Texas. Runnels, the Democratic candidate, won 46 per cent of the vote to Jowers' 41 per cent. The personal nature of Texas politics was evident, Neill, a resident of upper East Texas, claimed more than 12 per cent of the vote, scoring heavily in the counties along the Red River and carrying Collin and Dallas Counties. The high vote for Neill in the counties near his residence indicates lack of loyalty to either party and a continued attachment to voting for the man.

In the election for land commissioner, Crosby, the Know-Nothing nominee, gained twenty-five counties to Fields' eleven, but the race lacked the excitement of the Evans-Ward struggle. While voters cast nearly 21,000 ballots in the race for Congress, they cast fewer than 18,000 in the race for land commissioner.<sup>74</sup> Both Evans and Crosby had denied Know-Nothing membership. Many Democrats, because of the confusion, were said to have voted for Crosby.

East Texas Know-Nothings elected to the state senate and legislature are difficult to determine, as the legislature organized without regard for party lines, but papers occasionally gave the party of elected representatives. A conservative figure suggests that, statewide, twenty Americans won seats in the legislature and five in the senate.<sup>75</sup> Know-Nothings swept Harrison County, sending A. D. Burress, Nathan Smith, and W. A. Tarlton to the legislature. Other East Texas Know-Nothings elected to the legislature include William Stedman (Rusk), W. B. Ochiltree (Nacogdoches), J. J. Dickson (Red River), and Joseph Martin (Henderson and Kaufman Counties). Elihu Williams (Panola, Shelby, and San Augustine Counties) was said to be an ex-Know-Nothing.<sup>76</sup> John H. Reagan wrote that Know-Nothings had won Anderson County, a victory which would have sent two more Americans to the legislature.<sup>77</sup> Know-Nothings elected to the senate from East Texas include J. W. Flanagan, the editor of the Henderson *Star Spangled Banner*, William M. Taylor, who represented Anderson and Houston Cities,<sup>78</sup> and Robert H. Taylor, who represented Fannin and Hunt Counties.<sup>79</sup>

Both Democrats and Know-Nothings had excuses for lost elections. Runnels and Fields, Marshall Americans claimed, were Know-Nothings who had drawn the votes of

many Americans, some of whom claimed Fields as their nominee.<sup>80</sup> Evans' denials of Know-Nothing membership was important, his claim to be a Democrat capturing a number of Democratic votes and his avowal of Know-Nothing principles luring Know-Nothings.<sup>81</sup> As Evans was considered a good Union man, Democrats reported, he had gained the upper counties. Ward, a States' Righter, had been denounced there.<sup>82</sup> Ward's limited campaign was a convenient excuse, scheduled speeches, such as the one in Tyler, had been cancelled. A pro-American letter Sam Houston had written was said to have been influential in gaining votes for the Know-Nothings.<sup>83</sup> Democrats gave importance to Know-Nothing activity in setting up lodges. Know-Nothings, De Morse claimed, had ordered out members while Democrats, insufficiently roused, had remained at home. Other Democrats had succumbed to the appeals of patriotism and Americanism.

R. W. Loughery laid the Democratic loss of Harrison County to a lack of party organization, urging as a remedy immediate organization and increased circulation of Democratic papers. In summing up the election, he stressed the lesson forced upon the Democracy. "It will," he wrote, "teach the party to be more active and industrious for the future."<sup>84</sup> Needing little urging, a thoroughly aroused Democracy began organizing in preparation for the 1856 elections. Party organization occurred in counties throughout East Texas. Democrats organized in Anderson County, which had been a Know-Nothing county in 1855.<sup>85</sup> At a "large and enthusiastic" meeting in Honey Grove, a town in Fannin County, Democrats plotted to overthrow the Know-Nothings.<sup>86</sup> Residents of Lamar County met at Paris to strengthen party organization and to select delegates to the State Convention.<sup>87</sup> Organization of county units paid early dividends, being the major factor in a Cherokee County election to fill a vacancy created by death. Democrats there registered an increase of forty-one votes.<sup>88</sup>

The introduction of the American Party into Texas quickened the pace of Texas politics and caused the formation of a formidable Democratic party, conservative in philosophy. In contrast to the 1855 State Democratic Convention, which had been attended by delegates from only twelve counties, the 1856 convention attracted delegates from almost every county in Texas. With strong county organizations supporting the work of the state convention, a united Democracy easily turned back the Know-Nothings in the 1856 state and Presidential elections. Thus, by the end of 1856, the Know-Nothing Party was powerless. Know-Nothing victories in 1855 were the only successes of which the Americans could boast.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, October 21, 1854.

<sup>2</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, February 24, 1855; Ernest William Winkler (ed.), *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas* (Austin, 1916), 61-63.

<sup>3</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; Winkler, *Platforms*, 63.

<sup>4</sup>Walter Prescott Webb et al. (eds.), *The Handbook of Texas* (Austin, 1952), I, 501.

<sup>5</sup>William Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 116-17; Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>6</sup>Webb, *Handbook*, I, 931, 438, 763-64; Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; Clarksville *Standard*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>7</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; Clarksville *Standard*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>8</sup>In 1850 Evans was a District Judge residing in Marshall. See microfilm copies of the 1850 census, Texas, Harrison County. Although W. B. Ochiltree, the Whig candidate, carried the East in the 1853 governor's race, Evans defeated the other four candidates, gaining 24 per cent of the ballots to Pease's 20 per cent. The Clarksville *Standard*, September 10, 1853, contains the election returns. Pease's poor showing demonstrated that Westerners met chilly reception in the East. Party labels were unimportant. A vote for Ochiltree was for the man and the section.

<sup>9</sup>Clarksville *Standard*, July 7, 1855; Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>10</sup>Winkler, *Platforms*, 64; Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; Know-Nothing secrecy and ritual was a matter seriously objectionable to non-members. Know-Nothing oath-taking and ritualistic accouterments were the most obvious and easily attacked of American characteristics. East Texas papers carried "exposés" of Know-Nothing eccentricities. The contents of a pamphlet supposedly obtained from a Know-Nothing "soft" appeared in the *Texas Republican*. According to the article (which was lifted from another paper), candidates for membership were to be proposed by loyal members, and if selected, to present themselves for the first oath. After swearing never to divulge any questions asked new recruits, to never give the names of members, or to even admit the order's existence, and to answer each query truthfully, aspirants answered a number of questions: (1) name (2) age (3) residence (4) religion (5) birthplace (6) parents' birthplaces (7) grandparents' birthplaces (8) grandparents' activities during the American Revolution (9) if he agreed to vote for native Americans against all aliens, foreigners, and Roman Catholics. If the initiate ever told any Know-Nothing secrets, he was to be excommunicated. After completing the first oath, the convert learned the signs and grips, and, if doing well for two weeks, was recommended for the second degree. A new oath bound the member to act with the majority in the selection of a candidate and reaffirmed his determination to oppose all foreign influence, Popery, Jesuitism, and Catholicism. After three months, party faithfuls were eligible for the third degree. Kneeling, with his left hand raised and his right hand clutching the American flag, the stalwart again emphasized his earlier commitments and swore to aid all members in distress. Marshall *Texas Republican*, October 7, 1854; September 18, 1855. For a highly emotional "complete exposure" of Know-Nothing oaths, see the Clarksville *Standard*, December 2, 1854. The third degree, as given in Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 42-43, was a solemn affirmation to support the Union against all attacks.

<sup>11</sup>The Comptroller's report for 1859 showed that one-fourth of Texas' counties, nearly all in the East and Southeast, were assessed for two-thirds of the state's wealth. *The Texas Almanac*, 1860, 204-207.

<sup>12</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, June 16, 1855; Francis Richard Lubbock, *Six Decades in Texas, or Memoirs of Francis Richard Lubbock, Governor of Texas in War Times, 1861-63*, ed. C. W. Raines (Austin, 1900), 196.

<sup>13</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855, quoting the *Nacogdoches Chronicle*.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1855; July 12, 1855; July 21, 1855.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, July 21, 1855; July 14, 1855; July 28, 1855.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, July 14, 1855; September 1, 1855; Winkler, *Platforms*, 64.

<sup>17</sup>Letter from John H. Reagan quoted in *Clarksville Standard*, August 18, 1855.

<sup>18</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, July 7, 1855, quoting the *Austin Texas State Gazette*.

<sup>19</sup>Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 117.

<sup>20</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; September 1, 1855; *Tyler Reporter*, November 17, 1855.

<sup>21</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, March 17, 1855; March 24, 1855; May 5, 1855; June 30, 1855.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1855; July 7, 1855.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, July 7, 1855; *Clarksville Standard*, July 21, 1855.

<sup>24</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, August 4, 1855, quoting from a summary of Evans' June 30 speech in Palestine as reported by the *Palestine Advocate*.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, July 28, 1855, from Evans' Marshall speech of July 25.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, quoting a Know-Nothing paper, the *Clarksville Messenger*, July 20, 1855. Because of the personal nature of Texas politics, the withdrawals of Chilton and Mills conceivably aided Evans. A citizen of Tarrant County remarked that Evans could carry that area as Chilton had withdrawn. *Clarksville Standard*, July 28, 1855.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, August 11, 1855, citing the *Palestine Advocate*. The *Washington Ranger* claimed that Evans had been in Washington-on-the-Brazos during the Know-Nothing convention and had denied Know-Nothing membership before nearly one thousand people. Article in the *Clarksville Standard*, August 18, 1855.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, August 18, 1855, quoting a letter from John H. Reagan dated July 29, 1855.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1855; July 28, 1855.

<sup>31</sup>Letter from Marshall, *Ibid.*, August 4, 1855.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, July 21, 1855.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, July 7, 1855; July 28, 1855; *Clarksville Standard*, July 7, 1855; July 14, 1855.

<sup>34</sup>Quote from *Palestine Advocate* in *Clarksville Standard*, August 11, 1855.

<sup>35</sup>This is not to say that Democratic editors were soft on Know-Nothingism once its surge into Texas became known. Loughery, who had established the *Texas Republican* in 1849, came out early against the Americans. He was not one to dodge a fight, recognizing that highly-emotional political issues were the editor's lifeblood. "What is a paper without party politics?" Loughery asked in 1854. Papers without politics, Loughery continued, were "a perfectly wishy washy affair, devoid of interest or merit." *Marshall Texas Republican*, November 18, 1854. Charles De Morse, editor of the *Clarksville Standard*, made no empty claim when he asserted that he was "unequivocally and unswervingly Democratic and opposed to all ultraism, including Know-Nothingism." *Clarksville Standard*, May 17, 1856. For summaries of the lives of Loughery and De Morse see *The Encyclopedia of the New West* (Marshall, Texas, 1881), 501-502, 260.

<sup>36</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, June 30, 1855.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, quoting the *Dallas Herald*.

<sup>38</sup>*Clarksville Standard*, June 30, 1855.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, July 14, 1855.

<sup>40</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855.

<sup>41</sup>*Clarksville Standard*, August 18, 1855.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, *Marshall Texas Republican*, June 30, 1855.

<sup>43</sup>*Clarksville Standard*, July 7, 1855. A week later De Morse spoke differently. Evans, De Morse wrote, was "of good mind, though erratic," and was "not practically useful." Ambition had caused him to stray from his principles. *Ibid.*, July 14, 1855.

<sup>44</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, June 30, 1855; July 7, 1855.

<sup>45</sup>*Clarksville Standard*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>46</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, June 30, 1855.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, July 21, 1855, quoting the Know-Nothing paper the *Clarksville Messenger*; St. Clair Griffin Reed, *A History of Texas Railroads* (2d ed.; Houston, 1941), 99.

<sup>48</sup>*Clarksville Standard*, July 14, 1855; August 18, 1855; *Marshall Texas Republican*, June 30, 1855.

<sup>49</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, August 4, 1855.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, July 28, 1855.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, June 30, 1855; August 11, 1855; March 10, 1855.

<sup>53</sup>*Clarksville Standard*, June 23, 1855; letter in *Marshall Texas Republican*, July 7, 1855.

<sup>54</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, August 4, 1855; May 19, 1855.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, April 28, 1855.

<sup>56</sup>T. J. Rusk in *ibid.*, July 14, 1855; George H. Chilton in *ibid.*, July 7, 1855; J. P. Henderson, *ibid.*, May 19, 1855.

<sup>57</sup>Clarksville *Standard*, June 30, 1855; July 7, 1855.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, July 21, 1855; Marshall *Texas Republican*, March 17, 1855.

<sup>59</sup>Tyler *Reporter*, November 17, 1855; Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855.

<sup>60</sup>Clarksville *Standard*, July 21, 1855; Tyler *Reporter*, November 17, 1855.

<sup>61</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855.

<sup>62</sup>Clarksville *Standard*, August 4, 1855.

<sup>63</sup>East Texas Democratic papers known to support Ward in the election include the *Palestine Advocate*, established by A. E. McClure in 1855; the *Jefferson Herald*, with Ward Taylor publisher; the *Marshall Texas Republican*, started by R. W. Loughery in 1849; the *Nacogdoches Chronicle*, E. W. Cave editor; the *Clarksville Standard*, begun in 1842 by Charles De Morse; the *Henderson Democrat*, edited by M. D. Ector and James Estill; the *Tyler Reporter*, established in 1854 by James Estill, but published in 1855 by Jack Davis; the *Dallas Herald*, founded by J. W. Lattimer in 1849; the *Rusk Sentinel*; and the *Daingerfield Lamplighter*. Know-Nothing papers publishing in East Texas during the election were the *Marshall Meridian*, edited by Josiah Marshall; the *Clarksville Messenger*, published by \_\_\_\_ Thomas and \_\_\_\_ Darnell; and the *Henderson Star Spangled Banner*, published by J. W. Flanagan. Of the above publishers, M. D. Ector and Jack Davis were elected to the legislature in 1855, and J. W. Flanagan won a senate seat.

<sup>64</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, July 21, 1855; July 14, 1855; Clarksville *Standard*, July 14, 1855; July 21, 1855.

<sup>66</sup>Marshall *Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; September 29, 1855.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, November 3, 1855.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, October 20, 1855.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, November 10, 1855, quoting the *Galveston News*.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, November 17, 1855, quoting the *Texas State Gazette*.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, November 10, 1855. On November 6 Governor Pease issued Evans a Certificate of Election reading, "It appears that Lemuell D. Evans received the highest number of votes" in the Eastern Congressional District. File #2-13/324, Texas State Archives. An examination of the election returns in the State Archives found returns from Orange County and Evans' return from Liberty County. There were no returns from Jefferson County. The Orange and Liberty Counties votes, added to the official results as given by Loughery, gave Evans a majority of forty-four votes out of a total of 20,714.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, November 24, 1855. Of the twelve counties casting more than seven hundred ballots, Evans and Ward each carried six, with Evans averaging 61 per cent of the vote in the six he carried to Ward's 56.3 per cent average in his six counties. Evans' strength lay almost entirely in the populous upper half of the district.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, September 1, 1855. Returns supplied by librarian, Texas State Archives. The returns from thirteen counties were not included; returns from four counties located in newspapers.

<sup>74</sup>Computed from figures in *ibid.*, November 10, 1855.

<sup>75</sup>Rupert Norvai Richardson, *Texas, the Lone Star State* (Englewood Cliffs, 1958), 129. Overdyke set the figures at thirty and nine. *Know-Nothing Party*, 117. Overdyke's numbers are closer to the figures of the Americans, who boasted of eleven Americans in the senate arrayed against twenty-two Democrats. *Marshall Texas Republican*, December 15, 1855. The names, but not the party, of Texans elected to the state legislature and senate in 1855 are listed in *Members of the Legislature of the State of Texas from 1846 to 1939*, ed. Tommy Yett (Austin, 1939), 22-25. Americans probably claimed some politicians who took an independent course. Jack Davis, for example, the Democratic editor of the *Tyler Reporter*, was charged with having consented to become a Know-Nothing mouthpiece. The accusation, Davis answered, was false, but he was devoted to principles, and would vote as he saw fit. *Marshall Texas Republican*, December 22, 1855. Senator Scott of Harrison County was said to have Know-Nothing leanings because he reportedly had voted for Dickson. *Ibid.*, March 14, 1857. J. S. Devereux, a wealthy Rusk County planter elected to the legislature, noted that Know-Nothings made a poor showing in securing positions in the legislature. Dorman H. Winfrey, *Julien Sidney Devereux and His Monte Verdi Plantation* (Waco, 1962), 111. A feeble and unsuccessful attempt to pass a nativistic resolution was the only partisan action of Know-Nothings in the legislature. Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 117.

Overdyke, *Know-Nothing Party*, 117.

<sup>76</sup>Clarksville *Standard*, October 11, 1855; *Marshall Texas Republican*, September 1, 1855; August 25, 1855.

<sup>77</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, August 11, 1855. As Taylor was an Anderson County Know-Nothing elected to the senate, there is a good chance that the two representatives, J. H. McClanahan and Benjamin Parker, were Know-Nothings also.

<sup>78</sup>Taylor re-entered the Democrats before the 1857 election. *Ibid.*, April 4, 1857.

<sup>79</sup>Winkler, *Platforms*, 69.

<sup>80</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, September 1, 1855.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*; Clarksville *Standard*, August 11, 1855.

<sup>82</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, July 28, 1855; *Tyler Reporter*, November 17, 1855; Clarksville *Standard*, August 11, 1855.

<sup>83</sup>Lubbock, *Memoirs*, 196. Shortly before the election both Democratic and Know-Nothing papers had carried Houston's pro-American letter. In it he wrote that "whilst the triumph of American principles were reverberating throughout the Union, I was silent. When those principles are said to be in eclipse I come forward with cheerfulness and declare that I believe the salvation of my country is only to be secured by adherence to the principles of the American order." *Marshall Texas Republican*, August 11, 1855. See also Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (eds.), *The Writings of Sam Houston of Texas* (Austin, 1942), VI, 192-99.

<sup>84</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, September 15, 1855; November 24, 1855.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, October 20, 1855.

<sup>86</sup>Clarksville *Standard*, November 3, 1855.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, November 24, 1855.

<sup>88</sup>*Marshall Texas Republican*, December 22, 1855.