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Scandal Behind The Convent Walls: The Know-Nothing Nunnery Committee of 1855*

by John R. Mulkern

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Massachusetts was no stranger to the turbulent divisions of the 1850's. Unsettling economic changes and social tensions, fueled by rapid industrial and urban growth and thousands of poverty-stricken Irish Catholic immigrants pouring into the state each year, undermined the established party system (Whig, Democratic, and Free-Soil), already weakened by the national crisis over slavery. Failure of that system to respond meaningfully to the wrenching dislocations induced by the forces of industrialism, mass immigration, and sectionalism gave rise to a new party called American by its followers but dubbed Know-Nothing by its political foes.¹

Party organizers discovered the formula for political success in Massachusetts—the promise of change in a period of unprecedented change. In response to that promise, major interest groups such as advocates of free territories, temperance, and locofocoism joined their organizations in coalition with the party's Native American founding fathers. Its ability to present itself as a viable alternative to what the common people regarded as an anachronistic and corrupt party system attracted voters from all parties. Rank-and-file Free-Soilers, for example, rejected efforts by their party leaders to rally them to an anti-slavery fusion party in the spring and summer of 1845 and flocked instead to the American party's standards.² Among those rushing into the new party was Free-Soil gubernatorial nominee Henry Wilson. His hope, shared by other pragmatic Free-Soil leaders, was to wrest control of the American party from its Native American founding fathers and transformed it into a powerful anti-slavery organization.³

In the state election of 1854, the Know-Nothings, emerging from their clandestine lodge network, sprang the greatest political upset in state history. "There has been," wrote a shocked Charles Francis Adams "no revolution so complete since the organization of government."⁴ Adams was not given to exaggeration. The new party, in running up 63 percent of the total vote, had carried the entire congressional delegation, every constitutional state office, all 40 senate seats, and all but three of the 379 seats in the lower house. Nowhere else in the nation did the party achieve such a landslide victory, and nowhere else did it so thoroughly shatter the existing party system. So total a victory

eliminated the loyal opposition, and this, in turn, enabled the Know-Nothings to home in on their major concerns. Legislation favoring each of the party's major voting blocs spewed forth from the General court, for example, a strict temperance law, homestead exemption and mechanics' lien law, abolition of imprisonment for debt, desegregation of public schools, and a personal liberty law that prohibited state officials from cooperating in the return of fugitive slaves.⁵

In spite of its monolithic appearance, serious divisions existed within the secret confines of the party that augured ill for its future. As one critic observed, Know-Nothingism even at the outset suffered from a split personality:

In Boston the new party is more proslavery than even the old Whig party, being either national Whigs or Yankee mechanics who equally hate a Nigger as they do an Irishman; in the state it is far more antislavery than any legislature ever elected . . . ; in the nation, I fear national, which means proslavery.⁶

The ensuing legislative year featured a power struggle between the Native American and Free-Soil poles of the party, a struggle that former Free-Soiler Dr. James W. Stone from his vantage point in the Know-Nothing legislature described as "very severe." Stone was by no means confident that those of the antislavery persuasion in the party "would prevail." The intraparty struggle forced Henry Wilson, the most prominent Free-Soil convert to Know-Nothingism, to curry favor with Native Americans (who suspected his newly evinced enthusiasm for nativism) in order to secure legislative appointment to the United States Senate. Even at that the "Natick Cobbler" rose "from coward to the Senate" by grace of a one vote margin in the state senate.⁸

There was one issue, however, on which almost all Know-Nothings (including Free-Soilers) were joined—deep-seated hostility to foreigners and Roman Catholicism. This enabled the party to push through the most extreme nativist program in the country. During 1855, the Know-Nothing government ordered hundreds of Irish paupers and mental patients removed from state institutions and shipped to Liverpool, disbanded Irish militia units, enacted laws stripping state courts of their power to grant naturalization, mandated daily reading of the King James Bible in the public schools, and initiated constitutional amendments to deny Roman Catholics and naturalized citizens the right to hold public office and to restrict the suffrage to those with a minimum of twenty-one years residency in the United States.⁹

None of these measures generated opposition in party ranks. Nor was there any opposition to the creation of the "Joint Special Committee on the Inspection of Nunneries and Convents," which was to investigate those Catholic institutions where women "are forever barred from leaving . . . however much they desired to do so, and [where] acts of villainy, injustice, and wrong are perpetrated with impunity as a result of their immunity from public inspection . . ." ¹⁰ Armed with this commission, the members of the Nunnery Committee, as it was called, set off on the trail of skullduggery. But as soon as they left the State House, they came under the scrutiny of the militantly anti-Know-Nothing establishment press. Indeed, the first to uncover improprieties was

newspaperman Charles Hale whose father was publisher of the staunchly Whig *Boston Daily Advertiser*. Much to the chagrin of the Nativists, Hale charged the Nunnery Committee rather than Catholic clerics with wrong-doing.

In an editorial entitled "Our Houses Are Our Castles," Hale recounted that on the afternoon of March 26 a group of sixteen men pounded on the front door of Notre Dame Academy in Roxbury, a boarding school for girls run by the sisters of the order of Notre Dame. They were there, they informed the startled Mother Superior who had responded to the noise, as members of a legislative committee investigating religious institutions. No one bothered to inform the sister that she had the right to refuse them entrance. Nor was any time wasted on amenities, lest they afford the forces of evil time to conceal their crimes. Accordingly, the men brushed past the nun and fanned out through the house, peering into every room, closet, cupboard, passageway, and under every bed. In some closets they poked through ladies' dresses, and in the cellar they pried open the lid of a sink which though half-filled with dirty water contained no drowned babies or nuns. Their perseverance notwithstanding the Know-Nothing sleuths uncovered no hidden passageways, guns, ammunition, skulking lechers, or skeletons in the closets; but they did manage in their cellar to attic search to terrify the school children (one of whom shrieked "The house is full of Know-Nothings!"), to flush a nun from her devotions in the chapel and to determine that a youngster, confined to a sick bed, was, as the nuns assured them, a girl.¹¹

Hale's scoop furnished the partisan Boston press with what it had been waiting for—a major Know-Nothing scandal—and it pounced on the story with glee. State and national newspapers took up the cry. Their clamor forced the Great and General Court to establish a joint committee to investigate the Roxbury incident. Its choice as chairman, Representative James Carpenter, himself one of the Roxbury raiders, failed to calm such public suspicions. The Nunnery Committee story had become too hot for such a dodge. So had the special committee chair, for Chairman Carpenter resigned his post a few days later, amidst screams of conflict of interest. John Quincy Adams Griffin, whose credentials like his name, were in proper order, replaced Carpenter.¹²

On April 7, the Griffin committee met for the first time in an open hearing at the State House before a standing room crowd, gathered there by rumors of exciting new developments. They were not disappointed. First to testify were several members of the raiding party who assured their interrogators that their conduct at Notre Dame Academy not only was proper, it was "exemplary." Next to appear was the Mother Superior, Sr. Aloysia, who saw nothing exemplary about invasion of privacy. Moreover, she lodged a new charge. When the Know-Nothings had left the building, one had lingered behind and engaged her in conversation. He told her that he had once been a Catholic, educated at St. Mary's College in Baltimore, but that he had drifted from the fold. He hoped someday to return to the Church and wondered if he might visit Mother Superior alone sometime for "an agreeable conversation." His manner and tone were those of a man with something other than salvation on his mind. When asked his name, the ardent soul-searcher identified himself as

'Mr. Evans.' Sr. Aloysia explained to him that her vows limited her to instructing young ladies and that if he were really seeking spiritual balm he might contact the Bishop of Boston. 'Mr. Evans' took the hint and left.¹³

Charles Hale, having received permission to participate in the hearings, asked the Mother Superior if she could spot Mr. Evans in the legislative chamber. She was unable to pick him out from the numerous faces turned toward her. Chairman Griffin thereupon asked Nunnery Committee Chairman Streeter Evans to rise. Hale asked: "Was this the gentleman?" Sr. Aloysia responded: "No." Mr. Evans sat down, obviously relieved. Next the chair bid the "Grand Worshipful Instructor" of The Know-Nothing State Council, Joseph Hiss of Boston, to rise. Hale asked the sister: "Do you remember ever to have seen that gentleman?" Sr. Aloysia replied that she did not recognize him as Mr. Hiss, but as Mr. Evans.¹⁴

The real Mr. Hiss forced a wan smile. Hiss apparently was an accomplished smiler, having parlayed that talent and an ingratiating personality into high party office and a seat in the state legislature. The grin quickly faded, however, when the "Grand Worshipful Instructor" found himself parrying charges of a most serious nature. Another nun identified him as the man who had accosted her while she was praying in the chapel. In an effort to escape his attentions, she had fled the room only to have him pant after her to the hallway outside. There Hiss had fondled the sister's rosary which was suspended from her person and, amidst a shower of leers and winks, had asked his cornered quarry whether she liked staying in a convent, could she leave to go out in the world again, would she like to go to Montreal for a few days?¹⁵ The script, straight from Maria Monk's spicy *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*, was delivered with all the aplomb and raffish charm that Hiss, a failed tailor one step ahead of his creditors, could muster. The frightened girl was not intrigued.

The testimony of the two nuns did not go unchallenged. One senator asked the Mother Superior whether she had considered the visitor's behavior improper prior to her being told as much by newspapermen and Jesuits. Sr. Aloysia assured him that her opinion was formed the moment the Know-Nothing vice squad had burst into her school. Charles Hale wanted to know more about other Nunnery Committee activities. He had heard that the Committee had not finished its work day with its exploration of Notre Dame Academy. Hale, as it turned out, had heard correctly. Immediately upon leaving that institution, the investigators had repaired to another, the nearby fashionable Norfolk House where a sumptuous dinner (ordered beforehand) awaited their pleasure. According to eyewitnesses, champagne had "flowed freely" in violation of the temperance law which the Know-Nothing legislature had just passed. Even more singular, while there were only five members of the Nunnery Committee present at the Roxbury school and some sixteen men had searched the building, twenty gentlemen had enjoyed the feast at the Norfolk House at three dollars a plate, a rather steep price at a time when legislators received a dollar a day. Cost was no object, however—the Commonwealth footed the bill. Those unfamiliar with the pressures of public life wondered

about this and also why the business end of the day had taken less than half an hour, whereas the banquet and champagne had kept the lawmakers busy for several hours.¹⁶

In the midst of these speculations, the Griffin committee reported its findings to the House; but though the report substantiated the charges made in the original *Advertiser* article, the Committee recommended no course of action.¹⁷ However, the House would not sit still in the face of such an urgent matter. It voted to quash the report. Its reason for doing so was clear. By now, it was generally accepted that scores of legislators were "as deep in the mud as Mr. Hiss [was] in the mire." The entire state was buzzing with rumors of other junkets. One story alleged that while the Nunnery Committee was in Lowell a member had busied himself at the lower end of the town investigating a "secular nunnery" from which he had emerged soused and broke. Another featured Hiss and a lady friend in activities that were not even remotely connected to Committee business. Even the staid Boston theatre got into the act, presenting a farce which poked fun at the activities of the Nunnery Committee.

The best show in town, however, was the one appearing on Beacon Hill at the State House. There Charles Hale zeroed in on the Nunnery Committee's trip to Lowell. He had heard that in registering the Committee at the Washington Hotel in Lowell, Hiss had confided to the clerk that he expected a lady to arrive later and wished a room provided her. Moreover according to Hale, the names of the Committee members were registered in one hand, and the same hand had entered the name of one "Mrs. Patterson." Once again the House found itself obliged to establish another special committee, this one to investigate the allegations surrounding Hiss' visit to Lowell. A week later the new committee reported back that they cannot say that "they have obtained indubitable evidence which would authorize the conclusion that Mr. Hiss, on his late visit to the city of Lowell, was guilty of any conduct which can be pronounced criminal, and that they therefore ask to be discharged from the further consideration thereof."¹⁸ The House leadership promptly pushed the report through on a floor vote. To the delight of the press, this touched off a verbal donnybrook. One solon defended the move on the grounds that since the honorable and intelligent members of the Lowell committee had found no evidence to substantiate the vile rumors, the House should "not make itself the sluiceway through which to pour such dark and putrid waters upon the community." Another legislator turned the metaphor. He would rather a sluiceway than that the House become "a stagnant pool where should be dammed up all this pollution." Others, too, argued that to drop this matter would be the worst course of action imaginable, because the Hiss affair had reduced the House to a critical state, and if it were "corked up now and kept corked up until next autumn the scent at election time will be rather too strong for the voters."¹⁹

Chairman of the Lowell investigatory committee, Luther Lincoln, sought to calm his fellow legislators' apprehensions. He assured them that however ripe the reputation of a colleague, expulsion required evidence as unquestionable as that which would send that member to a penitentiary. This was too much for

J.Q.A. Griffin. Did the report imply that Hiss' conduct was almost enough to condemn him but not to send him to the State Prison? "I had never before supposed," Griffin snorted, "that it was but one step from the Massachusetts House of Representatives to the other State institution."²⁰ He urged the House to reconsider. Know-Nothing stalwart George Devereux of Salem took the floor. If Griffin had evidence to support the charges brought against Hiss, why had he not brought it to light in his committee's report instead of quotations from Blackstone and Shakespeare? Griffin sharply retorted that the quotations evidently had given the gentleman from Salem more trouble than had the champagne at the Norfolk House. (Devereux, though not a member of the Nunnery Committee, was one of the banqueters at the Roxbury watering spot.)²¹ After a debate, the House voted by a narrow margin to further explore the Lowell story. Testimony given before the House justified the move. Under oath, Hiss claimed that while accompanying the Nunnery Committee on its trip to Lowell he had met a gentleman acquaintance who was in the company of a "Mrs. Patterson." The friend, Hiss testified, had thought the chance encounter "felicitous," since he had "to go and collect a bill." Would Mr. Hiss escort the lady to the Washington House and settle her there? This the "Grand Worshipful Instructor" agreed to do, as would any gentlemen. Under cross examination Hiss unfortunately suffered occasional lapses of memory. Did he know Mrs. Patterson? "No. . . I don't think so. . . Maybe." Had he seen her at the Washington House? "I may have talked to her. I don't recall." How was her bill paid? "I don't know."²²

The clerk at the Washington House had a clearer recollection of events. Hiss, upon his arrival at the hotel, strode confidently to the desk and entered upon the register the names of the Nunnery committeemen. At the bottom he added the name of Mrs. Patterson and asked the clerk to give her a good room. The clerk, for reasons not brought out in the inquiry, assigned adjoining rooms to Hiss and Mrs. Patterson. That night Hiss' bed had not been slept in; Mrs. Patterson's had—by two people. The following day when asked how he wished to settle the expenses, Hiss said to charge all to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The bill included supper, lodging, breakfast, dinner, wine, gin, cigars, and Mrs. Patterson.²³

The House, so long as there was still room to maneuver, was not about to be swayed by mere facts. It found that although its errant member was "guilty of improprieties of conduct [he was not] deserving of censure for criminal conduct."²⁴ Hiss chose this moment to submit a letter resigning his legislative seat. His reason for doing so, he wrote, was to end the agitation that a hostile press had incited in order "to injure through me the American party." "It was my intention," Hiss continued, "to have resigned at an earlier day." But he had decided to wait until the facts were in and his personal honor vindicated.²⁵ To J.Q.A. Griffin, Hiss' letter smacked more of a prearranged deal than of honor vindicated. The evidence demanded expulsion not resignation. He urged his fellow legislators to reconsider the facts and jogged their memories point by point. First, Hiss had registered Mrs. Patterson at the Washington House, though she was not present at the time. Second, he had ordered supper sent to Mrs. Patterson's room, but the mysterious gentleman

Hiss had alluded to had never appeared to settle Mrs. Patterson's account. Third, that obligation fell to the state treasury, since Hiss had charged all expenses, including the lady's, to the Commonwealth. Fourth, witnesses had described Mrs. Patterson as a "woman of notoriously easy virtue." Fifth, her bedroom adjoined that of the "Grand Worshipful Instructor." Finally, Mrs. Patterson's bed "had been invaded by a man during the night," whereas Mr. Hiss' bed had not slept in, although an effort had been made to make it appear so.²⁶

The House grudgingly voted into existence still another committee, this one to consider whether or not to expel their nocturnal prowling colleague. Representing Hiss at the committee hearings were his lawyers, Benjamin Dean and Benjamin F. Butler. The latter's appearance at the State House on behalf of Hiss sparked a minor sensation among those present, since prior to his retention as Hiss' counsel, Butler—an outspoken opponent of Know-Nothingism—had been in the forefront of those screaming for his indictment.²⁷ Perhaps a sizable retainer and the chance to appear on page one of Boston's newspapers had soothed the outraged feelings of Massachusetts' foremost criminal lawyer.

First to testify were the members of the Nunnery Committee, each of whom lauded their colleague as a splendid gentleman whose behavior was beyond reproach. Next, succeeding each other on the stand, were the Mother Superior and the other nun whom Hiss had accosted in the Roxbury school. An hour's grilling failed to alter either their original testimony or low opinion of Hiss. Undaunted, Butler called a Mrs. Patterson to the stand. What Butler had in mind is difficult to determine, for, as it turned out, the lady called, although evidently well known to many of the men in attendance (her husband, a steamboat captain, was seldom home), was not the Mrs. Patterson of Washington House fame. The second Mrs. Patterson's testimony, adorned with girlish blushes and pleas of innocence, served only to convulse the male members of the audience. Perhaps Butler, with the sure touch of the dramatist, interposed a comic interlude to precede a new development—the reading of a Hiss letter retracting his resignation.²⁸

Counselor Dean explained that when the charges brought in the Roxbury school case "disintegrated," those who made the accusations changed tack and sought to smear Mr. Hiss' good name. "And from that time to this, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen," Dean lamented, repeating himself for emphasis, "From that time to this—this poor Mr. Hiss, has been persecuted, has been persecuted with a degree of asperity and roughness which in my judgment is without parallel."²⁹

Ben Butler now rose to deliver the final arguments for the defense. His technique was typical of the man—free-wheeling and theatrical. How stood his client on the charge of embezzlement? "Mr. Hiss has accounted for all disbursements except twenty-five cents. He does not know what he did with that quarter. It is certain that he could not have used it to pay Mrs. Patterson, for so small a sum would not have satisfied her demand. He throws himself on

your mercy as regards twenty-five cents." Butler dismissed the Roxbury and Lowell charges as unproven; but for those legislators who did not agree, he had a chilling reminder: "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone."³⁰

The special committee exploring the charges brought against Hiss only half agreed with Dean and Butler. In the case of the Roxbury school, the committee noted that the Mother Superior was French; and she had misunderstood Mr. Hiss and misinterpreted his remarks. Nothing would have come of the visit if it had not been for the intrusion of newspapers inimical to the American party and of certain Catholic clerics, including a Jesuit. Concerning Hiss' Lowell romp, however, the committee was not so gentle. The evidence was overwhelming, the witnesses American (whose understanding of English presumably was adequate); and, more to the point, the charges involved one man and not the party. Hiss' conduct at Lowell, the report concluded, was "highly improper and disgraceful both to himself and this body of which he is a member, and we deem it such as to render him unworthy longer to occupy a seat upon the floor of this House."³¹

In the matter of the Roxbury school raid, the entire party stood accused of gross boorishness and bigotry. Besides, it would not do to have party members pilloried by the testimony of Catholic nuns. Consequently, not only did the committee absolve Hiss of any wrongdoing at Roxbury; it commended him for his gentlemanly conduct. The Lowell caper was another matter. This time Hiss stood alone—and Hiss was expendable. The House concurred and adopted a resolution to consider Hiss' expulsion. Obviously, Hiss was to be a sacrificial lamb for Know-Nothing blunders. There was a snag, however—Hiss was not a willing victim. Rumor had it that the "Grand Worshipful Instructor" had threatened his colleagues that if he should fall, like mighty Samson, he would take the Philistines with him. Hiss gave weight to the story when he presented a memorial to the House. "I am not guilty," wrote Hiss, "but if I am guilty, others, members of this House, are equally guilty. If you expel me, you must expel them."³² This dark threat seemed to galvanize the House which met in special night session to consider the motion for expulsion. The representatives wrestled with the Hiss question from 7:30 in the evening until 2:30 the next morning at which time the bleary-eyed few who had not joined the rush for the last train home voted to purge Hiss from their ranks. They also voted to expunge from the record Hiss' "insinuations" concerning the conduct of fellow members.³³ It was now more than six weeks since l'affaire Hiss had first hit the newsstands; still the case was not quite closed.

A few days later while a vote was in progress on a motion to hold a special election in Boston to fill Hiss' seat, that worthy, who had entered the chamber and taken his old seat, rose to be counted. Here was Banquo's ghost visible to all—the membership naturally dissolved into confusion. Finally, the legislators regained sufficient composure to order the Sergeant-at-Arms to remove Hiss from the chamber. This was done, but several minutes later, Hiss, as dogged as ever, slipped back into his seat. Once again, the House instructed the Sergeant-at-Arms to eject Mr. Hiss and this time to bar him from re-entry, so that never

again would the unseated Know-Nothing Lothario darken the House with his presence.³⁴

Hiss was not one to suffer rebuke in silence. He took to the public stage to tell his side of the story and, coincidentally, to cash in on his notoriety. His appearances before capacity audiences at the Howard Atheneum were cut short, however, when the long arm of the law, responding to the screams of a tribe of creditors, reached out and clapped him into debtor's prison.³⁵

The Nunnery committee's sorry conduct at Roxbury and Lowell had badly tarnished the Know-Nothing party's image as a united, uncorrupted force for carrying out the will of the people. It is small wonder that it fell on hard times given the absurdity of its commission and the pitfalls that such a body must encounter in a democratic environment.

The scandal proved a turning point for Know-Nothing rule in Massachusetts. The party was hemorrhaging, and this galvanized Native American party leaders into collective response. Versed as they were in conspiratorial theories, they immediately sensed the direction and significance of the attacks on Hiss and the Nunnery Committee and lashed back: A "corrupt press," they charged, had blown the incident out of proportion for "party reasons." Legislators pushing the investigation were bent on gratifying "certain persons outside this House who wished to break down the power of the party." Hiss and his defense counselors added their voices to those crying plot. Why this persecution of a married man with children, a servant of the state, Ben Butler asked rhetorically. "It is because party ends are to be answered, and these are means to party ends. He is a member of the dominant party in the State, and men hope through him to strike down the party in power."³⁶

For once, the conspiratorial theorists were close to the truth. In other states "anti-Nebraska" and Republican organizations had been springing up. No such development had taken place in Massachusetts despite repeated attempts by antislavery leaders to construct such a party. Their efforts were aborted by the Know-Nothing party's ability to preempt the issue, first by winning the support of most Free-Soil voters in 1854 and then by enacting an outstanding antislavery program.³⁷ The Hiss fiasco changed this situation. Dr. Stone and others privy to the inner workings of the secret order reported the party "shaking to the foundations under the odium of its follies and absurdities at the State House."³⁸ Antislavery Know-Nothing leaders like Stone and Wilson sensed that rank-and-file Know-Nothings, who placed free-soil above nativism, had finally grasped the point that Free-Soil purists had been making all along: "When the freedom of an empire is at issue," there is more pressing business at hand than to "run off to chase a paddy."³⁹ Support from this group was absolutely vital to any antislavery movement in the state that wanted to win elections.

Hitherto the Wilson wing of the party had pursued a policy (with considerable success) of harnessing the power of the Know-Nothing party to the antislavery cause. Now Wilson, who was noted by friend and foe alike for his

“sinuosities” felt sufficiently emboldened by the crisis that the Nunnery Committee’s gambolings had precipitated to discontinue the Free-Soil alliance with Know-Nothing extremists:

As to the amendment to the Constitution [twenty-one year residency] passed by the Senate, I have to say that I am doing all that I can to kill itIts adoption will be disgraceful to the party and the state. We have a class of fools who have already disgraced the state and the party.⁴⁰

A year earlier Wilson had been in the forefront of those seeking to build an antislavery fusion party in the state, only to abandon the effort when it became apparent that antislavery voters preferred the Know-Nothing party. The fallout from the Nunnery Committee fiasco revived his interest in fusion. All along he had been badgering party leaders “to bring the secret order to an issue on the slave question.”⁴¹ Now he vowed to “break up the party” if his efforts failed. He kept his promise. A month after Hiss’ expulsion from the legislature Wilson led a bolt by Northern delegates from the Know-Nothing national convention in Philadelphia, and, returning home, he proclaimed the time propitious for the “disbandment” of the American party in Massachusetts and its replacement by an antislavery fusion party.⁴² Throughout the summer he labored in the antislavery vineyards trying to “breakdown the [Know-Nothing] order and effect a union.” His efforts and those of other antislavery leaders culminated in September with the emergence of the Republican party.⁴³

In the fall election the Know-Nothing party again prevailed, although by a considerably reduced margin from that which it had attained in 1854. When the two parties again locked in battle two years later, the Republicans triumphed and the Know-Nothing party passed into history.⁴⁴

Damaged to the Know-Nothing party and the boost given to the hitherto moribund fusionist movement were not the only significant developments stemming from the Nunnery Committee scandal. Nativism also suffered a severe setback. Discrimination against Irish Catholics neither began nor ended with the Know-Nothings, but it did peak under their rule. Never again would Bay State nativists be able to use the power of the state to mount so fearsome an attack against religious and ethnic minorities as that which the Nunnery Committee had spearheaded in the heyday of Know-Nothingism. The stage was now set for the gradual emancipation of Irish Catholics from the bonds of bigotry—an emancipation ironically that the Know-Nothing party and its Nunnery Committee through their excesses helped set in motion.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the rise of the Know-Nothing party in Massachusetts, see the author's "Western Massachusetts in the Know-Nothing Years: An Analysis of Voting Patterns," *Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts*, VIII, No. 1 (January 1980), 14-25. Works offering different interpretations include Dale Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts: The Political Realignment of the 1850's," *Journal of American History* LXIV, No. 4 (March 1978), 959-986; William G. Bean, "Party Transformations in Massachusetts with Special Reference to the Antecedents of the Republican Party, 1848-1860" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University, 1922), Chapters 8-10; Bean, "An Aspect of Know-Nothingism: The Immigrant and Slavery," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XXXIII (October 1924), 319-34; Bean, "Puritan versus Celt, 1850-1860," *New England Quarterly*, VII (March 1934), 70-89; Ray Allen Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (New York, 1938), Chapter 15; Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, a Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), Chapter 7; George H. Haynes, "The Causes of Know-Nothing Success in Massachusetts," *American Historical Review*, III (October 1897), 67-82; Haynes, "A Chapter from the Local History of Know-Nothingism," *New England Magazine*, XV (September 1896), 82-96; and Henry Wilson, *The Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (3 vols.; Boston, 1872-1877), II, Chapter 32.
2. George H. Haynes, "A Know-Nothing Legislature," *American Historical Association Report*, I (1896), 179; Edward L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner* (4 vols.; Boston, 1893), III, 400; Henry Wilson to Charles Sumner, July 2, 1854, Charles Sumner Papers (Houghton Library); Seth Webb to Sumner, July 14, 1854, Sumner Papers; Samuel Downer to Horace Mann, Oct. 25, 1854, Horace Mann Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, hereafter cited as MHS); and *Boston Post*, July 10, 1854.
3. George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years* (2 vols.; New York, 1903), I, 139; Wilson, *Slave Power*, II, 415; James W. Stone to Sumner, Jan. 13, 1855, Sumner Papers; and Charles Francis Adams, Diary, Nov. 15, 22, and Dec. 27, 1854, Charles Francis Adams Papers (MHS).
4. Adams Diary, Nov. 14, 1854, Adams Papers.
5. George F. Clark, *History of the Temperance Reform in Massachusetts, 1813-1888* (Boston, 1888), 89-92; Mass., *Supplement to the Revised Statutes of Massachusetts, 1855*, (Boston, 1855), Chap. 431, 225 and Chap. 238, 169; Mass., *Acts and Resolves, 1855* (Boston, 1855, Chap. 444, 853 and Chap. 256, 674-75; and Mass., *Senate Documents 1855* (Boston, 1855), No. 162.
6. Samuel Downer to Mann, Jan. 7, 1855, Mann Papers.

7. Adams Diary, Dec. 27, 1854, Adams Papers.
8. *Ibid.*, Aug. 30 and Oct. 25, 1854; Amos A. Lawrence to his wife, Feb. 1, 1855, Letterbooks, Amos A. Lawrence Papers (MHS); *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 19, 24, and 27, 1855; and *Boston Daily Courier*, Feb. 1, 1855.
9. Mass., *Revised Statutes Supplement, 1855*, Chap. 28, 108; Mass., House Docs., 1855 (Boston, 1855), No. 274; Mass., Acts and Resolves, 1855 (Boston, 1855), 300-302; Edward Everett to Edward Turlleston, Feb. 2, 1855, Letterbooks, Edward Everett Papers (MHS), *Boston Daily Courier*, Jan. 13 and May 29, 1855; and *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 13 and June 4, 1855.
10. Mass., *House Docs.*, 1855, No. 263; and Mass., *House Journal*, 1855 (Boston, 1855), 58-9.
11. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 31 and April 11, 1855.
12. Mass., *House Docs.*, 1855, No. 263.
13. *Boston Daily Bee*, April 9, 1855; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 11, 1855.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. Mass., *House Docs.*, 1855, No. 263; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 2 and 13, 1855.
17. Mass., *House Docs.*, 1855, No. 263.
18. Mass., *House Journal*, 1855 (Boston, 1855), 1290.
19. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 23, 1855.
20. *Ibid.*; *Boston Daily Bee*, April 23, 1855.
21. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 23, 1855.
22. *Ibid.*, April 28, 1855; Mass., *House Journal*, 1855, 1306.
23. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 28, 1855.
24. Mass., *House Journal*, 1855, 1307.
25. *Boston Daily Courier*, April 24, 1855.
26. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 24, 1855.
27. *Boston Daily Courier*, April 24 and 27, 1855.

28. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 27 and 30, 1855; *Boston Daily Bee*, May 3, 1855.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 7, 1855.
31. *Ibid.*, May 8, 1855.
32. *Ibid.*, April 23 and May 10, 1855.
33. Mass., *House Journal*, 1855, 1578-81.
34. *Ibid.*, 1615.
35. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 16, 1855; *Boston Investigator*, May 30, 1855. The law abolishing imprisonment for debt did not take effect until July 4, 1855. Mass., *Acts and Resolves*, 1855, Chap. 444, 858.
36. *Boston Daily Bee*, April 3, 1855; *Boston Daily Courier*, April 24, 1855; and *Boston Daily Advertiser*, April 2, 3, 24, and May 7 and 8, 1855.
37. Samuel Downer to Mann, Oct. 25, 1854, Mann Papers; Adams Diary, Nov. 15, 22, and Dec. 27, 1854, and Jan. 10, 1855, Adams Papers, and Adams to D. G. Bailey, April 15, 1855, Letterbooks, Adams Papers.
38. Adams, Diary, April 18, 1855, Adams Papers.
38. Adams, Diary, April 18, 1855, Adams Papers.
39. *Ibid.*; E.L. Pierce to Mann, Jan. 18, 1855, Mann Papers.
40. Henry Wilson to William Schouler, April 18, 1855, William Schouler Papers (MHS).
41. Henry Wilson to Charles Sumner, July 2, 1854, Sumner Papers; and Adams Diary, March 23 and April 18, 1855, Adams Papers.
42. Wilson, *Slave Power*, II, 423, 428-32; *Boston Daily Bee*, June 15, 1855; and Adams Diary, April 18, 1855.
43. Adams Diary, Aug. 25 and Sept. 2, 1855, Adams Papers; Adams to D.G. Bailey, Sept. 2, 1855, Letterbooks, Adams Papers; Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *Journal*, Aug. 22, 1855, R.H. Dana, Jr. Papers (MHS); and J.B. Mann, *The Life Of Henry Wilson, Republican Candidate for Vice-President* (Boston, 1872), 142-45.
44. 1856 being a presidential election year the Republicans opted not to contest the state election in return for Know-Nothing support in the presidential race.