

THE GENESIS OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN
MINNESOTA

The demand for the organization of a new anti-slavery party, following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska bill in May, 1854, was most urgent in the region of the Old Northwest. On July 6, in a state mass meeting made up of Whigs, anti-slavery Democrats, and Free-Soilers, Michigan gave the name Republican to the party whose formal organization was effected at this convention. Wisconsin, Ohio, and Indiana followed on July 13 with mass meetings taking similar action; while in Illinois and Iowa the same results were attained by the union of Whigs and Free-Soilers on state tickets. Minnesota was slow in joining the movement. Settlers were pouring into the territory in large numbers, and people were too much occupied in establishing themselves in their new homes to evince much concern over national politics. The majority of the voters belonged to the Democratic Party, but in the territorial elections the various elements divided on the basis of local or personal rather than national issues. On July 4, 1854, a small group of men in and around St. Anthony, who called themselves "friends of freedom," and who had been prominently affiliated with the Democratic and Whig parties, met informally at the schoolhouse. The meeting was dominated by such radical abolitionists as Rev. Charles Gordon Ames, who acted as secretary, and John W. North, who presided, both of St. Anthony.⁵ A territorial committee, composed of Luke Marvin of St. Paul, John W. North, and John S. Mann of Minneapolis, was appointed to call a meeting, at such time and place as should seem proper, of the people of Minnesota who were opposed to the further extension of slavery and who were likewise resolved to get rid of the corruption existing in territorial and national politics by the creation of a new political

⁵ Reminiscences of C. G. Ames in Eugene V. Smalley's *History of the Republican Party from Its Organization to the Present Time, to Which is Added a Political History of Minnesota from a Republican Point of View*, 324 (St. Paul, 1896).

party. Several months elapsed before the committee took any action in the matter. It was not until March 1, 1855, that the first printed notice of a "Republican Convention" to be held at St. Anthony, March 29 and 30, appeared.⁶

The St. Anthony convention was attended by many well-known men of Hennepin, Ramsey, Washington, and Dakota counties.⁷ William R. Marshall was presiding officer, and in the list of six vice-presidents selected by the nominating committee appear the names of Nathaniel McLean and A. P. Lane. The convention approved a set of fourteen resolutions embodying the principles or platform of the Territorial Republican Party, authorized the issuance of an address to the people, and appointed a territorial central committee of seven to call a convention at St. Paul which should perfect a permanent organization of the party and nominate a delegate to Congress. The committee as appointed consisted of Nathaniel McLean, Richard Chute, Warren Bristol, Dr. Childs, H. M. Nichols, A. P. Lane, and J. S. Mann; W. R. Marshall was later added as chairman.⁸

The call for the St. Paul convention was published for the first time in the columns of the *Daily Minnesotian* May 22, 1855. The date was set for "Wednesday, the 28th of July Next," an error which was corrected in the May 24 issue to "Wednesday, the 25th of July Next." Several days later copies of a circular containing the call printed from the same type as that used in the *Minnesotian*, with a letter appended, dated June 1, 1855, and signed by six of the members of the Territorial Republican Committee, were mailed to the leading

⁶ *Minnesota Republican* (St. Anthony), March 1, 1855.

⁷ *Daily Minnesotian* (St. Paul), March 31, 1855. Smalley in his *History of the Republican Party*, 149, gives the attendance as two hundred, but the editor of the *St. Anthony Express*, March 31, estimates that the largest number of actual members attending any of the sessions was fifty.

⁸ The proceedings of the convention, the resolutions adopted, and the "Circular Address of the Territorial Republican Convention to the People of Minnesota," prepared by C. G. Ames, appeared in the *Minnesota Republican*, April 5, 1855.

Republicans of each county. The copy of the circular which was found among the Sibley Papers, now in the manuscript collections of the Minnesota Historical Society, and which is reprinted below, was sent to James M. Boal of Mendota. It is addressed in the handwriting of Daniel Rohrer.⁹

Delegates to the convention to the number of 123 were selected by the various methods suggested in the call, but only 94 were in attendance at the sessions on July 25. All the members of the committee signing the call were present as delegates except A. P. Lane. Warren Bristol was made temporary chairman, and Daniel Rohrer temporary secretary. These two appointments were made permanent on the recommendation of the nominating committee, of which Richard Chute was a member. The central committee appointed by the St. Anthony meeting was continued for one year with Nathaniel McLean as chairman.¹⁰ The platform adopted reaffirmed the principles laid down by the St. Anthony convention, and pledged the party to the enactment of a prohibitory liquor statute. The only nomination to be made was that for delegate to Congress, which was settled by the first ballot, the votes being distributed as follows: W. R. Marshall, 52; Alexander Ramsey, 36; David Olmsted, 4; G. A. Nourse, 1.¹¹

⁹ A notation to this effect was made in pencil on the circular by Major R. I. Holcombe, who was engaged by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1893 to arrange the Sibley Papers. Daniel Rohrer came to St. Paul in 1850 and entered upon the practice of law. He was city treasurer from 1854 to 1859. In 1878 he removed to Worthington. *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 4: 462; 14: 654.

¹⁰ *Daily Minnesotian*, August 20, 1855.

¹¹ *Minnesota Republican*, July 26, 1855; *Daily Minnesotian*, July 26, 27, 1855.

CIRCULAR.

TERRITORIAL REPUBLICAN CONVENTION!

THE undersigned, a Committee appointed for that purpose by the preliminary Republican Convention held at St. Anthony on the 29th of March last, would hereby call upon the REPUBLICANS of MINNESOTA, without distinction as to the old party names of "Democrat" or "Whig," to meet in DELEGATE CONVENTION at St. PAUL, in the *Hall of the House of Representatives of the Territorial Capitol*, on

WEDNESDAY, the 25th of JULY NEXT,

at 10 o'clock, A. M., for the purpose of nominating a Candidate for DELEGATE IN CONGRESS; of declaring and enforcing the principles and platform of the Republican Party of Minnesota; and of taking such action and establishing such systematic organization, as shall ensure the triumph of the sacred and beneficent principles espoused by the Republican Party, and which lie at the foundation of all good government.

In apportioning the representation to the Convention, it has been deemed most advisable to assign one delegate at large to each of the thirty-five counties of the Territory, whether organized or not; and one additional Delegate for every 300 of population according to the census to be taken prior to the ensuing first of July, and for every fraction of population exceeding 150, also an additional delegate.

The mode of appointing the delegates—whether by mass meetings at the county seats or other central points or by separate meetings in the several election precincts of a county, or by County Delegate Conventions, is left to the discretion of the people of the counties respectively; but in remote unorganized counties contiguous to each other, and in the same Council District, it is suggested, that a general mass meeting in the most populous or central county, would be the most advisable mode of selecting delegates.

The Committee, in view of the fact, that the Republican Party is a return of the good and best men of all parties to the platform of principles enacted by our fathers on the 4th of July, 1776, earnestly recommend that the meetings in the counties,

for the selection of Delegates to the Territorial Convention, should be held wherever at all practicable, on the ensuing 4th day of July, 1855, there being no fitter mode of celebrating that sacred day than by raising once more to the breeze the banner of Freedom so long obscured by the dark clouds of human bondage.

The Committee deem it unnecessary to present at length considerations in behalf of the proposed convention.

That the tendency of our Government late years and at the present time is anti-Republican and in a directly opposite direction from that intended by its enlightened founders, and demanded by the unalienable rights of man, is too surely attested by the recent outrages of popular sovereignty in Kansas, and the unlimited extension of Human Slavery sought by the repeal of the Missouri Restriction.

That our local government needs renovating few will deny.

That our fair Territory needs to be redeemed from the withering blight of unrestrained traffic in intoxicating liquors, is too well proven by our statistics of pauperism and crime having their almost only sources in this nefarious traffic.

The great danger to our popular government is, that, through the apathy and indifference of the masses, public affairs and the administration of government, will be resigned into the hands of selfishly ambitious men and trading politicians. The sure prevention and cure is in the PEOPLE governing themselves.

We therefore call upon every man to meet the responsibilities of a citizen of a country whose sovereign and governor he is in part. And if his sympathies are with the Republican Party, to meet with his neighbors and fellow citizens to deliberate upon the means that will best promote the ends of *good government*.

WM. R. MARSHALL,
RICHARD CHUTE,
A. P. LANE,

N. M'LEAN,
WARREN BRISTOL,
JOHN S. MANN,

*Republican Territorial Committee.*¹²

St. Paul, May 22d, 1855.

¹² It is significant that all of the members of this committee were recent arrivals in Minnesota. Marshall located in St. Anthony in 1849 and McLean in St. Paul in the same year; Bristol and Mann came

To J. M. Boal¹³

DEAR SIR: We have been informed that you hold the principles of the Republican Party, and can be relied upon as a Leading Man in your vicinity, to be active in forwarding the organization of the Republican movement in this Territory. We trust you will forthwith go to work to secure the appointment of Delegates to the Territorial Convention at Saint Paul, on the 25th of July next. Do not, we beg of you, wait for some one else to move in the matter. If you believe the principles indicated by the above call to be right, it is *your* duty to use your utmost endeavors to have them prevail in the Territory and the Nation. We rely upon you as one to go forward and take a leading part in convening meetings of the People, and in seeing that Delegates

in 1850, both taking up claims in Hennepin County within the present limits of the city of Minneapolis; Chute and Lane established themselves in St. Anthony and Anoka, respectively, in 1854. After representing the St. Anthony precinct in the first territorial legislature, Marshall removed to St. Paul, where he was engaged in the banking business in 1855. McLean was one of the publishers of the *Minnesota Chronicle* and its successor, the *Chronicle and Register*, in 1849 and 1850; from 1850 to 1853 he held the position of United States Indian agent at Fort Snelling, after which he returned to St. Paul. Mann was elected county treasurer and Bristol county attorney of Hennepin County in 1852. By 1855, however, Bristol had removed to Red Wing. Chute was engaged in real estate business in St. Anthony, and Lane had erected the first flour mill in Anoka. In later years Marshall became governor of the state, and Bristol, after serving in the state legislature from 1856 to 1869, was appointed associate justice of the supreme court of New Mexico in 1872. Lane was a candidate for state auditor on the Republican ticket in 1857, but was not elected. See Upham and Dunlap, *Minnesota Biographies*, and references there cited, and for Mann, John H. Stevens, *Personal Recollections of Minnesota and Its People and Early History of Minneapolis*, 143, 153 (Minneapolis, 1890), and Isaac Atwater, (ed.) *History of the City of Minneapolis, Minnesota*, 35, 46, 98 (New York, 1893).

¹³ The name is written in. James McClellan Boal had been a member of the territorial legislature from 1849 to 1852. In 1855, probably before the date of this circular, he moved from West St. Paul to Mendota. *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 4: 158; 9: 148.

be appointed who will attend without fail the sessions of the Convention.

WILLIAM R. MARSHALL,
RICHARD CHUTE,
A. P. LANE,

N. M'LEAN,
WARREN BRISTOL,
JOHN S. MANN,

Republican Territorial Committee.

St. Paul, June 1, 1855.¹⁴

P. S.—The Committee would be glad to hear from you by letter, from time to time, in regard to any matters tending to forward the success of the Republican Party and its principles in your County.

[*Endorsed.*:] 1855 Call for first Republican Convention

¹⁴ Printed 1856, but corrected in ink in the circular to 1855.



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