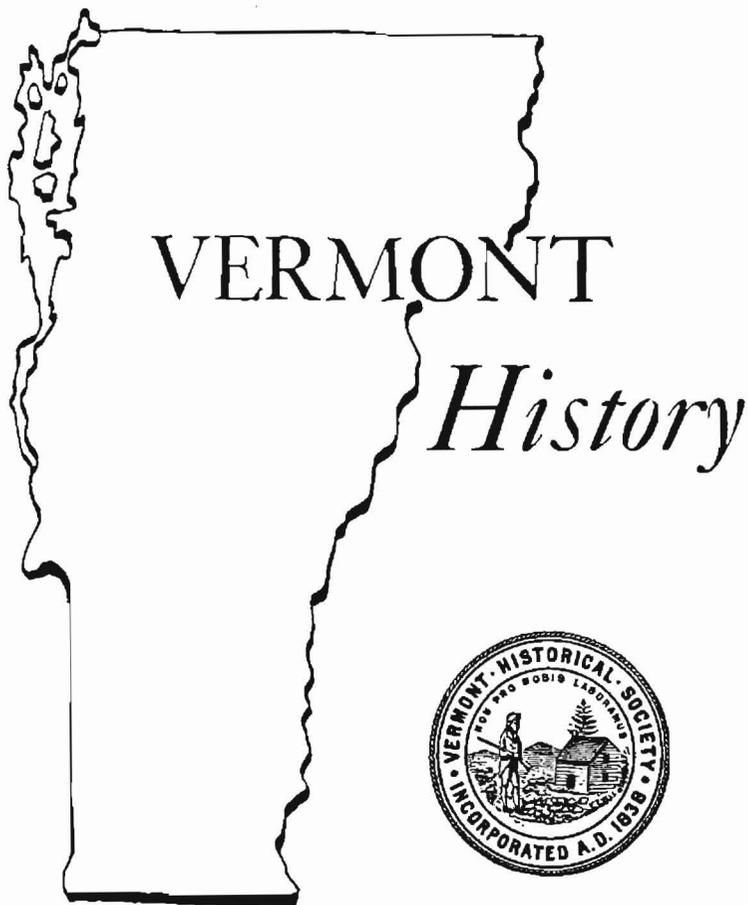
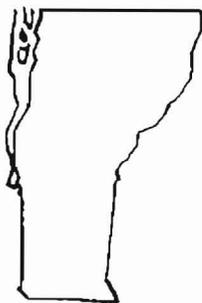


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The Liberty Party engaged in "moral warfare" and helped prepare the base for "the dominant element in Vermont state politics."

## The Liberty Party in Vermont, 1840-1848: The Forgotten Abolitionists

By REINHARD O. JOHNSON

Despite the attention given to Vermont in the anti-slavery struggle, little has been written about the activities of the Liberty Party in the Green Mountain State.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly remarkable because the party was the only substantial vehicle of antislavery protest during most of the 1840's, and because the Liberty Party developed surprising organizational and voting strength in the state. The success in attracting voters and setting up a political organization, however, to a large extent resulted from earlier efforts directed against the "peculiar institution."

Vermont enjoyed the reputation of being the most antislavery state in the nation.<sup>2</sup> It "had practically no commercial dealings with the South, almost no social intercourse with that section, and no shipping interests to profit by the slave trade."<sup>3</sup> The original State Constitution of 1777 made it the first state to forbid slavery, and state legislative bodies and Vermont Congressmen consistently voiced strong opposition to the "peculiar institution." Although there were relatively few nationally known abolitionists in Vermont during the 1830's, the people were interested and involved in the antislavery movement to a greater extent than any other state. In 1837 James G. Birney, future presidential candidate of the Liberty Party, wrote that he had "never seen our cause stand on such high ground among political men as it does among those of the Vermont Legislature."<sup>4</sup>

The governmental stance reflected the general feeling in the state. The Vermont Colonization Society was active 1818-1850; it was often called the "only auxiliary" to the national society because it had the longest uninter-

rupted membership of any state society. More militant abolitionism took firm root in Vermont during the 1830's. Shortly after the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society at Philadelphia in 1833, the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society became the first state auxiliary to the parent organization. Despite opposition from clergymen, especially many procolonization ministers, the Society prospered under the early leadership of Orson S. Murray, editor of the *Vermont Telegraph* and an indefatigable anti-slavery lecturer. Encouraging the establishment of local chapters, the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society had eighty-nine local organizations scattered throughout the state by 1837.<sup>5</sup>

The movement for immediate and unconditional emancipation made great progress in Vermont during the mid-1830's, but it began to lose its momentum toward the close of the decade. In testing new strategies for promoting an even stronger antislavery attitude on the part of elected officials, abolitionists began to question candidates for public office in 1838. The results were disappointing. Candidates of the major parties usually gave adequate answers, but once elected, seldom followed through to the degree they had promised.

Nonetheless, sentiment for an independent political party grew slowly in Vermont, a state not plagued by the serious internal dissensions among abolitionists which precipitated the division in the national and some state societies. The national dispute over the role of women in the movement did not exist in Vermont where women could participate fully in the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>6</sup> Although the state's abolitionists were divided in their view of William Lloyd Garrison, their disagreement did not hinder the efforts of the state society. Though the formation of a third political party caused disagreements among Vermont abolitionists, as with the other issues, these did not threaten the stability of the state society. No one was proscribed for advocating independent political nominations; and when the society went on record in 1842 in favor of political action, there seems to have been no mass exodus of those opposed to a political course. Apparently, the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society was sufficiently isolated and flexible so as to avoid the internecine warfare of the type which plagued the national society in general and the Massachusetts abolitionists in particular.

The prospect of a separate political party, however, was not immediately well received by most Vermont abolitionists. Before James G. Birney and Julius LeMoyné were nominated on a presidential ticket by a Fall, 1839, convention, the *Voice of Freedom*, the organ of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, took an editorial stand against an independent party.<sup>7</sup> As late as Spring 1840 the state society itself was ambiguous

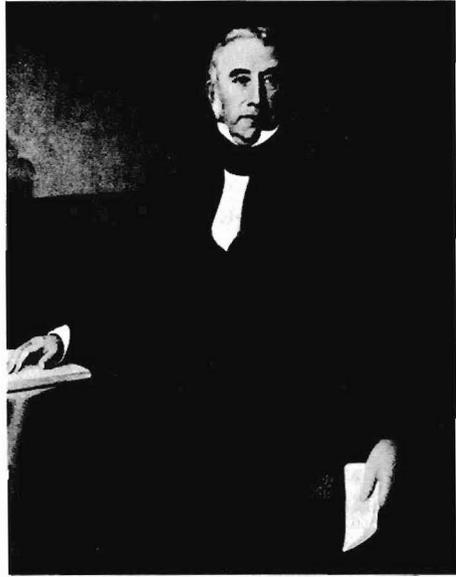
and noncommittal. The unpopularity of the idea of a separate party was apparent when only fourteen people answered a call for an initial meeting of the friends of independent political nominations to meet at Montpelier on June 18. Under the leadership of George Storrs, Benjamin Shaw, and Orange Scott — Wesleyan Methodist ministers — and with Whig Secretary of State Chauncy Knapp present, this small body endorsed the Liberty Party presidential ticket and selected presidential electors for Vermont. Although they were somewhat discouraged by what Knapp called “the day of small things,” the group agreed to reconvene in August.<sup>8</sup> In the meantime, they attempted to develop support for the new movement, chiefly through the *Banner of Liberty*, their campaign newspaper. These efforts were not very successful. Only about forty persons appeared at the August meeting where it was decided not to attempt to run a state ticket because of the closeness of September state elections.<sup>9</sup> The *Banner of Liberty* folded the next month, and the independent Birney electors only gathered 319 votes in the November presidential election.<sup>10</sup>

As 1840 drew to a close, however, the Liberty Party movement slowly began to gain momentum. The state society began moving from its noncommittal position on politics, and in early 1841 it resolved that its members were “bound to carry out principles wherever we go, and permit them to govern our conduct in whatever we do, whether in the exercise of our ecclesiastical, our political, or our personal rights.”<sup>11</sup>

After its shaky beginning, the new party gained prominence by the Fall of 1841. About 100 interested persons attended a March 1 convention at Montpelier where a state ticket for Council of Censors was selected, and five delegates were appointed for the National Liberty Party Convention to be held in New York City in May. The meeting was then adjourned until May 26, after the New York meeting.<sup>12</sup>

The May 26 meeting demonstrated the uncertainty and lack of coherent strategy and tactics that prevailed among interested Vermont abolitionists. After settling the arguments over the expediency of nominations, the convention approved a gubernatorial ticket composed of individuals who had neither been consulted nor who had given any indication of interest in the new party. The Liberty men took care, however, to balance their ticket between adherents of the two major parties by nominating Charles K. Williams, the Whig Chief Justice of the Vermont State Supreme Court, for Governor and Paul Dillingham, Jr., a rising young politician who had been the Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 1840, for Lieutenant-Governor. The convention went on to establish county committees with instructions to call conventions to select candidates for the state Senate.

*Charles K. Williams*  
(1782-1853)



Before adjourning, the convention also resolved to establish a political abolitionist newspaper for the state.<sup>13</sup>

The Liberty ticket was quite popular, especially Judge Williams, whom the Whigs nearly nominated. Dillingham soon refused the nomination, however, and Williams remained noncommittal through much of the summer. With a massive split threatening the Whig Party over the nomination of Charles Paine, considered less sound than Williams on antislavery, for governor, Williams yielded to Whig pressure and declined the Liberty nomination in late July. Party leaders hurriedly replaced Williams with Titus Hutchinson of Woodstock, a popular former Whig Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court. Alvah Sabin, a former Democrat, was given the spot vacated by Dillingham. The hastily arranged Liberty ticket did surprisingly well in the September elections. Hutchinson's 3,039 votes (just over 6%) deprived either major party candidate of the required simple majority, and the Liberty Party claimed nine seats in the lower house of the Vermont Legislature.<sup>14</sup> This relatively strong showing in 1841 established the Liberty Party as a significant element in Vermont politics and Vermont abolitionism. After the November election, anti-slavery conventions either endorsed no one or approved the whole Liberty ticket.

Even with a haphazard nominating process and minimal planning, the Liberty Party had made a pronounced impact on Vermont politics.

This importance would continue to be accentuated in the following years by a somewhat more sophisticated political organization and a general increase in popular support. The Whig leadership, believing that they had lost many votes to Hutchinson, took a harder line toward the new party. They stripped Chauncy Knapp, who had written editorials in support of Hutchinson, of his position as Secretary of State. Knapp had been retained the previous year even though he had not supported Whig presidential candidate William Henry Harrison but the strength of the Liberty Party in the state elections resulted in a stricter enforcement of party loyalty by the Whigs.<sup>15</sup>

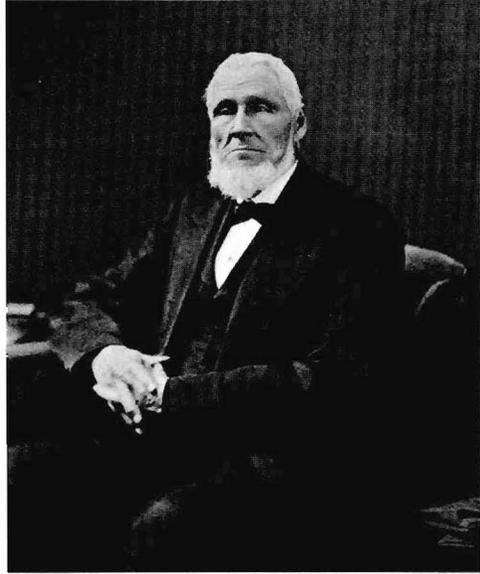
After its disorganized beginnings in 1840 and 1841, the Liberty Party became a significant element in Vermont politics and the spokesman for strong abolition sentiment in the state. Although the party never managed to develop the sophisticated party organization present in Massachusetts, it had an advantage over its neighbor in that Vermont Liberty men were able to develop a rough consensus on party principle without the internal strife so characteristic of the Bay State. Because of its unity and its base in one of the most anti-slavery states in the nation, the Vermont Liberty Party took a more extreme position than any other state Liberty organization in the nation. The basic strategy and voter base that the Liberty Party established in 1842 would change considerably before its merger with the Free Soil Party in 1848, but the rhetoric and leadership that had emerged in 1842 became the stabilizing factors which contributed to continuity.

The success in the 1841 state elections convinced many wavering abolitionists that a distinct third party could be an effective instrument against slavery. Former abolitionist leaders who had eschewed political involvement (most notably *Vermont Telegraph* editor Orson Murray) lost much of their influence during the early 1840's and dropped out of sight. The Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, itself not hostile to politics and containing many Liberty Party men, soon became superfluous, broke up, and ceased publication of its newspaper after 1843. In 1845 a correspondent sympathetic to Garrison wrote to him that "The antislavery of this State [Vermont] is mostly under the influence of the third party."<sup>16</sup>

The Liberty Party had a much easier time attracting and retaining candidates after 1841. In 1842 they succeeded in persuading influential members of both major parties to run on the Liberty ticket when Judge Williams accepted the gubernatorial nomination and Edward Barber, who had been the Democratic nominee for Lieutenant-Governor in 1841, accepted the second spot. When the Democrats also made Edward Barber their nominee for Lieutenant-Governor in 1842 (although he had made it clear that he "was entirely separated from all [Democratic] party associa-

*Alvah Sabin  
(1793-1885)*

*A native of Georgia,  
Vermont, he was a Baptist  
clergyman who took an  
active role in politics and  
anti-slavery activities.*



tions"<sup>17</sup>). Vermont Liberty men did not object. They later said this practice should not be followed, but this was a matter of practicality, not principle.<sup>18</sup> The strategy of placing former members of both major parties on the state ticket was consistently followed for the life of the party.

The 1842 election also revealed many weaknesses which would always plague the Liberty Party. A report on the Liberty Party's loss in votes emphasized three problems. First, the Liberty Party became a vehicle of protest through which some voters expressed dissatisfaction with either the Democrats or Whigs; second, the party lacked strong central leadership and effective statewide machinery until about 1845; and third, party propaganda efforts were ineffective for much of the period because they lacked a really effective and widely read newspaper until about 1846.<sup>19</sup> An examination of these three trouble areas reveals much about the Vermont Liberty Party.

Liberty leaders acknowledged that their party benefited from disputes in the Whig Party in 1841.<sup>20</sup> These internal problems caused many Whigs to leave their party temporarily in the early 1840's and vote for Liberty candidates, especially if they were former Whigs. This led to the domination of the state Liberty ticket by former Whigs and resulted in special appeals to the Whigs by Liberty men. Eventually the Whigs responded to the loss of support which endangered their position of



*William Slade  
(1786-1859)*

*Whig Governor of Vermont  
(1844-1846), who compiled the  
well-known edition of Vermont's  
State Papers.*

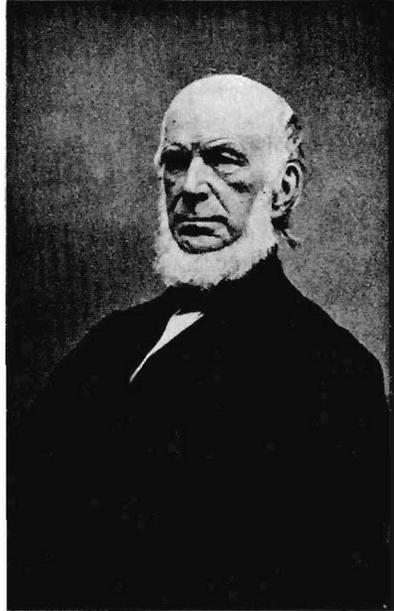
dominance within the state. After the Whigs had to rely on the legislature for the second time in three years to elect Paine governor in 1843, William Slade led a movement within the Vermont Whig Party to promote a much stronger antislavery stance.<sup>21</sup> The revolt succeeded, and Slade, who had gained national recognition for his antislavery behavior in Congress, became the gubernatorial nominee in 1845. The increasingly antislavery attitude of the Whig Party after 1843 was significant for the Vermont Liberty Party. Although the Liberty leadership was not significantly affected, the party lost much of the Whig support it once enjoyed.<sup>22</sup>

Conversely the Liberty Party garnered Democratic support as antislavery Democrats became more disgusted with the static behavior of the Vermont Democracy and the increasingly pro-Southern stance of the national Democratic Party. This shift became apparent to Vermont Liberty men shortly after the state election of 1844. The newest state Liberty newspaper observed:

Much of the larger part of our [Liberty Party] increase in this election is from the ranks of the sham democracy. In LaMoille county, which was the strongest seat of that party in the State, only six representatives are elected: two Liberty men and four Democrats. In this town [Montpelier] the Democratic majority for representative last year was 142 — this year only 20. It seems as though the false and

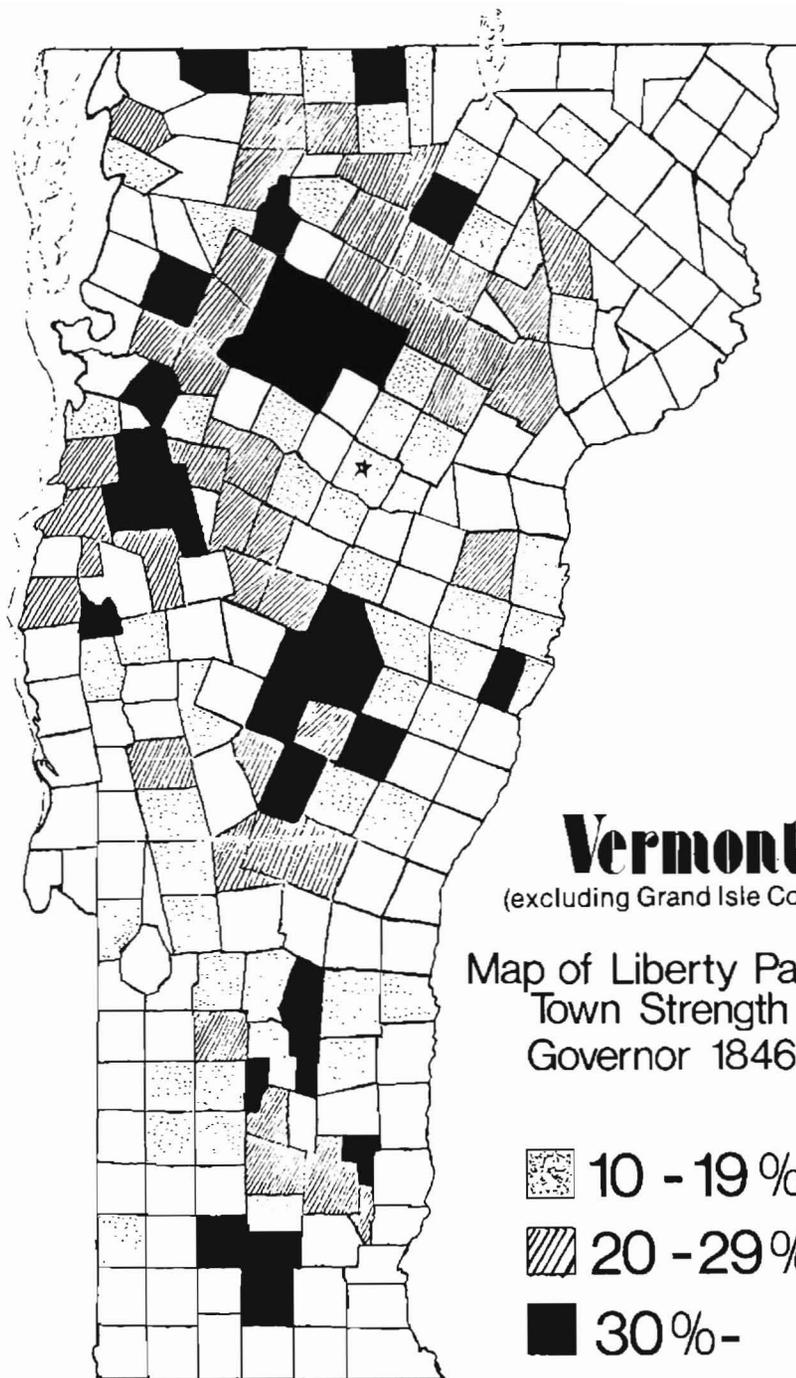
*Lawrence Brainerd  
(1794-1870)*

*A St. Albans businessman prominent in the early management of the Vermont Central Railroad, Brainerd played an important role in founding the Republican Party.*



senseless cry that "the Liberty party are in league with the 'Locos,'" must now cease.<sup>23</sup>

Soon Liberty propagandists began to make direct appeals to the Democrats by likening Liberty principles to Democratic principles. *The Green Mountain Freeman* claimed that the "Liberty Party, while it makes fewer pretensions and does not assume the name, yet is actually engaged in carrying out every Democratic principle which any honest Democrat would wish to see secure."<sup>24</sup> At the same time, former Democrats began to assume more important positions in the party and on the state ticket. Former Democrat Lawrence Brainerd, a prosperous St. Albans businessman, took over the top spot on the ticket in 1846 and 1847, while Jacob Scott, a former State Senator, received the Lieutenant-Governor nomination shortly after defecting from the Democrats in early 1846. Although the Liberty leaders always made certain that the three major positions on the state ticket (Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, and Treasurer) were not all filled by former members of just one party, the former Democrats headed the ticket after 1845, as the Whigs had done in the early years. Realizing that many antislavery former Whigs had returned to their old party and that there was little hope in winning new accessions



from the Whig Party, the post-1845 Liberty Party realistically switched its orientation and appeal from the Whigs to the Democrats, and the Liberty Party's base of support showed a corresponding shift.<sup>25</sup>

A second problem for the Liberty men was their inability to devise an effective statewide party apparatus. They replaced the haphazard and sporadic efforts of 1840 and 1841 with a more orderly ineffectiveness in the subsequent years. The drop in Liberty votes in the 1842 state elections was attributed to the absence of a central coordinating committee and lack of party organization.<sup>26</sup> A state Central Committee was then set up, but it took more interest in propagandizing about the abolitionist cause than in setting up a party organization. The Committee authorized agents and lecturers, sponsored tract publication and distribution, organized conventions, and exercised an important influence on the state ticket. When the party began to show signs of stagnation after the 1844 elections, they attempted a new plan which placed emphasis on practical grass roots organization. This plan was designed to replace the Green Mountain Liberty Associations, which had filled the local void created by the earlier demise of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society as an effective abolition agency. Modeled after the successful Liberty Association project in Maine, these local societies were to conduct rallies, disseminate literature, and provide funds through the collection of dues (one dollar) from the membership.<sup>27</sup> Unlike Maine, however, this system neither brought in the much-needed revenue nor made a major impact on the antislavery cause, and these organizations did little after 1846.<sup>28</sup> Vermonters eventually adhered to the "Massachusetts Plan," which advocated the establishment of a series of interlocking county committees, town committees, and school district vigilance persons.<sup>29</sup> These efforts increased the rhetoric on organization, and more announcements of town meetings appear after 1845, but to credit the Vermont Liberty Party with effective political organization would be misleading. Nevertheless, their mounting efforts contributed to an increase in Liberty popularity in 1846 and 1847, especially in the lower house of the Vermont Legislature where Liberty strength reached its peak of nineteen or twenty members in 1847.<sup>30</sup>

The third major cause of the Liberty Party's difficulties, particularly in its early years, was the lack of a strong party newspaper which could sustain itself for a respectable period of time. Until the *Green Mountain Freeman* was firmly established in Montpelier in 1845, there was no real Liberty Party organ.<sup>31</sup> The party attempted to establish some sort of press before each annual election, but these election sheets did not exercise statewide influence. In fact, the (Boston) *Emancipator* probably had exercised a greater influence on the Liberty Party in Vermont than any local newspaper. In discussing the *People's Advocate*, one of the

short-lived Vermont papers, one critic labeled it "a Vermont edition of the Emancipator . . . more than three fourths of the matter in both papers . . . being the same."<sup>32</sup> Against this journalistic background in late 1844, Joseph Poland and C.C. Briggs decided to reorganize and reincorporate the small *Green Mountain Freeman*, which was in the deep financial trouble which typically plagued the Vermont Liberty press.

If any period in Vermont Liberty Party history can be called a turning point, it would be the time following the presidential election of 1844 in which James G. Birney received 1,600 fewer votes than the gubernatorial candidate the preceding September. Perhaps the most important factor in the Liberty resurgence after the national election was the establishment of a viable statewide newspaper. The *Green Mountain Freeman* became even more than that; by 1847 it had the largest circulation of any Vermont newspaper.<sup>33</sup> The dominant force behind the paper was Joseph Poland, who became the sole editor of the paper in May 1846. A man of vast anti-slavery experience, he founded the *Voice of Freedom* in 1839 at the age of twenty-one; it was said that he was "for more than a score of years the principal Underground [Railroad] operator in Montpelier."<sup>34</sup> His revamped newspaper spurred Liberty men to organize active local chapters across the state and to establish a network of communication among the members. During 1845 the emphasis was on distributing literature and sending agents into the field, but dwindling finances and poor results in the election of 1845 brought about a shift in strategy. By spring 1846, the propaganda function of the party was deemphasized, and Liberty men concentrated on implementing the grass roots strategy of the "Massachusetts Plan," which proved more successful in the elections of 1846 and 1847. The importance of so elusive an element as an active party press is difficult to assess precisely, but it is fair to conclude that the *Green Mountain Freeman* made a significant contribution to the re-invigoration of the Liberty Party after 1845.

Although the Vermont Liberty Party had its problems, to a great degree they tended to be offset by some of its strengths. Most prominent was the unity among Vermont Liberty men that was usually lacking in the other northern states. Once the membership had reached a decision on a given issue, the consensus prevailed throughout the party. The annual January State Conventions, where strategy and committees for the coming years were decided upon, provide excellent examples of the continuing spirit of unanimity. Nominations for the state central committee were usually incumbents and were invariably adopted by overwhelming majorities, establishing a continuity in leadership. Resolutions were passed with a near unanimity, and the proceedings took on more the

tone of a religious revival than of a political meeting. A highly religious, moral tone also pervaded the Liberty press and meetings. Religious meetings often preceded and followed state and local conventions; and the political meetings themselves often rocked to spiritual hymns, frequently sung by the famous Hutchinson Family of revival fame.

Reflecting on the history of the party, Joseph Poland wrote in his valedictory for the *Green Mountain Freeman* in December, 1848, that:

The sentiment of liberty and humanity which compose the groundwork of the Liberty organization was deep toned *religious* sentiment. It took long hold of men's consciences and stirred up the fountains of human souls; and outward pressures . . . compelled its early advocates to mutual self-reliance — a confidence in the righteousness of the cause — a unity of year and purpose — a mingling of soul — such far beyond the comprehension of ordinary political associations, whose only cohesive principle is self advancement or blind partisan zeal.<sup>35</sup>

The role of organized religion in the party, however, remains ambiguous. Wesleyan Methodist ministers were influential in the early years,<sup>36</sup> and Baptist antislavery conventions often met in conjunction with Liberty conventions, but quantitative measures do not reveal any significant correlations between particular religious groups or "types" and Liberty support. As in pre-Liberty Party days, formal Congregationalism was seemingly more hostile than other groups to the party — especially in its state newspaper the *Vermont Chronicle*, but there were Congregationalists in the party, and there is no significant negative correlation between Congregational areas and Liberty support.<sup>37</sup>

The party's high sense of morality helped make its antislavery platform the most radical in the nation, particularly in its view of the relationship between the United States Constitution and slavery. In 1843 former Vermont Chief Justice Titus Hutchinson delivered an address asserting the unconstitutionality of slavery. Stating that the framers of the Constitution had expected slavery to exist only a few years, Hutchinson called its existence in the 1840's contrary to the spirit and intent of the document.<sup>38</sup> Characteristically, however, the appeal to an even "higher law" was more popular in Vermont than the legalistic approach. In arguing against the Fugitive Slave Law, a Liberty editor wrote that "Our first duties are not to the government. We belong first to God, and next to humanity. To be sure we owe a respect for, and an obedience to, government; but our respect and obedience must be limited by the regard of that government for the laws of universal justice and humanity."<sup>39</sup> At the State Liberty Party Convention at Ludlow in July, 1845,

2,000 to 3,000 persons (men and women) resoundingly affirmed this attitude, which would characterize Liberty discussions in the state until shortly before the Free Soil merger.<sup>40</sup>

By 1847 Vermont Liberty Party conventions were considered so extreme by the editors of the *National Era*, the national Liberty Party newspaper in Washington, D.C., that they refused to publish its strong antislavery resolutions concerning abolishing slavery in the slave states.<sup>41</sup> The state party and most of the auxiliary organizations did not moderate until the merger with Free Soil became imminent, and the Liberty men backtracked to the more conventional position of pledging not to interfere with slavery in the slave states.<sup>42</sup>

Although some discussion of expanding the party platform took place, the one-idea principle prevailed. Despite the fact that the *Green Mountain Freeman* was sympathetic to temperance, it neither emphasized the issue nor made it an article of party faith, as was done in Massachusetts. The multi-reform ideas of the Liberty League received little support from Vermont. Poland strongly opposed broadening the platform because he felt it would be impractical. While he would continue to support other reforms, he believed that the Liberty Party would only hurt itself by incorporating them into its platform. He criticized the (Boston) *Emancipator* for advocating Free Trade, Sabbatarianism, Postal Reform, and other causes. He predicted that if the party had "two ideas . . . it would have but half its original strength, and so on in the same ratio." He also opposed the Liberty League for the same reasons.<sup>43</sup>

In fact, the most serious disputes which affected the Vermont Liberty Party were Joseph Poland's mild attacks on new Liberty newspapers within the state. For instance, when his old partner on the *Green Mountain Freeman*, C.C. Briggs, founded the *Burlington Gazette*, Poland criticized him because this would take many subscribers from the *Green Mountain Freeman*.<sup>44</sup> These were personal matters, however, and he made no attempt to use the state party organization to squelch the competitors.

In short, the Liberty Party men saw themselves engaged in "moral warfare." Their major weakness was a lack of thorough grass roots organization; their major strength was a unity in which the members avoided divisive quarrels. And although the state Central Committee ran the party, the party candidates who ran for major offices were generally popular politicians who had left the major parties. As the election of 1848 approached, however, the politicians assumed a greater leadership role, and they spearheaded the involvement in the Free Soil Party.

The Vermont Liberty Party eventually committed itself wholeheartedly

to the Free Soil movement, and, combined with dissident Democrats, that made the Free Soil Party a very powerful force in Vermont politics. Not all Vermont Liberty men enthusiastically received the Free Soil Party, but when the professional politicians in the Liberty Party took the first steps toward merger, there was no realistic alternative for the remainder of the party except to follow.

The Free Soil movement gained momentum rapidly in Vermont during the summer of 1848, and despite reports in the *Emancipator*, there was little opposition to the concept of merger in the Vermont Liberty Party. Poland wrote that the members were not "sticklers for party; only let the country be rid of the guilt of slavery and political thralldom, and we care not how or by whom the work is performed."<sup>45</sup> Liberty men in Vermont generally shared Poland's view.

The major stumbling block for a merger involving Vermont Liberty men was the possible presidential candidacy of Martin Van Buren. Poland spoke for many when he observed that "should Van Buren be the nominee of that convention [in Buffalo] . . . then the Liberty Party is bound by every consideration of moral principle, consistency and true expediency to retain its present organization and candidates."<sup>46</sup> At the State Liberty Party Convention in July, the party unanimously approved the nomination of John P. Hale for president. There were some disagreements on the expediency of sending delegates to the Buffalo Free Soil Convention, but the more moderate resolutions on the constitutionality of slavery and the existence of slavery in the slave states demonstrated that Liberty men were willing to negotiate and compromise.<sup>47</sup>

The Whigs held their state convention at Woodstock and declared their opposition to extension of slavery, but they angered more militant antislavery Whigs by acquiescing in the presidential nomination of Zachary Taylor. No major split developed in the party, although a few militant antislavery Whigs — such as William Slade, Horatio Everett, and Edward Stansbury — soon became involved with the Free Soil Party.<sup>48</sup>

The nomination of Lewis Cass by the Democratic National Convention caused much more of a rift among the Vermont Democrats. Although the antislavery Democrats succeeded in obtaining a state platform opposing the extension of slavery, they walked out when the convention supported Cass for the presidency.<sup>49</sup> These dissident Democrats were the primary organizers of the State Free Soil Convention, which met August 1 at Middlebury. Joseph Poland, who served as secretary at the convention, reported that:

The convention was composed, we should judge, in the greatest proportion of seceding Democrats — the movement originating with,



*Joseph Poland  
(1818-1898)*

*Prominent editor, he held many political offices including state Representative and Senator.*

and convention called by them; notwithstanding a good number of prominent Whigs were present . . . we were glad to see a goodly number of Liberty men present . . . Liberty men have ever professed a willingness to extend a hand of fellowship to such as would take antislavery grounds; and hence their presence, their sympathy, and action upon this occasion.<sup>50</sup>

The convention showed this catholicity of spirit in its slate of nominees for state office: Oscar L. Shafter, a Liberty Party man, was the gubernatorial candidate; Luke W. Poland, a Democrat, was the nominee for Lieutenant-Governor; and Edward A. Stansbury, a prominent antislavery Whig, ran for Treasurer. A State Committee, a Committee of Correspondence, and party organizations down to the school district level were set up, and the convention recommended that a Free Soil League be founded in each town.<sup>51</sup> The distinctly Democratic tinge of the Liberty Party was an important factor in the cooperation between the Democrats and Liberty men in Vermont. Lawrence Brainerd, the Liberty nominee for Governor since 1846, and Free Soil gubernatorial nominee Oscar Shafter were only two of the influential former Democrats who wholeheartedly embraced the Free Soil Party. With many of its political leaders having become involved in the new party, it was only a matter of time before the Liberty Party would formally merge.

At the Buffalo National Free Soil Convention, the Vermont delegates supported John P. Hale 11 to 7 over Martin Van Buren despite pressure from neighboring New York State's Barnburner contingent. Nonetheless, Van Buren received the nomination, and the Vermont Liberty men reluctantly swallowed this because he would be running on a Liberty platform. The *Green Mountain Freeman* immediately put the Free Soil nominations of Van Buren and Charles Francis Adams on its masthead; and when Lawrence Brainerd returned from Buffalo and formally resigned as the Liberty nominee for governor, Poland endorsed the Free Soil state ticket with a strong editorial.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the fact that the new party had very little time to prepare for the September state elections, Free Soil candidates did very well at all levels. Poland reported that the gubernatorial vote was "beyond our most sanguine hopes."<sup>53</sup> These impressive results carried over into the State Legislature where the Free Soilers captured two (of thirty) Senate seats and elected eighty-two (of 223) Representatives to the lower house. These results buoyed Free Soil hopes for the November presidential contest, but the presidential returns showed the same general form as did the state totals.\*

David Ludlum reports that "Free Soil editors agreed that the presence of Martin Van Buren on their ticket had prevented the capture of insurgent Whig votes in this traditionally anti-Jackson region. Another candidate, unburdened by a political past, might have carried the state in 1848 in much the same manner as William Wirt had done under similar circumstances in 1832 (as the Anti-Mason candidate)."<sup>54</sup> The base had been prepared, however, from which the Free Soil Party would shortly become the dominant element in Vermont state politics. The Liberty Party members contributed candidates and mass support to the new Free Soil movement; and they also infused into the Vermont Free Soil Party a moral tone which remained throughout its brief, although important, existence and which continued into the Republican Party which dominated Vermont politics by the late 1850's.<sup>55</sup>

\*Vermont Vote for Governor 1848

Carlos Coolidge (Whig)	22,007
Oscar L. Shafter (Free Soil)	14,931
Paul Dillingham (Democrat)	13,420
Scattering	47

Vermont Vote for President 1848

Zachary Taylor (Whig)	23,132
Martin Van Buren (Free Soil)	13,837
Lewis Cass (Democrat)	10,948

Vermont Senate

20 Whigs
8 Democrats
2 Free Soil

Vermont House of Representatives

102 Whigs
39 Democrats
82 Free Soil

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The only works dealing directly with the party in Vermont are R.L. Morrow's sketchy "The Liberty Party in Vermont," *New England Quarterly*, 2 (April 1929), 234-248; and Bruce Loring Bigelow, "Abolition and Prohibition: Themes for an Historical Geography of Vermont, 1841-1850", M.A. Diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1970. Richard K. Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, 1976) is the most recent treatment of antislavery politics, although his coverage on Vermont is not complete. A national history of the Liberty Party remains to be written.

<sup>2</sup>John L. Myers, "The Beginnings of Antislavery Agencies in Vermont, 1832-1836," *Vermont History*, 36 (Summer 1958), 126-141; John L. Myers, "The Major Efforts of Anti-Slavery Agents in Vermont, 1836-1838," *Vermont History*, 36 (Fall 1968), 214-229. Both chronicle the organization of the anti-slavery forces by examining some of its leading exponents. See also Neil A. McNall, "Anti-Slavery Sentiment in Vermont, 1777-1861," M.A. Diss., University of Vermont, 1938, for an overview.

<sup>3</sup>Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (Columbus, Ohio, 1937), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup>James G. Birney to *Liberator* (Boston), 4 November 1837, in *Liberator*, 9 November 1837.

<sup>5</sup>A list of the Vermont chapters can be found in the *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1837).

<sup>6</sup>"Report of the Sixth Anniversary of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society," *Vermont Telegraph* (Brandon), 22 January 1840.

<sup>7</sup>*Voice of Freedom* (Montpelier and Brandon), as cited in Siebert, *Antislavery*, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup>*Emancipator* (New York), 12 June 1840 for the call; see *Emancipator*, 25 June 1840.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 August 1840.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 24 September 1840; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 24 September 1840 for folding of *Banner of Liberty*.

<sup>11</sup>*Vermont Telegraph*, 20 January 1841.

<sup>12</sup>See the call for the Montpelier convention in the *Vermont Telegraph*, 17 February 1841; see details of the convention in *Vermont Telegraph*, 10 March 1841; and *Boston Free American*, 25 March 1841.

<sup>13</sup>*Emancipator*, 10 June 1841.

<sup>14</sup>Walter Hill Crockett, *Vermont, The Green Mountain State* (New York, 1921-23), III, 320; *Boston Free American*, 28 October 1841; and *Vermont Telegraph*, 20 October 1841.

<sup>15</sup>For Knapp's editorial supporting Hutchinson see *Voice of Freedom*, as reprinted in *Emancipator*, 26 August 1841; on Knapp's removal see *Boston Free American*, 18 November 1841.

<sup>16</sup>Unsigned letter from West Brookfield, Vermont to William Lloyd Garrison, 21 September 1845, in *Liberator*, 10 October 1845.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, *Emancipator*, 8 August 1842.

<sup>18</sup>The results for 1842 show a decline in Liberty Party support.

Williams (Liberty Party)	2,093
Paine (Whig)	27,187
Smilie (Democrat)	24,130
Scattering	35

More important, Barber (Democrat-Liberty Party) only tallied 25,154 with his dual candidacy for Lieutenant-Governor, a gain of only 1,024 over Smilie. Apparently, a large number of Whigs who voted for Williams refused to vote for Barber, indicating that many Liberty voters did not entirely discard their old party loyalties.

<sup>19</sup>*Emancipator*, 29 September 1842.

<sup>20</sup>See report of J. P. Miller's remarks at a Liberty Convention in Syracuse, New York in E.D. Hudson to Garrison, 20 October 1842, in *Liberator*, 11 November 1842.

<sup>21</sup>"Report of the Whig State Convention at Montpelier," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 16 November 1843.

<sup>22</sup>See Reinhard O. Johnson, "The Liberty Party in New England, 1840-1848: The Forgotten Abolitionists," Ph.D. Diss., Syracuse University, 1975, pp. 228-257 for a quantitative analysis of the Liberty vote using data from 237 Vermont towns.

<sup>23</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman* (Montpelier), as reprinted in *Emancipator*, 11 September 1844; for similar sentiments after the 1845 elections see *Emancipator*, 10 September 1845.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, "A Talk with Honest Democrats," 8 January 1846.

<sup>25</sup>Johnson, "Liberty Party in New England," pp. 244-252.

<sup>26</sup>*Emancipator*, 29 September 1842.

<sup>27</sup>The "Records of the Green Mountain Liberty Association, 1845-1847," Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont contain only about 250 names and a few operational details; Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (Montpelier, Vermont, 1948), pp. 180-181.

<sup>28</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman*, 13 February 1846.

<sup>29</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman*, 6 August and 13 August 1846; *Emancipator*, 22 July 1846; Siebert, *Anti-Slavery*, p. 39.



Oscar Lovell Shafter  
(1812-1873)

*A native of Wilmington, Vt., Shafter went to California to practice law in 1854 and eventually became an Associate Justice of the California Supreme Court.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 10 October 1847; *Emancipator*, 27 October 1847.

<sup>31</sup>The *Green Mountain Freeman*, which was preceded by the *Vermont Freeman*, had been established in 1844; by 1845, after a reincorporation, it became the spokesman for the Vermont Liberty Party.

<sup>32</sup>*Vermont Chronicle* (Congregational newspaper), quoted in *Vermont Telegraph*, 25 September 1842.

<sup>33</sup>Unlike most Liberty newspapers, the *Green Mountain Freeman* had a long life, remaining in existence until 1885. It even published a daily for a while in the 1860's.

<sup>34</sup>Siebert, *Anti-Slavery*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>35</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman*, 28 December 1848. Emphasis in original.

<sup>36</sup>Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont* (Montpelier, 1948), pp. 86 and 177.

<sup>37</sup>Johnson, "Liberty Party in New England," pp. 255-256.

<sup>38</sup>The address is reprinted in the *Green Mountain Freeman*, 20 August 1846.

<sup>39</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman*, 6 April 1844, as quoted in Morrow, "The Liberty Party in Vermont," p. 240.

<sup>40</sup>*Emancipator*, 23 July 1845.

<sup>41</sup>*National Era*, 8 July 1847.

<sup>42</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman*, 13 July 1848.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, 23 April 1846, 17 June 1847 and 4 May 1848.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 19 July 1846.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 4 May 1848.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 20 July 1848.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 13 July 1848.

<sup>48</sup>Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, p. 192; Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 368-370.

<sup>49</sup>Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, pp. 192-193; Crockett, *Vermont*, III, 369-370.

<sup>50</sup>*Green Mountain Freeman*, 10 August 1848.

<sup>51</sup>"Proceedings of the State Convention," *Ibid.*, 10 August 1848.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 31 August 1848.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 14 September 1848.

<sup>54</sup>Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, p. 197.

<sup>55</sup>Johnson, "Liberty Party in New England," employs quantitative techniques to show that the Vermont Free Soil Party was composed primarily of former Democrats and Liberty men, and he discusses the dynamics of the merger in detail.