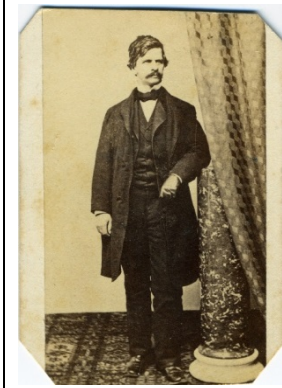


Chapter 225 – After 133 Ballots The New House Selects A “Know-Nothing” As Speaker



Dates:
December 3, 1852 to
February 2, 1856

Sections:

- Four Political Factions Vie To Elect Their Candidate As Speaker Of The House
- Nathaniel Banks Is Finally Chosen By Plurality

Date: December 3, 1855

Four Political Factions Vie To Elect Their Candidate As Speaker Of The House

Amidst the growing turmoil in Kansas, the 34th Congress convenes on December 3, 1855.

It is marked by dramatic turn-over in the House, resulting from the Democrat’s loss of 75 seats in the mid-term voting and the near collapse of the Whig Party.

U.S. House Make-Up: December 1856

Party Coalitions	# Seats
Democrats	83
“Opposition Party”	54
Know-Nothings	51
Anti-Nebraska/Free Soil	37
Total	225

The first order of business lies in selecting a Speaker, and each of the four factions puts forward their candidates.

For the Democrats, the leading contender is William Richardson of Illinois, close ally of Stephen Douglas, and best known for driving the Kansas-Nebraska through the lower chamber.

The “Opposition Party,” consisting mainly of ex-Whigs, are split between two men, Henry Fuller of Pennsylvania, and Alexander Pennington of New Jersey.

The Know-Nothings lack a clear front-runner. Some back “Bobbin Boy” Nathaniel Banks, erstwhile Republican, who begins as a mill worker, enters politics as a Democrat, breaks with the party over the Nebraska Bill, and joins the anti-slavery wing of the American Party in time for its 1856 sweep in Massachusetts. Others favor Southern options, notably Kentucky’s Humphrey Marshall, Felix Zollicofer of Tennessee and James Ricaud of Maryland.

The Anti-Nebraska members are behind the Free-Soiler, Lewis Campbell, of Ohio, whose fiery rhetoric against the Douglas's bill provokes a physical assault by a democratic opponent from Virginia.

Major Candidates For Speaker Of The House: 34th Congress

Party Coalitions	Candidates	State	Term #
Democrats	William Richardson	Illinois	4 th
	James Orr	South Carolina	4 th
	William Aiken, Jr.	South Carolina	2 nd
	Thomas J. D. Fuller	Maine	4 th
	John Wheeler	New York	2 nd
"Opposition Party"	Henry Fuller	Pennsylvania	2 nd
	Alexander Pennington	New Jersey	2 nd
Know-Nothings	Nathaniel Banks	Massachusetts	2 nd
	Benjamin Thurston	Rhode Island	4 th
	Humphrey Marshall	Kentucky	3 rd
	James B. Ricaud	Maryland	1 st
	Felix Zollicofer	Tennessee	2 nd
Anti-Nebraska/Free Soil	Lewis D. Campbell	Ohio	4 th

The traditional House rule demands that a Speaker win a majority of the votes cast on any given ballot, and the only person even remotely close on the opening count is William Richardson, with 38% of the total.

First Ballot Cast For Speaker: December 3, 1855

Representatives	Party	# Votes
William A. Richardson	Democrat	74
Lewis D. Campbell	Anti-Nebraska	53
Nathaniel Banks	Know-Nothing	30
Henry Fuller	Opposition	21
Alexander Pennington	Opposition	17
16 Others	----	2
Total		197

From this initial ballot forward it becomes clear that none of the four party factions are willing to budge.

A total of thirty-three separate votes are taken over six days.

Session Days	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth
# Votes Taken	4	5	6	6	6	6

The first break comes after Ballot #23, when Lewis Campbell, who has actually surpassed Richardson on Ballot #14, drops from contention. By Ballot #30, it becomes clear that the bulk of his Anti-Nebraska/Free Soils support has shifted to another Northerner, Nathaniel Banks.

Ballots Cast For Speaker Of The House: #14 -- #30

Know Nothings	Party	#14	#23	#24	#30
William A. Richardson	Democrat	74	73	74	73
Lewis D. Campbell	Anti-Nebraska	81	75	1	0
Nathaniel Banks	Know-Nothing	8	10	41	98
Henry Fuller	Opposition	21	16	19	28
Humphrey Marshall	Know-Nothing	13	0	0	0
Alexander Pennington	Opposition	5	9	18	4
All Others	----	21	36	67	16
Total		223	220	219	219

Date: December 1855 – February 2, 1856

Nathaniel Banks Is Finally Chosen By Plurality



Nathaniel Banks (1816-1894)

Banks continues to add supporters, and reaches 107 votes by Ballot #41, just six shy of the required majority.

Ballots Cast For Speaker Of The House: #31 -- #41

Know Nothings	Party	#31	#41
Nathaniel Banks	Know-Nothing	99	107
William A. Richardson	Democrat	72	74
Henry Fuller	Opposition	29	28
All Others	----	21	16
Total		221	225

But this is followed by a prolonged stalemate, lasting well over a month. On Ballot #115, Bank’s total has dropped to 88 votes and roughly 30 members decide against even casting their ballots.

Ballots Cast For Speaker Of The House: #95 -- #115

Know Nothings	Party	#95	#115
Nathaniel Banks	Know-Nothing	101	88
William A. Richardson	Democrat	73	65
Henry Fuller	Opposition	29	29
All Others	----	11	13
Total		214	195

The logjam is finally broken after Ballot #122 when the Democrat William Richardson withdraws, and Fuller’s support begins to fade. The South Carolina Democrat, James Orr picks up Richardson’s supporters, while James Ricaud, a Maryland Know-Nothing reaches a momentary high.

Ballots Cast For Speaker Of The House: #122 -- #123

Know Nothings	Party	122	123
Nathaniel Banks	Know-Nothing	90	96
William A. Richardson	Democrat	65	0
Henry Fuller	Opposition	30	12
James Orr	Democrat	0	68
James Ricaud	Know Nothing	0	18
All-Others		9	9
Total		194	203

The next shift occurs after Ballot #129, when Orr give way to another South Carolinian, William Aiken, Jr., owner of the mammoth rice plantation on Jehossee Island. Aiken also adds votes from Henry Fuller, in an evidently last ditch effort to prevent Banks from winning.

At this point, all sides have had enough, and the Know-Nothings and Democrats agree to hold three more ballots and, if no one achieves a majority, to settle the matter based on a plurality.

On February 2, 1856, sixty-one days after polling began, the Know Nothing Nathaniel Banks wins the Speakership by a narrow 103-100 margin on Ballot #133. This surpasses the 63 ballots required to elect Howell Cobb in 1849, as the longest races in history.

Final Ballots Cast For Speaker: #129 -- #133

Know Nothings	Party	129	130	131	132	133
Nathaniel Banks	Know-Nothing	99	102	102	102	103
William Aiken, Jr.	Democrat	0	93	93	92	100
Henry Fuller	Opposition	34	14	14	13	6
James Orr	Democrat	69	0	0	0	0
All-Others		8	6	6	6	5
Total		210	215	215	213	214

In the end it appears that Banks victory traces to several factors: the current popularity of his Know-Nothing Party; his prior association with the anti-slavery wing of the Free Soil movement; and his regional appeal as a Northern Yankee, ready to blunt Southern wishes if need be. None of these reasons bode well for Franklin Pierce and the Democrats.

Sidebar: A Recap Of “High-Water” Vote Totals In The 1856 Race For Speaker

A total of fourteen different politicians enjoy serious levels of support, albeit often momentary, for the position of Speaker. Five of them – Banks, Aiken, Campbell, Richardson and Orr – gather upwards of one-third of total votes cast along the way.

Top Vote Counts For Serious Speakership Contenders (1855-56)

Know Nothings	State	Term	Prior Party	Highest Vote	On Ballot #
Nathaniel Banks	Mass	2nd	Free Soil	103	133
Humphrey Marshall	Ky.	3 rd	Whig	30	4
James Ricaud	Md.	1 st	Whig	18	123
Felix Zollicofer	Tenn	2 nd	Whig	15	23
William R. Smith	Ala	3 rd	Democrat	14	16
Benjamin Thurston	R.I.	4 th	Democrat	8	26
Democrats					
William Aiken, Jr.	S.C.	2 nd	Democrat	100	133
William A. Richardson	Ill	4 th	Democrat	78	5
James L. Orr	S.C.	4 th	Democrat	69	129
Thomas J.D. Fuller	Maine	4 th	Democrat	19	12
John Wheeler	N.Y.	2 nd	Democrat	13	21
Opposition					
Henry Fuller	Penn	2 nd	Whig	41	57
Alexander Pennington	N.J.	2 nd	Whig	20	21
Anti-Nebraska/Free Soil					
Lewis D. Campbell	Ohio	4 th	Whig	81	14