


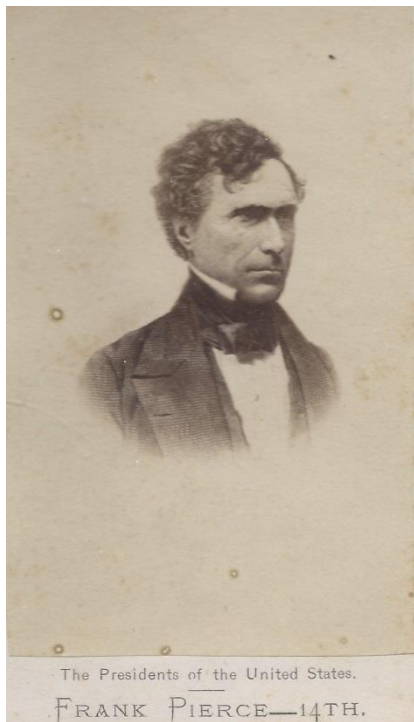
## Chapter 197 – The Parties Hold Their Nominating Conventions In 1852

 <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">The Presidents of the United States. FRANK PIERCE—14TH.</p>	<p><b>Dates:</b> June 1-20, 1852</p>	<p><b>Sections:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Democrats Need 49 Ballots Before Settling On Another “Doughface” Nominee</li> <li>• A Stalemated Whig Convention Ends On The 53<sup>rd</sup> Ballot</li> <li>• Conditions Have Changed For The Free Soil Party Since 1848</li> <li>• A Reluctant John Hale Becomes The Final Party Nominee</li> </ul>
--	--	--

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: June 1-5, 1852

### The Democrats Need 49 Ballots Before Settling On Another “Doughface” Nominee



Franklin Pierce (1804-1869)

The Democrats convene on Wednesday, June 1, 1852, to select their nominee for the White House. The meeting is held in Baltimore at The Maryland Institute For The Promotion Of Mechanic Arts, and runs for five days. The delegates arrive optimistic about their chances. They have regained their dominant congressional majority in the mid-term races and are eager to exploit the rupture between the Core Whigs and the Free Soil and Unionist factions.

That is, if they can find a candidate able to heal the internal wounds related to slavery that materialized in 1846 with the Wilmot Proviso, and were re-opened around the 1850 Compromise Bill. As the initial gavel sounds, the main threat to unity lies with Southern delegates who are dead set on protecting the region’s economic future by extending slavery into the new territories won from Mexico. Most outspoken on this score are the successors to John Calhoun, the Fire-Eaters, older men like Rhett and Mason, and younger counterparts like Yancey and Wigfall – all openly threatening secession if their demands are not met.

The question then becomes whether the more moderate Southerners, among them Davis, Breckinridge and Unionists like Cobb, can coalesce with Northern forces in the hall around someone who can unify the party. Four men are eager to assume that role.

The most obvious is Lewis Cass of Michigan, proponent of the “popular sovereignty” compromise on slavery, and nominee in 1848, carrying 14 of 29 states, and losing to Taylor by a narrow 163-127 margin in electors. But Cass is now seventy years old and facing the fact that no prior loser has ever come back to win the presidency.

Another old hand is William Marcy, age sixty-six, the long-time leader of the party machine in New York known as the Albany Regency, and more recently Polk’s Secretary of War from 1845-49. His loss to Henry Seward in the 1838 race for governor is, however, a concern, and many consider him a regional, not national, figure.

A third option is Stephen Douglas whose political career has been meteoric to date, and, in pushing the 1850 Bill through the Congress, one who has demonstrated his ability to achieve regional consensus. Douglas is a Northern man, who owns a sizable plantation in Mississippi and announces that he will favor Robert TM Hunter of Virginia as his running mate. What weighs against the “Little Giant” is his youth (39 years old) and the fact that his supporters overlap with those of his mentor, Cass.

Thus comes the second most obvious contender, sixty-one year old James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. On paper his credentials are pristine. Ten years in the House; Ambassador to Russia; another ten in the Senate; then Polk’s Secretary of State. But lurking around the edges of this track record are “character issues,” some whispered, others said out loud. In an age of rough and tumble masculinity, Andrew Jackson will refer to Buchanan as “Aunt Nancy,” for his delicate mannerisms and affectionate behavior toward a Washington housemate, Senator William King of Alabama. Jackson’s protégé, James Polk, also exhibits frustration with his Secretary of State on multiple occasions, most often around waffling on policy recommendations (Oregon and Mexico expansion) to improve his own presidential prospects. Still, most delegates view Buchanan as the most likely option to Cass, as the voting begins.

On the first ballot, Cass leads Buchanan while falling some 30 votes short of the clear majority needed to win. By the 21<sup>st</sup> round, Cass fades, with Buchanan and Douglas gaining momentum. The 29<sup>th</sup> ballot – taken on Friday -- finds many Cass supporters switching to Douglas, testing his ability to win the nomination. But this too fails.

On Saturday morning comes another upheaval, with Cass making a remarkable comeback on the 34<sup>th</sup> tally, sourcing votes from both Douglas and Buchanan. But again the pro-Cass faction is unable to find the eighteen additional backers he needs to win.

On the 35<sup>th</sup> roll-call a new name appears for the first time when Virginia suddenly casts its 15 votes for forty-seven year old Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, who has been out of public office for a decade.

Another twist occurs on the 46<sup>th</sup> ballot, with William Marcy jumping into the lead for the first time. But like the others, Marcy is unable to tack on more support. By the 48<sup>th</sup> round the delegates finally realize that none of the original four front-runners are viable, which forces everyone to ponder the “fallbacks” available.

The answer comes on the 49<sup>th</sup> tally, after James Dobbin, the head of the North Carolina delegation which had backed Buchanan, heralds Pierce for supporting the 1850 Compromise and the Constitution. The result is a stampede to Pierce as the standard bearer for 1852.

**Full Voting Results At The 1852 Democratic Convention (149 Needed To Win)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>49</b>
Lewis Cass	116	118	98	60	27	130	131	78	72	2
James Buchanan	93	95	88	102	98	49	39	28	28	0
Stephen Douglas	20	23	51	64	91	53	52	32	33	2
William Marcy	27	27	27	26	26	33	34	98	89	0
Franklin Pierce	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	44	55	282
Others	40	33	32	44	54	31	25	16	19	10

Unlike James Polk in 1844 – who enjoyed Jackson’s backing prior to the convention – Pierce is a genuine dark horse victor in 1852. He does, however, fit the model that Cass established for Democratic candidates, a Northern man by geography who is willing to bend on slavery to the Southern members of the party. In other words, a “Doughface.”

His nomination demonstrates that while the South can no longer hope to place one of their own in the White House, they can, by holding together, veto any Northerner who is put forward.

As another sop to the South, the exhausted delegates choose Buchanan’s ally, William Butler of Alabama, as Pierce’s running mate. They also adopt a platform that pledges to enforce the 1850 Bill, including the Fugitive Slave Act, and end further agitation over constraints on slavery.

When word of the outcome reaches Pierce, rumor has it that his wife, Jane, faints on the spot.

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: June 17-20, 1852

**A Stalemated Whig Convention Ends On The 53<sup>rd</sup> Ballot**



Winfield Scott (1786-1866)

Twelve days after the Democrats depart the Maryland Institute, the Whigs pour into the same site for a nominating convention also marked by controversy.

An ominous tone hangs over the gathering from the beginning -- with Henry Clay, the father of the party, lying on his deathbed in nearby Washington, and the second Whig pillar, Daniel Webster, reeling politically from his March 7 speech supporting the Fugitive Slave Act.

Then there are the losses suffered in the mid-term elections, and the very mixed reactions within the party to their own sitting President. Millard Fillmore was no more than an afterthought at the 1848 convention, and his track record, after being thrust into office by Taylor’s death, has been mediocre. Rumor also has it that after giving Webster, his Secretary of State, a green light to win the nomination in 1852, he has characteristically changed his mind and entered the race. This move apparently galls the crusty Webster who, at seventy, is described as a “poor, decrepit old man,” already suffering from the cirrhosis that will kill him five months hence.

Given these reservations about Fillmore and Webster, a third figure, General Winfield Scott, presents himself as a prominent option. Scott is sixty-six at the time, standing 6’5”, weighing 300 lbs. and fitting Thurlow Weed’s political dictum to ride a military hero to victory. This model worked with Harrison and Taylor, so why not again with Scott.

The first two days of the convention are devoted to administrative matters and the passage of a platform. A Southern version is rejected by a 227-66 margin in favor of a very brief alternative consisting of eight “sentiments.” The first seven reflect traditional Whig doctrines, stated as generalities. The eighth, however, takes a firm stand in support of the 1850 Bill and the Fugitive Slave Act, and an end to sectional “agitation.”

*That the series of acts of the Thirty-first Congress,—the act known as the Fugitive Slave Law, included—are received and acquiesced in by the Whig Party of the United States as a settlement in principle and substance, of the dangerous and exciting question which they embrace; and...we will...insist upon their strict enforcement...and we deprecate all further agitation of the question thus settled, as dangerous to our peace; and will discountenance all efforts to..renew such agitation.*

Next comes nominations for president, with the first roll call setting the stage for the grinding deadlock to follow. Fillmore leads with 133 votes to Scott’s 131, with Webster trailing far behind. A minor shift occurs on the eighth tally, with Scott moving ahead – but from then on the two front-runners remain stalemated.

Calls to change the rules from a majority to a simple plurality are rejected, and June 19 ends on the 46<sup>th</sup> ballot, with Scott at 134 votes, Fillmore hanging on to 127, and the delegates scrambling to find a way out.

They do so over the course of seven roll calls on the final day – marked not by a sudden rout, but rather by very gradual slippage from Fillmore to Scott. On the 52<sup>nd</sup> ballot, the General falls one shy of a majority. On the 53<sup>rd</sup> he wins as six Fillmore and five Webster men come to his side.

**Voting At The 1852 Whig Convention (149 Needed To Win)**

<b>Candidate</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>53</b>
Millard Fillmore	133	131	127	129	124	122	122	120	118	112
Winfield Scott	131	133	134	135	137	139	142	142	148	159
Daniel Webster	29	29	31	29	30	30	28	29	26	21
Others	3	3	4	3	5	5	4	5	3	4

Before adjourning, William A. Graham is chosen unanimously as Scott’s running mate. Graham, at forty-eight, has served as Senator and Governor of North Carolina, and is currently Fillmore’s Secretary of the Navy.

What is most amazing about Scott’s victory is the inability of Fillmore to convince Webster to shift his “difference-making” votes to his side over more than fifty roll calls. At one point in his career, Webster was his mentor. Then, after Webster alienates his Massachusetts’ constituents by supporting the Fugitive

Slave Act, Fillmore embraces him as his Secretary of State. The fact that this history between the two men doesn't lead to a Fillmore nomination must attest to Webster's pique over the President's change of mind about running again in 1852.

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: August 11-12, 1852

**Conditions Have Changed For The Free Soil Party Since 1848**

Eight weeks after the close of the Whig's convention, remaining members of the Free Soil Party gather at the Masonic Hall in Pittsburgh for what will be their final active political campaign.

The party origins trace back to Salmon P. Chase who concludes in 1844 that the abolitionist Liberty movement will never achieve enough political scale to halt the further spread of slavery. His response is to attempt a merger between the Liberty men and dissidents from the two major parties – namely the Conscience Whigs along with the “Barnburner” and Wilmot Democrats.

In 1848 these disparate elements band together behind ex-President Martin Van Buren and a platform, written by Chase, which asserts that slavery should be banned in the west. The abolitionist wing of the party applauds this ban on moral grounds, while others, like David Wilmot, simply want to reserve the new soil for white men only. Despite these radically different motivations, the new party rallies in 1848 behind the slogan:

*Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men*

Each element carries weight with various coalition members.

- “Free soil” signals “free of all blacks” to some along with “free land grants” for settlers to all.
- “Free speech” is a jab at the Slave Power for trying to “gag” the voice of those opposing slavery.
- “Free labor” reasserts the “dignity” of white men’s work vs. the demeaning toil of the enslaved.
- “Free men” signals Chase’s claim that the founder’s intended to have slavery vanish over time.

In 1848, with Van Buren heading the ticket, the Free Soil Party wins 10% of the popular vote, along with two vocal senators, John Hale and Chase himself.

**Results Of 1848 Presidential Election**

	<b>Party</b>	<b>Pop Vote</b>	<b>%</b>
Taylor	Whig	1,361,393	47.3%
Cass	Democrat	1,223,460	42.5
Van Buren	Free Soil	291,501	10.1
G. Smith	Liberty	2,545	0.1
Other		285	---
		2,879,184	100.0

By 1852, however, the “marriage of convenience” that spawned the Free Soil Party in 1848 has come apart at the seams.

The most telling blow finds many of the Barnburners and Wilmot men returning to their Democratic Party home after the loss by Cass – their political revenge having been taken against Southern elements who denied their hero, Van Buren, the nomination in 1844. Included here are Martin Van Buren and his son, “Prince” John, along with John Dix and others now ready to again don the Democratic mantle and back a New Englander like Franklin Pierce.

Once the Van Buren men depart, what remains of the original Free Soil coalition are those who oppose slavery on moral grounds.

Included here are the Liberty Party abolitionists – rallying around Gerrit Smith, James Birney and the Tappan brothers – and others like John Hale, Joshua Giddings, Henry Wilson, Charles Francis Adams, Owen Lovejoy and Chase himself.

Despite their depleted numbers, the remaining Free Soilers come together on August 11 to piece together a credible platform and to choose candidates for 1852.

\*\*\*\*\*

Date: August 11-12, 1852

### **A Reluctant John Hale Becomes The Final Party Nominee**



John P. Hale (1806-1873)

Over two hundred delegates are on hand as the convention opens on Wednesday, August 11. They represent a mix of older and younger figures in the abolitionist movement, among them the Reverend Charles Finney, whose “Second Great Awakening” revival meetings in the 1830’s sparked many to join the anti-slavery crusade.

One notable absentee is Salmon Chase, whose dalliances with the Democrats have distanced him by now from the party he founded.

Procedural matters dominate the first day. Henry Wilson, the Massachusetts Conscience Whig, is chosen to preside; a committee adjourns to nearby LaFayette Hall to work on an updated platform; various luminaries including Frederick Douglass offer up speeches to those left in the hall.

Douglass’ inflammatory remarks on the Fugitive Slave Act are particularly notable for their virulence:

*The only way to make the Fugitive Slave law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnapers. A half dozen...carried down South would cool the ardor of Southern gentlemen, and keep their rapacity in check.*

Action picks up on day two, with lively debates over various aspects of the platform, especially in relation to slavery. Two key planks draw much of the attention:

*Number 4. That the early history of the Government clearly shows the settled policy to have been, not to extend, nationalize and encourage, but to limit, localize and discourage Slavery; and to this policy, which should never have been departed from, the Government ought forthwith to return.*

*Number 14. That slavery is a sin against God, and a crime against man, the enormity of which no law nor usage can sanction or mitigate, and that Christianity, humanity, and patriotism alike demand its abolition.*

Several delegates lobby for a plank specifically addressing the Fugitive Slave Act:

*That not only do we condemn and trample upon the enactment called the Fugitive Slave Law...but we hold all forms of piracy, and especially the most atrocious and abominable one of Slavery to be entirely incapable of legislation.*

This leads to a discussion about “resistance,” including the possibility of “opposing the law with carnal weapons.”

The philanthropist Gerritt Smith disavows violence, but Joshua Giddings disagrees, referring to those who killed the slave-catcher Gorsuch (in the “Christina Affair”) as “the most efficient protectors of our Constitution.” Charles Francis Adams quickly pushes back by saying that any resort for violence would permanently alienate Southerners troubled by the ethics of slavery.

Lewis Tappan proposes a platform alternative replacing Numbers 4 and 14 with a single alternative:

*That as American slavery is a sin against God and a crime against man, it is in the highest sense invalid, illegal, not law, either divine or human; and is therefore utterly void, and of no force, before God and man.*

The Reverend Owen Lovejoy, brother of the slain abolitionist editor, Elijah Lovejoy, finds Tappan’s option wanting, and a third option reaches the floor:

*That as American slavery is a sin against God and a crime against man, which no human enactment can make right; and that Christianity, humanity, and patriotism alike demand its abolition.*

This option seems to please both sides, and it is approved by a 192-15 margin.

Attention then shifts to Land Reform and approval is given to a plank demanding that ownership of the new western territories be retained by the national government for the purpose of granting small parcels to settlers, free of charge.

*That the public lands of the United States belong to the people, and should not be sold to individuals nor granted to corporations, but should be held as a sacred trust for the benefit of the people, and should be granted in limited quantities, free of cost, to landless settlers.*

This motion is enthusiastically approved, as part of the “Free Soil” promise of the Party.

With the platform approved, the delegates move on to the nominating process, which is anti-climactic and largely a fiasco. They select abolitionist Senator John P. Hale of New Hampshire by 192-15 on the first ballot – even though Hale has already indicated that he is not interested in running. Their Vice-Presidential choice is House member George Julian of Indiana, a well-known advocate for land reform and immediate emancipation.

August 12 marks the end of the Free Soil Party as a stand-alone political entity.

But within the next four years its core principal – opposition to the *nationalization* of slavery – will be picked up by the new Republican Party and used once again to unite different Northern factions against a fracturing Democratic opposition.