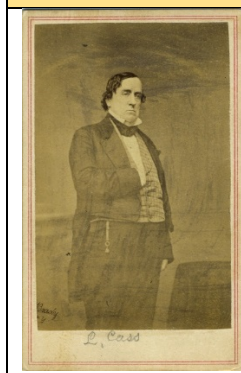


Chapter 160 – The Contentious Democrats Nominate Lewis Cass



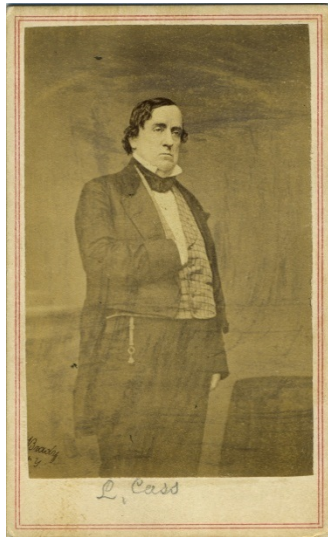
Dates:
May 22, 1848

Sections:

- The Democrats Nominate Cass

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The Democrats Nominate Cass



On May 22, 1848, ten weeks after the Mexican War Treaty is signed, the Democrats convene in Baltimore to pick a presidential nominee to secede Polk, who keeps his promise of serving only one term.

Delegates from all 30 states are present, with the total count evenly split between northerners and southerners.

As expected, the issue of “slavery in the new western territories” is front and center for all.

Its divisive character is evident right away in a floor fight over seating the New York delegation, with both the Barnburners and the Hunkers claiming to represent the state. After heated debate, the convention decides, by a margin of 126-125, on a compromise, with each faction awarded 18 votes.

Lewis Cass (1782-1866)

This results in the first “walk-out,” with the Barnburners exiting the convention to explore an alliance with other “free soil” groups, across parties, who oppose the spread of slavery.

The second walk-out occurs after Fire-Eater William Yancey presents the “Alabama Platform” proposals to the delegates, and they are voted down by a wide 216-36 margin. In protest, the hot-tempered Yancey leaves the hall.

As the actual balloting begins, it’s clear that no Southern dark horse, like Polk in 1844, will win the day.

Instead, three Northerners are in the running.

One is Supreme Court Justice, Levi Woodbury, ex-Senator and Governor of New Hampshire, and a solid Jackson man. His cause, however, is hurt by his role as Secretary of the Treasury during the Bank Panic of 1837 and the following recession.

A second contender is Polk’s Secretary of State, James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, who received a trickle of votes in the 1844 convention. The President comes to regard Buchanan as self-serving, untrustworthy and lacking in good judgment. His handling of the Oregon dispute almost leads to war with Britain; he tries to torpedo Scott’s plan to conquer Mexico City; and he plays politics with the final peace treaty, attempting to hide his early vocal opposition to acquiring any new land from the war. Despite these gaffes, Buchanan’s “resume” is sufficient for him to make a second run at the nomination.

As in 1844, however, the front runner is again Senator from Michigan, Lewis Cass.

The 68 year old Cass is first off a tried and true Democrat, who has served in Jackson’s cabinet, consistently backs Polk, favors annexing all of Mexico, and never wavers on the rights of slave owners. On top of that, he is known forever as “General Cass,” conqueror of Tecumseh and “hero of the War of 1812” – a legacy the party hopes will allow him to offset the popular appeal enjoyed by the potential Whig military candidates, Taylor and Scott.

The voting favors Cass from the start, and he wins handily on the fourth ballot.

Voting For Democratic Party Nomination

Candidate	1	2	3	4
Lewis Cass	125	133	156	179
Levi Woodbury	53	56	53	38
James Buchanan	55	54	39	33
John Calhoun	9	0	0	0
Others	9	9	5	5
Abstaining	39	38	37	35

His running mate will be General William O. Butler, whose military career has spanned the War of 1812 through the Mexican War, where he is second in command to Taylor and wounded at the Battle of Monterrey. Butler is from Kentucky, and has served two terms in the U.S. House (1839-43) before joining Cass on the ticket.

In the end, the nomination of Cass from Michigan is symbolic of what becomes the Democrats search for a North-South presidential compromise -- something that will be repeated in 1852 with Franklin Pierce and in 1856 with James Buchanan.

All are Northern men who embrace Southern sympathies in their drive to win the presidency.

Over time they will all share the same epithet in the Northern press, that of “Doughfaces” – men lacking in firm principles, as pliable as bread dough when it comes to standing up to the South on tough issues like slavery.