

A LIFE OF WILSON SHANNON,  
GOVERNOR OF OHIO, DIPLOMAT, TERRITORIAL GOVERNOR OF KANSAS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
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For

Professors Francis P. Weisenburger and Merton L. Dillon,  
my family, and Joan Marino. They would not let me quit.

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## INTRODUCTION

\* Most historical depictions of "Bleeding Kansas" in 1855-1856 reflect a seemingly permanent propaganda victory for the antislavery version of that infamous melodrama. Their basic premise is that the antislavery forces in Kansas were the "good guys." All those who did not endorse the free-state movement--proslavery southerners, northern moderates advocating popular sovereignty, and others--are cast as villains. One expects such simple-minded judgments to be rendered by contemporaries actively engaged in the antislavery crusade. It is quite shocking, on the other hand, to find the same biased viewpoints dominating discussions of "Bleeding Kansas" in modern textbooks and monographs.

One significant nineteenth century public figure whose reputation has been victimized by these distorted presentations is Wilson Shannon, governor of Kansas Territory from August, 1855, to August, 1856, at the height of the troubles there. Shannon was a states' rights Jeffersonian Republican of the "Old School" who opposed the antislavery movement in Kansas and elsewhere as a threat to the perpetuation of the Union. Because of his views and some of his actions, historians have consistently, unfairly portrayed him as a major villain in the "Bleeding Kansas" scenario, a willing sycophant of the Missouri border ruffians and at least partially responsible for

the "sack" of Lawrence in 1856. Since there is abundant, readily available published documentation refuting these pejorative assessments of Shannon's conduct, the conclusion is inescapable that many historians have been negligent, even incompetent, in researching the sources on "Bleeding Kansas."

No extensive scholarly account of Shannon's life has been hitherto undertaken. The brief published sketches most commonly cited in historical works are those by Wendell H. Stephenson in the Dictionary of American Biography, an anonymously authored portrait in volume III of the Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, and a chapter in William E. Connelley's Kansas Territorial Governors.<sup>1</sup>

Only the anonymous author treats his subject with respect. Connelley bitterly denounces Shannon's conduct as Kansas territorial governor as "obsequious," "base," "servile," and even "villainous." Stephenson presents a broader indictment by concluding that, despite a seemingly impressive public career encompassing terms as governor of Ohio (1838-1840, 1842-1844), minister to Mexico (1844-1845), and congressman (1853-1855) in addition to the year in Kansas, Shannon had been nothing more than a weak, "time-serving politician." Similarly denigrating judgments are found in the applicable influential works of such prominent scholars as Allan Nevins, Roy F. Nichols,

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<sup>1</sup>"Biography of Governor Wilson Shannon," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, ed. F. G. Adams (Topeka, 1875-1908), III, 279-323; William E. Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors (Topeka, 1900), pp. 37-60; Wendell H. Stephenson, "Wilson Shannon," Dictionary of American Biography (hereafter cited as DAB), ed. Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone (rev. ed.; New York, 1964-1975), VII, 20-21.

Stephen B. Oates, and James Rawley.<sup>2</sup>

In defense of Shannon, it should be noted that many, if not most, of his contemporaries adjudged him to be an honorable man devoted to worthy principles and desirous of contributing significantly to the public good. He was so highly regarded by the Ohio Democracy that they nominated him for governor three consecutive times despite his firm adherence to policies conflicting with those of the dominant radical, hard money, antibank wing of the party. In statesmanlike fashion, he persistently maintained that banking facilities and some non-specie currency were essential to a viable state and national economy. As governor, furthermore, he led the minority conservative Democratic faction in its successful efforts to thwart radical schemes to destroy Ohio's banks in the 1840's. Because of his refusal to cater to their wishes, state Democratic leaders eliminated Shannon after 1843 from their list of acceptable candidates for high public office. His course as governor of Ohio was decidedly contrary to that of a "time-serving politician."

In Kansas Territory, Shannon advocated the implementation of popular sovereignty to resolve the slavery issue. He acted as governor in accordance with his belief in democratic principles exercised through a government of laws rather than of men. Once he ascertained that both proslavery and free-state forces in the

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<sup>2</sup>Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union (New York, 1947), II, 389-90; Roy F. Nichols, Franklin Pierce (2d ed. rev.; Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 478-79; Stephen B. Oates, To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown (New York, 1970), p. 100; James A. Rawley, Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 92, 158.

territory were prepared to ignore the processes of orderly government, Shannon wisely asked President Franklin Pierce for authority to use a neutral third party, the United States Army troops stationed in Kansas, to protect the rights of all citizens. Although Pierce's half-hearted response left him without the powers he so desperately needed, the governor was able to confine the territorial disorders and resultant bloodshed to relatively modest proportions. On several occasions he personally negotiated settlements of disputes between the rival factions, as in the Wakarusa War in December, 1855, and deserves credit for saving the lives of many territorial residents. In word as well as deed Shannon refused to play the role of "time-serving politician" in Kansas just as he had in Ohio. He strenuously objected to administration directives he deemed ill-advised and vigorously advocated policies he considered essential even though his views often were politically unpopular in Washington. Consequently, Pierce was undoubtedly relieved to be able to make Shannon a scapegoat for many of the territorial difficulties in 1855-1856 and to dismiss him from office in August, 1856. Having had enough of democratic politics at its worst, the former governor remained in Kansas to practice law. For most of the next twenty years prior to his death in 1877 he was acknowledged by his peers to be the foremost general legal practitioner in the state.

The time is long overdue for the historical profession to rectify its frequently distorted, sometimes libelous treatment of Shannon's good name and distinguished accomplishments. This

dissertation, it is hoped, will contribute significantly to the rehabilitation of his reputation without adding new distortions to the historical record.

## Chapter I

### THE FORMATIVE YEARS IN BELMONT COUNTY

Wilson Shannon's birthplace and his home for the first fifty-five years of his life was in Belmont County, Ohio. He was the ninth and last child of one of the earliest pioneer families to settle there. Possessed of little resources other than a willingness to work hard, the Shannon family achieved some prosperity in the first two decades of the nineteenth century and four of Wilson's older brothers engaged in prominent public careers. The attitudes and abilities of the youngest Shannon were strongly influenced by the examples set by his brothers, by the rural environment in which he lived, and by the highly active, competitive political climate existing in the county during the Age of Jackson. A review of his experiences during his formative years in Belmont County provides many insights, therefore, into his motivations and into the origins of the principles and policies he later advocated as a political leader in Ohio and in Kansas Territory.

Wilson Shannon's father, George, emigrated with his parents from Ireland to America in 1760. The death of George's mother during the voyage was soon followed by the loss at sea of his father, who was returning to Ireland on a business trip. An Episcopal clergyman in Wilmington, Delaware, where the ten-year-old boy and his father

had settled, then informally adopted George and raised him.

Leaving his adoptive home upon reaching manhood, George Shannon settled in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. He enlisted at the outbreak of the American Revolution in a local company recruited by Captain James Young. The company's service concluded with its participation in the seige of Yorktown, and George returned to his Pennsylvania home.

In 1783, he married Jane Milligan, a farmer's daughter of Bedford County, Pennsylvania. Responding to the lure of the frontier, the couple moved westward four times in the next eighteen years. They moved first to Washington County, Pennsylvania, and then to Ohio County, Virginia, near Wheeling. After four years' sojourn there, they crossed the Ohio River in 1800 to become one of the first families to settle in Kirkwood Township, Belmont County, Ohio Territory. One year later, they moved to a farm at the headwaters of Leatherwood Creek, just two miles north of the soon-to-be established community of Barnesville in Belmont County.

During the first eighteen years of marriage, the Shannons paused long enough between their shifts to new frontier homesites to have eight children. In order of birth, the children were George Jr., Thomas, John, Nancy, James, David, Lavina, and Arthur. The ninth and last child, Wilson, was born February 24, 1802, in the family cabin erected beside Leatherwood Creek.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>F. H. Hibbard, "Wilson Shannon, Ohio's First Native Governor, Commemorated Sunday, August 7," Barnesville [Ohio] Whetstone, August 4, 1949; Dempsey O. Sheppard, The Story of Barnesville, Ohio, 1801-1940 (Columbus, 1942), pp. 130-31; R. H. Taneyhill, "Hon. Wilson Shannon," History of Belmont and Jefferson Counties, Ohio, ed. J. A. Caldwell (Wheeling, West Virginia, 1880), p. 187.

George, Sr., did not live to enjoy the public prominence attained by several of his sons. One wintry day in January, 1803, he went hunting in the woods near his farm, became lost during a severe snowstorm that arose unexpectedly, and froze to death. Thomas (age sixteen) and John, the oldest sons at home, assumed responsibility for the family's welfare and, by hard work and judicious management, soon established a secure financial base for the future. In 1806, the Shannons moved to a newly purchased eighty acre farm two miles west of their previous location. Later, in 1812, Thomas and John purchased and settled on separate farms in the area. Their mother and younger children lived thereafter with John.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to working on the family farms, young Wilson picked and marketed ginseng, a plant much desired for its alleged medicinal qualities. He also attended a one-room school in the district until he was sixteen.<sup>3</sup>

Wilson underwent a traumatic experience sometime prior to the age of five when the last two fingers on his right hand were accidentally chopped off with an axe by his brother Arthur. According to one Belmont County historian, the unfortunate mishap produced an amusing incident many years later while Wilson was the county's

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<sup>2</sup>C. J. Howard, "Barnesville--A Sketch," Historical and Pictorial Barnesville (n. p., 1908), p. 37; Sheppard, Story of Barnesville, pp. 131-32; Taneyhill, "Wilson Shannon," pp. 187-89.

<sup>3</sup>"Popular Portraits with Pen and Pencil: Hon. Wilson Shannon, Late Governor of Ohio," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review (hereafter cited as U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev.), XXV (August, 1849), 174; St. Clairsville (Ohio) Belmont Chronicle, September 6, 1877; Winifred S. Smith, "Wilson Shannon," The Governors of Ohio (2d ed.; Columbus, 1969), p. 43.



prosecuting attorney. Several rustic witnesses who had received instructions from him concerning proper court procedures faithfully imitated Wilson as they were sworn in by raising only the first two fingers of their right hands.<sup>4</sup>

Supported financially by his brother James, Wilson attended Ohio University at Athens for one year, 1818-1819, and Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, the following two years. Without graduating, he left the University to study law briefly with brothers George and James in Lexington. He returned in 1822 to St. Clairsville, Ohio, the Belmont County seat, to continue his legal training in the office of two exceptional tutors, David Jennings and Charles Hammond. Jennings became the Tenth District's congressman in 1824 and Hammond, one of Ohio's finest lawyers, had served prior to 1822 in both the Ohio Senate and House of Representatives. Subsequently, as editor of the Cincinnati Daily Gazette, Hammond became one of the nation's most influential journalists. Shannon completed his studies in 1826 and was admitted to the bar at St. Clairsville.<sup>5</sup>

While Wilson was growing to manhood and preparing to enter the legal profession, four of his brothers engaged in careers which brought them considerable renown in the state, and even some in the nation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Taneyhill, "Wilson Shannon," pp. 187-88.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 188-89; Columbus Ohio Statesman, January 23, 1838; "Wilson Shannon," U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev., p. 174; Francis P. Weisenburger, "Life of Charles Hammond," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly (hereafter cited as O. A. H. Quar.), XLIII (1934), 338, 413-16.

<sup>6</sup>In addition to having four distinguished brothers, Wilson was linked by his first marriage to four talented brothers-in-law. Because all eight relatives undoubtedly influenced his career in varying

George, Jr., the oldest brother, was the recipient of most of the national recognition. During a visit to Pittsburgh in August, 1803, he secured his ticket to fame by accepting an offer to join the Lewis and Clark expedition. Only sixteen at the time, the tall, husky lad was the youngest member of the company. He served competently as Lewis' and Clark's private secretary, and, following his return from a trip in 1807 to the Mandan Indian country, he assisted Nicholas Biddle in Philadelphia in preparing the journals of the expedition for publication. After graduating from Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, and studying law, George settled in Lexington to pursue a highly successful legal and political career. He served seven years as a United States District Attorney, three years in the Kentucky legislature, and seven years as a judge on the state Supreme Court. His circle of friends included Henry Clay to whom he once sold 320 acres of land. Following his move to Missouri in 1828, George was appointed United States District Attorney for the southern district of that state by Andrew Jackson. In 1832, he failed in an attempt to wrest the Democratic nomination for United States Senator from the incumbent, Thomas H. Benton. His death came in 1836, soon after he had been elected to the state Senate. Missourians subsequently named Shannon County

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degrees, brief resumes of their lives are included in this chapter. Much of their influence can only be surmised, unfortunately, because of the paucity of relevant documentation.

in his honor.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to farming, Thomas Shannon became a successful carpenter and prominent merchant in Barnesville. He paved the way impressively for Wilson in Belmont County and Ohio state politics by, first of all, easily winning election to the state House of Representatives for six one-year terms between 1819 and 1825. When the district's incumbent congressman, David Jennings, resigned in mid-term in 1825, Thomas was elected to replace him in the Nineteenth Congress. His congressional stint was followed by three two-year terms in the Ohio Senate covering the years 1829-1830 and 1837-1840. No particularly notable accomplishments are identified with Thomas' service in public office. At one point, however, he exhibited considerable courage and enlightenment by supporting an unpopular legislative bill which stipulated that free blacks could testify in court provided two whites vouched for their character. Thomas died in 1843, having been a popular, major figure in Belmont County politics for a quarter of a century.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Taneyhill, "Wilson Shannon," p. 187; Charles G. Clarke, The Men of the Lewis and Clark Expedition (Glendale, California, 1970), pp. 52-53; Virginia S. Erfurt, George Shannon: Young Explorer with Lewis and Clark (New York, 1963), pp. 1-265; Ohio Statesman, January 23, 1838; George Shannon to Henry Clay, November 2, 1815, The Papers of Henry Clay, ed. James F. Hopkins (Lexington, Kentucky, 1959--), II, 90-91; Charles V. Ravenswaay (ed.), Missouri (rev. ed.; New York, 1954), pp. 442, 550.

<sup>8</sup>St. Clairsville [Ohio] Gazette, September 12, 1829; R. H. Taneyhill, History of Barnesville, Ohio (Barnesville, 1899), pp. 7, 22; Taneyhill, "Wilson Shannon," pp. 188-89; W. A. Taylor, Ohio Statesman and Hundred Year Book from 1788-1892 (Columbus, 1892), pp. 160, 162, 164, 193, 195, 198.

James Shannon, considered by family friends to be the most talented of the Shannon brothers, studied law with his brother, George, in Lexington, Kentucky, and with a Judge Harper in Zanesville, Ohio. Admitted to the bar in 1818, James practiced briefly in St. Clairsville and Wheeling, represented the Wheeling area for one term in the Virginia House of Representatives, and then returned to Lexington. He soon became one of Kentucky's leading attorneys and married a daughter of Isaac Shelby, the state's first governor (1792-1796) and an influential political leader. Named by Andrew Jackson in 1830 to the Board of Visitors of the United States Military Academy at West Point, James received additional presidential preferment in 1832 when he was appointed United States Chargé d'Affaires to the Federal Republic of Central America. James' bright future was terminated by his death from yellow fever contracted almost immediately upon his arrival at his post in Guatemala.<sup>9</sup>

David Shannon became a printer for a short time, then attended Transylvania University, and, like James, studied law with George in Lexington. In 1821, he established a highly significant political connection for the Shannons by accepting a position as private secretary to the first United States territorial governor of Florida,

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<sup>9</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), History of the Upper Ohio Valley, with Family History and Biographical Sketches (Madison, Wisconsin, 1890), II, 806; Lewis Collins, Historical Sketches of Kentucky (1848; rpt. New York, 1971), pp. 527-31; Ohio Statesman, January 23, 1838; B. F. Simpson, Remarks in the Supreme Court on the death of Hon. Wilson Shannon (Topeka, Kansas, 1877), pp. 3-4; J. A. Eaton to James Shannon, April 20, 1830, Edward Livingston to James Shannon, February 10, 1832, Wilson Shannon to Mrs. Susan Shannon, September 6, 1832, James Shannon Papers, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

Andrew Jackson. That same year, David briefly assumed the governor's responsibilities during Jackson's temporary absence from the territory. At the completion of Old Hickory's six months' tour of duty in Florida, David was appointed to a judgeship on the territorial court. The young Ohioan's potentially brilliant career ended tragically eighteen months later in 1823 with a brief, fatal illness.<sup>10</sup>

Little need be said about Wilson's other two brothers. Arthur died as a young boy and John was content to prosper as a farmer in Belmont County and avoid the public limelight.<sup>11</sup>

Of importance to their youngest brother's future endeavors, the attainments of George, Thomas, James, and David placed the Shannon name prominently before Wilson's prospective Belmont County and Ohio constituencies. Furthermore, the close association of David with Andrew Jackson and the important political contacts established by the other brothers undoubtedly influenced in countless favorable ways Wilson's own political course.

On November 30, 1825, Wilson Shannon married Elizabeth Ellis of St. Clairsville. Her father, Ezer Ellis, had long been politically prominent in Belmont County, serving from 1813-1826 as clerk of the county courts. The marriage was of brief duration. A few pleasant years together highlighted by the birth of a son, James, on September 9, 1826, ended on October 1, 1831, with Elizabeth's death

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<sup>10</sup>Ohio Statesman, January 23, 1838; Robert Remini, Andrew Jackson (New York, 1966), pp. 87-90; Sheppard, Story of Barnesville, p. 132.

<sup>11</sup>Taneyhill, "Wilson Shannon," pp. 187-89.

after an extended illness. Her obituary in the St. Clairsville Gazette described her as "an affectionate companion and an intelligent and interesting neighbor and friend." The couple's only child, James, was shortlived like his mother, dying in 1849 at the age of twenty-three.<sup>12</sup>

His marriage into the Ellis family established important links for Shannon with four talented brothers-in-law who achieved distinction in Ohio and elsewhere in such fields as law, politics, business, and journalism. Two of the four, Isaac E. Eaton and Hugh J. Jewett, were much younger than Shannon and played no major role in furthering his Ohio political endeavors. Eaton, a lawyer, entered actively into Belmont County Democratic politics in the 1840's and was prosecuting attorney from 1851 to 1855. In the late 1850's, he followed Shannon's example and moved to Kansas. Settling in Leavenworth, he prospered as a real estate agent for eastern financial interests. Although disdaining public office, Eaton became one of the state's leading Democrats and served for many years as the Kansas member of the Democratic National Committee.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 189; Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 471, 805; Hibbard, "Wilson Shannon"; Shannon "Family Record," in The Holy Bible (New York, 1834), p. 1 (hereafter cited as Shannon "Family Record"), in the Kansas State Historical Society Library; Simpson, Hon. Wilson Shannon, p. 4-5; St. Clairsville Gazette, October 8, 1831.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., July 1, 1845, January 9, May 29, 1846; Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 473, 702; The Lecompton [Kansas] Union, September 13, 1857; H. Miles Moore, Early History of Leavenworth City and County (Leavenworth, Kansas, 1906), pp. 330-31.

Jewett, also a lawyer, practiced in St. Clairsville with Eaton for a few years in the 1840's. Following a move to Zanesville in 1848, he added banking and railroad management to his legal activities. In politics, he served in the Ohio Senate (1853-1855) and House of Representatives (1868-1869), and as a congressman (1873-1874). Also, Jewett was the unsuccessful Democratic gubernatorial candidate in 1861 and was briefly considered for the top spot on the Democratic national ticket in 1880. He had developed, meanwhile, into one of America's most successful railroad executives. His greatest accomplishments came during the years 1874-1884 when he assumed direction of the bankrupt Erie Railroad and re-established its economic viability.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Eaton and Jewett, another brother-in-law, William Kennon, was a long-time close associate of Shannon in both politics and the legal profession. Immediately following Shannon's admission to the bar in 1826, he and Kennon formed a law partnership in St. Clairsville. For many years thereafter, it seemed that Kennon was destined to outshine his partner in the Ohio political firmament. Although he had never held any public office, the Jacksonians of the Tenth Congressional District (Morgan, Monroe, Belmont, and Guernsey

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest L. Bogart, "Hugh Judge Jewett," DAB, V, 68-69; "Hugh J. Jewett," Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography, ed. James Grant Wilson and John Fiske (New York, 1892), III, 433-34; New York Times, March 7, 1898; Eugene H. Roseboom, The Civil War Era, 1850-1873, Vol. IV of The History of the State of Ohio, ed. Carl Wittke (Columbus, 1941-1944), pp. 206, 390, 414-15; Belmont County, Ohio, Court of Common Pleas, Civil Appearance Docket (hereafter cited as Belmont County C.A.D.), XI (1847-1849), 1, 16, 28, 62, 109, 255, in the Clerk of Courts office, St. Clairsville, Ohio.

counties) chose Kennon as their candidate in 1828 for the United States House of Representatives. Shannon and his other supporters campaigned vigorously for him, and Kennon defeated his opponent, John Davenport, by a 180-vote majority. He easily repeated his victory in 1830. Stepping aside in 1832 to let his partner, Shannon, try unsuccessfully for a congressional seat, Kennon ran again for the House in 1834 and won. Two years later, he was ejected when the Whig ticket in Belmont County won every office contested. Kennon's political fortunes receded, at that point, as his legal prospects began to flourish. His talents as an attorney combined, in all likelihood, with the political influence of his Belmont County friends secured Kennon's election by the Ohio legislature in 1842 as president judge of the court of common pleas circuit encompassing Monroe, Belmont, Guernsey, Jefferson, and Harrison counties. He concluded seven years in that position by acting as chairman of the judiciary committee at the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1850. The peak of his distinguished career followed in 1854 with his appointment by Governor William Medill to the Ohio Supreme Court, where he served for three years. He then resigned, returned to St. Clairsville, and practiced law there until his death in 1870.<sup>15</sup>

The fifth Ellis daughter married George W. Manypenny, who played a major role for nearly three decades in shaping the course

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<sup>15</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 646-47, 805-806; A. T. McKelvey (ed.), Centennial History of Belmont County, Ohio and Representative Citizens (Chicago, 1903), p. 102; St. Clairsville Gazette, July 12, October 4, October 25, 1828, April 9, 1831, August 11, 1832, October 18, 1834, October 15, 1836.



of Wilson Shannon's public career. Manypenny, born in Pennsylvania in 1808, arrived in St. Clairsville in 1829 to become co-editor, with Robert H. Miller, of the St. Clairsville Gazette. Despite his youthfulness, Manypenny proved to be a skillful, partisan editor of the Gazette, making both the paper and himself well-known in Ohio political circles.<sup>16</sup> The Gazette's influence was enhanced by the fact that, as late as 1830 when Manypenny became sole proprietor, it was the only Jacksonian newspaper published in its congressional district or, for that matter, in any of the river counties from Marietta to Steubenville.<sup>17</sup> Under Manypenny and his successors the Gazette vigorously and faithfully promoted the political fortunes of Wilson Shannon and his relatives and friends.<sup>18</sup> Manypenny sold the newspaper in 1833 to John and Jacob Glessner and left journalism to superintend the operations of the National Road in western Ohio.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, he moved to Zanesville in 1838, was clerk of courts of Muskingum County from 1841-1846, and served on both the state Board of Bank Commissioners (1839-1840) and Board of Public Works (1851-52).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, January 3, 1829, March 9, 1833; William G. Wolfe, Stories of Guernsey County, Ohio (Cambridge, Ohio, 1943), pp. 461-62.

<sup>17</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 785.

<sup>18</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, September 12, 1829, September 29, 1832, August 22, 1835, January 13, 1838, December 7, 1839, March 4, 1842, March 15, 1844, September 30, 1852.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., March 9, 1833.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., March 16, 1839, April 11, 1851; Norris F. Schneider, "Written by George W. Manypenny," Zanesville (Ohio) The Times Recorder, January 25, 1970. I am indebted to Mr. Schneider, who is the editor of The Times Recorder, for providing me with a copy of his excellent article and other materials on Manypenny.

In 1853, Manypenny came within three votes at the Democratic state convention of winning the gubernatorial nomination from the incumbent, William Medill. The following year, after running a strong second to George Pugh in the legislative balloting for a new United States Senator from Ohio, he was appointed by President Franklin Pierce to the prestigious post of United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs.<sup>21</sup> While serving in that position in 1855, he probably played an instrumental role in securing Shannon's appointment as governor of Kansas Territory. He continued as Commissioner until Pierce left office in 1857. Returning to Ohio, Manypenny became part owner of the state's leading Democratic newspaper, the Ohio Statesman, which he also edited from 1859 to 1864. In addition, he was General Manager of Ohio's Board of Public Works from 1861 to 1863.<sup>22</sup> Maintaining his interest and involvement in Indian affairs, he served as chairman of two temporary national commissions established to investigate relations between the United States Government and her Indian dependents, the Sioux Commission of 1876 and the Ute Commission of 1880. Manypenny reviewed and analyzed critically his experiences with Indian affairs in a book published in 1880, Our Indian Wards. His remarkably perceptive, enlightened commentary has been favorably compared to Helen Hunt Jackson's Century of Dishonor as an effective appeal to the American public on behalf of the Indians. After a long and productive life, Manypenny died

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.; Roseboom, The Civil War Era, pp. 273-74, 278-79.

<sup>22</sup>Schneider, "George W. Manypenny."

in 1892 at the age of eighty-four.<sup>23</sup>

Wilson Shannon's marriage on November 25, 1832, to Sara Osbun, daughter of Dr. Samuel Osbun of Cadiz, Ohio, produced a large family, but no political ties comparable to the Ellis family connections. Sara, a devout Episcopalian, was, by all reports, an exceedingly lovely, bright, and charming lady, nearly thirteen years her husband's junior. The couple had four sons--John (1834-1860), Wilson, Jr. (1839-1873), Osbun (1843-1901), and Albert (1849-1868)--and three daughters--Mary (1836-1879), Susannah (1844-?), and Sara (1852-1893). As the dates reveal, three of the four sons died prior to their father's death in 1877.<sup>24</sup> The costs of raising such a large family probably contributed to the financial difficulties besetting Shannon from time to time.<sup>25</sup>

Until his removal to Kansas in 1857, Shannon's adult life was spent in St. Clairsville, the Belmont County seat. Named after Arthur St. Clair, then Governor of the Northwest Territory, the community was laid out on a hilltop by David Newell in 1801. The site was beside Zane's Trace, the only pathway of consequence through the area, and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; George W. Manypenny, Our Indian Wards, ed. Henry E. Fritz (1880; rpt. New York, 1972), pp. xi-xviii.

<sup>24</sup> "In Memoriam," The Kansas Churchman, January 15, 1881, p. 75; Lawrence [Kansas] Daily Journal, January 7, 1881; "Sarah Osbun Shannon," The First Ladies of Ohio, ed. Marilyn G. Hood (Columbus, 1970), p. 11; Shannon "Family Record."

<sup>25</sup> Carlo C. Carroll to Micajah T. Williams, December 1, 1839, Micajah T. Williams Papers, Ohio State Library; Wilson Shannon to Peter Kaufmann, November 6, 1840, Peter Kaufmann to Martin Van Buren, November 15, 1840, Peter Kaufmann Papers, Ohio Historical Society; St. Clairsville Gazette, November 12, 1841.

was just eleven miles west of a major commercial artery, the Ohio River.<sup>26</sup> During the latter part of the 1820's, Zane's Trace was converted in Belmont County into the much more impressive National Road which ran westward from Cumberland, Maryland. The new thoroughfare was a spacious eighty feet wide and was durably surfaced with three inches of crushed limestone. Wheeling, twelve miles east of St. Clairsville, could be reached by stagecoach in one hour and the 116 miles westward to Columbus traversed in approximately twenty hours after the road was completed to that point in 1833. The trip to Washington, D. C., required a more grueling thirty hours.<sup>27</sup>

St. Clairsville, a major stopover for coach lines using the route, derived great commercial benefits from servicing the myriad types of traffic passing through. According to one depicter of conditions on the road:

Wagons, stages, pedestrians, and vast droves of cattle, sheep, horses and hogs crowded it constantly, all pressing eagerly by the great arterial thoroughfare--for there were no railways then--to the markets of the East. Westwardly, on foot and in wagons traveled an interminable caravan of emigrants . . . whose gypsy fires illuminated at night the roadside woods and meadows. For the heavy transportation . . . huge covered wagons were used, built with massive axles and broad tires, and usually drawn by from four to six, and sometimes eight horses.

The road was frequented by traders, hucksters, peddlers, traveling musicians, small show-men, sharpers, tramps, beggars,

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<sup>26</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 758-59; Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio (Centennial ed.; Cincinnati, 1907), I, 308-11.

<sup>27</sup> C. B. Galbreath, "National Old Trial Road in Ohio," O. A. H. Quar., XXXVII (1928), 144-47; McKelvey (ed.), Belmont County, pp. 68-69; Francis P. Weisenburger, The Passing of the Frontier, 1825-1850, Vol. III of The History of State of Ohio, ed. Carl Wittke (Columbus, 1941-1944), pp. 108-10; Wolfe, Guernsey County, pp. 216-18.

and odd characters. . . . 28

Also appearing frequently among the wayfarers were prominent western politicians on their way to and from the national capital. Belmont County notables such as Shannon had numerous opportunities, consequently, to confer with important state and national figures.

Benjamin Lundy, destined to become the most influential critic of slavery in America in the 1820's, secured a niche for St. Clairsville in histories of the antislavery movement by founding Ohio's first antislavery association there in 1815. Operating under a constitution drafted by Charles Hammond, one of Shannon's future legal mentors, the group soon recruited over 500 members. A branch of the American Colonization Society was also established at the county seat in 1817. Despite the advantageous proximity of Mt. Pleasant, a Quaker abolitionist center just ten miles north of St. Clairsville in Jefferson County, both of Belmont's antislavery organizations quickly lost momentum and apparently failed to influence significantly community affairs during

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<sup>28</sup> Alfred E. Lee, History of the City of Columbus (New York, 1892), I, 327. Also see Archer B. Hulbert, The Cumberland Road (1905; rpt. New York, 1971), pp. 73-81, 119-22, 132-38, 156-63. Despite its important location and commercial activities, St. Clairsville's population in 1830 was only 782. Noting with disgust that even Cadiz had surpassed that figure, Manypenny complained in the St. Clairsville Gazette that "we have more drones and bachelors in our town than in any other in the world." Little changed for the rest of the century, apparently, because the town's population increased only to 1,210 by 1900 even though Belmont County totals between 1830 and 1900 rose from 28,627 to 60,875. St. Clairsville Gazette, June 19, 1830; F. E. Scobey and B. L. McElroy (eds.), The Biographical Annals of Ohio (Columbus, 1902-1903), I, 799, 815; The Ohio Historical Records Survey, Project Service Division, Works Progress Administration, Inventory of the County Archives of Ohio, No. 7, Belmont County (St. Clairsville) (Columbus, 1942), pp. 6-8 (This source will be cited hereafter as W. P. A., Belmont County Inventory).

the 1820's and 1830's.<sup>29</sup> Neither Wilson Shannon nor any of his relatives are mentioned in local press reports about antislavery endeavors in the county.

The provisions of the Ohio Constitution of 1802 ensured that St. Clairsville would be a center of much legal activity. That document specified that the state Supreme Court, a body of four judges as of 1816, had to hold an annual court term in each county with no fewer than two judges present. Furthermore, every county had to have a court of common pleas conducting three terms annually. The county courts were organized originally into three circuits whose numbers were increased as the population expanded. Heading each circuit was a president judge, who had to be a lawyer, assisted in each county by two or three associate judges who often were not legally trained. Finally, all counties were authorized to have a number of justices of the peace to handle minor legal matters.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to Wilson Shannon and William Kennon, many other talented lawyers lived and practiced in Belmont County in the late 1820's and 1830's. Among the best known were David Jennings,

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<sup>29</sup>Merton L. Dillon, Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom (Urbana, Illinois, 1966), pp. 18-28, 30-33; Howe, Historical Collections, I, 311-12. The November 21, 1829, issue of the St. Clairsville Gazette notes that the defunct local colonization society had been revived earlier that year. No other mention of antislavery activity appears in the local press (St. Clairsville Gazette, Belmont Chronicle) for the next decade except for reports of two antislavery society meetings in the fall of 1837. Belmont Chronicle, August 1, September 12, 1837.

<sup>30</sup>F. R. Aumann, "The Development of the Judicial System of Ohio," O. A. H. Quar., XLI (1932), 201-10; W. P. A., Belmont County Inventory, pp. 115-19, 292n.

Benjamin Ruggles (also United States Senator from 1817-1833), John C. Wright, Benjamin S. Cowen, Joseph Ramage, James Weir, Carlo C. Carroll, William Kennon, Jr. (no close relation to Shannon's partner), Robert H. Miller, Robert J. Alexander, William B. Hubbard, Washington Johnston, George W. Thompson, Daniel Peck, Isaac Goodenow, and Thomas Genin. From this group came much of the area's political, economic, and cultural leadership. They filled many public offices; edited newspapers; supported efforts to promote a railroad through Belmont County, build a bridge across the Ohio River to Wheeling, and establish proper educational facilities; and joined in other enterprises designed to enhance the community's welfare.<sup>31</sup> Wilson Shannon was included among those who served regularly on railroad and bridge committees. He also involved himself prominently in promoting the St. Clairsville Institute and Female Seminary founded in 1836.<sup>32</sup> The attainments of Shannon and his contemporary professional colleagues seem impressive enough to substantiate one historian's assertion that "the Belmont County bar long enjoyed the reputation of being among the ablest in the state."<sup>33</sup>

It was, therefore, amid the presence of considerable legal talent that Shannon and Kennon launched their partnership in 1826. The bulk of the firm's cases, as was true with most lawyers in the

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<sup>31</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 469-74, 671-72, 803-07; Thomas William Lewis, History of Southeastern Ohio and the Muskingum Valley, 1788-1928 (Chicago, 1928), I, 331, 356-58; St. Clairsville Gazette, March 25, 1830, November 14, 28, 1835, August 1, 1837.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., November 28, 1835, March 12, 1836, September 23, 1837; Belmont Chronicle, January 7, October 10, 1837.

<sup>33</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 803.

area, involved estate settlements. Interspersed occasionally were suits for divorce, damages (slander, alienation of affections, for example), and other less common legal situations. Not only did the partners work together on the same side of a case, but, at times, even confronted each other as in a suit for slander arising in their first year of practice. Shannon's pride undoubtedly suffered a blow when Kennon's client was awarded 1000 dollars in damages.<sup>34</sup>

In their first term as practitioners before the Court of Common Pleas, the May Term of 1826, the two neophytes participated singly or jointly in nine (15.5%) of the fifty-eight civil cases heard. Improving their percentage, they appeared in twelve (24.5%) of forty-nine civil cases in the September Term, 1826, and twenty-six (26.3%) of ninety-nine in the February Term, 1827. Although the numbers fluctuated considerably thereafter, the firm was involved usually in one-fifth to one-fourth of the civil cases adjudicated between 1826 and 1834 in the Belmont County Court of Common Pleas.<sup>35</sup> Their appearances at the state Supreme Court sessions in the county were infrequent. The first case they argued was in the October Term, 1827, and was followed by one or two appearances each subsequent term until 1833. They were involved in five of the fourteen suits

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<sup>34</sup> Belmont County C. A. D., III (1826-1830), V-VI (1830-1837). There is no C. A. D., Vol. IV. The specific case alluded to is Thurisa Vass v. David Stidd and Freeloove Stidd, recorded in C. A. D., III, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Belmont County C. A. D., III (1826-1830), V-VI (1830-1837). The Court of Common Pleas criminal case records for the 1820's-1840's have been mislaid or destroyed.



processed that year and seven of eighteen cases heard in 1834.<sup>36</sup>

As the above resume of their courtroom endeavors indicates, Shannon and Kennon rather quickly earned recognition as two of the ablest attorneys in Belmont County. While Shannon's personality and political skills are adequately documented in various Ohio sources, the only detailed, reliable commentaries available concerning his legal talents are based, unfortunately, upon observations made after he left Ohio permanently in 1857 to settle in Kansas. It seems reasonable to assume, nevertheless, that most of the attributes depicted in the Kansas sources were fully developed and displayed during his thirty years of practice in Ohio. It should be noted, first of all, that his physical appearance in court or elsewhere was quite imposing since he was stoutly built, though not overweight, a towering six feet, six inches tall, and "straight as a pole." He had a deep, strong voice, blue eyes, dark auburn hair always closely cropped, and a slightly florid face whose clean-shaven features were a bit too coarse to be called handsome. In and out of the courtroom, he was always a dignified gentleman. At the same time, he was an exceedingly affable, courteous, kindly, generous, witty and entertaining friend to those who shared his company socially.<sup>37</sup> Perhaps the key to his success as an attorney

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<sup>36</sup> Ohio State Supreme Court, Belmont County Appearance Docket (hereafter cited as Ohio Supreme Court, B. C. A. D.), I (1804-1846), 71-113, in the Clerk of Courts office, St. Clairsville, Ohio.

<sup>37</sup> Elliott Banks to John Hutchings, March 14, 1862, Elliott Banks Papers, Spencer Library, University of Kansas; Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 805; "Wilson Shannon," U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev., pp. 177-78; Taneyhill, "Wilson Shannon," p. 189; Smith, "Wilson Shannon," p. 45.

was his methodical, scholarly approach to the law. He thoroughly researched the applicable precedents and utilized what he found extensively and effectively to bulwark his arguments in court. An informative analysis of Shannon's courtroom techniques is contained in a eulogy prepared by five distinguished Kansas colleagues:

No one in the exigencies of the contest could exceed him in presenting acute distinctions and pressing the last and remotest reason for his client while when the way was clear and the law undoubtedly on his side his negligence of the refined construction, the technical, the farfetched was equally marked.

While in addressing court or jury his argument was strong and his observations upon the witnesses and sometimes counsel of the opposite side were couched in weighty and even stinging terms. Yet no one ever doubted his kind and tender feelings even towards those he had just spoken of so pointedly, and away from the trial and the hot debate he carried no grudge or ill will.

His wit in social conversation was unailing and abundant, but in arguments to courts and juries he relied almost entirely on a solid, compact, and vigorous presentment of his views.<sup>38</sup>

Other contemporary assessments of Shannon's legal capabilities express judgments similar to those indicated above.<sup>39</sup> The respect he earned from his fellow attorneys for his skillful performances before the bar must have been a significant factor in their willingness to accept him as a serious contender for the Ohio gubernatorial nomination in 1838.

As Kennon's legal attainments clearly reveal, his talents were equal to those of his partner. The two young Ohioans constituted, indeed, a formidable courtroom team. Despite their apparent professional

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<sup>38</sup> Solon O. Thacher, *et. al.*, "Resolutions of Respect--Memorial," October 1, 1877, Douglas County (Kansas) District Court Journal; L (1876-1877), 593-94, in Clerk of Courts office, Lawrence, Kansas.

<sup>39</sup> Banks to Hutchings, March 14, 1862, Banks Papers; "Wilson Shannon," *U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev.*, 174-75; Simpson, Hon. Wilson Shannon, pp. 9-10; Lawrence (Kansas) *The Daily Tribune*, August 31, 1877; Lawrence (Kansas) *Western Home Journal*, September 6, 1877; *Belmont Chronicle*, September 6, 1877.

success and compatibility, Shannon and Kennon, for reasons unknown, dissolved their partnership in February, 1834. Kennon then joined forces with Carlo C. Carroll.<sup>40</sup> Shannon, who had been elected county prosecuting attorney in 1833, practiced alone until 1839, when he was allied for two years with Daniel Peck. Peck was replaced in 1841 by Robert J. Alexander. After his return in 1845 from serving for a year as the United States Minister to Mexico, Shannon practiced alone.<sup>41</sup>

Political alignments in Belmont County, like those throughout the nation, were in a transitional state in the 1820's as America moved from the Era of Good Feelings into the Age of Jackson. The overwhelming choice of the county's populace in the presidential election of 1824 was Henry Clay, who received 1487 votes to 509 for Andrew Jackson and 303 for John Quincy Adams.<sup>42</sup> During the next three years, the followers of Old Hickory in Belmont County worked energetically to establish a Jackson party there while the Adams-Clay men organized their forces.<sup>43</sup> Both groups were so successful that, by the fall of 1827, Charles Hammond's Cincinnati Gazette listed Belmont among the seven counties in Ohio whose political organization had progressed to the point where Jackson and Administration party lines were clearly

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<sup>40</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, May 10, June 14, 1834.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., October 12, 1833, May 7, 1841, September 11, 1846; Belmont County C. A. D., VII (1837-1840), 168, 179, 192-93, 268, 296, VIII (1840-1842), 80-96, 155-64, 296-98, IX (1842-1844), 84, 96, 99, 283, 286; Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 806.

<sup>42</sup> Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 219.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 220-28; St. Clairsville Gazette, September 1, 8, 22, 29, December 1, 1827; H. C. Webster, "History of Democratic Party Organization in the Northwest," O. A. H. Quar., XXIV (1915), 14-23.

discernible.<sup>44</sup>

Not only were Belmont's Jacksonians able to fashion a sizeable constituency, but they were among the state's pacesetters in adopting political innovations. The St. Clairsville Gazette, which was founded in 1825 as a Jacksonian newspaper, announced in February, 1826, that citizens in most of Belmont's townships had agreed to send elected delegates to county and district conventions held to nominate candidates for public office. The typical Jacksonian procedure in the past had been for influential individuals and small groups to nominate their favorites (sometimes themselves) without making any serious effort to determine or abide by the preferences of the general public.<sup>45</sup> The first county convention under the new delegate system was held June 20, 1826, and a slate of candidates selected for the October elections.<sup>46</sup> Belmont's Jacksonians were also among the first county organizations to establish a formal correspondence committee (May, 1827), appoint township committees (March, 1828), form a "Jackson Newspaper Club" (March, 1828), and hold a Democratic young men's convention (August, 1828).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, October 7, 1827, quoted in ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>45</sup> Brant and Fuller (eds.), Upper Ohio Valley, II, 785; St. Clairsville Gazette, February 25, 1826, quoted in Webster, "Democratic Party Organization," p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, July 1, 1826, cited by ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>47</sup> Webster, "Democratic Party Organization," pp. 7-18, 21, 28-30; St. Clairsville Gazette, September 1, December 1, 1827, March 8, 15, August 30, 1828.

The applicable reports and commentaries in the St. Clairsville Gazette leave no doubt that Wilson Shannon and his relatives and friends dominated Jacksonian politics in Belmont County during the latter part of the 1820's and in the 1830's.<sup>48</sup> In 1827, Wilson was a member of both the county's central committee (five members) and its three-man correspondence committee. At the county convention in September, he presented the resolutions prepared for the occasion. That same year, his brother Thomas chaired the correspondence committee and was the party's unsuccessful candidate for the state Senate. Thomas was one of three Belmont delegates to Ohio's first state Jacksonian convention held in Columbus on January 8, 1828. William Kennon, as previously noted, was elected to represent the district in Congress in 1828, and Thomas successfully ran for the Ohio Senate in 1829. 1829 was also the year that George Manypenny became co-editor of the Gazette.<sup>49</sup> The point was finally reached in 1830 where several concerned citizens wrote the Gazette complaining angrily that a "family monopoly" headed by Wilson Shannon had improperly assumed control over the county Democratic organization.

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<sup>48</sup> Since Wilson Shannon's older brothers, George, James, and Thomas, were all Jacksonians, they probably had a decisive influence upon his choice of party affiliation. His adherence to states' rights Jeffersonian Republican political principles also probably turned him more toward Jacksonian viewpoints than toward the nationally-oriented program of the Adams-Clay forces. The applicable sources do not indicate any other apparent reasons for his Jacksonian party loyalties. For Wilson Shannon's political views see Ohio Statesman, January 23, 1838.

<sup>49</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, September 1, 8, 29, October 13, December 1, 1827, October 25, 1828, January 3, October 17, 1829.

The writers noted that, in 1830, Wilson had sought the position of president judge of the area's common pleas court circuit, Thomas Shannon was state senator, Ezer Ellis was the sheriff and a candidate for the clerk of courts office, and Manypenny, now sole owner and editor of the Gazette, was maneuvering to become the state printer. Also, one of Belmont's representatives in the Ohio House, Crawford Welsh, was a loyal Shannon family friend. Lastly, the critics charged that Wilson Shannon, in particular, was dictating the selection of many candidates for public office even before the county nominating conventions were held.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the truth or falsity of the final assertion, there obviously was considerable substance to the "family monopoly" allegations.

Jacksonian campaign rhetoric in Belmont County closely followed the lines established by national spokesmen for the 1828, 1832, and 1836 presidential elections. Resolutions passed at a St. Clairsville meeting in September, 1827, for example, denounced the "torrent of executive abuse" emanating from the White House and asserted that Adams' election by the House of Representatives in 1824 constituted an undemocratic exercise in "practical aristocracy." The standard Adams-Clay "corrupt bargain" charge was reiterated, and, finally, the noble virtues of that "great American" and "man of the people," Andrew

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<sup>50</sup>"Crabapple" to Andrew Patterson (n. d.), St. Clairsville Gazette, July 10, 1830; Patterson to Crawford Welsh (n. d.), ibid., September 4, 1830; Welsh to Patterson (n. d.), Thomas Shannon to Welsh (n. d.), Cornelius Okey to Welsh (n. d.), "Scipio Africanus" [John R. Mulvany] to the Editor (n. d.), ibid., September 18, 1830; Eli Nichols to George Manypenny (n. d.), ibid., September 25, 1830.

Jackson, were extolled.<sup>51</sup> In the next decade, Belmont's Democrats joined Jackson's crusade against the banks, endorsing his veto in 1832 of the United States Bank charter, his removal of federal deposits from that institution, and other related measures. Administration policies concerning the tariff, Indian removal, internal improvements, and the nullification controversy with South Carolina were also staunchly defended by Shannon and most of the other Democratic county leaders.<sup>52</sup>

A relatively small number of Old Hickory's followers in the county were alienated by his policies and shifted their allegiance to the opposition. Wilson Shannon's friend, Crawford Welsh, chaired a meeting of approximately seventy-five "original Jacksonians" held in St. Clairsville on February 22, 1834. The group proclaimed its admiration for John C. Calhoun and his doctrine of nullification, denounced Ohio's Democrats for supporting Jackson and his designated successor, Martin Van Buren, and expressed their preference for Supreme Court Associate Justice John McLean, an Ohioan, as the next President of the United States.<sup>53</sup> A meeting of the "regular Democrats" followed on March 11. Both Kennon and Shannon addressed the large throng on behalf of Jackson's leadership. A resolution whose denunciation of nullification was clearly directed at the party renegades was passed by acclamation.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, September 29, 1827.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., March 26, July 30, 1831, July 28, 1832, March 15, August 9, 1834, August 22, 1835.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., March 1, 1834.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1834.

Belmont's Democrats could not hope for electoral successes if they lost many members. Included in the ranks of both the county's Adams-Clay forces and the Democrats were many talented, politically active citizens. Opposing candidates for public office conducted vigorous campaigns, the margin of victory was often close, and neither party consistently dominated election results. The competitiveness of the situation is illustrated by the fact that, for the four consecutive years from 1834-1837, the opposing political forces in Belmont alternated in winning a majority of the offices contested in each year's fall elections.<sup>55</sup> The coterie of Jacksonians headed by Wilson and Thomas Shannon, William Kennon, and George Manypenny had as much success in winning county, legislative, and congressional offices in the 1830's as any other political clique in either party in Belmont County, but their victories were seldom easily attained.

After skillfully managing campaigns for others for several years, Wilson Shannon decided late in 1829 to seek public office himself by running for the prestigious post of president judge of the Fifth Circuit of the Court of Common Pleas. The circuit included Belmont County. President judges were chosen by a joint ballot of both houses of the General Assembly. Shannon's influential friends, therefore, mounted a campaign on his behalf involving both direct and mail contacts with the legislators. The political fiasco which produced his defeat is discussed in decidedly contradictory and partisan terms in a series of letters written by those involved and

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., October 18, 1834, October 17, 24, 1835, October 15, 1836, October 14, 1837.



printed in the St. Clairsville Gazette by Manypenny. It seems that Andrew Patterson, one of Belmont's Jacksonian members in the Ohio House, concluded that Shannon's closest friends were trying to promote their candidate by making unsavory deals with the opposition party in the legislature. The shift of Patterson's support from Shannon to the incumbent and ultimate victor, J. H. Hallock, at a crucial point in the balloting in the House apparently influenced other representatives to change their votes also. Shannon, who had led on the first ballot, soon faded from contention.<sup>56</sup>

The stage was set for Shannon's next attempt at public office when William Kennon announced in April, 1831, that he would not seek reelection to Congress at the conclusion of his second term.<sup>57</sup> A redistricting of the state following the 1830 census had resulted in a shift of Belmont County from the Tenth to the Eleventh Congressional District formed in conjunction with Guernsey County. Jacksonian delegates from the two counties convened on August 10, 1832, at Fairview in Guernsey County and nominated Shannon as their candidate to replace Kennon.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, the Adams-Clay men chose an exceedingly formidable candidate, James Bell of Guernsey County, to oppose Shannon. In addition to being a prominent lawyer and a major general in the Ohio militia, Bell had been the county prosecuting attorney for four years and had served five consecutive one-year terms

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<sup>56</sup> Andrew Patterson to Crawford Welsh (n. d.), ibid., September 4, 1830; Welsh to Patterson (n. d.), ibid., September 18, 1830; W. P. A. Belmont County Inventory, p. 292.

<sup>57</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, April 9, 1831.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., August 11, October 13, 1832.

from 1826-1830 in the state House of Representatives. He had been elevated to the position of speaker during his last term.<sup>59</sup> Against Bell's eminent qualifications, Shannon's supporters could only offer assurances that their candidate was a knowledgeable man "of general information and industry" who knew better than Bell how to serve the true interests and wants of his prospective constituents. Manypenny vigorously but ineffectually attacked Bell in the Gazette, charging that the "General," as he was called, had never done anything constructive while in the legislature and was an immoral man--a gambler!<sup>60</sup> Perhaps the only surprising result of the campaign was that Shannon lost by only thirty-seven votes, 3,128 to 3,091. Belmont County voters favored him, 2,135 to 1,837, but even the long coattails of Andrew Jackson, who outpolled Henry Clay in Belmont County by a 2,153 to 1,977 vote, could not prevent Guernsey County from giving Bell the margin of victory. The only consolation for the Shannons was that Thomas easily won reelection to the Ohio Senate.<sup>61</sup>

After two near misses in striving for relatively prestigious offices, Shannon decided to adjust to a humbler goal in 1833. He accepted the Democratic nomination for the modest position of county prosecuting attorney and overwhelmed John McMahon, his opponent in the October election, by a vote of 2,170 to 905. 1833 was the first year the choice for that office was made by direct popular vote. Previously,

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<sup>59</sup>Taylor, Hundred Year Book, pp. 195, 198; Wolfe, Guernsey County, pp. 101-02.

<sup>60</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, September 8, 29, October 20, 1832.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., October 13, 20, 1832.

the legislature had selected the occupant.<sup>62</sup>

The next four years were exceedingly busy ones for the new prosecuting attorney, who served two two-year terms. During most sessions of the common pleas court he appeared in his public capacity or as a private attorney in at least one-third of the civil cases tried. In the September Term, 1834, for instance, he participated in thirty-one of the seventy-six cases presented and in forty-three of the 113 heard in the March Term, 1835. He was also involved in seven of eighteen cases before the state Supreme Court in its October Term in 1834 at St. Clairsville and eight of twenty cases in the October Term in 1835.<sup>63</sup> So impressive was Shannon's performance as prosecuting attorney during his first term that, when he indicated a desire to run for another term, both the Democrats and the Whigs nominated him for the office.<sup>64</sup> Such bipartisan support at a time of intense political rivalry in Belmont County and across the nation was rather remarkable. The St. Clairsville Gazette commented about Shannon's nomination:

Unlike the most of mankind, his superior faculty for making friends has so ingratiated him into the good graces of the people, that opposition to him would be worse than useless. To say his abilities as a jurist stand at the top of his profession would be but a reiteration of every day's declaration.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., August 17, October 12, 1833; W. P. A., Belmont County Inventory, p. 171.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 171, 294; Belmont County C. A. D., VI (1833-1837); Ohio Supreme Court, B. C. A. D., I (1804-1846), pp. 105-42.

<sup>64</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, August 22, September 19, 1835.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., August 22, 1835.

During Shannon's term as prosecuting attorney, Belmont's Democrats apparently devoted much effort to accumulating power within the ranks of the state party organization. The fruits of those labors were first significantly demonstrated in 1834 when William Kennon was elected president of the annual state convention held in Columbus on January 8. He also served in May, 1835, as a delegate to the national Democratic Convention in Baltimore.<sup>66</sup>

The following year, Shannon received his first, albeit modest, statewide exposure to the Ohio Democracy while acting as a delegate to the January state convention. A delegate from each of the state's nineteen congressional districts was appointed a vice president of the convention and seated on the main platform at the front of the assembly hall. Shannon was the Eleventh District's choice for that honor. With his huge six feet, six inch frame placed on such prominent display, he surely drew the attention of many of those present and impressed his name and appearance upon their memories for future reference.<sup>67</sup>

Shannon seems to have concentrated on his legal responsibilities during the remainder of 1836 and most of 1837. In the meantime, Thomas Shannon chose to end several years absence from public office by running in 1837 for the Ohio Senate. He handily defeated Joseph Ramage in the October elections.<sup>68</sup> Soon thereafter Wilson Shannon decided to conclude his extended apprenticeship in county politics.

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., January 18, 1834, May 25, 1835.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., January 23, 1836.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., September 9, October 14, 1837.

His credentials as a successful political manager and campaigner were well established after a decade of leading the county's Jacksonians and he decided to test his capabilities in a much larger political arena. The lure of political life in the state capital, in fact, had become irresistible.

## Chapter II

### GOVERNOR OF OHIO, 1838-1840

Wilson Shannon was the second Democratic governor of Ohio. Robert Lucas, elected in 1832, was the first successful Jacksonian candidate. Lucas retired from office in 1836 after serving two terms<sup>1</sup> and was succeeded by the state's first Whig governor, former congressman Joseph Vance. Vance easily defeated the Democratic candidate in 1836, Eli Baldwin.

Having served four terms in the Ohio House and seven terms in Congress, Vance was a knowledgeable politician who proved to be a capable state chief executive.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, several leading Democrats were eager to challenge him in 1838. The state's economic difficulties, induced especially by the Panic of 1837, were blamed by Ohioans primarily upon the Whigs. It was politically disadvantageous in 1837-1838 to be closely identified with the state's leading financial interests. Ohio Democratic editors, therefore, repeatedly noted that most bankers were Whigs and that the Whig governor and the Whig majority in the General Assembly

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<sup>1</sup>S. Winifred Smith, "Robert Lucas," The Governors of Ohio (2d ed.; Columbus, 1969), pp. 36-37.

<sup>2</sup>S. Winifred Smith, "Joseph Vance," ibid., pp. 40-41.

advocated probank policies. The suspension of specie payments in the spring of 1837 by banks in Ohio and across the nation was emphasized by the Jacksonians as clear evidence of the unreliable, even treacherous nature of the bank "monopolists" and of their willingness to pursue any course to protect their own interests.<sup>3</sup>

Convinced that a gubernatorial campaign based upon anti-bank themes would ensure victory in 1838, Ohio's Democrats began serious consideration in November of the merits of the various candidates suggested by county conventions and in the press.<sup>4</sup> It may well be that party members were guided, in part, in their deliberations by the same considerations as those listed in 1844 by Benjamin Stanton of Bellefontaine. Writing to his favorite potential candidate, the prominent Cincinnati Whig, Timothy Walker, Stanton noted that, in addition to being a first-rate stump speaker and unincumbered by past political sins, the ideal candidate should be young, ". . . have a good constitution, and . . . be able to stand the labor . . . ." Stanton apologetically added, "I hope you will consider it no offense that in enumerating the qualifications for a candidate for Governor, I name pretty much the same that I would in selecting a drayhorse."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 12, 22, December 5, 8, 28, 1837, January 12, 30, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, September 2, October 7, 1837, March 17, 1838; William Gerald Shade, Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865 (Detroit, 1972) pp. 44-52, 56-62, 79-83; James Roger Sharp, The Jacksonians Versus the Banks: Politics in the States After 1837 (New York, 1970), pp. 9-11, 124-26; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 328-48.

<sup>4</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 1, 8, 12, 14, 25, 28, 1837; St. Clairsville Gazette, November 19, 25, December 2, 23, 30, 1837.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Stanton to Timothy Walker, February 6, 1844, Timothy Walker Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society.

Wilson Shannon's relatives and friends apparently thought that he exhibited the qualities of a good drayhorse who could rescue the state from the clutches of Joseph Vance and the Whigs. Since Shannon had held only one public office prior to 1838, prosecuting attorney for Belmont County, and was not well known outside of his own congressional district, his decision to run for governor was quite audacious, to say the least. The achievements that followed, three consecutive gubernatorial nominations and two election victories, proved that the decision was neither ill-advised nor unwarranted in terms of the candidate's capabilities. He demonstrated beyond question that his aptitude for politics and his earlier county political apprenticeship had prepared him well for high public office as he and his supporters skillfully secured the 1838 gubernatorial nomination for him and established themselves as a powerful influence in the Ohio Democracy for nearly a decade.<sup>6</sup>

The public aspect of Shannon's efforts to secure the Democrat nomination was inaugurated in the November 19, 1837, issue of the St. Clairsville Gazette. Editor John Irons wrote:

This section of the State has, perhaps, as strong a claim to the candidate as any other, provided we present as good a man. Under this impression, we would recommend WILSON SHANNON, Esq., of St. Clairsville, to the consideration of our political friends for the dignified station. A more sterling democrat or more competent public officer could not be found. What says the Democracy of Ohio?

Belmont County's nominee joined a list of prospects which included several of the state's most experienced and respected

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<sup>6</sup>Edgar A. Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio, 1840-1850," O. A. H. Quar., XXXVII (1928), 456, 501-04, 508-14, 524-36, 548-52, 563, 571-74; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 130-51.



politicians. Among those under consideration were Colonel Samuel Spangler, a longtime state senator from Fairfield County; John A. Bryan, state auditor since 1836; Congressman Thomas L. Hamer, a former speaker of the Ohio House; former Congressman John Thompson of Columbiana County; and state senator Elijah Vance of Butler County, twice speaker of the Ohio Senate.<sup>7</sup> Shannon's qualifications seemed meager indeed alongside the distinguished records of his competitors. Nevertheless, a favorable response to his candidacy appeared in several Democratic newspapers.

The Stark County Democrat declared that Shannon was "a good man and true."<sup>8</sup> The Cadiz Sentinel asserted that he was "well and favorably known in Harrison County,"<sup>9</sup> and the Cincinnati Journal assured its readers that "those who know Mr. Shannon speak in high terms of him."<sup>10</sup>

The leading Democratic press organ in the state was Samuel Medary's Ohio Statesman, published in Columbus.<sup>11</sup> A significant development on Shannon's behalf, therefore, was the appearance of a laudatory article by "Buckeye" in the December 25 issue of the Statesman. After claiming that Shannon would be "the next governor

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<sup>7</sup>Ohio Statesman, December 1, 8, 12, 14, 28, 1837; Taylor, Ohio Statesman and Hundred Year Book, pp. 162-63, 200-04; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 347.

<sup>8</sup>Quoted in St. Clairsville Gazette, December 2, 1837.

<sup>9</sup>Quoted in ibid., December 23, 1837.

<sup>10</sup>Quoted in ibid., December 2, 1837.

<sup>11</sup>Helen P. Dorn, "Samuel Medary--Journalist and Politician, 1801-1864," O. A. H. Quar., LIII (1944), 17.

of Ohio," the writer stated:

He is one of those native sons of this state, who, without patrimony, has acquired by his own application a liberal education, and by his untiring exertions has succeeded in obtaining a respectable standing as a lawyer and a gentleman amongst the members of his profession. As a politician, his course has not been boisterous, but decided and unwavering on the side of Equal Rights and Democratic principles. To esteem, it is but necessary to know him; and from present feeling amongst the Democratic party, he is the most prominent man spoken of, and will most likely receive the nomination . . . .

Among the Democratic contenders, only Bryan and Spangler received enough public support to pose a threat to Shannon's aspirations.<sup>12</sup> Bryan's prospects dwindled when it became generally known, prior to the January 8 state convention, that he had once edited a Federalist newspaper in New York state.<sup>13</sup> Spangler's Achilles heel was bared in two articles in the Ohio Statesman which denounced him for opposing the desires of his Democratic colleagues in the Ohio Senate by voting against resolutions making bank stockholders individually liable for their banks' debts.<sup>14</sup> While support for his opponents steadily eroded, Shannon's campaign for the nomination apparently progressed smoothly and effectively. Although the assumption cannot be documented, it seems obvious that Shannon's Belmont County Democratic coterie had engaged in much shrewd preliminary planning and cultivation of party leaders throughout the state during the latter part of 1837.

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<sup>12</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 12, 14, 1837, January 3, 5, 1838.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., February 14, 1838; John A. Bryan to Martin Van Buren, February 19, 1838, Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy).

<sup>14</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 6, 1838.

Nearly 800 Democratic delegates convened in Columbus on January 8, 1838, to nominate a gubernatorial candidate and reaffirm the prevailing Jacksonian dogmas. The date marked the twenty-third anniversary of Andrew Jackson's great victory over the British in the Battle of New Orleans. Two of the delegates, Thomas Shannon of Belmont County and George Manypenny, a new resident of Muskingham County, undoubtedly observed the proceedings in the Eagle Theater with special anticipation. Judge Eber W. Hubbard of Lorain was elected president of the convention at the opening session on January 8, and various minor preliminary matters were processed.<sup>15</sup>

At 9:30 A.M. on January 9, Judge Hubbard gaveled the convention to order. The delegates immediately directed their attention to the selection of their candidate for governor. Only the three most active aspirants were nominated and the issue was determined on the first ballot. Thirty-one votes were cast for Shannon, sixteen for Spangler, and twelve for Bryan. Upon the recommendation of spokesmen for Spangler and Bryan, the convention nominated Shannon by acclamation. The spirit of harmony among the delegates that Medary had called for in an editorial in the January 7 issue of the Ohio Statesman seemed to prevail at the convention.

Following the balloting, a committee of three delegates escorted Shannon into the hall where he was introduced to the convention by Hubbard. When the cheering subsided, the nominee addressed

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<sup>15</sup> Reports of the arrival of the delegates and of the convention's opening session are in ibid., January 8, 9, 1838. A list of the delegates is in ibid., January 12, 1838. For another report of the proceedings see St. Clairsville Gazette, January 20, 1838.

the delegates " . . . in a clear, forcible, and eloquent manner, being frequently interrupted by repeated bursts of applause." The committee on resolutions then presented thirteen items which were readily approved. The resolutions praised President Martin Van Buren's leadership, his proposal for an Independent Treasury to handle the government's financial operations, and the strict construction principles of the Virginia Resolutions of 1798. The committee's resolutions denounced Governor Vance's "stale" and "inept" doctrines, the probank policies of Whig legislators, and the suspension of specie payments in 1837 by Ohio's banks. Lastly, one of the resolutions enunciated the Democratic party's chief campaign theme: "We ask . . . for BANK REFORM--a thorough, a radical reform, which we believe to be demanded by the public voice--the public interest, and the public liberty."<sup>16</sup> The resolutions formed a platform wholly compatible with Shannon's views and, as was subsequently demonstrated, served him well in the campaign.<sup>17</sup>

Democratic press reactions to the darkhorse nomination of Wilson Shannon were exceedingly enthusiastic. Sam Medary assured his readers that "no one can become acquainted with Wilson Shannon, but must feel a warm and ardent attachment for him, personally as well as politically . . . ." In a tactically significant comment, Medary wrote approvingly about Shannon's lack of experience in public office. The nominee had not " . . . sucked at the Treasury tit all

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<sup>16</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 12, 1838.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., January 23, 1838; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 348-50.

his lifetime, nor sat on a board at West Point at the public expense . . . like a Bank executive I know."<sup>18</sup> Such a statement, designed to convert one of Shannon's most glaring deficiencies into a positive attribute, proved to be an effective campaign ploy.

On January 23, Medary published an anonymously authored biographical sketch of Shannon in the Ohio Statesman. The article extolled Shannon's humble, log cabin origins, outlined the distinguished accomplishments of his brothers, and summarized the political credo which he faithfully, resolutely adhered to throughout his public career in Ohio.

Mr. S. is a Democrat of the Jefferson school; he believes that the objects for which the General Government were formed, are few and simple--that it should confine its action to the powers expressly delegated--and depreciates the exercise of doubtful powers as endangering the stability of our happy union.

As regards matters of State policy, he may emphatically be called an Ohioan.

He is in favor of an enlightened and liberal school system, as the main foundation of our prosperity and greatness.

He is in favor of our general system of internal improvements, progressing steadily, but prudently--and diffusing its benefits as equally as possible to all parts of the State.

While in favor of a well digested Banking system--he is at the same time in favor of a reform in our present State Bank system--a reform, which while it presents to the capitalist a safe and sufficiently profitable investment, will, at the same time, give to the holders of Bank paper greater security than they now possess against loss.

In fine, he is in favor of an enlightened and liberal State policy--such a policy as is worthy the position of this great State in the confederacy.

In addition to being reprinted in various Democratic newspapers, the sketch appeared in the leading Whig journals.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 10, 1838.

<sup>19</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, February 3, 1838; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, January 29, 1838; Columbus Ohio State Journal, January 26, 1838.

Because Shannon was a relatively unknown figure to most of the Ohio Democracy, was unburdened by past political sins, and professed doctrines endorsed by the vast majority of Jacksonians, there probably was some validity to the assertion in the St. Clairsville Gazette that ". . . the nominee . . . is one upon whom the whole Democracy of this great State can cordially unite, and to whom they can give their zealous and undivided support."<sup>20</sup> Echoing those sentiments, President Van Buren's organ, the Washington Globe, extravagantly claimed that Shannon would bring ". . . more personal popularity to the support of the principles of his party than could any other man in the state." The Globe was particularly pleased that "the imported money doctrine, rearing its head in the shape of monopolies in every section, and overshadowing the agricultural interests, from which they suck the blood that fattens them, has no place in his creed."<sup>21</sup> Democrat editorialists, in addition to praising Shannon's advocacy of bank reform, noted proudly that he was the state's first native son to be nominated for governor. Campaign strategists subsequently focused their publicity upon those two points, Shannon's commitment to bank reform and his Ohio birth.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, January 13, 1838. Also see James Hampson to Thomas L. Hamer, December 23, 1837, Maria D. Coffinberry Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

<sup>21</sup> Washington Daily Globe, January 17, 1838.

<sup>22</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 12, 31, February 2, 3, 5, July 3, 20, August 25, September 4, 1838; Ohio Eagle, n. d., quoted in ibid., January 18, 1838; Zanesville Aurora, n. d., and Crawford Republican, n. d., quoted in ibid., January 29, 1838; Wooster Advocate, n. d., Wooster Telegraph, n. d., and Holmes County Republican, n. d., quoted in ibid., January 31, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, January 13, 20, April 21, August 4, 25, September 16, 1838.

The response of Ohio's Whig editors to Shannon's nomination was not as critical as might have been expected. The chief Whig organ in Columbus, the Ohio State Journal, grudgingly admitted that the "Vanocrats" could have made a worse choice. Editor John Gallagher claimed, however, that Samuel Spangler would have been a more formidable opponent, declared that the candidate had been chosen " . . . solely with a view to the gaining of the votes of the States Rights party of Ohio," and referred derisively to Shannon as the "Leatherwood Lawyer." Gallagher's assessment of Shannon snidely concluded: "His obscure position has tended to confine a knowledge of his superior recommendations to a limited circle."<sup>23</sup>

Charles Hammond's Cincinnati Gazette was Ohio's most influential Whig journal. Hammond published a rather ambivalent evaluation of his former legal apprentice. First of all, he criticized the Shannon brothers in general for making a practice of "living by public employ." The youngest Shannon brother, Hammond contended, was nothing more than a "respectable mediocre," having had only "fair" success as a lawyer. Furthermore, the Democratic nominee was "little conversant with public affairs." "Nevertheless," Hammond acknowledged, "he is competent to discharge the duties of Governor without discredit to those who have selected him for that station. The Whigs should so hold him, and treat him respectfully, in the canvas."<sup>24</sup> Other Whig editors primarily reiterated throughout the

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<sup>23</sup> Ohio State Journal, January 10, 1838.

<sup>24</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, January 29, 1838.

campaign the views expressed by Hammond and Gallagher in their January editorials.<sup>25</sup>

Ohio's Whigs did not hold their state convention until May 31. Governor Joseph Vance was renominated without opposition.<sup>26</sup> A native of Pennsylvania, Vance had moved to Ohio in 1801. He engaged in business in Urbana, served four terms in the Ohio House (1812-1814, 1815-1816, 1818-1820), and was elected to the United States House of Representatives for seven consecutive terms (1821-1835).<sup>27</sup> In addition to favoring Henry Clay's nationalistic "American System," Vance advocated the usefulness and interdependence of all segments of the American economy--agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing. Banks and their credit system were beneficial, democratizing economic agents, he maintained. The credit system allowed states and private individuals to build internal improvements and establish colleges; the poor could borrow to educate themselves or start a business; and countless other advantages accrued to society because of the availability of credit.<sup>28</sup> Vance's admiration for the existing banking system was not unqualified, however. He warned the legislature in 1837 about the "growing evil" in Ohio of

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<sup>25</sup> Belmont Chronicle, April 24, August 24, 1838; Cleveland Herald, n. d., quoted in Cincinnati Gazette, July 19, 1838; Maumee Express, n. d., quoted in Ohio State Journal, August 14, 1838; Newark Gazette, n. d., quoted in ibid., August 28, 1838.

<sup>26</sup> Zanesville Aurora, n. d., quoted in Ohio Statesman, June 15, 1838.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, "Joseph Vance," pp. 39-41.

<sup>28</sup> Ohio State Journal, December 16, 1836, December 5, 1837; Shade, Banks or No Banks, pp. 80-83.



excessive corporate power and privileges. In general, Vance's economic viewpoints were typical of the moderate Whig politicians of the late 1830's and 1840's.<sup>29</sup>

The Ohio electorate had decidedly contrasting gubernatorial choices before it in 1838. The Whigs offered a politically experienced, business oriented, probank candidate, while the Democrat presented a young, politically inexperienced, bank reform challenger. According to the Buckeye Democrat, it was "Shannon and Democracy" versus "Vance and federal aristocracy."<sup>30</sup> Despite public interest in such controversial matters as slavery and internal improvements, the obsession of the Jacksonians with banking and currency questions forced all other issues almost totally out of campaign discussions and debates. The Ohio Statesman constantly proclaimed that the only "true issue" was bank reform.<sup>31</sup> Such an emphasis was not unique to Ohio, of course. The closely related banking and currency questions proved to be the dominant subjects of national political debate during the Jacksonian era.<sup>32</sup>

Democrats in Ohio and elsewhere had exhibited an ambivalent attitude toward banking and currency practices prior to the Panic of 1837. Andrew Jackson had established an antibank, hard money policy as a central feature of his party's credo. To the orthodox

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 80-81; Ohio State Journal, December 5, 1837.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Ohio Statesman, June 22, 1838.

<sup>31</sup> Ohio Statesman, April 20, 25, July 20, 27, August 4, 18, 1838; Shade, Banks or No Banks, pp. 82-83.

<sup>32</sup> Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, p. 4.

Jacksonians, banks were corporate institutions whose directors, mostly Whigs, endeavored to monopolize wealth and power in America in order to promote the interests of a privileged few.<sup>33</sup> Many Jacksonians were offended, furthermore, by the willingness of the aristocratic Whig bankers to engage in cooperative business ventures with foreign financiers, particularly British banking interests. Although stemming from several sources, anti-British sentiment in the United States was significantly intensified as a result of the unsuccessful Canadian Rebellion of 1837-1838. Many Ohioans and other Americans became personally involved in the efforts of the rebels to separate from England. In addition, pressures exerted by British financial interests upon American businessmen were considered a partial cause of the Panic of 1837.<sup>34</sup>

The antibank, hard money Jacksonians (also known as "radicals" and "Locofocos") considered the paper currency issued almost at will by American bankers as a major exploitative device of the financial elites to manipulate economic conditions. Democratic spokesmen constantly complained about the power bankers had to expand or contract their currency issues regardless of the needs of the society

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<sup>33</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 3, 10, 30, August 4, 11, 25, September 4, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, November 25, 1837, March 17, August 4, 25, September 16, 25, 1838; Washington Globe, August 7, September 25, 1838; Shade, Banks or No Banks, pp. 40-52, 56-58; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 3-8, 14-20.

<sup>34</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 12, August 4, 18, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, August 4, October 2, 1838; James C. Curtis, The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1844 (Lexington, Kentucky, 1970), pp. 170-81; Shade, Banks or No Banks, pp. 43-47; Weissenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 356-62.

as a whole. The radicals maintained that the only reliable, constitutionally authorized currency was specie (gold and silver) and that the elimination of paper currency would correct many of the nation's economic ills.<sup>35</sup>

The radical position was opposed by a sizeable minority in the party of conservative, soft money, probank men. These conservatives were caught up in the booming entrepreneurial spirit of the 1830's and engaged in every phase of America's business and banking operations. For instance, the largest banking institution in Ohio in 1838, the Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company, was headed by a prominent Democrat, Micajah T. Williams, and had three other Democrats on its board of directors. The conservatives contended that banks, with their credit and investment facilities, and with their flexible currency, were essential to the continued healthy growth of the economy. Nevertheless, Andrew Jackson's opposition to a national bank was upheld by the conservatives. They insisted only on the maintenance of state or local banks. Finally, the conservatives opposed the return to a specie currency because there was not enough gold and silver available to provide an adequate circulating medium for the economy.<sup>36</sup> Although an ardent critic of many banking practices and a vigorous advocate of bank reform,

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<sup>35</sup>Ohio Statesman, July 10, 21, August 11, 25, October 23, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, August 4, 25, 1838; Shade, Banks or No Banks, pp. 45-50; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 7-8, 14-19.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 4, 6, 10-17; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 308-11.

Wilson Shannon was included in the ranks of the Democratic conservatives. He was basically a political pragmatist, not an ideologue. He considered banks and some paper currency to be necessary evils in the operations of a viable state and national economy.<sup>37</sup>

During the 1820's and 1830's, many individuals, groups, and state governments engaged in extravagant investments in internal improvements, in unwise land speculations, and in a generally undisciplined economic expansion which could not be sustained by the available financial resources. The result was a collapse of the nation's economy in 1837. Many banks and businesses closed and the banks that remained open refused, for a time, to exchange gold and silver specie for bank notes. Democratic radicals charged that the collapse was engendered by the unscrupulous conduct of America's bankers. Even Democratic conservatives admitted that a major revision of the prevailing banking practices was in order. Thus, while the Panic of 1837 strengthened the already dominant radical wing of the party, both radical and conservative Democrats could and did readily unite on a platform of "bank reform" for the political contests in 1838. The exceedingly serious ideological split in Ohio's Jacksonian ranks and across the nation was, fortunately for Wilson Shannon and and other Democratic candidates, temporarily bridged.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 15, 130-32; Ohio Statesman, July 21, December 14, 1838.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., January 12, October 23, 1838; Cincinnati Gazette, August 2, 7, 1838; Harry N. Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era: A Case Study of Government and the Economy, 1820-1861 (Athens, Ohio, 1969), pp. 36-211; Shade, Banks or No Banks, pp. 20-55; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 5-19, 25-36, 123-26; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 278-82, 333-50.

A statewide network of forty-three Democratic newspapers afforded ample opportunity to Shannon to have his name and viewpoints placed constantly before the electorate during the 1838 campaign.<sup>39</sup> As editor of the party's "flagship" organ in Columbus, the Ohio Statesman, Sam Medary played a key role in promoting Shannon's political prospects. By the beginning of 1838, Medary had established himself as the most influential Democratic editor in the state. The rest of the party press followed many of his editorial leads, while Whig journalists deemed it necessary to devote many columns to dissecting his assertions. He wrote in a clear, fluent, and vigorous prose style. He assailed the political opposition in the most partisan, polemical terms at his command. Both in print and on the stump, Medary was a masterful, resourceful debater. He was a leading spokesman for radical economic viewpoints, but maintained a conciliatory attitude toward Democratic conservatives until the early 1840's.<sup>40</sup> Among the other Democratic editors, only Moses Dawson of the Cincinnati Advertiser seems to have approached Medary's talents, but Dawson did not command comparable statewide influence.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ohio Statesman, January 13, 1838.

<sup>40</sup>Dorn, "Samuel Medary," pp. 15-18, 38; Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," pp. 454-57, 504, 524-25, 533-34; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 19-20. For examples of Medary's partisan style and viewpoints see Ohio Statesman, April 20, May 25, August 11, 18, 1838, April 16, June 28, July 19, September 10, October 19, 1839, May 31, July 15, October 3, 21, 1842, January 10, 14, 20, February 1, 6, 1843. For Whig press attacks on Medary see Ohio State Journal, July 2, August 9, 20, 1839, February 12, 14, March 3, April 10, May 19, 1840.

<sup>41</sup>Virginius C. Hall, "Moses Dawson, Chronic Belligerent," Bulletin of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio, XV (1957), 177-83; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 127-32; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 353-54.

Second only to Medary in his influence as an editor upon Wilson Shannon's political career was Dr. John Dunham. He replaced John Irons as editor of the St. Clairsville Gazette in March, 1838. A talented, eloquent, fiercely partisan writer, Dunham skillfully championed Shannon's political interests until he left St. Clairsville in 1845.<sup>42</sup>

July 4 seems to have been the date on which both Whigs and Democrats launched campaigns for their candidates in the fall elections. Prominent Ohio politicians addressed huge throngs at various holiday gatherings across the state. Shannon was the featured speaker at Massillon. According to the Ohio Statesman, he spoke to over 4,000 attentive citizens for an hour on the subject of bank reform, his central campaign theme.<sup>43</sup> Three days later, at Ravenna, he repeated his bank reform speech. His remarks were recorded in full on that occasion and published in the Statesman and the St. Clairsville Gazette.<sup>44</sup>

The address at Ravenna was a significant milestone in Shannon's political advancement. It brought him his first national recognition. A summary of his remarks, accompanied by a laudatory editorial, appeared in the August 7 issue of the Washington Globe.

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<sup>42</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, March 10, August 11, October 19, 1838, December 7, 21, 1839, May 16, October 10, 1840, June 24, 1842, January 27, December 15, 30, 1843, March 15, 1844, June 17, 24, July 8, 1845.

<sup>43</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 10, 13, 1838; Cincinnati Gazette, July 12, 1838.

<sup>44</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 20, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, July 21, 1838.

Although scarcely innovative in its content, the address provided impressive evidence to all Ohioans that Shannon could deliver an excellent speech and that he was as conversant with public affairs as other politicians in the campaign. Most importantly, at Ravenna he set forth, in more complete detail than he had previously, the fundamental views and policies concerning banking and the currency which, with minimal alterations, guided his political course on those issues for the next decade.

In his remarks, the Democratic candidate affirmed his support for the Jeffersonian principle of strict construction of the Constitution, denounced Nicholas Biddle's United States Bank as unconstitutional, praised Van Buren's Independent Treasury proposal, and warned his audience that there was an alliance between the nation's bankers and the Whig party which constituted " . . . a deadly enemy . . . penetrating the vitals of our political independence." He charged that, in Ohio, the bank-Whig alliance had caused the Whig-dominated legislature of 1837-38 to reject all bank reform measures even though many Whigs professed support for the reforms suggested. Shannon then enunciated the specific reform proposals he and other Democratic leaders deemed essential. He recommended that bank stockholders be made personally liable for an appropriate proportion of the debts of their banks, that banks be required to increase their specie reserves in proportion to the amount of bank notes issued to ensure a more stable currency, that the legislature assume the power to alter or repeal bank charters, that stockholders and directors not be allowed to borrow from their

own banks, and, finally, that all bank notes under five dollars in value be eliminated. He vehemently denied Whig allegations that the Democrats intended eventually to destroy all banks. "Banks are not created, or ought not to be created, for private emolument, and the individual benefit of their stockholders alone, but are established for the public benefit, and to attain this object I am in favor of them."<sup>45</sup>

Shannon's opinions echoed those professed by radical party leaders and those presented in the Democratic State Central Committee's "address" to the people of Ohio published in the Ohio Statesman on July 3.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Shannon, however, radicals such as Sam Medary actually were "bank destructionists" masquerading temporarily as bank reformers while awaiting a more propitious time to pursue their ultimate objective. This fundamental divergence of opinion between many radicals and their candidate for governor remained submerged from public view during the campaign.<sup>47</sup>

During July, August, and September, Shannon energetically traversed the state giving speeches and trying to make himself known to as many voters as possible. At Ravenna and elsewhere, he exhibited the capabilities already familiar to his Belmont County admirers. He was, first of all, an excellent stump speaker and political

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<sup>45</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 20, 1838, contains the most legible copy of the speech.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., January 12, April 20, July 20, August 18, 1838; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 14-21, 124-27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-18, 21-22; St. Clairsville Gazette, December 23, 30, 1842, December 30, 1843.



debater. While he was not a flowery orator, his "plain, ungarished style" and carefully reasoned arguments apparently proved both appealing and persuasive to his audiences. Usually addressing crowds of several thousand persons for one or two hours, the candidate demonstrated that he had an excellent grasp of all the various political concerns of his day.<sup>48</sup> B. B. Taylor, a Democratic legislator, heard Shannon address a crowd of over 4,000 people at Mount Vernon on September 8. Taylor wrote that the candidate spoke ". . . with energy, eloquence and effect. He showed them in that effort, how greatly superior in talent and every statesmanlike qualification he is to the present . . . Governor, Joseph Vance."<sup>49</sup> It should also be noted that Shannon's warm, affable personality seemed to secure friends and votes for him wherever he went.<sup>50</sup>

As the campaign intensified in August, Shannon was joined on the stump by United States Senator William Allen. Allen had been elected to the office a year earlier by the legislature to replace the incumbent Whig, Thomas Ewing. Senator Allen was one of the most popular, eloquent orators in the state. He and Shannon occasionally campaigned together, but they usually traveled different circuits. For both speakers, the unrelenting theme was that the

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<sup>48</sup>For reports and evaluations of Shannon's campaign see ibid., August 4, 11, 18, 25, September 16, 1838; Ohio Statesman, July 10, 17, 20, August 10, 17, 21, September 11, 1838; Jacob Medary, Jr., to Allen G. Thurman, October 5, 1838, Allen G. Thurman Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>49</sup>B. B. Taylor to Allen G. Thurman, September 11, 1838, ibid.

<sup>50</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, August 4, 1838; Ohio Statesman, August 10, 1838.

abuses of state and national banking interests had caused the Panic of 1837 and the economic miseries following thereafter. The refusal of Whig politicians to curb those abuses could only be remedied by electing Democrats to every public office in the land.<sup>51</sup>

In the Whig political ranks, meanwhile, a rather strange campaign procedure evolved. For reasons unknown, Governor Vance disdained the campaign trail. He apparently preferred to let his long public record speak for itself.<sup>52</sup> In his stead, two of the best known Whig spokesmen in Ohio entered the fray, former Senator Thomas Ewing and the prominent Whig presidential contender, William Henry Harrison. Neither man appeared in public nearly as frequently as Shannon and Allen.<sup>53</sup> The only direct confrontation between any of the major opposing figures active in the canvass occurred in St. Clairsville on September 27, when Allen debated Ewing. Allen claimed a "splendid victory" over his opponent and reported that Ewing had rejected proposals for additional debates.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Reginald C. McGrane, "William Allen," Governors of Ohio, p. 102; Reginald C. McGrane, William Allen: A Study in Western Democracy (Columbus, 1925), pp. 77-80; William Allen to Allen G. Thurman, July 10, September 23, October 4, 1838, Thurman Papers; Moses Dawson to Andrew Jackson, August 28, 1838, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy); Ohio Statesman, August 4, 8, 21, 31, September 5, 11, 1838.

<sup>52</sup>There is no indication in either of the state's leading Whig journals, the Ohio State Journal and the Cincinnati Gazette, that Vance was present at any campaign event in 1838.

<sup>53</sup>Cincinnati Gazette, July 12, August 2, 1838; Ohio State Journal, December 21, 1838; Lyman W. Hall to Thomas Ewing, August 29, 1838, J. L. Miller to Ewing, September 14, 1838, Thomas Ewing Family Papers, Library of Congress; McGrane, William Allen, pp. 78-79.

<sup>54</sup>William Allen to Allen G. Thurman, October 4, 1838, Thurman Papers.

The Whig State Central Committee published an "address" to the Ohio electorate during the first week of September. Devoid of specific policy recommendations, the address was devoted to a very generally stated attack upon the national administration. The substance of the charges was that Democrats were willing to do anything to secure political power and public office.<sup>55</sup> That bland, ineffectual statement seemed to typify the entire state Whig campaign. Whig spokesmen evidently had relatively limited success in convincing the voters that only the wise economic management of Governor Vance and the Whig-dominated legislature had kept Ohio from suffering, in 1837-1838, many of the economic ills created by the misguided fiscal policies of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren.<sup>56</sup> The Whig press assailed Shannon as a Van Buren "lackey" who was "practicing all the low arts of the . . . demagogue" as he traversed the state "like a peddler of wares."<sup>57</sup> Also, his youth and inexperience were constantly contrasted with Vance's distinguished public record.<sup>58</sup> As with other Whig campaign efforts, the press assault upon Shannon apparently failed to have a major impact

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<sup>55</sup> Ohio State Journal, September 4, 1838.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., February 13, July 13, September 4, 21, 1838; Cincinnati Gazette, August 7, 8, 1838.

<sup>57</sup> Mt. Vernon Watchman, n. d., quoted in Belmont Chronicle, September 25, 1838. Also see ibid., August 28, September 18, 1838; Cincinnati Gazette, August 7, 1838; Ohio State Journal, August 14, 1838.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., January 16, February 13, August 14, 1838; Cincinnati Gazette, January 29, July 12, 1838; Belmont Chronicle, April 24, 1838.

upon the electorate.<sup>59</sup>

The Democrats, on the other hand, had no difficulty in developing hard-hitting criticisms to level against the opposition. The Whigs, their adversaries charged, were allied with the monopolistic "money power," which included British as well as American financial interests. The last Whig legislature had raised taxes in the state by twenty-five percent. Whig ranks were filled with troublemaking abolitionists.<sup>60</sup> Governor Vance, the Democrats claimed, was a drunkard, was corrupted by his ownership of stock in the Urbana Bank, and was so unpatriotic as to raise BRITISH Durham bulls on his farm! Furthermore, he continued to defend his banker friends even after their mismanagement of economic affairs was indisputably revealed by the suspension of specie payments in 1837 and, again, in early 1838.<sup>61</sup>

Both Democratic and Whig politicians were concerned about the influence upon the 1838 elections of Ohio's steadily growing antislavery forces, estimated to number about 20,000 adherents. The antislavery men refused to act politically as a group and endorse candidates for office. With a majority of their members in the Whig party, however, they exerted great pressure upon Whig

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<sup>59</sup> Ohio State Journal, December 21, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, November 3, 1838; J. J. Faran to Allen G. Thurman, September 17, 1838, Jacob Medary, Jr., to Thurman, October 5, 1838, Thurman Papers.

<sup>60</sup> Ohio Statesman, April 13, 20, June 5, July 3, 27, August 4, 11, 18, 1838; St. Clairsville Gazette, August 4, 18, September 16, 1838.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., August 4, 11, September 16, October 2, 1838; Ohio Statesman, April 25, June 5, 19, August 4, 11, 18, 25, 1838.

candidates to advocate their policies. Such tactics caused considerable dissension and resentment within Whig ranks because close party identification with the anti-slavery interests was likely to alienate many more Buckeye voters than it would gain.<sup>62</sup>

Ohio's underground railroad activity produced an incident in early September which proved to be quite damaging to Vance's election prospects. John B. Mahan, a Brown County clergyman, assisted fifteen slaves who fled from Kentucky to freedom in Canada. Under the provisions of the national Fugitive Slave Law, Governor James Clark of Kentucky demanded that Mahan, a former resident of that state, be extradited for prosecution. The extradition authority rested with Vance and he complied with Clark's request. At Mahan's trial in October, the judge ruled that Mahan had not assisted in the escape in Kentucky and had been out of the state for too many years to be subjected to its laws in the particular case before the court. The jury declared Mahan innocent and he was returned to Ohio.<sup>63</sup>

Led by Gamaliel Bailey's Philanthropist, the official organ of the Ohio State Antislavery Society, antislavery spokesman vehemently castigated Vance for his spinelessness in yielding to Clark's request.<sup>64</sup> Even Sam Medary, a states' rights foe of

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<sup>62</sup>Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 350, 375-83; Cincinnati Philanthropist, March 13, 27, July 31, August 21, October 2, 23, 1838.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., October 23, December 11, 1838; Ohio State Journal, October 9, 26, 1838; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 350.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.; Cincinnati Philanthropist, October 2, 23, December 11, 1838.

abolitionism, could not resist such an appealing opportunity to make political hay. He joined with the antislavery chorus of critics in denouncing Vance's conduct in the Mahan affair.<sup>65</sup> Unlike Medary, Shannon made no public comments. The most important result of the Mahan imbroglio was that a significant number of outraged antislavery voters either defected to the Democrats or abstained from voting in the October elections.<sup>66</sup> It was a rather incongruous spectacle to observe antislaveryites flocking to the banner of party which, according to the Whigs, was courting Ohio's states' rights interests and whose gubernatorial candidate, Wilson Shannon, was a states' rights Jeffersonian.

When contrasted with the vigorous campaign effort sustained by Shannon and other Democratic leaders, the Whig campaign appeared to be singularly dispirited, anemic, and ineffectual. Many Whigs, nevertheless, were surprised at the results on election day, October 9. In 1836, Vance had triumphed over Eli Baldwin by a 6,000 vote margin. Shannon turned those results around in 1838, defeating the governor by a ballot of 107,884 to 102,158, a margin of over 5,700 votes. The Democrats also regained control of both houses of the legislature and the Whig majority in the state's congressional delegation was converted to a Democrat majority of

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<sup>65</sup>Ohio Statesman, October 6, November 2, 1838.

<sup>66</sup>Jacob Medary, Jr., to Allen G. Thurman, October 5, 1838, Thurman Papers; Cincinnati Philanthropist, October 23, 30, November 3, 1838; Ohio State Journal, December 21, 1838.

four.<sup>67</sup> Thomas Ewing wrote in disgust to his brother, "The Loco Foco victory in Ohio astonished us all, and them not less than us . . . ."<sup>68</sup> The Ohio State Journal despairingly proclaimed: "Routed! Horse and Foot! We, the Whigs of Ohio are beaten, and that most essentially. We have no mitigating circumstances--no saving clauses--no consolation."<sup>69</sup>

The Democrats were, of course, ecstatic. Shannon's chief press spokesman, John Dunham, exulted in large headlines:

The State is safe--and our Country is redeemed from Federalism and Biddleism, and from "solitudes" and Panics. The banner of Democracy is unfurled; the broad stripes and glittering stars are once more visible; the proud Eagle, the emblem of our liberty, is perched on high and the motto of "Shannon and the Sub-Treasury," is seen legibly inscribed by the fingers of the bold and free!<sup>70</sup>

Democratic legislator Thomas Buchanan enthusiastically exclaimed in a letter to Allen G. Thurman, "How we have floored them in a few brief months!" Buchanan admiringly noted that Ohio's Democratic ticket of candidates for state and national office had been carried by a larger average majority than at any other election in the previous eight years.<sup>71</sup> No doubt many Democrats agreed with Sam

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<sup>67</sup>Ohio Statesman, October 19, 23, 30, 1838; Ohio State Journal, October 12, 1838; Thomas Buchanan to Allen G. Thurman, October 22, 1838, Thurman Papers; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 314, 350.

<sup>68</sup>Thomas Ewing to George Ewing, November 20, 1838, Ewing Family Papers.

<sup>69</sup>Ohio State Journal, October 12, 1838.

<sup>70</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, October 19, 1838.

<sup>71</sup>Buchanan to Thurman, October 22, 1838, Thurman Papers.

Medary that Shannon's victory was "a triumph of principle!"<sup>72</sup>

In the election post mortems, Vance's press organ in Columbus, The Political Register, attributed the Whig defeat to "passion and prejudice, a love of novelty, a misunderstanding of the true questions at issue, and the ancient and firmly knotted ties of party . . . ." <sup>73</sup> The Ohio State Journal thought that the governor's reputation had been adversely, though unjustly, affected by Democratic allegations of intemperance. <sup>74</sup> Other apparently significant factors contributing to the Whig debacle included the detrimental influence of the Mahan affair, Vance's failure to campaign, Shannon's impressive performance on the stump, and the effective utilization by the Democrats of the bank reform issue. <sup>75</sup>

Wilson Shannon's triumph was indeed, as John Dunham declared, "Glory enough for one year."<sup>76</sup> Not only was Shannon the first native son to be elected governor of the state, but he was the youngest man ever chosen. Furthermore, unlike all of his predecessors, he attained the office without previously having held a prominent political or

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<sup>72</sup>Ohio Statesman, October 12, 1838.

<sup>73</sup>Quoted in St. Clairsville Gazette, November 3, 1838.

<sup>74</sup>Ohio State Journal, December 21, 1838.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.; Ohio Statesman, October 12, 19, 23, 1838; Jacob Medary, Jr., to Allen G. Thurman, October 5, 1838, Thurman Papers; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 348-50. The Philanthropist, October 23, 1838, claimed that the Democrats were so successful because many Whig antislavery men abstained from voting due to their disgust with Vance's conduct in the Mahan affair. Also see ibid., November 6, 1838.

<sup>76</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, October 19, 1838.



judicial position. As of 1977, he can still claim exclusive proprietorship over all three of the special achievements mentioned. His precedent-setting victory, therefore, remains as remarkable and unduplicated a feat 140 years later as it was in 1838.<sup>77</sup>

Following the election, Shannon enjoyed a few weeks respite in St. Clairsville. On Friday evening, December 7, he arrived with his wife in Columbus to prepare for his inauguration. The couple settled in rooms in the American Hotel, a popular hostelry for politicians of both parties.<sup>78</sup> Shannon stayed there whenever he was in the state capital during his two terms as governor.<sup>79</sup>

The General Assembly convened on the afternoon of December 7 and selected James J. Faran of Cincinnati to be speaker of the House and William Hawkins of Morgan County to serve as speaker of the Senate.<sup>80</sup> Another consequential event immediately prior to Shannon's inauguration was the publication in the Columbus press of President Van Buren's annual message to Congress. The special emphasis in the message was upon the urgent need for congressional legislation to establish an Independent Treasury to handle the government's financial operations and divorce them entirely from the nation's

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<sup>77</sup> Biographical sketches of all of Ohio's governors from 1803 to 1977, with the exception of John Gilligan (1970-1974), are in Governors of Ohio, pp. 1-211. For information on Gilligan see New York Times, November 4, 1970.

<sup>78</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 10, 1838; Cincinnati Gazette, December 15, 1839.

<sup>79</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 10, 1842, November 28, 1843.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., December 10, 1838.

banks.<sup>81</sup> Shannon and other Ohio Democratic spokesmen had expressed support for the proposed agency in their campaign presentations.<sup>82</sup>

On Thursday afternoon, December 13, 1838, a "vast assembly" gathered in the chambers of the state House of Representatives to witness the inauguration of Governor Wilson Shannon. Although "severely indisposed" during the previous several days, Shannon was able to participate as scheduled. At 3:00 P.M., a committee of state dignitaries escorted him into the House and to the speaker's chair. The new governor then delivered in a "distinct and impressive manner" a one and one-half hour address<sup>83</sup> which, in Sam Medary's partisan opinion, was the "ablest and most popular address ever listened to on such an occasion in that hall."<sup>84</sup> John Dunham assured his readers that the complete attention of the crowd was "riveted" on the speaker for the duration of his comments.<sup>85</sup>

Shannon opened his remarks with an acknowledgment that he could not bring into the "councils of state" the level of experience possessed by previous governors. He was hopeful, however, that he would be able to properly fulfill the trust bestowed upon him as long as he was sustained by "Providence," the legislature, and the citizens of the state. Emulating his predecessors, he extolled the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., December 10, 1838; Ohio State Journal, December 10, 1838.

<sup>82</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 7, August 11, 18, September 1, 1838.

<sup>83</sup> Ohio State Journal, December 14, 1838.

<sup>84</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 14, 1838.

<sup>85</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, December 22, 1838.

virtues of Ohio's free public school system in operation since 1825 and recommended the continuance of state financial support for it. His many German admirers were undoubtedly pleased to hear Shannon urge the legislature to change the existing restrictive laws to permit schools using only German-language textbooks and German-speaking teachers to receive state funds until conditions were more favorable for instituting dual-language instruction in all schools. The governor praised Ohio's internal improvements program and advocated its extension, as financial resources permitted, into areas of the state not yet involved.

The major portion of Shannon's message predictably dealt with banking and currency issues. After observing that those issues were the most important ones that the legislature would be acting upon, the governor eloquently reiterated the major arguments and proposals he had presented at Ravenna and elsewhere during the campaign. He asserted that a well regulated banking system utilizing specie and some paper currency, was essential to the operations of the American economy. Ohio's banks, he contended, were as reliable as those of any other state, but their procedures under the prevailing state regulations were, nevertheless, seriously defective. To correct the situation, Shannon recommended that legislation be enacted to provide for the following: (1) individual liability of bank stockholders for the debts of their banks ("the wealthy banker is the only person in the community . . . exempt from the payment of his debts"), (2) a limit upon the issuance of paper currency by banks to an amount not exceeding three times the value of the specie in their vaults,

(3) a ban upon all bank notes less than five dollars in value, (4) quarterly bank financial statements, (5) assumption by the legislature of the power to alter or repeal bank charters issued by the state, (6) a prohibition upon bank stockholders against borrowing from their own banks, (7) a ban on post notes (non-interest bearing promissory notes), (8) the establishment of procedures enabling courts of chancery to assume control over the assets of insolvent banks and to arrange settlements with the creditors affected, and (9) the exclusion of the United States Bank of Pennsylvania from operating in Ohio either through its own offices or in a relationship with any of the state's banks.

The governor concluded his address by praising Van Buren's Independent Treasury plan, by expressing his firm conviction that a national bank was unconstitutional, and by reciting the standard Jeffersonian litany about the virtues of strict construction of the Constitution and the importance of the reserved powers of the states. "So soon as we venture into that boundless and unknown sea of implied powers," he stated, "the vessel of State will be exposed every moment to shipwreck and destruction." Adherence to the principles of strict construction, on the other hand, guaranteed that America would stand as "a beacon light to the friends of liberty throughout the world."<sup>86</sup>

The speech, a well-crafted, lucid exposition of Shannon's political views, was praised extravagantly by the Democratic press.

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<sup>86</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 14, 1838.

Sam Medary's claim that he was "in ecstasies with much of the message" typified the response.<sup>87</sup> Thomas Ritchie, editor of the Richmond [Virginia] Enquirer, was so impressed that he printed the bank reform passage of the address in the Enquirer together with an editorial commending Shannon's proposals to the Virginia legislature.<sup>88</sup> The Ohio State Journal, on the other hand, while conceding that the message had been delivered in a "distinct and impressive manner," also insisted that portions of it "would not have been respectable on the stump."<sup>89</sup>

The new governor of Ohio had attained an office which his contemporaries adjudged to hold some honor but very little power.<sup>90</sup> Some historians agree with that assessment.<sup>91</sup> Jeffersonian influences upon the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1802 had persuaded the delegates to limit severely the responsibilities of the state's chief executive. Almost all of the power to appoint

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. For comments by other Democratic editors see Zanesville Aurora, n. d., New Lisbon Patriot, n. d., quoted in ibid., December 26, 1838; Newark Constitutionalist, n. d., Canton Democrat, n. d., Steubenville Union, n. d., quoted in ibid., January 2, 1839; Marietta Pilot, n. d., Wooster Republican, n. d., quoted in ibid., January 4, 1839.

<sup>88</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 30, 1839.

<sup>89</sup> Ohio State Journal, December 14, 1838.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., October 24, 1843; Benjamin Tappan to Edwin Stanton, February 20, 1840, Benjamin Tappan Papers, Ohio Historical Society (microfilm copy); John Jay Janney, "Recollections of Thomas Corwin," ed. James H. Hitchman, Ohio History, LXXI (1962), p. 109; J. Jeffery Auer, "Thomas Corwin," Governors of Ohio, p. 47.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.; Eugene H. Roseboom and Francis P. Weisenburger, A History of Ohio (2d ed.; Columbus, 1969), p. 69.

officials and establish policies was given to the legislature.<sup>92</sup> Only six brief articles in the state constitution were required to set forth the governor's duties. He was authorized to grant reprieves and pardons, to act in lieu of the legislature to fill vacancies in state offices created when an incumbent died while the assembly was recessed, to call special sessions of the legislature, to set the date for adjourning the legislature if the two houses failed to agree on a mutually acceptable date, and to serve as commander-in-chief of the militia. He was, also, "from time to time," to deliver a "state of the state" message to the General Assembly. There were no provisions for an executive veto, so the governor had little control over the course of the legislature.<sup>93</sup>

In addition to the limitations of the constitution, other considerations diminished the importance of the gubernatorial office. The state did not provide an official governor's residence. Each incumbent lived in "the hostelry of his choice." As a consequence, the customary practice was that the Buckeye chief executive resided in Columbus only during the four months each year when the legislature was in session.<sup>94</sup> Neither Shannon nor any of his predecessors were regular residents of Columbus, so, as of 1838, the state capital was accustomed to being deprived of its chief

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.; Constitution of the State of Ohio (Chillicothe, 1802), pp. 1-13.

<sup>94</sup> Ohio State Journal, October 21, 1842.

official for approximately eight months annually.<sup>95</sup> As a final negative consideration, the governor's rather meager \$1,000 annual salary was inadequate to compensate the incumbents for the private income lost while they devoted themselves to the state's business. Although the salary increased to \$1,500 upon Shannon's assumption of office, thirteen other states provided higher stipends. They ranged from Tennessee's \$2,000 to Louisiana's \$7,500 remuneration. Maine and Massachusetts matched Ohio's \$1,500 figure. Only seven of the twenty-three states paid less.<sup>96</sup> In several vital aspects, therefore, the governor's office lacked attractive incentives which might appeal to potential candidates.

Shannon's distinguished gubernatorial successor in 1840, Thomas Corwin, found little to enjoy or appreciate in the position. Corwin complained to friends that, under the constitution's restrictions, he played the role of a "mere dummy." He claimed that his chief duties consisted of signing deeds for canal land sales and commissions for justices of the peace, appointing "a colored brother to make the fires and sweep the office," and "pardoning Democrats out of the penitentiary." Only with great reluctance did Corwin agree to run for a second term in 1842.<sup>97</sup> Other prominent politicians in both parties found it convenient to resist entirely the lure of the office. David Spangler even declined

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.; Governors of Ohio, pp. 1-43.

<sup>96</sup> Ohio Statesman, November 9, 1838.

<sup>97</sup> The quotation is in Janney, "Recollections of Thomas Corwin," p. 109. Also see Auer, "Thomas Corwin," p. 47.

to run for governor after he had been nominated by the state Whig convention in 1844.<sup>98</sup>

In its constitutional dimensions, the gubernatorial office was, without question, feebly endowed. Shannon's performance as governor demonstrated, however, that the position offered abundant opportunities for a skillful politician to influence significantly the course of state politics. Because Shannon and other Ohio governors were often considered to be the chief spokesmen in the state for their political parties, their public utterances often received more sustained attention in the Ohio press than the statements of other state or even national public figures. Consequently, the governors were able readily to gain publicity, albeit of a critical nature in the opposition press, for their beliefs, their party's goals, and themselves personally.<sup>99</sup> In their annual messages, the governors offered their versions of what should constitute the major items on the legislative agenda for the year ahead. Their recommendations were fully reported and analyzed in the press, were referred to the appropriate committees in the legislature, and must have had some impact upon the assembly's deliberations.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> The Governors of Ohio, pp. 29, 37, 41, 47, 54, 59. Spangler is mentioned on p. 54. Also see Joseph Ridgway to the Editor, February 13, 1844, Ohio State Journal, February 16, 1844.

<sup>99</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 10, 20, August 10, 14, 17, December 14, 1838, December 3, 5, 6, 13, 14, 16, 20, 1839, June 12, 19, July 10, August 5, December 8, 16, 1840; Ohio State Journal, July 20, September 21, December 14, 1838, December 3, 1839, July 14, 31, December 10, 1840; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 238-356.

<sup>100</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 14, 1838, December 14, 16, 20, 1839, December 16, 1840, December 14, 1842, December 5, 1843; Ohio



Various honorary offices bestowed upon the governors gave them additional prestige and extra opportunities to secure the lime-light and sway public opinion. Shannon, for instance, served as president of the Ohio Education Convention, which met in Columbus on December 26, 1838,<sup>101</sup> and was elected president of the new Ohio State Colonization Society formed at a meeting in Columbus on January 29, 1839.<sup>102</sup> He also, as governor, automatically became a member of the board of trustees of his alma mater, Ohio University at Athens.<sup>103</sup>

One of Shannon's minor, but not wholly insignificant functions, was to supervise the implementation of the so-called "Loan Law" (also known as the "Plunder Law") passed in March, 1837, by the legislature. The legislative intent was to enhance the state's internal improvements program. The act directed that state loans be granted to private railroad corporations in amounts not exceeding one-third of their authorized operating capital provided that private investors furnished the other two-thirds. Publicly chartered turnpike companies, furthermore, could secure state subscriptions to one-half of their capital stock and canal companies could obtain subscriptions for one-third of their stock.<sup>104</sup> Under the "Loan Law," the governor's

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State Journal, December 14, 1838, December 3, 1839, December 10, 1840, December 6, 10, 14, 1842, December 6, 1843.

<sup>101</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, January 12, 1839.

<sup>102</sup> Ohio State Journal, February 1, 1839.

<sup>103</sup> Ohio Statesman, September 17, 1839.

<sup>104</sup> Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, pp. 110-112; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 112-114.

duties included appointing inspectors to ascertain that corporations requesting loans and subscriptions conformed to the conditions stipulated in the law and, upon confirmation that everything was in order, authorizing the issuance of the loan. Various communications in Shannon's gubernatorial papers indicate that this supervisory function was conscientiously fulfilled. Inspectors reported in detail to Shannon on their findings, loan requests were rejected on occasion, and, apparently, every effort was made to ensure that state funds were distributed only to responsible parties.<sup>105</sup>

Although Shannon could not refuse to authorize a loan once the group requesting it met the applicable requirements, the discretion he could exercise in determining when that condition had been attained added a small degree of power and prestige to his position.

It is impossible to assess accurately the extent to which his limited prerogatives as governor enabled Shannon to become, within a year after assuming office, one of the most influential politicians in the state.<sup>106</sup> The poorly documented activities of Thomas Shannon, George Manypenny, William Kennon, and his other

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<sup>105</sup>Wilson Shannon to the President, Ripley and Hillsborough Turnpike Road Company, December 24, 1838, Shannon to John Ward, January 26, 1839, Shannon to J. J. Faran, September 13, 1839, Thomas M. Drake to Shannon, May 1, July 16, 1839, E. E. Smith to Shannon, July 9, 1839, George House to Shannon, August 9, 1839, John W. Erwin to Shannon, November 18, 1839, Wilson Shannon Papers, in Ohio Governors' Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>106</sup>T. Buchanan to William Medill, December 15, 1839, John Brough to Medill, December 7, 25, 1839, William Medill Papers, Library of Congress; Edwin Stanton to Benjamin Tappan, January 14, 1840, Tappan to Stanton, January 14, 1840, Tappan Papers; Holt, Party Politics in Ohio, pp. 456; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 130-32.

supporters, plus Shannon's own considerable talents were undoubtedly instrumental factors contributing to the success and recognition he achieved as governor. The office itself, nevertheless, was clearly an important one when placed in capable hands.

Much of Shannon's energies during his first term was devoted to coping with Ohio's serious economic dilemma. The legislature's heavy financial commitments to the state's internal improvements were difficult to sustain in the midst of the existing severe depression. As the new year (1839) began, state indebtedness totaled \$10,030,162. Nearly one-half of that amount had been incurred during the previous eighteen months under the liberal provisions of the "Loan Law." Annual interest on the debt was \$462,099.<sup>107</sup> Charles Hammond's detailed computations indicated that Ohio's total commitment to public works completed, in progress, and approved for the future exceeded \$15,000,000.<sup>108</sup>

According to historian Harry A. Scheiber, the state's involvement in such an extensive program was not necessarily irrational. He notes that,

in the mid-thirties, the state's property tax rested upon an assessed valuation base of more than 85 million dollars; the long-term indebtedness of local government was nil; and predictions that sizeable toll revenues and enormous indirect returns would accrue from the new facilities were not entirely unreasonable.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, June 7, 1839; Ohio State Journal, March 8, 1839; Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, pp. 111-12.

<sup>108</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, June 25, 1839.

<sup>109</sup> Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, p. 112.

Serious financial difficulties arose because the legislature failed to set a maximum limit upon yearly expenditures under the "Loan Law" and to establish construction priorities. The natural consequence was that too many costly projects were undertaken simultaneously and the state's financial resources were strained to the breaking point.<sup>110</sup>

A canal fund board of three commissioners appointed by the legislature was responsible for arranging the sale of state bonds as needed to secure funds for investment in public works. The commissioners were also supposed to supervise the processing of payments to contractors.<sup>111</sup> Shannon was not normally involved in the commissioners' transactions, but he discovered that he could not remain entirely aloof from them. The state became so delinquent in its payments to contractors in the spring of 1840 that the governor deemed it necessary to assist personally one of the fund commissioners in securing a loan for the state from New York financiers.<sup>112</sup> His major responsibility, however, was confined to his supervision of the disbursement of funds under the "Loan Law" provisions. By the completion of his first term in December, 1840, Shannon had authorized the distribution to turnpike, canal, and railroad companies of over \$450,000.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-44.      <sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 7, August 21, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, May 16, July 4, 11, 1840.

<sup>113</sup> A list of the stock subscriptions and loans authorized by Shannon is in Shannon Governors' papers.

Unlike several other states entrapped in the internal improvements craze of the 1820's and 30's, Ohio managed to avoid defaults on payments to its creditors. The dedicated efforts of the various canal fund commissioners and other state officials such as Governor Shannon made it possible for Ohio to squeak through numerous financial crises between 1837 and 1844. After 1844, the state was able to finance public works without resorting to bond sales.<sup>114</sup>

Although the inaugural ceremony in December, 1838, and the response to his address gave Shannon a brief tenure in the public limelight, the center of political action and attention for the next four months was the legislature. On December 20, the Democratic majority elected Benjamin Tappan, an ardent hard money, antibank radical, to replace the incumbent Democratic United States Senator from Ohio, Thomas Morris. Morris' energetic championing of the antislavery cause had alienated his party's leaders.<sup>115</sup> The next and major item of business was to fulfill the campaign pledges of Shannon and other Democratic spokesmen by developing effective bank reform legislation. Whig prophesies that the Democratic legislators would not seriously entertain significant reforms were disproved.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, pp. 140-155.

<sup>115</sup>Ohio Statesman, December 21, 1838; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 326, 379-80.

<sup>116</sup>Ohio State Journal, January 7, February 1, 4, 1839.

John Brough, soon to become state auditor, headed the House finance committee which devised the new measures. The Democrats opposed the use of "shinplasters" (bank notes in denominations less than five dollars) in the circulating currency. The small notes were considered helpful to the banking interests in their efforts to fend off Locofoco demands for an all-specie currency. A Democratic bill banning such currency had been passed in 1836, but had been repealed by the Whig legislature in 1837. Now it was the Democrats turn again and they passed a new bill on February 9, 1839. After July 4, 1839, no notes under three dollars in value were to be issued and after October 1, 1839, none under five dollars.<sup>117</sup> A further currency restriction was embodied in a law passed on March 18 forbidding Ohio corporations other than banks from issuing circulating currency.<sup>118</sup>

The most important piece of new banking legislation was the Bank Commissioner Act passed on February 25, 1839. It prohibited banks from circulating notes whose total value was more than three times that of the banks' specie reserves, made directors individually liable for bank debts arising because of the issuance of notes in excess of the authorized amounts, and made stockholders responsible for debts not covered by the directors' liabilities. Banks had to exchange their notes on demand for specie or for the notes of other

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<sup>117</sup> C. C. Huntington, "History of Banking and Currency in Ohio before the Civil War," O. A. H. Quar., XXIV (1915), 384, 389-90; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 337-38, 346. The text of the bill is in Cincinnati Gazette, July 2, 1839.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., March 22, 1839; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 351.

banks. Failure to do so for thirty days in any one year would automatically terminate a bank's charter. Lastly, the act stipulated that the legislature appoint a board of three bank commissioners who were to maintain a surveillance over Ohio's banking operations. The commissioners were to conduct visitations of bank facilities, to examine corporate records frequently, and to publish detailed quarterly reports indicating the financial status of each chartered bank.<sup>119</sup>

In light of radical domination of the Democratic ranks, it is somewhat surprising that Democratic conservatives and Whigs succeeded in placing on the board of commissioners two probank men, William S. Hatch, a Whig, and George W. Manypenny, Shannon's former brother-in-law. The third appointee was Elias W. Hubbard, a Democrat who seems to have cooperated fully with his fellow commissioners.<sup>120</sup> The important oversight role assigned to the commissioners was reinforced in May when the Ohio Supreme Court sustained their right to examine the books of the state's banks.<sup>121</sup>

The banking and currency measures enacted by the legislature in 1839 generally followed the recommendations advocated by Shannon. In toto, the new regulations constituted a vigorous effort by the Democrats to effect a meaningful reform of the state's banking system.

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<sup>119</sup> Ohio State Journal, March 1, 1839. Also see St. Clairsville Gazette, March 16, 1839; Huntington, "Banking and Currency in Ohio," pp. 164, 392; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 126-27.

<sup>120</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, March 16, 1839; St. Clairsville Gazette, March 16, 1839.

<sup>121</sup> Ohio Statesman, May 7, 1839.

Both Shannon and the General Assembly were forced to devote some attention to the slavery issue early in 1839. The steadily expanding underground railroad activity in Ohio angered and alarmed officials in the neighboring state of Kentucky. Two representatives appointed by the Kentucky legislature arrived in Columbus on January 19 to discuss the situation with Ohio officials. On January 21, the Kentuckians delivered a "communication" from their legislature to Shannon. The governor transmitted it without comment to the Ohio legislature on January 26. The message requested that laws be enacted in Ohio to prevent "evil-disposed persons from enticing away the slaves of citizens of Kentucky," to prevent Ohioans from aiding and concealing escaped slaves, and to provide more effective procedures for recovering the black fugitives.<sup>122</sup> After considerable debate, the General Assembly passed, with large Democratic majorities in both houses, a stringent new state fugitive slave law. Ohioans harboring escaped slaves could be fined up to \$500 and imprisoned for as much as sixty days. Law enforcement agencies were directed by the act to assist slave-owners in recovering their property and in removing the fugitives from the state.<sup>123</sup>

The passage of the "Black Bill," as it was dubbed by antislavery spokesmen, produced a reaction by antislaveryites against Shannon and the Democrats comparable to the response to Governor

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<sup>122</sup> Ohio Statesman, February 1, 1839; Cincinnati Philanthropist, February 12, 1839; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 381-82.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.; Ohio Statesman, February 25, 1839.



Joseph Vance's actions in the Mahan affair of 1838. Gamaliel Bailey filled the Philanthropist with bitter denunciations of all those politicians associated in any way with the bill. For most of Ohio's antislavery forces, the only acceptable political alternatives thereafter were the Whig party or a separate anti-slavery political organization.<sup>124</sup>

The Ohio legislature adjourned on March 18, 1839, after a highly productive session which included the passage of fifty-three general acts. Corporate charters had been issued to thirty-nine turnpike and railroad companies and to thirty-eight academies and literary institutions. An appropriation for \$25,000 had been passed to finance the first stages of the construction of a new State House. Finally, six divorce petitions had been approved.<sup>125</sup> Whig subscribers to the Cincinnati Gazette must have been startled, if not disgruntled, to read the favorable assessment of the assembly's efforts made by Hammond's Columbus correspondent, "Probus."

Of the several General Assemblies whose "sayings and doings" I have witnessed, I think none has equaled that for the present year, either in talent, education, or general intelligence. Among the members constituting the political majority . . . there were a number of very able men, some of whom will doubtless be heard hereafter in our state and national councils, and take conspicuous stands as lawyers and statesmen.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Cincinnati Philanthropist, February 19, 26, March 5, December 10, 1839; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 382-86.

<sup>125</sup> Ohio Statesman, March 19, April 2, 1839; Cincinnati Gazette, March 22, 1839.

<sup>126</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, March 22, 1839.

While Shannon had remained out of the political limelight during most of the legislative session, he and the Democratic legislators shared in the approbation expressed at numerous Democratic county meetings for the successful enactment of the new bank reform measures. His vigorous advocacy of bank reform during the 1838 campaign had not been forgotten. Perry County Democrats, meeting on May 27, enthusiastically asserted that "the gubernatorial chair of Ohio has never . . . been more ably filled than it is at present."<sup>127</sup> Franklin County Democrats claimed that Shannon's conduct as governor had been such " . . . as to elicit commendation from without and gratitude from within the confines of Ohio" and that he "richly deserved" to be reelected.<sup>128</sup> Similar sentiments were promulgated at other county meetings held throughout the rest of the year.<sup>129</sup> These favorable notices were important to Shannon's future political prospects because he only had one year to serve in office before the Democratic state convention would meet (on January 8) to choose the party's 1840 gubernatorial candidate.

During the last week of May, the governor toured the Sandusky and Maumee River valley areas investigating internal improvements possibilities as well as conducting some personal business.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Ohio Statesman, June 7, 1839.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., July 2, 1839.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., April 30, May 31, June 25, July 9, 26, August 6, 27, 30, September 24, October 4, November 5, 15, 19, 26, December 2, 6, 9, 10, 1839.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., June 4, 1839.

Otherwise, he apparently concentrated on his private affairs in St. Clairsville between the legislature's adjournment in March and its reconvening in December. Somewhat surprisingly, he chose to participate in St. Clairsville's observance of July the Fourth rather than in the much more significant celebration in Columbus.<sup>131</sup> The featured attraction in the state capital was the ceremony of laying the cornerstone for the new capitol building. Perhaps his absence from Columbus can be considered providential since the platform holding the dignitaries involved collapsed during the proceedings creating a jumbled mass of highly embarrassed and temporarily speechless orators.<sup>132</sup> Shannon's abstinence from major public affairs evidently included campaign activities in the fall. His name is not mentioned in press accounts of any of the many Democratic county rallies.

During the spring, summer, and fall of 1839, meanwhile, a variety of other developments were unfolding which greatly influenced Shannon's political future. The legislature's restrictive bank reform measures and the state's financial difficulties created much anxiety about the future among Ohio's financial interests. According to the state auditor's report, as of November 15, 1839, state debts totaled approximately \$12,000,000. Another \$3,000,000 in future obligations had been incurred under the terms of the "Loan Law." Annual interest charges on the indebtedness exceeded \$660,000. That

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<sup>131</sup>Ibid., July 12, 1839; St. Clairsville Gazette, July 6, 1839.

<sup>132</sup>Cincinnati Gazette, July 9, 1839.

was \$250,000 more than the state received in revenues from the public works.<sup>133</sup> During 1839, the canal fund commissioners were forced to market over \$2,400,000 in long-term bonds to maintain the financial viability of the public works enterprise.<sup>134</sup>

The Ohio Life Insurance and Trust Company and other state banks were allowed to make payments for Ohio bonds they purchased directly to contractors on the public works projects. The banks often made such payments in post notes whose frequently depreciated status created unnecessary hardships for the contractors and their employees. The state was so consistently delinquent in its payments, however, that the contractors accepted depreciated bank currency as better than nothing at all. At the same time, state officials received many complaints about the post notes and the Democrats added another example of bank "perfidy" to their growing list.<sup>135</sup>

Much to the chagrin of Democratic antibank radicals, the supposedly stringent bank reform measures enacted during the winter were easily circumvented by Ohio's banks. The prohibition on issuing "shinplasters" and the new specie reserve requirements were evaded by circulating out-of-state currency and post notes to which the laws did not apply.<sup>136</sup> If that did not confirm radical convictions about the dishonorable nature of bankers, the resumption in

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<sup>133</sup> Shannon Governor's Message, delivered December 3, 1839, Ohio State Journal, December 3, 1839.

<sup>134</sup> Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, pp. 144-45.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 145; Ohio Statesman, December 6, 1839.

<sup>136</sup> Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, p. 145.

October of the suspension of specie payments by banks across the commonwealth did resolve any doubts. The radicals were probably disappointed at the effectiveness of one of the new regulations, the prohibition against the suspension of specie payments by banks for more than thirty days. All of Ohio's thirty-five banks managed to comply with that stipulation and to prevent revocation of their charters.<sup>137</sup>

While the state struggled with its economic problems during the year, the Ohio Democracy endeavored to control the expanding strife in its ranks between the radical and conservative factions. The first serious manifestations of disunity arising in 1839 appeared in April when, over Sam Medary's vehement objections, two new Democratic newspapers began publication in Columbus. John G. Miller's Ohio Confederate and Old School Republican exhibited a strong states' rights orientation. Former state auditor John Brough offered the Ohio Bulletin as a conservative counter to the Statesman's antibank radicalism. Medary, claiming a circulation of over 4,000 readers, insisted that his faithful service to the party obviated the necessity for the new publications. He vowed that he would drive from the field his challengers for journalistic supremacy among Ohio's Democrats.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ohio Statesman, October 22, 25, 1839; Huntington, "Banking and Currency in Ohio," pp. 391-92; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 127-30.

<sup>138</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, November 12, 1839; Ohio Statesman, March 15, April 5, 9, October 11, 25, November 15, 1839; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 403.

A major prize at stake for all of the Democratic editors was the lucrative position of state printer, awarded by the legislature in 1838 to Medary. The annual compensation for the post was approximately \$25,000, a sum enabling the recipient to expand his staff, improve his facilities, and generally strengthen his capabilities in relation to his competitors.<sup>139</sup> At the state Democratic editors' convention in Columbus in August, a committee was appointed to revise the procedures for bidding for the printer's contract. Medary apparently looked upon the move as an attempt to weaken his hold upon the position and refused to serve on the committee. Unfortunately for Shannon, John Dunham chose to attack Medary in the St. Clairsville Gazette for the Columbus editor's uncooperative attitude. Dunham's criticisms inaugurated a bitter feud which totally alienated the two most important journalists involved in Shannon's political career. Medary's increasingly militant radicalism was a key factor influencing the conservative Dunham's actions.<sup>140</sup> Since Shannon and Medary continued to work closely together throughout the rest of the governor's term in office, it is probably true, as Medary claimed, that Dunham acted on his own in launching the feud.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Ohio State Journal, April 5, June 21, November 5, 1839.

<sup>140</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, n. d., quoted in Ohio Statesman, August 20, 1839; Ibid., October 25, November 15, 1839, January 14, 28, February 1, 6, 1843; St. Clairsville Gazette, February 3, 1843.

<sup>141</sup>Ohio Statesman, February 1, 1843.

While the Democrats quarreled, the Whigs were also bickering, were somewhat disorganized, and continued to be adversely affected by their close identification with the state's financial interests.<sup>142</sup> The Whigs could not agree, furthermore, on whether to support Henry Clay or Ohio's own William Henry Harrison for the 1840 presidential nomination.<sup>143</sup> There was a lack of strong leadership at the state level which was reflected, in part, by the instability of the Ohio State Journal, the party's chief organ in Columbus. The Journal's seemingly constant financial distress produced frequent changes in owners and editors, caused occasional lapses in publication, and greatly diminished the Journal's effectiveness.<sup>144</sup> Charles Hammond's independent nature and identification with the antislavery movement reduced the influence of the Cincinnati Gazette, the other major Whig newspaper in Ohio, among the party's followers.<sup>145</sup>

The Democrats were highly successful in the fall elections in October, 1839. Their bank reform program apparently still appealed to the voters. Also, divisiveness within party ranks

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<sup>142</sup> Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," pp. 447-53.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.; Belmont Chronicle, January 1, 1839; Cincinnati Gazette, August 16, September 3, October 4, 1839, January 3, 1840; Ohio State Journal, April 19, 26, May 10, 21, 31, July 23, November 8, 13, 1839.

<sup>144</sup> Ohio State Journal, February 1, March 6, April 5, November 12, December 14, 1839, February 10, 1840, July 9, 1842, January 3, November 25, 1843.

<sup>145</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, April 17, December 6, 1839, January 3, April 8, 1840; Ohio State Journal, March 29, 1839; Weisenburger, "Charles Hammond," pp. 414-24.

evidently adversely affected Whig more than it did Democratic campaign efforts.<sup>146</sup> The Jacksonians increased their majorities in both houses of the General Assembly to over two-thirds, twenty-five Democrats to eleven Whigs in the Senate and forty-eight Democrats to twenty-four Whigs in the House.<sup>147</sup> Thomas Shannon was among those Democrats reelected to the Senate.<sup>148</sup>

Democratic radicals eagerly awaited the convening in December of the legislature. The second round of suspensions of specie payments by the banks in the fall and the continuance of economically depressed conditions strengthened radical desires for the enactment of more stringent bank reform measures than those passed by the previous legislature.<sup>149</sup> In the midst of an unusually strong antibank atmosphere, therefore, the General Assembly opened its new session on December 2. According to an erroneous rumor circulating at that time, the choice for speaker of the Senate would very likely be the Democratic gubernatorial nominee in 1840. Governor Shannon, it was reported, was about to be appointed by

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<sup>146</sup> Elijah Hayward to Andrew Jackson, October 16, 1839, Jackson Papers; Cincinnati Gazette, October 29, 1839; Ohio State Journal, July 23, August 23, October 11, 18, 22, November 5, 1839; Ohio Statesman, July 2, 9, 26, August 6, 17, October 15, 22, 1839; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 352-53.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 353; Ohio Statesman, October 22, 1839.

<sup>148</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, October 12, 1839.

<sup>149</sup> Cincinnati Advertiser and Journal, July 31, August 5, 9, 27, October 22, 1839; Cincinnati Gazette, October 29, 1839; Ohio Statesman, June 28, July 19, November 15, 1839; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 127-30.



Van Buren to a "much fatter" office than he currently occupied.<sup>150</sup>

The Senate's choice for speaker was William McLaughlin of Richland County. The House elected Thomas Buchanan of Clermont County to serve as its speaker.<sup>151</sup> The next order of business was the chief executive's annual message to be delivered on December 3.

The Cincinnati Gazette's Columbus correspondent reported on December 2 that

an unusual degree of interest is manifested this year in regard to the message. It is expected to furnish a criterion by which to judge of the probable course of policy to be pursued in relation to many important subjects, by the loco foco majority of our Legislature.<sup>152</sup>

The moment had come for Shannon either to establish firmly his credentials as a statesman or to exhibit the characteristics of a time-serving politician. The vigor with which he rose to the occasion surprised all segments of both political parties.

Much of the message was non-controversial. In his opening remarks, the governor presented an optimistic survey of Ohio's economic status and future prospects. He pointed with pride to the steady progress of the public school system, particularly the institution of classes taught in German where that was deemed desirable, and urged the legislature to retain school lands currently considered surplus. Shannon suggested that the large surplus acreage of canal lands held for many years by the state be sold in small quantities to persons desirous of actually settling

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<sup>150</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, December 5, 1839; Ohio State Journal, November 29, 1839; Ohio Statesman, December 2, 1839.

<sup>151</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, December 5, 1839. <sup>152</sup> Ibid.

on the land. Observing that there were seventy pupils in the state deaf and dumb asylum, nineteen students in the recently opened school for the blind, and 130 inmates in the state "lunatic" asylum, the governor spoke approvingly of the important services provided by those facilities. He declared that "these humane institutions have more than met the expectation of the public, and they will stand as lasting monuments of the generous philanthropy of their projectors, an honor to the state, and a blessing to the country."

A lengthy portion of the address concentrated on the deplorable condition of the Ohio militia. Several specific recommendations were made for legislative action to remedy the situation. After reviewing the status of Ohio's public works and reiterating his support for them, Shannon discussed critically the adverse economic effects of the 1837 "Loan Law." He concluded that Ohioans could not sustain additional economic burdens for public works beyond the commitments already made. He asked the legislature, therefore, to repeal the law immediately. While this recommendation involved a major change in policy, it was not particularly controversial because it reflected a growing consensus among all Ohioans that such action was necessary.

Shannon's extensive commentary on banking and currency issues did, however, generate a reaction of impressive proportions, both pro and con. Fundamentally, he restated the views presented a year earlier in his inaugural address, but he did so in language so strong and positive that Democratic radicals were shocked and dismayed. It

was "wholly impracticable," he asserted, for the state to return to a hard money currency. Even if it were attempted, notes issued by banks in other states would be circulated in Ohio and create more problems than would well-regulated issues of currency from Ohio's banks. Shannon then analyzed the merits of two alternatives suggested as replacements for the existing independently operated, state chartered and regulated banking system. One proposal advocated the creation of a state owned and operated bank and the other recommendation called for an unregulated free banking system. Concluding that both alternatives exhibited serious defects, the governor contended that "a system of independent banks properly restricted and limited in their powers, placed under the control of the legislature, if not the best system that could be adopted, is perhaps the best within our reach, at present, or for some time to come."

Following some comments deploring the irresponsibility of many of the nation's bankers, Shannon had the audacity (for a Jacksonian) to praise Ohio's banks. He noted that the last quarterly report of the Board of Bank Commissioners indicated that the state's banks were "generally in a sound condition" and that it was "highly creditable" to them that they had, with few exceptions, continued to redeem their notes in specie on demand while banks elsewhere had suspended specie payments.

Most of Ohio's banks were operating under charters expiring in 1843. In a recommendation that was heretical to the radicals, Shannon urged the legislature to allow those banks an additional

three years beyond 1843 to wind up their business. Some of the banks already were beginning to curtail their transactions in anticipation of their 1843 closings. The governor maintained that this development was adversely affecting Ohio's economic climate. He hoped that the postponement of the 1843 deadline would at least temporarily relieve the anxiety of the state's banking interests about their future. Shannon's closing declaration to the legislature that he did not expect his views on banking and the currency "to meet with the entire approbation of a majority of your honorable body" was not an overly pessimistic assessment of the response of his auditors.<sup>153</sup>

To sustain unity in the face of a rapidly approaching presidential election year, Sam Medary and many other members of the dominant radical wing of the Ohio Democracy curbed their tongues and tempers in public. Medary, in fact, vigorously defended the governor against all critics, Whig or Democrat, and endeavored to "interpret" Shannon's comments in such a way as to make them less offensive to the radicals. Noting that the governor had expressed his views with "a candor and fearlessness of expression for which . . . he is ever distinguished," the Statesman's editor praised the message's recommendations on bank reform and maintained that they were consistent with the progressive policies advocated in the 1838 campaign. Medary admitted that some people might "differ

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<sup>153</sup> The message is in Ohio Statesman, December 3, 1839. For support for suspension of the "Loan Law" see Ohio Statesman, January 28, 1839, January 9, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, August 12, November 6, December 7, 1839; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 355.

in detail" with Shannon's statements about the limitations on bank charters, but he insisted that "the ultimate object will be the same, and the end will be in due season accomplished . . ." in accordance with Democratic wishes.<sup>154</sup> While asking for an extension of bank charters, the governor had expressly declared that the purpose of the extra time was to allow the banks to "wind up" their business properly, not to prolong their existence unnecessarily. There was, therefore, no reason for Democrats to find the governor's recommendation objectionable, Medary claimed.<sup>155</sup>

Unlike Medary, Moses Dawson of the Cincinnati Advertiser, a friend and frequent correspondent of Andrew Jackson, could not contain his fury over Shannon's "betrayal" of Democratic principles. Dawson filled the columns of several issues of his paper with bitter denunciations and dissections of the governor's views. His ire was especially directed at Shannon's assertion that an all specie currency was "wholly impracticable" and at the request for bank charter extensions. Dawson charged that such sentiments were not those expected from a Democratic governor and that they were "completely at war with those upon which he [Shannon] was elected."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup>Ohio Statesman, December 3, 1839. Also see ibid., December 5, 1839; Cincinnati Gazette, December 17, 1839.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., December 13, 1839.

<sup>156</sup>Cincinnati Advertiser, December 5, 7, 9, 12, 1839. Dawson forwarded a copy of Shannon's message to Andrew Jackson at the Hermitage in Tennessee. Jackson expressed his reaction in a letter written to Dawson on December 9.

"I have glanced my eye over the Governor [sic] Message which you have enclosed me, and I do assure you, you could not have been more astonished than I am at that part which relates

The harshest condemnations in the Advertiser appeared in two "communications" from "Old Hamilton." "The message," declared the writer, "shows more moral depravity than anything I ever read." It was obviously part of a plot to deliver Democrats, "bound hand and foot," to their enemies, the banks. According to "Old Hamilton," Shannon was guilty of "lying," "meanness," "double dealings," and "moral turpitude." The Democracy clearly had no choice but to throw away the governor as a "rotten stick" and find a "sound one."<sup>157</sup>

Dawson's opinion of the message apparently reflected more accurately than Medary's the true feelings of the radicals. State Senator John Hough informed Allen G. Thurman that he had talked to "a number" of Democratic legislators and found only one who approved of Shannon's position on banking and currency questions. Hough also reported: "I understand that Shannon repents of his message; and would retract, if it could be done honorably." Although obviously upset by Shannon's pronouncements, Hough concluded that the governor had to be renominated at the state convention on January 8. "If we cast him off we will meet certain defeat."<sup>158</sup>

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to the bank and currency. It is rather a temporizing sic production, between the paper credit System, and an undeviating standard of value sic, gold and silver coin. I wish my health was such that I could give you some aid in criticising sic this, to me, extraordinary production. . . ." Jackson to Dawson, December 9, 1839, Moses Dawson Papers, Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., December 10, 12, 1839.

<sup>158</sup> Hough to Thurman, December 15, 1839, Thurman Papers. There is no other documentation to substantiate Hough's report that "Shannon

The message had a disconcerting effect upon the Whigs as well as upon the Democrats. Both the Ohio State Journal and the Cincinnati Gazette praised the remarks of the Democratic governor. James Allen of the Journal stated that he expected Shannon's comments on the currency issue to be highly partisan, but he had been "agreeably disappointed." Allen's overall reaction to the message was one of "astonishment and gratification."<sup>159</sup> Charles Hammond declared in the Gazette that the message was ". . . a sound, sensible, practical document, such as we are glad to see from a native Governor. It is calculated to raise the credit of the state everywhere. We can hardly resist the belief that it will make Ohio Bonds current both in Wall street and London."<sup>160</sup> Such favorable comments for Shannon were certainly an uncommon feature in the opposition press. Other Whig journals chose the more normal partisan course of attacking the governor for his continued advocacy of "ruinous" bank reform measures.<sup>161</sup>

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repents of his message." The Columbus correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette wrote on December 31 that a committee of Democrats had visited Shannon to urge him to modify his views in another public statement. According to the report, he replied: "I stand or fall upon that message. I have nothing to explain--nothing to retract." Cincinnati Gazette, January 3, 1840. The governor's subsequent statements and actions indicate that Hough's assertion is false. Shade, Banks or No Banks, p. 102, repeats it, however.

<sup>159</sup> Ohio State Journal, December 4, 1839.

<sup>160</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, December 6, 1839.

<sup>161</sup> Belmont Chronicle, December 24, 1839; Steubenville Herald, n. d., quoted in ibid.; Cincinnati Evening Post, n. d., quoted in Ohio State Journal, December 13, 1839; Cleveland Herald, n. d., quoted in ibid., December 15, 1839.

One of the more significant consequences of Shannon's gubernatorial message was the opposition to his renomination it generated among some of the Democratic radicals. The most serious manifestations of this opposition occurred at large meetings of Hamilton County Democrats held in Cincinnati on December 12 and December 21. The first meeting was apparently called especially to express opposition to Shannon's views and to his renomination as governor. One of the resolutions passed declared that those present could not "conscientiously support Wilson Shannon for re-election" and recommended that some other candidate be selected.<sup>162</sup> In a regularly scheduled Hamilton County convention, which met on December 21 to choose delegates to the state convention, Shannon's views were again heavily criticized. The delegates to the Columbus convention were instructed to seek postponement of the nomination of a candidate for governor until the spring or summer. This delaying tactic was apparently designed to secure time to build up opposition to Shannon and to settle on an acceptable alternative nominee.<sup>163</sup> State auditor John Brough and state senator Samuel Spangler were suggested as suitable replacements for Shannon. Both men rejected such overtures, however.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Cincinnati Advertiser, December 14, 1839.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., December 23, 1839.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., December 10, 1839; Ohio State Journal, December 12, 1839; John Cassel to William Medill, December 18, 1839, John Brough to Medill, December 25, 1839, Medill Papers; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 354.



Perhaps to their surprise, the Hamilton County Democrats discovered that there was little support elsewhere in the party ranks for deposing the incumbent governor. He was personally a popular figure and his message had pleased, as well as alienated, many Democrats.<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, many radicals and conservatives shared the conviction that party unity and victory in the 1840 elections depended, in part, upon the renomination of Shannon. He was still the Democrat's leading bank reform spokesman. Rejection of him might appear to the electorate to be rejection of that which was considered to be a popular party platform. House Speaker Thomas Buchanan wrote to Congressman William Medill about Shannon's prospects:

. . . I can see some disposition in many of our friends to lay Shannon aside and take a new man, but I think it will be bad policy . . . for the people have been looking forward to his re-nomination with more than ordinary concern. To now lay him aside . . . would produce destruction and disunion in our ranks. . . . I cannot go with the governor in some of his notions but still I think that it will be good policy to "pick the flint and try him again." His policy will not take generally in the state but still in many parts it is popular.<sup>166</sup>

In a letter written to Medill on December 25, John Brough stated that "the feeling in relation to the message is gradually softening down, and will yield very readily to the renomination of Shannon, which will unquestionably be made on the 8th."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> William Ewing to William Medill, December 8, 29, 1839, Thomas Buchanan to Medill, December 15, 1839, John W. Gaylord to Medill, December 26, 1839, Medill Papers; Ohio Statesman, December 3, 5, 19, 1839.

<sup>166</sup> Buchanan to Medill, December 15, 1839, Medill Papers. Also see Sam Barker to Medill, December 15, 1839, ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Brough to Medill, December 25, 1839, ibid.

Brough's assessment proved correct. According to reports in the Ohio Statesman, nearly twenty county conventions held between December 5 and December 31 endorsed "Shannon and bank reform."<sup>168</sup> When the Vice President of the United States, Richard M. Johnson, visited Columbus on December 19, a large banquet was held in his honor at the American Hotel. Samuel Spangler presided and Wilson Shannon was one of the featured speakers. Medary reported that Shannon spoke "in a strain of empassioned [sic] eloquence which delighted all who heard him."<sup>169</sup> It was obvious that Democratic leaders were not about to cast the governor aside.

The largest gathering of Democrats ever to attend a state convention assembled in Columbus on January 8, 1840. Numbering well over one thousand persons, the crowd could not be accommodated in the scheduled facility, the Eagle Theater. The convention was forced, consequently, to move outside to a large open area and conduct its two days of sessions amid a decidedly chilly atmosphere. A welcome result produced by the cold temperatures was a drastic reduction in the volume of convention oratory.<sup>170</sup>

Party moderates and conservatives had firm control of the proceedings. Ex-congressman Thomas L. Hamer, a conservative, presided over the convention. On January 8, Shannon was renominated

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<sup>168</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 11, 13, 16, 23, 24, 25, 28, 31, 1839, January 1, 6, 7, 1840.

<sup>169</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 20, 1839.

<sup>170</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, January 7, 10, 14, 1840; Ohio Statesman, January 10, 1840; Ohio Eagle, n.d., quoted in ibid., January 15, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, January 18, 1840.

by acclamation to be the 1840 candidate for governor. No objections were raised and no other names were presented.<sup>171</sup> At a banquet that evening at the American Hotel, he was the subject of many laudatory toasts.<sup>172</sup>

The only manifestations of dissension among the Democrats occurred on January 9 in response to the resolutions presented for adoption by the assembly. Several delegates objected vehemently to two resolutions directed at the slavery issue. One of the two declared that Congress should not abolish slavery in the District of Columbia without the consent of the people in the District and of the citizens of Virginia and Maryland as well. The other resolution asserted that Ohioans had no right to interfere with the constitutionally protected institution of slavery in other states and denounced the organization of societies established for that purpose. After the few vocal opponents were shouted down by the throng, the two measures were readily adopted.<sup>173</sup>

Other resolutions praised President Martin Van Buren and his Independent Treasury proposal, castigated the banking interests for various alleged misdeeds, and urged the continuance by the legislature of its bank reform program. Political abolitionism was denounced as nothing more than "ancient federalism" under a new guise. Its purpose was "to overthrow Democracy." Lastly, one of

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid.; Cincinnati Gazette, January 14, 1840.

<sup>172</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 9, 1840.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., January 10, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, January 14, 1840.

the resolutions adopted stated:

That Wilson Shannon, our present distinguished Governor, deserves the entire confidence of the democratic party, for the fidelity and ability with which he has discharged the duties of his station, and we earnestly recommend him to the united and zealous support of our political friends as a candidate for re-election.<sup>174</sup>

As his summary of the convention's speeches and general tenor from a Whig viewpoint, "Argus" of the Cincinnati Gazette commented:

The party placed "the Democracy of Ohio" on the top of a hickory pole for safe keeping, resolved Martin Van Buren, the dandy, into the Hero of N. Orleans, the conqueror of Pakenham, and denounced Harrison, the Hero of Tippecanoe and the Thames, an old granny! Shameful.<sup>175</sup>

"Argus" might have added that the Democracy had obviously written off the sizeable antislavery vote in the state.

There was a general feeling of relief in state Democratic ranks that serious divisions had been avoided at the convention. Claiming that there had been "no opposition expressed and but little felt" to Shannon's renomination, the Newark Advocate remarked: "It was hoped by our opponents that we would split upon the gubernatorial question but we sailed past that rock without striking it. We are now out of danger."<sup>176</sup> After a week's hesitation, even Moses Dawson meekly yielded to the spirit of party unity. He placed Shannon's name on the masthead of his journal and wrote:

. . . We have no hesitation in declaring our hearty approbation

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<sup>174</sup>Ohio Statesman, January 10, 1840.

<sup>175</sup>Cincinnati Gazette, January 14, 1840.

<sup>176</sup>Quoted in Ohio Statesman, January 13, 1840.

of the nomination. We rejoice to find that the proceedings were conducted with the most perfect harmony and unanimity, and like a band of brothers, the Convention dispersed with the greatest good humor and confidence in each other.<sup>177</sup>

Behind the facade of Democratic unity, some prominent Ohio radicals privately exhibited a contrary spirit. Edwin M. Stanton, the young law partner of radical Democratic United States Senator Benjamin Tappan, wrote on January 14:

If the Whigs had a thimble full of sense or honesty they would carry this State next fall. And as matters now stand it is by no means certain that Ohio will not be lost to Mr. Van Buren. If we could lose the Governor and prevail with the President I should be content.<sup>178</sup>

A subsequent communication from Tappan to Stanton declared:

I think we must run Shannon, that he is politically Damned I have no doubt, but as he is nominated he must be supported. I shall say to all . . . the office of Gov. of Ohio is of very little consequence, and Shannon is as good as the average-- he cannot do anything and what he says if wise will have weight if unwise none at all. We had better vote the whole ticket, but Mr. Allen and I do not intend to say anything about Shannon if we can help it, if he goes in well, if not well.<sup>179</sup>

Tappan's comments clearly revealed the adverse effects of the sustained division between radicals and conservatives upon the Democratic party in Ohio.

At the time Wilson Shannon was nominated for governor by the Democrats, the Whigs were in a quandary over their gubernatorial choice. Charles Hammond, following his usual independent course, threw Whig ranks into temporary disarray with a startling recommendation

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<sup>177</sup> Cincinnati Advertiser, January 13, 1840.

<sup>178</sup> Stanton to Tappan, January 14, 1840, Edwin M. Stanton Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy).

<sup>179</sup> Tappan to Stanton, February 20, 1840, Tappan Papers.

he published on January 3, just before the Democratic state convention.

If our opponents nominate Governor Shannon for re-election, ought the Whigs to name an opposing candidate? I think they should not. A man of correct principles and of independent measures is what the Whigs require, and if he is in nomination already, why should they look for another?<sup>180</sup>

Shannon had evidently progressed a long way in two years from the candidate Hammond had evaluated as a "respectable mediocre" in January, 1838.

Astoundingly enough, a few Whig editors endorsed Hammond's suggestion.<sup>181</sup> Many others did not. By January 14, Hammond felt compelled to acknowledge that the Whigs were "not to be contented without their own candidate for Governor." He was ready, therefore, "to throw up our caps for whoever may be nominated. . . ." <sup>182</sup>

In addition to the effect of Hammond's unsettling proposal, another problem confronting the Whigs in their choice of a gubernatorial candidate was the initial refusal of Congressman Thomas Corwin, the favorite of many party members, to consider the nomination.<sup>183</sup> The weakness of the other potential candidates was exhibited when the Ohio State Journal listed eighteen possibilities in its January 13 issue and admitted that the party was not united behind any of them. The Whigs were undoubtedly greatly relieved when Corwin yielded to

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<sup>180</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, January 3, 1840.

<sup>181</sup> Ohio State Journal, January 3, 1840; Xenia Free Press, n. d., quoted in ibid., January 6, 1840.

<sup>182</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, January 14, 1840.

<sup>183</sup> John W. Allen to Elisha Whittlesey, February 5, 1840, Elisha Whittlesey Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society; Ohio Statesman, December 26, 1839.

the entreaties of party leaders and agreed to run. He was nominated by acclamation at the state convention in Columbus on February 22.<sup>184</sup>

The Whig national convention had already met in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the first week of December, 1839, and nominated Ohio's favorite son, William Henry Harrison, and Virginia's John Tyler to head the party's national ticket.<sup>185</sup> With a Buckeye from their own ranks running for President and one of the nation's most highly touted political orators, Thomas Corwin, seeking the gubernatorial chair, Ohio's Whigs had every reason to look forward eagerly to the opening of the 1840 campaign.

The state's legislators seemed to be saving their energies for the campaign since they were relatively unproductive during their 1839-1840 session. Perhaps their most important action occurred during the first week of the new session when they suspended the disbursement of funds for internal improvements under the 1837 "Loan Law."<sup>186</sup> Shannon was thus relieved of his time-consuming responsibility of supervising the implementation of the law. Subsequently, on March 16, the law was repealed.<sup>187</sup> The only new bank reform measure, enacted on March 23, 1840, forbade Ohio's banks and other corporations to issue or receive "shinplasters"

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<sup>184</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, February 26, 1840.

<sup>185</sup> Ohio State Journal, December 12, 1839; Ohio Statesman, December 12, 1839. Medary derisively characterized the convention as "a federal farce of ex-Governors, fallen politicians and super-annuated interests." Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, December 10, 1839.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., March 19, 1839.

(bank notes under five dollars) and most types of post notes. County treasurers, furthermore, were not to accept the small notes for tax payments.<sup>188</sup>

Like the legislators, Shannon seems to have been concentrating on preparations for the campaign. His name seldom appeared in the press in connection with any activity. As he had the previous year, the governor chaired the annual meeting of the Ohio Colonization Society held in Columbus on December 25-26, 1839. One of the members in attendance was Thomas Corwin.<sup>189</sup> Shannon also presided again over the Ohio Education Convention which assembled in Columbus during the second week of January.<sup>190</sup> His most significant action on behalf of the state was performed in April, after he had left the capital and returned to St. Clairsville.

By April 1, 1840, the state had fallen behind by an amount exceeding \$400,000 in its payments to contractors on the public works. Laborers on the various projects had not been paid for many weeks and, it was reported, were in dire straits as a result. Under such circumstances in the past, the three canal fund commissioners had gone to New York and secured loans to cover the state's obligations. The board's membership had almost evaporated by April 1, however. The legislature, before closing its session in March, 1840, had passed an act mandating that the canal fund commissioners arrange

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<sup>188</sup>Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 355.

<sup>189</sup>Cincinnati Philanthropist, January 21, 1840.

<sup>190</sup>Ohio State Journal, January 10, 1840.



to be bonded for \$250,000 each. The costs were to be paid out of the commissioners' own pockets. One commissioner, Daniel Kilgore, promptly resigned, and another, Samuel McCracken, refused to fulfill his responsibilities for a time. He ultimately resigned also. The remaining commissioner, Joseph S. Lake, was left to cope alone temporarily with the board's pressing financial problems. Because of the urgent need for funds, Lake decided to proceed to New York to secure a loan. On his way eastward, he stopped at St. Clairsville to ask Governor Shannon to assist him in his mission. Although deeply involved in court business in St. Clairsville, Shannon complied with Lake's request. The two men readily succeeded in arranging for a \$400,000 loan at reasonable interest rates. The money was placed in the state treasury and used to pay the long-deprived contractors.<sup>191</sup> This commendable errand of mercy, which also sustained the state government's economic credibility, subsequently proved to be a major campaign liability to the governor.

The 1840 Whig presidential campaign is the classic example in American political history of a canvass emphasizing style rather than substance. After losing three consecutive presidential elections, the old National Republicans finally realized that victory was possible only if they outbid the Jacksonians for the

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<sup>191</sup> The entire course of the transaction is outlined in Joseph S. Lake to Samuel Medary, August 15, 1840, Ohio Statesman, August 21, 1840. For the causes of the resignations of Kilgore and McCracken see ibid., July 7, 14, 1840; Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, pp. 147-48.

votes of the "common man."<sup>192</sup> Ohio's Whigs had learned this lesson in 1838 when an aloof Governor Vance and a low-key campaign had been overcome by the vigorous stump efforts of Shannon and other Democrats. It is unlikely that any twentieth century advertising agency could devise a more effective campaign package than that produced by the Whigs in 1840. The key component was the presidential candidate, Ohio's General William Henry Harrison, whose status as a genuine military hero was guaranteed to appeal to the masses. As another attractive feature, Harrison's political views were so vaguely defined that the disparate elements of the Whig party could comfortably rally around him. John Tyler of Virginia, the general's running mate, appealed to other alienated Jacksonians, like himself, and to southern adherents to the Jeffersonian states' rights philosophy. As a final stroke of promotional genius, the Whig candidates were surrounded with images dear to the common man--log cabins, coonskin caps, and jugs full of hard cider--and were festooned with banners proclaiming "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!"<sup>193</sup> In Ohio, "Corwin the Wagon Boy" and "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!" made the Democratic battlecry, "Van Buren, Shannon, and Victory!", seem dull and anemic.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Robert Gray Gunderson, The Log-Cabin Campaign (Lexington, Kentucky, 1957), pp. 7-11, 74-77.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-51, 62-66, 71-77.

<sup>194</sup> The Democratic slogan is mentioned in Ohio Statesman, January 10, 1840. Corwin was dubbed "The Wagon Boy" because as a young man he had driven wagonloads of supplies to United States Army troops during the War of 1812. Dayton Log Cabin, n. d., quoted in Ohio State Journal, April 17, 1840.

The Democratic National Convention did not meet in Baltimore to renominate Van Buren until May 5, 1840. There was no challenge to that choice despite the President's lack of popularity with the general public. He had a strong, committed body of followers in the party and the endorsement of the venerable Jackson. Richard M. Johnson of Kentucky, the incumbent Vice President, was also renominated.<sup>195</sup>

Shannon and his fellow Democrats confronted a formidable task in Ohio. Not only did they have to overcome the weighty influence upon the state's citizenry of an Ohio Whig presidential candidate, but they also were being challenged by one of the strongest gubernatorial candidates available within Whig ranks. Corwin had served in the legislature for three terms in the 1820's and, since 1831, in the United States House of Representatives. He had achieved a national reputation by 1840 as a witty, satirical political orator and debater. Some observers ranked him as the finest stump speaker in America.<sup>196</sup> Governor Shannon, seven years younger than Corwin, had only two years of experience in high public

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<sup>195</sup>Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 78-83; Curtis, The Fox at Bay, pp. 194-98. William Johnston reported from Baltimore to Salmon P. Chase that "we have just finished the most glorious convention the world ever beheld. . . . We had all the lions, and some of the asses of the nation present and such a roaring and sucking you never heard in your day." Johnston to Chase, May 6, 1840, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Library of Congress (microfilm copy). Shannon was not named as an official delegate to the convention. He informed his friend, Peter Kaufmann, that he could not attend it. Shannon to Kaufmann, March 16, 1840, Kaufmann Papers.

<sup>196</sup>Dayton Log Cabin, n. d., quoted in Ohio State Journal, April 17, 1840; Auer, "Thomas Corwin," pp. 46-49.

office to match against his opponent's long and illustrious career. Nevertheless, Shannon does not seem to have been in the least intimidated by the challenge before him. The most serious problems for Democrats across the nation were, in fact, posed by the continuance of hard times, by Van Buren's lack of popular appeal, and by the success of the high hoopla in attracting the attention and votes of the masses.<sup>197</sup>

So much attention is given in historical discussions of the 1840 campaign to its picturesque "log cabin and hard cider" Whig aspects, that it is easy to overlook the fact that the Democrats probably campaigned as energetically and often as colorfully as the opposition. The Whigs featured log cabin raisings, log cabin clubs, and hard cider. The Democrats erected hickory poles, formed hickory clubs, and had just as much "hard" in their cider as the Whigs.<sup>198</sup> As early as March 10, 1840, Democrats in Columbus organized a hickory club.<sup>199</sup> In March and April, campaign orators for both parties in Ohio began taking their message to the people. The Democratic spokesmen advocated the strengthening of their existing bank reform program, but offered no striking new proposals. They also claimed that abolitionism had thoroughly pervaded Whig

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<sup>197</sup> Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 7-28, 75-79; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 355, 390-96.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., pp. 391-94; Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 151-54, 219-39; Ohio Statesman, May 22, 29, June 5, 12, July 3, 7, 10, August 5, 11, 25, 1840.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., March 11, 1840.

ranks.<sup>200</sup> The Whigs declared that "well-regulated" banks were necessary, denounced "executive usurpation" and the "spoils system," and, otherwise, disdained issues.<sup>201</sup>

Shannon's enthusiasm for entering the campaign was dampened somewhat by the death on February 21 of his young private secretary, George Shannon, the son of his brother Thomas.<sup>202</sup> In addition, the governor was ill during the early part of March.<sup>203</sup> After speaking at McConnellsville on March 30 to a gathering of some 2,000 citizens,<sup>204</sup> he spent a few more days in Columbus and then rejoined his family in St. Clairsville.<sup>205</sup>

At a Democratic meeting in St. Clairsville on April 13, Shannon joined with William Kennon in attacking the Whigs and defending the Van Buren administration. The governor's chief complaint against the Whigs was "non-committalism." He noted that neither the Harrisburg nor Columbus conventions had established a "chart of principles" for the people to consider and the Democrats to challenge. "For the first time in the history of this republic," he declared, "we have . . . a candidate for the highest office in

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., March 7, 11, April 3, 10, July 3, 28, 1840; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 394-95, 404.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 404; Auer, "Thomas Corwin," p. 47; Ohio State Journal, February 22, 27, 1840.

<sup>202</sup> Ohio State Journal, February 22, 1840.

<sup>203</sup> Wilson Shannon to Peter Kaufmann, March 16, 1840, Kaufmann Papers.

<sup>204</sup> Ohio Statesman, April 10, 1840.

<sup>205</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, April 11, 1840.

the world whose views are to be kept from the public eye on questions momentous to the people." He decried the hypocrisy of the opposition which had criticized the nomination of a military chieftain in 1828 yet now endorsed the candidacy of another military chieftain.

Most of the nation's problems, according to the governor, were not caused by Jacksonian policies. The banks were, of course, a major villain, guilty of recklessly expanding and contracting the currency, of maintaining inadequate specie reserves, of borrowing excessively from British banking interests, and of encouraging an undisciplined economic expansion which could not be sustained. A new National Bank was not the solution to the prevailing economic ills. The most appropriate course, Shannon concluded, was to adopt the administration's Independent Treasury plan.<sup>206</sup>

The governor addressed several county meetings in late May and early June.<sup>207</sup> Following a few weeks respite, he entered the fray again at Cadiz on July 4. Addressing for three hours a crowd estimated to exceed 5,000, Shannon gave "one of the best speeches I ever heard," reported Medary's correspondent.<sup>208</sup>

The most intense period of Democratic campaign efforts commenced during the last week of July and continued through the first week in October. Most of that time, Shannon appeared jointly on the stump with Senator William Allen and Vice President

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., April 18, 1840.

<sup>207</sup> Ohio Statesman, June 5, 12, 16, 1840.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., July 10, 1840.

Richard M. Johnson.<sup>209</sup> In August, the "big three" were augmented or relieved on occasion by William Medill, John Brough, and George W. Manypenny.<sup>210</sup> Senator Benjamin Tappan also actively entered the campaign in September.<sup>211</sup> Johnson spent most of August and September in Ohio because party leaders had decided that his presence there would do little damage and might counter-balance the strong influence of Harrison upon the state's electorate. Like Harrison, the Vice President had been at the Battle of the Thames in 1814 and had been credited with making a major contribution to the American victory. His election campaign role seems to have been to match war stories with Harrison to entertain his audiences and to try to reduce the heroic image of the general projected by Whig orators.<sup>212</sup>

Following appearances in Washington, Pennsylvania, and Wheeling, Virginia, Shannon, Allen and Johnson spoke to large gatherings at St. Clairsville on July 28, at Steubenville on July 29, at Washington on July 30, and at Zanesville on August 1. The crowd at Zanesville was estimated to be over 7,000 persons.

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<sup>209</sup> Ohio Statesman, August 5, 14, 25, 28, September 4, 18, 29, October 2, 9, 1840.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., August 5, 25, 1840. Cincinnati Gazette, August 8, 1840; Ohio State Journal, July 31, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, August 1, 22, September 19, 1840.

<sup>211</sup> Benjamin Tappan to Eli Tappan, November 9, 1840, Tappan Papers.

<sup>212</sup> Ohio Statesman, August 11, September 4, 22, October 9, 1840; Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 241-46; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 394.

Allen addressed the throng for three hours and Shannon for two. A gathering of 10,000 greeted the itinerant peddlars of Democratic political wares on August 5, at Lancaster.<sup>213</sup> A comparable assembly in Columbus on August 8 listened from 12:30 P. M. to sunset to Allen (three-hour speech), Shannon (two hours), Johnson (one hour), and several lesser lights denounce the "bank-corrupted," "abolitionist-dominated" opposition.<sup>214</sup>

The largest gathering of the entire campaign was present at Mount Vernon on August 19 for the Young Men's State Democratic Convention. It was reported that Shannon, Allen, and Johnson addressed over 20,000 raptly attentive party stalwarts that afternoon.<sup>215</sup> Although the Vice President campaigned elsewhere during the first two weeks in September, the governor and Senator Allen continued to stump the state, speaking at least every other day and often every day. This schedule did not terminate until October 10.<sup>216</sup>

Whig orators in Ohio matched the industrious exertions of their opponents and attained even more productive results. Thomas Corwin and former United States Senator Thomas Ewing headed the Whig campaign team. They were joined frequently by General Harrison.

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<sup>213</sup>Ohio Statesman, August 5, 1840. There is no way to ascertain accurately the size of the crowds at the various campaign meetings. The historian can only hope that the figures reported in the Democratic and Whig journals are not too grossly inflated.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., August 11, 1840.

<sup>215</sup>Ibid., August 25, 1840.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., August 28, September 2, 18, 29, October 2, 9, 1840.



Maintaining as rigorous a schedule as Shannon and Allen, Corwin and Ewing stumped the state, attending countless "log cabin raisings" and addressing crowds seldom reported to number less than 3,000 persons and usually exceeding 5,000.<sup>217</sup> A Whig observer from New York wrote that "Corwin and Ewing are making the tour of the State with prodigious effect. There is hardly a stronger 'two cattle team' in the nation."<sup>218</sup>

The Whig campaigners consistently drew larger crowds than did the Democratic speakers. No Democratic meeting matched the gigantic assembly of citizens which gathered at Dayton on September 10, to listen to Harrison, Corwin, Ewing, and others. Although the stated estimate of 100,000 in attendance undoubtedly was highly exaggerated, the affair dwarfed any comparable Democratic celebration.<sup>219</sup>

While Van Buren stayed on the sidelines, Johnson and Harrison challenged each other's claims to military valor. Senator Allen engaged in similar attacks. Shannon seldom resorted during his entire public career to criticisms of such a personal nature

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<sup>217</sup> Thomas Corwin to Thomas Ewing, September 2, 12, 1840, Ewing Family Papers; Cincinnati Gazette, July 11, 14, August 10, September 2, 18, 1840; Ohio State Journal, September 8, 15, October 2, 1840; Auer, "Thomas Corwin," p. 47; Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 208-11; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 391-96.

<sup>218</sup> Francis Granger to Thurlow Weed, September 2, 1840, Francis Granger Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in ibid., p. 393.

<sup>219</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, September 12, 15, 1840; Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 121, 165-66, 208-11.

and refrained from doing so in 1840.<sup>220</sup>

The most vigorous, extreme assaults upon the integrity and capabilities of the various candidates emanated from Whig and Democratic journalists in their regular publications and in several special campaign newspapers circulated during the summer and early fall. Whig publications included the Dayton Log Cabin Advocate, the Chillicothe Log Cabin Herald, and James Allen's Columbus Straight Out Harrisonian. The Democrats offered the Canton Hickory Club, the Newark Democratic Rasp, and the Xenia Kinderhook Dutchman.<sup>221</sup>

Leading the journalistic charge against the Whigs was, as usual, Sam Medary. Harrison, "the seducer," liar, and abolitionist, received much attention in the Ohio Statesman.<sup>222</sup> Corwin was depicted as "the great gun of abolition whiggery" and given the sobriquet of "Black Tom" because he had once supported the right of Negroes to testify in court provided that their good character was vouched for by two whites.<sup>223</sup> Whig editors portrayed Van Buren as a disdainful aristocrat who squandered public funds, advocated ruinous economic policies, and was subservient to the Catholic

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<sup>220</sup> Ohio Statesman, September 1, 22, 29, October 9, 13, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, April 18, September 19, 1840.

<sup>221</sup> Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 391-94.

<sup>222</sup> Ohio Statesman, April 3, May 1, July 3, 7, 1840. Harrison allegedly had once "seduced" the young daughter of one of his friends. The story first appeared in 1825. Ibid., July 7, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, July 15, 1840.

<sup>223</sup> Ohio Statesman, June 19, July 3, 1840.

Church.<sup>224</sup>

None of the candidates for either party was subjected to a more intensive and, to some extent, effective press offensive in Ohio than Governor Shannon. Editorials appeared in May in the Ohio Statesman and the St. Clairsville Gazette praising the governor for his role in securing the \$400,000 loan in New York to discharge state obligations to contractors on the public works.<sup>225</sup> Soon thereafter, reports appeared in the Ohio State Journal and Cincinnati Gazette claiming that Shannon had taken some of the funds with him upon leaving New York and had used them temporarily for some advantageous financial transactions before depositing the funds in the state treasury. Implicated with Shannon in the affair was C. L. Cole of the Binghamton [sic] (New York) Bank. It was alleged that Shannon exchanged gold and silver with Cole for depreciated Binghamton post notes in a profitable arrangement for both men and unloaded the disreputable currency upon the state.<sup>226</sup> The Whig press followed the initial charges with allegations that Cole had loaned the governor \$3,000 to purchase lands along the projected right of way of the Miami Canal. It was claimed that Shannon's position gave him advance knowledge of the exact site of the right of way and that he had taken improper advantage of the situation to promote

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<sup>224</sup> Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, pp. 97-107; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 395.

<sup>225</sup> Ohio Statesman, May 12, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, May 16, 1840.

<sup>226</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, June 12, July 14, 1840; Ohio State Journal, June 12, 16, 30, 1840.

his personal interests.<sup>227</sup> The regularity with which Whig editors repeated the charges between May and October and published documents and letters related to the controversy suggests that they believed that the allegations made some impact upon the Ohio electorate.<sup>228</sup>

Medary, John Dunham, and other Democratic editors replied with statements from Shannon, canal fund commissioner Joseph S. Lake, and other parties involved. According to Lake, the loan had been received in the currency of respectable New York banks, not in gold and silver; Shannon had left New York to travel to Washington before any of the funds had been received and could not, therefore, have used them personally at all; and he (Lake) had paid the full amount of the funds, with no Binghamton post notes included, into the state coffers. Since Lake's assertions were not challenged by state treasurer Joseph Whitehill, a Whig, they probably were true.<sup>229</sup>

Shannon denied the charges and insisted that he had never engaged in any financial arrangements with Cole.<sup>230</sup> Although the governor apparently had purchased several sections of land in the Miami

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., July 28, August 4, 7, September 22, October 6, 1840; Belmont Chronicle, August 4, September 15, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, August 18, 1840.

<sup>228</sup> Belmont Chronicle, June 23, August 4, September 15, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, June 12, July 11, 14, 22, August 10, 14, 17, 18, 25, 1840; Ohio State Journal, June 12, 16, 30, July 14, 17, 21, 28, August 4, 7, 14, 25, September 4, 8, 22, October 6, 1840.

<sup>229</sup> Joseph S. Lake to Samuel Medary, August 15, 1840, Ohio Statesman, August 21, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, July 4, 1840.

<sup>230</sup> Wilson Shannon to Samuel Medary, August 8, 1840, Ohio Statesman, August 11, 1840. Also see John A. Bryan to Samuel Medary, August 11, 1840, ibid., August 14, 1840; David Chase to Samuel Medary, August 15, 1840; ibid., August 21, 1840.

Canal area in 1839, no illegality was involved and the extent of the action's impropriety, if any, was not clearly established.<sup>231</sup>

The failure of the Whigs to resurrect the 1840 campaign allegations when Shannon ran again for governor in 1842 indicates that the charges had served their political purpose in 1840 and lacked the substance to be sustained thereafter.

While the Democratic and Whig forces battled for popular support, Ohio antislavery men were debating among themselves whether to adhere to their traditional political allegiances or to form an Ohio branch of the newly organized (April 1, 1840) national Liberty Party. The Liberty Party's nominee for President was James G. Birney, only recently an antislavery editor in Ohio.<sup>232</sup> Neither major party's national ticket offered much hope to the antislavery men. The same condition existed at the state level. Both Shannon and Corwin were members of the Ohio Colonization Society, an affiliation unacceptable to most opponents of slavery.<sup>233</sup> The Democratic State Convention, furthermore, had adopted resolutions condemning the antislavery movement.<sup>234</sup> Gamaliel Bailey of the Philanthropist concluded unenthusiastically that Corwin was the less objectionable

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<sup>231</sup> Ohio State Journal, September 22, October 6, 1840.

<sup>232</sup> Cincinnati Philanthropist, November 19, 1839, January 21, March 3, May 5, 19, June 30, September 22, 1840; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 373-76, 384-85.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., pp. 384-85; Cincinnati Philanthropist, January 21, 28, March 3, May 19, June 30, 1840.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., January 28, 1840.

of the two gubernatorial candidates.<sup>235</sup>

Bailey persisted until late in the summer of 1840 in his long-held view that the antislavery movement should not establish its own political party. Former Democratic United States Senator Thomas Morris and others finally prevailed upon him to accept the Liberty Party concept, however. At a special convention in Hamilton, Ohio, on September 1, 1840, 170 delegates formed the Ohio Liberty Party and endorsed James G. Birney for President. No state ticket was nominated. Many antislavery leaders such as Leicester King, Benjamin Wade, and Joshua R. Giddings remained in the Whig ranks.<sup>236</sup>

As the campaign progressed, it became obvious to all observers that popular interest and participation was far greater than ever before in any previous presidential contest. In a letter written to President Van Buren on August 18, 1840, Sam Medary remarked:

I have never seen such a state of things as is witnessed in Ohio at this time. It seems as though every man, woman and child preferred politics to any thing else. And it is this unusually excitable condition of the people that makes all calculations as to results more uncertain.<sup>237</sup>

A month later, Medary warned the readers of the Statesman to be on the lookout for fraud at the polls.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., September 29, 1840.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., June 30, September 8, 29, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, July 21, 1840; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 385-86.

<sup>237</sup> Medary to Van Buren, August 18, 1840, Van Buren Papers.

<sup>238</sup> Ohio Statesman, September 29, October 6, 9, 1840.

His apprehensions about a possible election-day disaster were fully justified. Over 70,000 more voters marched to the Ohio polls on Tuesday, October 13, 1840, than had cast ballots in the 1836 presidential contest. The results favored Harrison, 148,157 votes to 124,782 for Van Buren and a paltry 892 for James G. Birney. Shannon outpolled the President, receiving 129,312 votes, but was far short of Corwin's 145,441 total. The only consolation for the losers was that, while yielding a majority to the Whigs in the Ohio House, they retained control of the Senate.<sup>239</sup> Thus the Democrats still were in a position to stymie any effort by the Whigs to alter existing legislation concerning the banks or other consequential matters.

Like many other Democrats, Sam Medary rejected the role of a graceful loser. Unwilling to acknowledge the effectiveness of Whig campaign strategy, the adverse impact upon the Democrats of a depressed economy, the limited popularity of Van Buren, and the sizeable increase in Ohio's population since 1836, Medary blamed the election results upon the "money power" and rampant fraud at the polls. He claimed that, along the Ohio River, on Lake Erie, and along some of the canals, boatloads of Whig voters had been transported from county to county to cast their ballots several times.<sup>240</sup> He did not understand how Shannon could poll nearly

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<sup>239</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, October 20, December 15, 18, 1840; Ohio Statesman, October 16, 30, 1840; St. Clairsville Gazette, October 3, 10, 17, 1840.

<sup>240</sup> Ohio Statesman, October 13, 16, 27, 1840.

22,000 more votes in 1840 than he did in 1838 and still lose the election. Medary was absolutely certain, in fact, that Shannon had received the majority of the legal votes cast on October 13.<sup>241</sup> John Dunham of the St. Clairsville Gazette wholeheartedly concurred with Medary's assessment. He printed a list of Belmont County townships with statistics which he claimed demonstrated that many more people voted than could be accounted for in the 1840 national census or by any other available records.<sup>242</sup> While there probably was fraudulent voting by adherents of both parties, the fact remained, as Medary lamented, that "our most excellent and worthy Governor" had gone down to defeat along with the national ticket.<sup>243</sup>

Shannon had clearly campaigned as vigorously as was humanly possible. Confronted by a formidable gubernatorial opponent enveloped in one of the most successful exercises in political hoopla ever devised, the governor had run a strong race, had outpolled the President, and had conducted himself in the canvass with more honor and more devotion to the issues that should have been the focus of attention than had most of the other major political spokesmen in the state. Despite his loss, his performance had reinforced his position as one of the preeminent figures in the Ohio Democracy.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid., October 20, 30, 1840.

<sup>242</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, October 17, 1840.

<sup>243</sup> Ohio Statesman, November 6, 1840.

<sup>244</sup> John Dunham estimated that Shannon addressed over 200,000 citizens during the 1840 campaign. St. Clairsville Gazette, November 12, 1841. Peter Kaufmann wrote to the President that Shannon enjoyed "the affection and esteem of every Democrat in



Governor Shannon's dedicated service to the state Democratic Party since 1838 had had a devastating effect upon his private affairs.

He stated in a letter to Peter Kaufmann:

I find myself at the end of this great struggle out of business, my property all exhausted, largely in debt, with a growing family demanding my care and protection. Under these circumstances, I have consented to let my name go to the President for an appointment. There is no office in the gift of the President which would be of much service to me in a pecuniary point of view except a foreign mission.

Shannon expressed a preference for the Austrian minister's post as the best available diplomatic vacancy and asked Kaufmann to write Van Buren in support of such an appointment.<sup>245</sup> Kaufmann readily complied by forwarding to the President a long, eloquent communication pleading Shannon's case and urging that he be rewarded with the desired appointment. After noting that the governor was "emphatically" a favorite among the Germans in the state, Kaufmann concluded: "If such a man who has done so much for the party . . . is suffered to go down, it would be an everlasting disgrace to the whole party and drive its best men away or make them inactive."<sup>246</sup>

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Ohio" and was a man "around which [sic], as a moral pillar, the party can rally again hereafter." Kaufmann to Van Buren, November 15, 1840, Kaufmann Papers. Kaufmann was the editor of a German newspaper in Canton, a member of the Democratic State Central Committee, and had been a delegate to the national convention in May. Wilson Shannon to Martin Van Buren, February 9, 1839, ibid.; Ohio Statesman, January 10, 1840.

<sup>245</sup> Shannon to Kaufmann, November 6, 1840, Kaufmann Papers.

<sup>246</sup> Kaufmann to Van Buren, November 15, 1840, ibid.

Many other Ohioans also appealed to Van Buren on Shannon's behalf.<sup>247</sup> Included among the petitioners was one of the governor's strongest radical critics, Senator Benjamin Tappan. Tappan visited the President on December 21, and urged him to make Shannon chargé de'affaires to Venezuela. Van Buren replied that he would consult with his cabinet officials about such an appointment, but that he preferred to leave the existing vacant diplomatic posts for Harrison's action unless harm would result from the delay.<sup>248</sup> Van Buren failed to act subsequently, so Shannon was left to cope with his problems with his own depleted resources.

Shannon's final annual message was delivered to the legislature on December 8. The Cincinnati Gazette complained about the message's "extraordinary length" and noted that one hour and forty minutes had been required to read it to the legislators.<sup>249</sup> Most of Shannon's comments consisted of a reiteration of his views on banking and currency issues. His remarks on the one new topic he chose to discuss, the problem of fraudulent voting, undoubtedly were welcomed by his fellow Democrats. He recommended revising the election laws to make those who voted illegally subject to a penitentiary sentence and to impose stiff penalties upon judges of elections who knowingly accepted illegal votes. His other observations and recommendations

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<sup>247</sup> Matthew Birchard to Peter Kaufmann, November 22, 1840, ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Benjamin Tappan Senate Journal, entry for December 21, 1840, Tappan Papers.

<sup>249</sup> Cincinnati Gazette, December 11, 12, 1840.

resembled those presented in previous messages.<sup>250</sup> After participating in Thomas Corwin's inaugural ceremony on December 16, Ohio's first native-born governor packed his belongings and returned to St. Clairsville.<sup>251</sup>

Perhaps the most notable achievement of the Democratic legislature and of Governor Shannon during his administration was to improve the overall economic stability of the state government. Depressed conditions prevailed in the state and throughout the nation from 1838-1840 and Ohio was saddled most of that time with a \$15,000,000 public works debt. Nevertheless, the state met its obligations and maintained its credit in financial circles. During the latter half of 1840, Ohio bonds sold in New York nearly at par, ninety-seven cents on the dollar or better. The bonds of some other western states such as Indiana and Michigan were discounted much more heavily.<sup>252</sup> Shannon's annual message indicated that there had been much progress on the public works, that toll revenues from roads and canals had significantly increased, and that the state was operating on a balanced budget except for the excessive obligations assumed under the "Loan Law" of 1837.<sup>253</sup> With Shannon as their chief

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<sup>250</sup> Ibid., December 11, 12, 1840; Ohio Statesman, December 8, 1840.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., December 16, 1840; Cincinnati Gazette, December 19, 1840.

<sup>252</sup> For bond prices see Ohio State Journal, August 4, 1840; Ohio Statesman, January 30, 1841. For Ohio's indebtedness see Shannon's Annual Message in ibid., December 10, 1840. Also see Scheiber, Ohio Canal Era, pp. 144-58.

<sup>253</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 10, 1840.

spokesman, the Democrats had promoted the cause of bank reform among the people and had passed some much needed banking and currency legislation. While some of the measures were ineffective, others, such as the ban on the suspension of specie payments by banks for more than thirty days, had proved beneficial. Also, Shannon's recommendation that the disastrous "Loan Law" be repealed had been fulfilled.

In two campaigns and two years as governor, Shannon demonstrated that he was one of the most talented Democratic politicians in the state. He was an excellent speaker, advocated enlightened, progressive policies with regard to most public issues of his time, and adhered conscientiously to fundamental principles in which he believed. After adding its praise for Shannon's final gubernatorial message to the commendations of many other Democratic journals, the Lower Sandusky Democrat declared that, when the campaign "dust and smoke" obscuring Shannon had cleared, "the people of Ohio will award to him his just measure of fame, and place him with her best, ablest and most honored statesmen."<sup>254</sup>

Such accolades were not confined to his Ohio admirers. Lewis Cass of Michigan was a leading national figure in the Democratic Party and an aspirant for the Presidency. As the major Cass press organ, the Detroit Free Press exercised considerable influence

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<sup>254</sup> Quoted in Ohio Statesman, December 31, 1840. For editorial praise for Shannon's message see Ohio Statesman, December 8, 12, 1840, January 15, 1841; Mount Vernon Banner, quoted in ibid., December 23, 1840; Coshocton Democrat, quoted in ibid., December 26, 1840; Dover, New Hampshire Gazette, quoted in ibid., January 15, 1841; St. Clairsville Gazette, December 12, 1840; Cincinnati Advertiser, December 12, 1840.

within party ranks. Shannon must have been pleased, therefore, to read in the Free Press that his gubernatorial message was "worthy of a mature statesman" and would "add greatly to his already distinguished reputation." The editor of the Free Press also volunteered his opinion that Shannon was "one of the most promising Democratic politicians of the West."<sup>255</sup> Belmont County's former prosecuting attorney obviously had advanced many rungs up the American political ladder in just three years.

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<sup>255</sup> Quoted in Ohio Statesman, December 21, 1840. For information on Lewis Cass see Frank B. Woodford, Lewis Cass: The Last Jeffersonian (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1950), pp. 214-26.

### Chapter III

#### GOVERNOR OF OHIO, 1842-1844

Wilson Shannon returned to St. Clairsville at the conclusion of his first term as governor of Ohio intending to devote himself to his neglected legal career. After practicing alone for a few months, he formed a partnership, in April, 1841, with Robert J. Alexander.<sup>1</sup> The firm's prestigious aura resulting from Shannon's presence was enhanced in the following October when Alexander was elected county prosecuting attorney.<sup>2</sup>

Other than delivering two brief speeches in the county just prior to the October, 1841, elections, Shannon remained aloof from politics.<sup>3</sup> He neither expected nor desired another gubernatorial nomination.<sup>4</sup>

For a brief period in August, 1841, the possibility existed that the former governor might assume a political responsibility at the national level. Following President William Henry Harrison's death in April, 1841, Vice President John Tyler of Virginia became

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<sup>1</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, May 7, 1841.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., October 15, 1841.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., September 24, October 8, 10, 1841.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., November 12, 1841.

President. During his first few months in office, Tyler began to alienate Henry Clay and other Whig leaders by adhering to strict Jeffersonian states' rights doctrines and policies. The rift became serious, even insuperable, in August, 1841, when he vetoed Clay's bill to charter a new National Bank.<sup>5</sup> On August 13, Senator Benjamin Tappan wrote to Edwin Stanton that he and other Ohioans in the Capital were trying to commit Tyler to give Shannon a cabinet post. The resignation of all or most of the existing Whig Presidential cabinet was expected at any time. One of those about to leave was Ohio's Thomas Ewing, who was Secretary of the Treasury.<sup>6</sup> Tappan's motives are not clear. As a radical, he may have wished to remove Shannon from the Ohio political scene, but it seems most unlikely that an influential position in the cabinet constituted a desirable isolation site. Perhaps in part, at least, concern for Shannon's welfare was the motivation. The cabinet did resign, but Tyler chose other men to fill the vacancies.<sup>7</sup>

Governor Thomas Corwin and the Whigs, meanwhile, were undergoing a miserable, frustrating experience in trying to conduct Ohio's governmental affairs according to party dictates. In his inaugural address, Corwin had proposed that either a state bank with several branches be created to correct the admitted deficiencies

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<sup>5</sup>Robert J. Morgan, A Whig Embattled: The Presidency under John Tyler (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1954), pp. 60-68.

<sup>6</sup>Tappan to Stanton, August 13, 1841, Tappan Papers; Morgan, A Whig Embattled, pp. 67-79.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

of the existing banking system, or that the most stable of the banks be rechartered under strict state regulations.<sup>8</sup> The Whig legislators were divided among themselves as to the best arrangement. Any conservative Whig plan developed could expect, of course, to be defeated by the Democratic majority in the state Senate if it passed the House. The result was that Whig "bank reform" endeavors in 1841 were completely stalemated.<sup>9</sup> Also, Ohio's economic status deteriorated badly during the first year of the Corwin administration. Ohio bonds, selling at ninety-seven cents on the dollar in December, 1840, were discounted below sixty cents by January, 1842.<sup>10</sup> The amount of specie in the state's banks dropped from \$1,752,000 in 1840 to \$827,000 in 1842.<sup>11</sup> In December, 1841, the state had to borrow \$200,000 to pay the interest due in January on Ohio's bonds.<sup>12</sup> With such an undistinguished record before the people, the Whigs fared poorly in the 1841 fall elections and the Democrats returned a majority in both houses of the General Assembly.<sup>13</sup>

During the latter part of 1841, the divisiveness in Whig ranks at the national level began to affect the party members in Ohio.

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<sup>8</sup>Ohio State Journal, December 15, 1840.

<sup>9</sup>Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," pp. 514-20; Shade, Banks or No Banks, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup>Cincinnati Daily Enquirer, March 25, 1842; Ohio Statesman, March 25, 1840.

<sup>11</sup>Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 406.

<sup>12</sup>Ohio Statesman, March 15, 1842.

<sup>13</sup>Holt, "Party Politics in Ohio," pp. 517-18.



John G. Miller, editor in Columbus of the Ohio Confederate and Old School Republican, was a brother-in-law of President Tyler. He and some other states' rights Ohioans had deserted the Democrats in 1840 to support the Whig ticket and now formed a solid group of Tylerites in the Ohio Whig membership. Although Miller and his associates defended Tyler's vetoes of Clay's various nationalistic legislative proposals, the main block of Whigs in Ohio joined their national leaders in "reading" Tyler out of the party.<sup>14</sup>

The sustained Whig travails of 1841 provided good reasons for Ohio's Democrats to be optimistic about their election prospects in 1842. The choice of a gubernatorial candidate was the most important consideration before the party faithful in November, 1841. Without any apparent encouragement on his part, Wilson Shannon's name appeared immediately at the top of the list of prospects. In response to a query published in the Ohio Statesman, John Dunham stated that Shannon had authorized him to say that "under no circumstances whatever" would the former governor consent to be a candidate. "His private affairs are such as to occupy his undivided attention." Dunham expressed Shannon's gratitude for the interest shown by the party and recommended that favorable consideration be given to the other "good men and true" who had been suggested for the nomination. That list included John Brough, state Senator Dowty Utter, and Congressman William Medill.<sup>15</sup> It seems obvious that Shannon was not

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 454, 483-85, 517-18; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 398-402.

<sup>15</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, November 12, 1841.

playing the "reluctant candidate" role. He had exhibited little interest in politics throughout 1841, his financial status was unsatisfactory, and his first term as governor had been filled with many disagreeable experiences as well as gratifying rewards.<sup>16</sup>

Despite his unequivocally stated desires, Democratic leaders urgently pleaded with Shannon to run again. None of the other potential candidates seemed to inspire enough confidence in their ability to defeat the Whig opposition. Finally, on December 24, state Senator David Tod and sixty-nine other prominent Democrats from all areas of the state addressed the following appeal to Shannon:

A desire to see the utmost harmony and unanimity characterize all the proceedings of the Democracy of Ohio, in relation to the next annual election, has induced us to request you to forego the determination to which you had brought your own mind upon the subject, and to consent, once more, to become our candidate for the Gubernatorial chair.

We are sensible of the sacrifice it must cost you, but we think the urgency of the crisis a sufficient apology for exacting it at your hands.

That letter and Shannon's reply were published in the St. Clairsville Gazette on December 31, 1841. In his response, Shannon reiterated his wish to remain a private citizen in the party ranks. Nevertheless, he could not ignore the obligations placed upon him by two previous gubernatorial nominations from the party. "If, therefore," he wrote, "my being a candidate shall be considered by the convention essential to the interests or success of the Democratic party, I shall not feel myself at liberty to decline the nomination."

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

That exchange settled the issue of the Democratic gubernatorial choice. No other candidate was presented at the January 8 state convention and Shannon was nominated by acclamation.<sup>17</sup> At a banquet held on the evening of January 8, the new nominee for governor was the recipient of many laudatory toasts. Presiding over the banquet was Moses Dawson, formerly a vehement radical critic of Shannon. The spirit of harmony and unity seemed to prevail in the Democratic ranks.<sup>18</sup>

The platform promulgated by the convention to establish the issues for the campaign was decidedly limited in its topics. The resolutions denounced Congress for repealing Van Buren's Independent Treasury structure, objected to the distribution to the states of the proceeds from the sale of public lands, and asserted that those banks which had recently suspended specie payments should resume them or cease doing business. Other resolutions praised Jackson, Van Buren, Richard M. Johnson, and Shannon. As with the Whigs in 1840, the Democratic campaign was manifestly not going to focus on issues.<sup>19</sup>

The 1842 gubernatorial campaign began to assume a comedic dimension when Governor Corwin imitated Shannon by announcing in early February that, due to the condition of his private affairs, he

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., January 14, 1842; Cincinnati Enquirer, January 11, 1842.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.; St. Clairsville Gazette, January 14, 1842.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

could not "consent to be a candidate for reelection."<sup>20</sup> His declaration was probably as sincere as Shannon's earlier similar statement. Corwin was thoroughly disenchanted with the office after one year of frustrating experiences.<sup>21</sup> Party leaders soon overcame his objections to running again, however, and he was renominated without opposition at the state convention on February 22, 1842.<sup>22</sup> Thus both major parties in Ohio presented candidates for governor in 1842 who, in reality, were unenthusiastic about holding the office.

In addition to the reluctance to run of the gubernatorial candidates, conditions within both Whig and Democratic ranks strongly affected the campaign. The Whigs were split between supporters of Henry Clay and of John Tyler. The division finally progressed to the point where the Tylerites held a poorly attended state convention of their own on July 30, 1842, in Columbus. They endorsed the policies of the President and recommended his continuance in office. There was no nomination made for governor.<sup>23</sup> Even before the convention, the Ohio State Journal charged that the states' rights Tyler men were fully committed to promoting Shannon's candidacy.<sup>24</sup> Additional problems for the Whigs arose from the significant increase in the

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<sup>20</sup> Lebanon Star, n. d., quoted in Cincinnati Enquirer, February 12, 1842.

<sup>21</sup> Auer, "Thomas Corwin," p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Ohio State Journal, February 23, 1842.

<sup>23</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 30, August 2, 1842; Ohio State Journal, August 3, 1842.

<sup>24</sup> Ohio State Journal, July 29, 1842. Also see ibid., August 27, 1842.

number of antislavery men in their ranks who shifted allegiances to the Liberty Party after 1840. Contrary to the policy followed in 1840, the Ohio Liberty Party convention, held in December, 1841, nominated a candidate for governor, Leicester King. Votes for King in 1842 would primarily be secured at the expense of the Whig candidate.<sup>25</sup>

The ranks of the state's Democrats were in only slightly less disarray in 1842 than those of the Whigs. The charters of thirteen of Ohio's twenty-three banks were scheduled to expire in January, 1843. The radicals were determined either to let the banks die at that time or, as the price of continuation, to force the banks to accept stringent new controls over their operations. Conservative Democrats and the Whigs fought in the legislature to soften or block the various harsh bank measures proposed by the radicals.<sup>26</sup>

As a first step in developing a new bank reform program, the legislature passed a bill ordering all banks that had suspended specie payments to resume them by March 4 or to face revocation of their charters. A more significant act, approved on March 7, was a general banking act sponsored by Senator Samuel Latham. The Latham Act directed that banks possess one-third of their circulation in specie, that their capital be paid entirely in specie, that banks'

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<sup>25</sup> Cincinnati Philanthropist, February 9, March 9, 1842; Ohio State Journal, September 22, October 22, 1842.

<sup>26</sup> Ohio Statesman, March 25, 1842; Cincinnati Enquirer, January 10, 11, February 2, 1842; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 133-35; Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, pp. 406-07.

liabilities not exceed one and one-half times their assets, and that dividends be paid only from bank profits. Additional stipulations were that a safety reserve fund be established to handle emergency financial crises and that bank officers and stockholders were individually liable for the obligations of their corporations. Latham's "Humbug," as the Whigs dubbed it, was presented as a reform measure, but constituted, in fact, a none too subtle attempt by the radicals to force Ohio's banks to close their doors.<sup>27</sup>

Although amended in 1843 to reduce its severity, the act fulfilled its purpose. No banks were chartered under its provisions and only eight of the institutions were still doing business after January, 1844.<sup>28</sup>

The insistence of Democratic radicals upon adhering to a course of "bank destruction" finally forced the battle within the party to manifest itself openly in reports and editorial debates in the Democratic press. The press debate was triggered by resolutions passed at a large meeting of conservatives held at West Union in Adams County on March 25, 1842. Introduced by Thomas Hamer, the resolutions denounced the harshness of the Latham Act, declared that "a well regulated Banking system" in Ohio was both necessary and desirable, and castigated Sam Medary and other hard money men for trying, by devious means, to lead the Democratic Party down the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 407-08; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 133-35.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 138-40.

path of bank destruction.<sup>29</sup> Medary responded with a bitter attack upon Hamer as the "debtor, attorney, and instrument" of the "swindling bankers."<sup>30</sup> Throughout the spring and early summer, Medary, Hamer, and other prominent Democrats vigorously assaulted each other in the press over their differing views on banking and currency issues.<sup>31</sup> In one of his letters to the press, Hamer declared that Shannon fully agreed with the West Union resolutions.<sup>32</sup> Shannon evidently refrained, however, from entering directly into the conservative-radical debate. His generally conservative views were well known, of course. Medary's vitriolic, anti-conservative diatribes in the Ohio Statesman must have made it difficult for the Democratic nominee and the editor to maintain a viable working relationship during the campaign.<sup>33</sup> A united campaign effort either by the Democrats or by their opponents was obviously impossible.

It was not surprising, in light of the prevailing political climate, that the 1842 gubernatorial canvass was an extremely low-keyed, dispirited affair. Apparently convinced that the electorate was already adequately familiar with their opinions, neither Shannon nor Corwin campaigned extensively. A total of just seven public campaign appearances by Shannon is listed in the Ohio Statesman

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<sup>29</sup>Cincinnati Enquirer, April 16, 1842; Ohio State Journal, April 22, 1842; Ohio Statesman, April 19, 1842.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., May 31, 1842.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., April 19, 22, 26, 29, May 13, 21, June 10, 17, 21, July 15, 1842; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 16, 25, May 2, 24, June 6, 14, July 12, 1842.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., June 17, 1842. <sup>33</sup>Ibid., May 31, July 15, 1842.

and the St. Clairsville Gazette.<sup>34</sup>

At Steubenville, on May 19, Shannon delivered a two-hour address which probably dismayed many of his conservative friends. He praised the new harsh banking acts passed by the last legislature, although he admitted that some modifications in them were needed. He insisted that, contrary to Whig charges, he and other Democrats favored "a well regulated banking system" and had no other goal in mind.<sup>35</sup> As in 1840, the largest Democratic gathering occurred at the Young Men's Democratic State Convention held on July 29 in Columbus. Shannon's former brother-in-law, George W. Manypenny, presided at the occasion. In his remarks, Shannon blamed the Whigs for mismanaging national and state affairs, denounced the protective tariff currently in force, and repeated his standard bank critique.<sup>36</sup>

A significant, though unscheduled, campaign development occurred on October 1. Both Shannon and Corwin arrived in Findlay early on that date to address their respective admirers. The local Whig arrangements committee promptly called for a debate between the two candidates and both accepted. Commencing at 1:00 P. M., Corwin spoke for one and one-half hours, Shannon responded for two hours, and Corwin offered a thirty-minute conclusion. Several other speakers also participated in the debate which did not end until 9:00 P. M. Corwin discussed the virtues of a state bank, a United

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<sup>34</sup> Ohio Statesman, June 3, July 29, August 20, October 6, 21, 1842; St. Clairsville Gazette, September 2, 9, 16, 1842.

<sup>35</sup> Ohio Statesman, June 3, 1842.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., July 28, 29, 1842.



States Bank, and a high protective tariff. According to the partisan report published in the Ohio Statesman, Shannon so skillfully demolished Corwin's arguments that the Whig spokesman chose to tell some jokes and stories in his concluding remarks rather than to respond to the points raised by the Democratic gubernatorial nominee.<sup>37</sup>

In reference to the coonskin caps favored by the Whigs in 1840, Sam Medary declared that election day, October 11, 1842, was going to be a great day for "coon-skinning" in Ohio.<sup>38</sup> And so it was. Shannon defeated Corwin by a majority of 3,443 votes, 129,064 to 125,621. The Liberty Party candidate, Leicester King, received 5,403 votes. It is quite possible that most of King's votes came from former Whigs. Thus Shannon may have owed his victory to an organization many Democrats deemed thoroughly reprehensible. In addition to winning the governorship, the Democrats retained control of both houses of the legislature.<sup>39</sup>

The Ohio Senate met at 3:00 P. M. on December 9 to officially validate the vote for governor. To the consternation of the Democrats, as of the morning of December 9, four counties had not forwarded their official gubernatorial tallies. Without them, Shannon had fewer votes than Corwin. The extremely awkward situation was eliminated by the arrival early on the ninth of the Richland County report

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<sup>37</sup> Findlay Courier, n. d., quoted in ibid., October 6, 1842.

<sup>38</sup> Ohio Statesman, October 11, 1842.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., October 15, November 8, 1842; Ohio State Journal, October 22, 1842.

which gave Shannon enough votes to be declared the victor.<sup>40</sup>

Sam Medary declared in the Ohio Statesman of December 10:

"It sounds good to say Governor Shannon, by official authority, once more." Medary also remarked that Shannon would "hardly know" the governor's office.

Corwin, the "log cabin" Governor has filled it up with fine new carpets, new chairs, new desks, until it shines again! It is quite aristocratic, at the public expense, since the "log cabin" and coon skin boys got in. There is a wide difference between some men's profession before the people, and their practices afterwards.

Governor Shannon's second inaugural address, delivered on December 14, was relatively brief and devoid of any significant new policy proposals. One-third of the speech was devoted to a denunciation of high protective tariffs. Shannon advocated, instead, a tariff for revenue purposes with some limited "incidental" protection for American manufacturers. He reiterated his opposition to a United States Bank and to a state bank. He reaffirmed his support for a system in Ohio of "well regulated" local banks. He also enthusiastically praised President John Tyler for vetoing the Whig bill to recharter a national bank and declared that all citizens should be grateful to the President for his "honest and fearless exercise of constitutional power for the good of the country." Shannon had previously lavished praise upon Tyler in his remarks at the Young Men's Democratic State Convention in July, 1842. No other substantive comments were presented in the inaugural. Perhaps the only positive aspect of the address was that it offered little for

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<sup>40</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 10, 1842.

the Whigs to criticize.<sup>41</sup> Medary, seeking somewhat futilely for something to applaud, commended the "chaste, easy, and direct" style of the message and its "conciseness."<sup>42</sup>

It is unfortunate for Shannon that he did not ignore the entreaties of his fellow Democrats and stand by his initial rejection of the gubernatorial nomination. At the time he assumed office, the governor and his conservative friends were almost totally alienated from the dominant radical leadership of the party. Their differences on several vital matters were irreconcilable and could only be expected to worsen.

Since replacing Harrison, President Tyler had been exerting a divisive influence upon the Democrats as well as upon the Whigs. Almost completely deserted by the Whigs by the end of 1841, Tyler tried to re-enter the Democratic ranks and even secure the party's next presidential nomination.<sup>43</sup> Shannon and many other Ohio Democrats were pleased with the course Tyler followed as President and the views he espoused. Several Democratic county conventions in 1842 had even issued resolutions praising Tyler's actions.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 14, 1842. For Shannon's July comments about Tyler see ibid., July 29, 1842.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., December 14, 1842.

<sup>43</sup> Sylvan H. Kesilman, "John Tyler and the Presidency: Old School Republicanism, Partisan Realignment, and support for His Administration" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Department of History, The Ohio State University, 1973), pp. 216-35; Robert Seager II, And Tyler Too: A Biography of John and Julia Gardiner Tyler (New York, 1963), pp. 151-71.

<sup>44</sup> Ohio Statesman, March 25, May 10, July 29, 30, September 12, 1842.

Shannon was among the Democratic minority who were willing to respond affirmatively to Tyler's request for the restoration of his Democratic credentials.<sup>45</sup> The majority of Democrats did not concur, however, and Tyler became a President without a major party sustaining him. Attempts to build a separate Tyler party were only minimally successful in Ohio and elsewhere.<sup>46</sup>

Despite their receptive attitude toward Tyler's overtures, Shannon and other Ohio conservatives did not endorse his presidential ambitions. Convinced that Van Buren, the continued choice of the radicals, was no longer a viable candidate in the state, they turned after the 1840 elections to Lewis Cass of Michigan to be their 1844 national standard bearer.<sup>47</sup> Cass had been an Ohio resident from 1802 to 1813, governor of Michigan Territory from 1813 to 1831, and Andrew Jackson's Secretary of War from 1831-1836. He returned to the United States in 1841 after serving five years as minister to France. As a former Ohioan and as the most prominent Democrat in the neighboring state of Michigan, Cass was well-known to the citizens and political leaders of Ohio. Like Governor Shannon, he espoused traditional Jeffersonian Republican political views.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ohio Statesman, July 29, December 14, 1842.

<sup>46</sup> Kesilman, "John Tyler and the Presidency," pp. 240-61.

<sup>47</sup> Edwin Stanton to Benjamin Tappan, March 7, 1841, Tappan Papers; Stanton to Tappan, February 8, 1843, Stanton Papers; St. Clairsville Gazette, February 2, 1844. Other leaders of the Cass movement in Ohio in addition to Shannon included Rufus P. Spaulding, George W. Manypenny, Samuel Lahm, William Sawyer, and David Disney. Ohio Statesman, December 23, 27, 28, 1843.

<sup>48</sup> Woodford, Lewis Cass, pp. 21-219.

Shannon's support for Cass, his praise for Tyler, and his sustained advocacy of conservative banking and currency policies were bitterly resented by Medary, Senators Tappan and Allen, and other radicals. The inability of the radicals to find an acceptable gubernatorial candidate within their own ranks in 1842 forced them to turn to "bank reform" Shannon, but all persons involved soon had good grounds for regretting that decision.<sup>49</sup>

Medary tried for a short time to maintain a facade of party unity. In reply to John Dunham of the St. Clairsville Gazette and other press critics, the Statesman's editor asserted that he was not a bank destructionist and that his only desire as an editor was to act as a mediator whenever differences arose within the party. Medary insisted that, contrary to Dunham's claims, he and Shannon remained good friends. The only Democrats causing real trouble within the party, he declared, were Thomas Hamer and his West Union followers.<sup>50</sup>

Medary presided over the annual party celebration on January 8, 1843, in Columbus. Shannon was absent, but other conservatives were included in the crowd. Several toasts extolling the governor's virtues were presented. In response to toasts to the noble, magnanimous spirit of the ladies present, a feeling of euphoric good will descended upon the throng, according to Medary.

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<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Tappan to Edwin Stanton, January 14, 1840, Tappan to Stanton, February 20, 1840, Stanton to Tappan, January 30, 1842, Stanton Papers; St. Clairsville Gazette, February 2, 1844.

<sup>50</sup> Ohio Statesman, January 13, 14, 19, 28, February 1, 6, 1843.

"The hatchet was buried . . . and present in its stead was the olive branch of peace, consecrated to the cause of democracy--to our friends, a talisman of Union--to our enemies, a weapon of terror." The words did not, of course, match the realities.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the most vigorous and widely publicized struggles between conservative and radical Democrats occurred in the legislature. Many conservatives and some Democratic moderates maneuvered with the Whigs to eliminate some of the harshest aspects of the laws enacted at the previous session. Shannon made known his view that the "solvent banks" whose charters expired on January 1, 1843, should be rechartered to prevent a serious loss of public support for the Democrats at the next election.<sup>52</sup> A measure designed to provide for a brief extension failed in late December in the legislature, nevertheless. Thirteen of Ohio's banks ceased their operations, therefore, on January 1. In response to conservative pressures, the radicals agreed to the passage of a new compromise banking bill in February. The chief modification reduced the extent of the liability of stockholders and officers for their banks' obligations. Edwin Stanton assured Senator Tappan that the bill would not " . . . do any other harm than always follows the taking untenable ground, for no banking will be done under it . . . ."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., January 10, 1843.

<sup>52</sup>George M. McCook to Benjamin Tappan, December 15, 1842, Benjamin Tappan Papers, Library of Congress; Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 137-38.

<sup>53</sup>Stanton to Tappan, February 8, 1843, Stanton Papers; Ohio Statesman, January 2, 3, 1843.

As Stanton assumed, the provisions of the new act were considered too restrictive by the banking interests and no new charters were sought.<sup>54</sup>

Conservative Democratic editors vehemently assailed the radical legislators and their chief journalistic defender, Sam Medary, for continuing to undermine the party's welfare by adhering rigidly to a policy of bank destruction. Medary reacted angrily by announcing on February 6 that he had "given up" on five newspapers, the St. Clairsville Gazette, the Zanesville Aurora, the Hillsborough Gazette, the Coshocton Democrat, and the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Directing his wrath particularly at Shannon's hometown editor, John Dunham, Medary charged that Dunham had come to Ohio as a "blackguard" and had not reformed.<sup>55</sup> This open intraparty press warfare shattered any pretense by Medary or other Democrats that divisions within the party were minor and easily reconcilable.

Although he occupied a prominent position as governor of the state, Shannon apparently engaged in little political activity of any kind during 1843. The few undertakings in which he was involved did not endear him to Democratic radicals. On January 28, 1843, Lewis Cass arrived in Columbus to consult with Shannon and others about presidential prospects in Ohio for 1844. A welcoming committee headed by the governor met General Cass, a hero of the War of 1812, three miles outside Columbus. As Cass approached the

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<sup>54</sup> Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, p. 139.

<sup>55</sup> Ohio Statesman, February 6, 1843. Also see ibid., January 12, 13, 14, 19, 1843.

capital, he was greeted with a twenty-six gun salute. A reception followed in the evening.<sup>56</sup>

Van Burenite Edwin Stanton, who attended the various Cass festivities, forwarded an informative report of his observations to Senator Tappan.

I told you that Shannon had nothing to do with the [John C.] Calhoun movement, but was in the Cass interest. I was right. He . . . is now in the most confidential relationship with Cass, and is exerting his utmost interest to rally a party.

He having undertaken my conversion to that faith, I have become acquainted with some, and soon shall know all their calculations. They reason thus, --Calhoun and Van Buren will cripple each other: a bitter animosity is growing up between their respective partisans, which will become irreconcilable, and then Cass will come in Sweep Stakes. Their first and dearest object now is, to get up an excitement in Ohio. Shannon said to me about an hour since, "Sam Medary has it in his power to make Cass President."

You know Medary well enough to understand his views. A truer man never breathed, and it is true, that he holds at this moment in his hands, an immense power. The warfare waged against him this winter is increasing his strength.

The principal partisans here [Columbus] of Mr. Cass are Shannon, Rufus Spaulding, Edson B. Olds, and John E. Hunt. The soft money men rushed to him. But he has had not enough to discover that is not the "go." Altho his letter published a short time since said that he was in favor of Specie with a "due degree of credit," he has here given strong intimations of being a hard money man. To Medary he has distinctly so expressed himself.

He reached here this morning on his return from Cincinnati. Shannon took me this afternoon to see him . . . Shannon says that a letter has been written to Cass from Indiana, and that his answer, in which he takes the whole democratic ground occupied by Mr. Van Buren, will soon be published.<sup>57</sup>

The Cass interests made very limited progress in 1843 in converting Democrats to their candidate's cause. Cass rallies were

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., January 28, 30, 1843.

<sup>57</sup> Stanton to Tappan, February 8, 1843, Stanton Papers.



held in Cincinnati in February and in Akron in June.<sup>58</sup> At the end of the year, Cass men purchased the Zanesville Aurora.<sup>59</sup>

Little else seems to have been accomplished.

During the summer and early fall, several county conventions endorsed Shannon's conduct as governor and urged his renomination.<sup>60</sup> During the same period, however, word evidently began circulating from the radical leadership through the party ranks that the governor was no longer acceptable as a candidate. As a result, the endorsements tapered off. A possible alternative for the governor's future political employment was suggested in late June in a report in the Philadelphia Spirit of the Times that President Tyler might appoint Shannon to succeed Hugh Legare, who had died, as Attorney General. The post went to John Nelson of Maryland, however.<sup>61</sup>

The division within Democratic ranks seriously affected the prospects of party candidates in the fall elections. Other than speaking in Cincinnati on July 4, Shannon apparently did not campaign at all.<sup>62</sup> He is not mentioned in any of the press reports of campaign rallies. The names of Senators Allen and Tappan and

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<sup>58</sup>Cincinnati Enquirer, February 7, 1843; Ohio Statesman, February 16, June 20, 1843.

<sup>59</sup>H. C. Whitman to William Allen, December 15, 1843, Allen Papers.

<sup>60</sup>Ohio Statesman, June 20, 30, July 4, 11, August 4, 25, 29, September 19, 1843.

<sup>61</sup>Quoted in ibid., June 30, 1843. For Nelson's appointment see ibid., July 7, 1843.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., July 7, 1843.

other leading party orators are likewise absent from accounts of campaign activities. Also, Whig attacks upon Democratic banking policies evidently proved persuasive to some of the electorate. The consequences were that the Democrats lost control of the Ohio House and retained only a slim majority in the Senate.<sup>63</sup>

By the first of November, Democratic leaders had settled on former state Senator David Tod as the successor to Shannon.<sup>64</sup> With that announcement confronting him in the Ohio Statesman, the governor was probably delighted to agitate the radicals by issuing a letter praising President Tyler. Written on November 12 and published in the Ohio Confederate and Old School Republican on November 22, the lengthy communication was a response to friendly overtures and complimentary resolutions emanating from a Tyler meeting in Cleveland. In his letter to the Tyler group, Shannon reviewed in detail Tyler's course as President and found nothing involved other than a firm adherence to sound Democratic principles. The President, declared Shannon, fully deserved the approbation of all Democrats for his conduct in office. The governor did not go so far, however, as to desert his allegiance to Cass and recommend Tyler for the party's 1844 presidential nomination.<sup>65</sup> With his political prospects in Ohio virtually eliminated, Shannon thus chose

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<sup>63</sup>Weisenburger, Passing of the Frontier, p. 415.

<sup>64</sup>Ohio Statesman, November 3, 1843.

<sup>65</sup>Wilson Shannon to H. N. Barston, et. al., November 12, 1843, Ohio Confederate and Old School Republican, November 22, 1843. For the actions of the Cleveland meeting see ibid., November 8, 22, 1843.

to enhance to at least a slight degree his options elsewhere.

Shannon's Tyler letter earned him a column of editorial rebuke in Van Buren's organ, the Washington Globe. The Globe sarcastically commented that Shannon had been buried by "Tippecanoe and Tyler too!" in 1840 and had been "disinterred" and restored to office by the Democracy which he now claimed was unjust to Tyler. The governor's assertions that Tyler's policies were in accord with those of the Democratic Party were false. The Globe concluded that Shannon would undoubtedly "profit" from his pro-Tyler actions.<sup>66</sup>

Shannon delivered his final gubernatorial message to the legislature on December 5. His only new proposal was a recommendation for amending the state constitution to expand the structure of the woefully inadequate state court system. He did not forego the opportunity to state for the fourth time in such a message his belief that a "well guarded and well restricted system of local banks" was the "most practical" system for the state to maintain.<sup>67</sup>

Sam Medary expressed no opinion about the message.<sup>68</sup> Radical reactions were clearly expressed by one of Senator William Allen's correspondents, however.

Shannon's message has done an incalculable injury. His infamous endorsement of Tyler nearly as much. We have

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<sup>66</sup> Washington Globe, November 28, 1843.

<sup>67</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 5, 1843.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Medary simply repeated some of Shannon's main points.

several soft Demos. in the Senate who only waited for Shannon to lead off on the currency question to show their hands. Miller of Belmont . . . , Lahm of Stark and one or two others are rotten to the core . . . ."<sup>69</sup>

John Dunham praised the message, as could be expected. He noted that Shannon was "where he had always been" on banking and currency issues, just as the rest of the Democratic Party should be too if it acted responsibly.<sup>70</sup>

Shannon engaged as governor in one last struggle on behalf of his convictions at the state convention on January 8. Shannon, George W. Manypenny, and other Cass men endeavored to secure passage of a resolution allowing delegates to the national convention to be chosen by conventions in the state's congressional districts. If the delegates were chosen during the state convention, as was the normal procedure, a slate of Van Buren adherents would undoubtedly be chosen. The proposed change moved by Shannon was voted down. The delegates then completed their rejection of the "Shannonites" by nominating David Tod for governor by acclamation.<sup>71</sup>

A banquet for party leaders held on the evening of January 8 was presided over by conservative leader David Disney of Cincinnati. Shannon was present and was toasted along with Tod, Cass, Van Buren, and other prominent Democrats. During his brief remarks, Shannon

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<sup>69</sup>H. C. Whitman to William Allen, December 15, 1843, Allen Papers.

<sup>70</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, December 15, 30, 1843.

<sup>71</sup>William Medill to William Allen, January 11, 1844, Allen Papers; Ohio Statesman, January 8, 9, 1844.

pledged his support to the party's gubernatorial nominee. Medary reported that the spirit of unity prevailed and that the friends of Cass "bowed in patriotic submission to the overwhelming expression for Mr. Van Buren."<sup>72</sup>

After the January 8 convention, Shannon had little to do except wait for the legislature to adjourn in March so that he could return to St. Clairsville. As a lame duck governor at odds with his party's leadership, he did not have to feel guilty about devoting himself to his legal practice for the rest of his term. His anticipated semi-retirement was not to be, however.

On February 28, United States Secretary of State Abel P. Upshur was killed on the battleship Princeton when an overheated gun exploded.<sup>73</sup> Upshur was replaced by John C. Calhoun. Concurrently with the announcement of Calhoun's appointment, Tyler named a new minister to Mexico. That choice was Wilson Shannon.<sup>74</sup> Shannon's role as the most prominent defender in Ohio of Tyler's actions as President had brought the governor his just reward, the major diplomatic post he had been seeking since 1840.

Shannon must have left Columbus filled with a bitter political aftertaste resulting from his experiences as governor of Ohio. He assumed the office in 1838 prepared to implement a program of bank reform and controlled state expenditures which, he was confident,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., January 9, 1844.

<sup>73</sup> Ohio Statesman, February 3, 4, 1844.

<sup>74</sup> Washington Globe, March 15, 1844.

would correct the state's economic ills. After three and one-half years of dedicated efforts on his part to fulfill his campaign commitments, the desired objectives had not been attained. Banking and currency measures deemed too moderate were blocked by the radical Democratic ideologues. Proposals held to be too harsh were stymied by the Whigs and some conservative Jacksonians. Those new provisions which did pass were often successfully evaded by Ohio's financial interests. Most distressing of all was the fact that the radicals had succeeded in forcing fifteen of Ohio's twenty-three banks to close by January 1, 1844. Shannon feared that the eight remaining banks would not be able to cope with the state's financial needs.<sup>75</sup>

Shannon approached his evaluation of presidential contenders in the same pragmatic spirit with which he considered economic policies. Martin Van Buren had conclusively demonstrated in 1840 that he was not a viable presidential candidate as far as Shannon was concerned. The most attractive Democratic alternative on the horizon in 1842-1843 was Lewis Cass. Shannon, therefore, tried to persuade his party colleagues to support the more promising prospects of the Michigan contender. Once again, Democratic hard-liners thwarted the governor's endeavors and, also, turned him out

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<sup>75</sup> Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 138-40. While Shannon exercised only a very limited influence upon the political course of the radicals, he was so dominant as a leader of the conservative wing of the Ohio Democracy that the radicals continued to refer to the conservatives as "Shannonites" after the governor left office. D. A. Robertson to William Medill, August 5, 1845, John B. Weller to Medill, September 4, 1845, Medill Papers.

of office for his insistence upon seeking the appropriate course for a pragmatic, constructive statesman rather than the path of an obsequious, time-serving politician.

Shannon did not conduct himself as governor with perfect wisdom at all times. He could claim with justification, nevertheless, that most of his actions and most of the policies he advocated, when instituted, had enhanced the welfare of Ohioans. He had not, of course, been able to control many of the circumstances and individuals affecting his performance in office. Sam Medary, Benjamin Tappan, Edwin Stanton, and many other Ohio political leaders could testify, on the other hand, that Shannon had pursued his goals with enough skill and determination to become one of the most prominent, influential politicians in the state during the Jacksonian era.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sharp, Jacksonians Versus the Banks, pp. 15, 19-22, 130-32, 141-46.

## Chapter IV

### MINISTER TO MEXICO AND CALIFORNIA FORTY-NINER

Wilson Shannon's nomination to be Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Mexico was submitted to the United States Senate by President John Tyler on March 6, 1844.<sup>1</sup> While Governor Shannon may have hoped for some kind of appointment from Tyler, he neither sought nor expected to secure the office received.<sup>2</sup> The post became available when Waddy Thompson, the incumbent since 1842, resigned the first week of February.<sup>3</sup> The letter from acting Secretary of State John Nelson notifying Shannon of his nomination also stated:

I deem the occasion a suitable one to say that the relations between the United States and Mexico, which have long been of a very delicate character, are rendered particularly so at the present juncture by the anticipated negotiations for the annexation to this Union of the Territory of Texas, in the issue of which the President feels a deep and anxious interest; and which he assumes,--and in that assurance offers you the difficult position that may enable you to advance this leading

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<sup>1</sup>John Nelson to Wilson Shannon, March 6, 1844, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (Williamsburg, Virginia, 1896), III, 132-33.

<sup>2</sup>"Wilson Shannon," U. S. Mag. and Dem. Rev., p. 176.

<sup>3</sup>James H. Costin to William L. Marcy, February 9, 1844, William L. Marcy Papers, Library of Congress.



object of his policy,--that you entirely and cordially endorse.<sup>4</sup>

Only after learning that his nomination had been confirmed unanimously by the Senate on April 9, did Shannon resign from his position as governor of Ohio and write a letter accepting the Mexican assignment.<sup>5</sup>

Both friend and foe in Ohio applauded the Buckeye governor's appointment, but for vastly differing reasons. John Dunham asserted in the St. Clairsville Gazette: "No better selection could have been made than that of Governor Shannon. Prudent, indefatigable and firm in all he has hitherto undertaken in defense of popular rights, he cannot fail in this new and enlarged field . . . ."<sup>6</sup> Shannon's longtime press nemesis, the Ohio State Journal commented:

The appointment . . . will be a source of regret to many of his friends in this State, who have counted much upon his influence in the coming campaign to break down the Central Circle of Hard Money Men. His influence upon the majority of his party was very considerable, and has been mainly instrumental in . . . forcing Mr. Tod and his friends to disguise their true sentiments upon the currency question. He has been a thorn in the side of the hards, notwithstanding their pretensions of friendship, and they anticipate an easy victory over the softs now that he is removed.

The Journal concluded: "Gov. Shannon will fill creditably to himself and the country, as we think, the post for which he has been chosen."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Tyler, Life and Times of the Tylers, pp. 132-33.

<sup>5</sup>Shannon to John C. Calhoun, Secretary of State, April 17, 1844, Dispatches from United States Ministers to Mexico, 1823-1906, National Archives, Records of the Department of State, microfilm, Roll 13, Volume 12 (hereafter cited as Dispatches, Mexico); Washington, D. C., Daily Madisonian, April 10, 11, 1844; St. Clairsville Gazette, April 19, 1844.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., July 5, 1844. For further comments see ibid., March 15, 1844.

<sup>7</sup>Ohio State Journal, March 11, 1844.

A letter from B. B. Taylor in Columbus to Senator William Allen confirms the Journal's report about the response of Ohio's radicals to the governor's nomination.

The greatest blessing that can befall the Democracy of Ohio at this time, is the confirmation of Shannon's appointment, and his rejection will be a corresponding curse. If he were out of Ohio, we can carry it, if he is rejected, it will be his aim to foment further difficulty. Then take these things into consideration and vote accordingly . . . . If he is rejected, pray re-consider the vote.<sup>8</sup>

Senator Benjamin Tappan probably had Shannon in mind when he wrote to Ethan Allen Brown on May 5, 1844, that Tyler had used his patronage powers to "seduce" some Democrats, but that the loss of such weak men would only strengthen the party.<sup>9</sup>

At the time Wilson Shannon was nominated to be minister to Mexico, President Tyler was deeply involved in efforts to achieve the last great goal of his administration, the annexation of Texas. The question of annexation had been before the American people since Texas secured its independence from Mexico in 1836. Vehement northern objections to the addition of another slave state to the Union had sufficiently intimidated Jackson, Van Buren, and Harrison to discourage them from attempting annexation even though Texas had formally requested such action as early as 1837. Presidents prior to Tyler exercised restraint, also, because Mexico contended that Texas was still their territory despite the provisions of the 1836 Treaty of San Jacinto. Annexation would constitute an act of war

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<sup>8</sup>B. B. Taylor to William Allen, March 11, 1844, Allen Papers.

<sup>9</sup>Tappan to Brown, May 5, 1844, Ethan Allen Brown Papers, Ohio State Library.

argued the Mexican authorities and would be met with appropriate military measures. Tyler refused to be bound by the concerns of his recent predecessors. According to his biographer, Robert Saeger, the President's policy on annexation was motivated by the nationalistic, expansionist spirit of manifest destiny rather than, as some critics insisted, by the fervent desire proclaimed by many southerners to bring more slave territory within the nation's boundaries. Tyler hoped that both California and Texas, and possibly other Mexican lands as well, would eventually become American soil. In his opinion, the entire nation, not just the South, would reap great commercial benefits from the addition of such areas.<sup>10</sup>

Abel P. Upshur, a Virginia expansionist, became Secretary of State in June, 1843. Soon thereafter, he and Tyler began secret negotiations with Texas representatives to arrange an acceptable treaty of annexation. Both England and France strongly opposed Tyler's efforts to incorporate Texas into the Union. They preferred the favorable commercial relations they had established with an independent Texas. The British textile industry was particularly interested in Texas as an alternative to the American southern states as a source of cotton. In addition, the British government valued an independent Texas as a barrier against American expansion southward. Finally, England was also influenced by antislavery interests who contemplated an Anglo-Texas alliance whose provisions would ultimately

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<sup>10</sup> Saeger, And Tyler Too, pp. 209-16; David M. Fletcher, The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War (Columbia, Missouri, 1973), pp. 64-88, 113-35.

eliminate slavery in Texas.<sup>11</sup> Texas President Sam Houston, who did not appreciate previous American rebuffs of annexationist endeavors, skillfully kept his options open concerning future alliances and sought to secure the maximum benefits for his fledgling nation from all interested parties. The major stumbling block in the American-Texas discussions was Houston's insistence that Texas be provided with adequate military safeguards against the anticipated Mexican response to an annexation treaty. The desired assurances were finally given in February, 1844. At that point, Upshur was killed on the Princeton.<sup>12</sup>

Tyler chose John C. Calhoun to succeed Upshur in response to the entreaties of Calhoun's many powerful friends. The South Carolinian had previously rejected a similar offer by the President, but was now convinced that duty called him to join in the crusade to add Texas to the Union. Calhoun was the leading national spokesman for southern slave interests and an "avid" expansionist. The annexation of Texas was as urgent a goal to him as it was to Tyler. He immediately assumed the task of completing the annexation treaty arrangements made by his predecessor.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately for the cause of the annexationists, Calhoun's accession to the Secretary of State's position deeply antagonized northern antislavery interests. They were convinced that, more than ever, the southern slave "conspiracy" would now be dictating the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-84, 113-27.      <sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-84, 127-35.

<sup>13</sup> Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun, Sectionalist, 1840-1850 (Reissue; New York, 1968), pp. 150-56, 161-67.

policies of the administration. Such apprehensions were reinforced when the Washington National Intelligencer of March 16, 1844, outlined the course of the hitherto secret negotiations with Texas. To Tyler's consternation, the Intelligencer's revelations generated such an antagonistic northern backlash that what had been a clear Senate majority favoring annexation began evaporating immediately.<sup>14</sup>

Tyler apparently concluded that it was desirable to put a northerner in the Mexican embassy as an attempt to placate partially his critics in that section. Wilson Shannon was one of the most prominent northerners sympathetic to the President and available for the assignment. In addition, the Ohio governor was a Jeffersonian states' rights westerner who was prepared to enlist in the expansionist crusade. Shannon's lack of diplomatic experience was obviously not as important a factor to Tyler as his other qualifications, so the appointment was made.<sup>15</sup>

Shannon arrived in Washington on April 25 and remained until May 8 to discuss his new responsibilities with Tyler and Calhoun.<sup>16</sup> His personal affairs delayed his departure for Mexico until the first

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<sup>14</sup> Frederick Merk, Slavery and the Annexation of Texas (New York, 1972), pp. 53-82; Seager, And Tyler Too, pp. 217-19.

<sup>15</sup> Louis C. Pitchford, "The Diplomatic Representatives from the United States to Mexico, 1836-1848" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, Dept. of History, University of Colorado, 1965), pp. 226-27. The subject of one of the chapters is "Wilson Shannon, Dubious Diplomat." I am indebted to Professor Pitchford for supplying me with a copy of that chapter. His excellent, perceptive critique of Shannon's conduct as minister to Mexico has influenced much of my presentation.

<sup>16</sup> Ohio Statesman, May 1, 13, 1844.

of July. After conferring with the President in Washington on July 3, he proceeded to Norfolk. On July 8, he sailed for Vera Cruz on the U. S. Sloop of War Falmouth.<sup>17</sup> The long, slow voyage was not completed until August 24.<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, the Texas annexation treaty had been overwhelmingly defeated in the Senate on June 8. Prior to the vote, both leading contenders for their respective party's presidential nomination, Martin Van Buren and Henry Clay, had published letters opposing annexation. The treaty's prospects were already dim and the letters settled the issue.<sup>19</sup> The Tyler administration immediately turned to an alternate strategy to replace the treaty procedure. Annexation would be achieved by a joint resolution of Congress. Such a resolution required only a simple majority vote rather than the two-thirds majority mandated for treaties. The desired measure was presented to Congress on June 11.<sup>20</sup>

In Mexico, much anger was generated by Tyler's maneuvers to annex "Mexican territory." When the existing armistice with Texas expired in June, Mexican dictator Santa Anna's army commander in the north, General Adrian Woll, promptly declared that hostilities were renewed. Mexican army units began making threatening preparations

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., July 8, 1844; St. Clairsville Gazette, July 5, 1844.

<sup>18</sup> Washington Madisonian, October 9, 1844.

<sup>19</sup> Seager, And Tyler Too, pp. 218-19, 229.

<sup>20</sup> Wiltse, John C. Calhoun, p. 199; Merk, Slavery and the Annexation of Texas, pp. 121-51.

suggesting that an actual military move against Texas was in the offing.<sup>21</sup>

In the midst of a decidedly unfavorable diplomatic climate in terms of American-Mexican relations, Shannon disembarked at Vera Cruz from the Falmouth on August 24.<sup>22</sup> His experiences during the next eight months can best be described as an unmitigated disaster. He was robbed both upon entering and leaving Mexico, he rather impetuously suspended diplomatic relations in November, and he was confined to his room with a serious illness for two months in February and March. He was castigated for suspending relations with Mexico by the American press and his superiors in Washington, and he received no communications from the administration from mid December, 1844, until early April, 1845. Finally, in an action which implied censure of his conduct as minister, he was recalled to Washington in April, 1845, by the Polk administration.

Shannon's travails commenced on the evening of August 25 as he rode in a coach on his way from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. Soon after leaving Vera Cruz, the military escort assigned to the coach disappeared. Almost immediately, bandits stopped the coach and stripped its occupants of their valuables. Although Shannon lost eighty dollars, a cloak, and several other items, he was exceedingly fortunate. Most of his important belongings were in a chest which

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<sup>21</sup>Adrian Woll to Gen. Sam Houston, June 19, 1844, Washington Madisionian, December 7, 1844; Pletcher, The Diplomacy of Annexation, pp. 150-56.

<sup>22</sup>Washington Madisionian, October 9, 1844.

the bandits ignored.<sup>23</sup>

During an overnight stop at the castle of Perote, Shannon visited a large number of Texans incarcerated there. The prisoners had been captured while engaged in various forays into Mexico. Their visitor found some of them in a "wretched" condition and promised to attempt to secure their release. Shannon then proceeded on to Mexico City, arriving on August 27.<sup>24</sup>

The new United States Minister entered upon his duties with an extensive set of instructions prepared for him on June 20 by Secretary Calhoun. Conventions between Mexico and the United States signed in 1839 and 1843 provided for quarterly payments by the Mexican government to the large number of American claimants who had incurred property damages or other types of losses during the frequent disruptions of the peace in Mexico. Calhoun noted that the April payments had not been made and urged Shannon to press for strict compliance with the conventions' terms. The governors of four provinces had recently been ordered by the central government to expel all Americans within their boundaries. A decree had been issued which prohibited foreign residents in Mexico from engaging in retail trade. Shannon was to protest both directives. He also was to inform Mexican authorities that the right of Texas and the United States to arrange a treaty annexing Texas was not subject to any discussion or challenge. "We hold Texas to be independent de jure

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; Wilson Shannon to John C. Calhoun, August 25, 1844, Dispatches, Mexico.

<sup>24</sup> Wilson Shannon to John C. Calhoun, September 21, 1844, ibid.



as well as de facto . . . and that, in entering into the treaty of annexation with her, we violated no prior engagement or stipulation with Mexico." Finally, Shannon was told to inform the Mexican Foreign Office that his instructions were "to pass over, unnoticed, the menaces and offensive language which the Government of Mexico has thought proper to use."<sup>25</sup> Shannon's instructions were manifestly not designed to endear him to the Mexican authorities.

Shannon presented his credentials to General Santa Anna, President of the Republic of Mexico, on September 1. The general was "very courteous" and they had a pleasant introductory discussion. Before they parted, Shannon presented a letter he had prepared asking, as a personal favor, that all of the imprisoned Texans held in Mexico be freed. Upon receipt of a noncommittal response a few days later, Shannon arranged for another interview with Santa Anna on September 12. To Shannon's gratification, his request was agreed to at the second interview and the prisoners were released on September 16. Those freed included 104 men at Perote, ten in Vera Cruz, three in Mexico City, one in Puebla, and two in Matamoras for a grand total of 120 prisoners. The general asked Shannon to inform President Tyler that " . . . he wished to cultivate the most amicable relations with the U. States, that the interest of Mexico and that country was the same, and that he hoped his liberation of the . . . prisoners would be received . . . as an evidence of his liberality

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<sup>25</sup> Calhoun to Shannon, June 20, 1844, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1906: Mexico, National Archives, Records of the Department of State, microfilm, Roll 13, Volume 15 (hereafter cited as Instructions, Mexico).

and friendly disposition."<sup>26</sup>

In the same dispatch reporting the release of the prisoners, Shannon stated that the claims payments due in April and July had been paid on August 27 to the American agent assigned to handle them.<sup>27</sup> Shannon had been misinformed by the agent and the Mexican Foreign Office, however. Payment was authorized, but not collected because the treasury did not have the requisite funds. The entire transaction was processed before Shannon became involved in his duties, yet he was subsequently criticized in the American press and by Calhoun's successor as Secretary of State, James Buchanan, for his inaccurate report.<sup>28</sup>

Calhoun and Tyler were highly incensed over the warlike preparations of the Mexican Army ostensibly to attempt a reconquest of Texas. Some observers thought that the buildup was intended by Santa Anna to intimidate his sometimes recalcitrant congress rather than to create an army of invasion. On September 10, 1844, the Secretary of State wrote a lengthy dispatch to Shannon which he entrusted for delivery to Duff Green, who had just been appointed American consul at Galveston. Green, a former prominent Jacksonian, was a close friend of both Calhoun and Tyler. Duff's son Benjamin

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<sup>26</sup>Wilson Shannon to John C. Calhoun, September 21, 1844, Dispatches, Mexico.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Benjamin Green to John C. Calhoun, December 17, 1844, Wilson Shannon to James Buchanan, July 2, 1845, Dispatches, Mexico; Ohio Statesman, June 11, 1845.

was the Secretary of Legation in Mexico City.<sup>29</sup>

In the communication, Calhoun detailed the administration's views concerning recent developments in Mexico. He declared that Mexico undoubtedly intended ". . . to renew the war against Texas on a large scale, and to carry it on with more than savage ferocity." Mexico's course was obviously designed to thwart American annexation of Texas and was unacceptable to the United States. "Mexico would make a great mistake, if she should suppose that the President would regard with indifference the renewal of the war which she has proclaimed against Texas. Our honor and our interests are both involved." Shannon was instructed to communicate to the Mexican authorities the views of the President

in reference to the renewal of the war . . . and the manner in which it is intended to be conducted; and to protest against both in strong language, accompanied by declarations, that the President cannot regard them with indifference, but as highly offensive to the United States.

Shannon was also directed to state that American annexation measures had not been undertaken in a spirit of hostility to Mexico and that if annexation were consummated, the United States would be prepared "to adjust all questions growing out of it, including that of boundary, on the most liberal terms."<sup>30</sup> Shannon promptly prepared, on October 14, the desired message in accordance with his instructions. Most of

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<sup>29</sup> Charles H. Raymond to Anson Jones, September 13, 1844, Anson Jones, Memoranda and Official Correspondence Relating to the Republic of Texas, Its History and Annexation (1859; rpt. Chicago, 1966), pp. 382-83; Pitchford, "Diplomatic Representatives to Mexico," pp. 259-62.

<sup>30</sup> Calhoun to Shannon, September 10, 1844, Instructions, Mexico.

the statements were taken verbatim from Calhoun's letter which had clearly been written to serve as the core of Shannon's note.<sup>31</sup>

Mexico had a new Foreign Secretary, Manuel Crescencio Rejón. He responded to Shannon's strongly worded message by declaring that it was an example of "the perfidiousness with which Mexico has so long been treated." Rejón blamed the loss of Texas upon the United States. The Americans who had settled in Texas had conspired to annex it to their native country and their efforts, Rejón charged, had been aided and abetted by American officials for the past twenty years. The foreign minister concluded by asserting that Mexico would always defend its own territory and "if when Mexico enforces this right . . . the Government of the United States attempts to carry out the threat which it has made against her, thus bringing about a change in the relations existing between the two countries, the responsibility for the consequences" would rest upon the United States.<sup>32</sup>

Shannon answered Rejón's charges in as blunt terms as those the Mexican had used. The United States minister declared that Rejón's note was grossly offensive because it alleged that Americans were guilty of "falsehood, artifice, intrigues and designs of a dishonorable character and with barefaced usurpation." Shannon demanded that Rejón's message be withdrawn.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Shannon to Manuel Crescencio Rejón, October 14, 1844, Dispatches, Mexico.

<sup>32</sup> Rejón to Shannon, October 31, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Shannon to Rejón, November 4, 1844, *ibid.*

The Mexican's second note written on November 6 was even more insulting than the first one.<sup>34</sup> Shannon replied on November 8 by denouncing the Foreign Minister's communications as pieces of false propaganda promulgated to win support from the Mexican populace for the Santa Anna administration. Shannon felt compelled, he stated, to submit the recent objectionable correspondence to Washington and await further instructions. In the meantime, unless Rejón withdrew all of his notes, official relations between the American embassy and the Mexican government would be suspended.<sup>35</sup>

Rejón responded by repeating his previous charges. Also, he claimed that the responsibility for any adverse alteration in the relations between the United States and Mexico rested upon Shannon's shoulders.<sup>36</sup> This note forced the American minister to carry out his threat and suspend diplomatic relations. In justifying his drastic action to Calhoun, Shannon commented:

. . . If I consulted my own feelings, I would have demanded my passports; but in view of the consequences, which such a course would involve, and not wishing to take any step that might appear rash, I thought it best to notify the Mexican Government that the two exceptionable notes would be immediately referred to my Government for instructions, and that, unless they were withdrawn, all official intercourse between this Legation & the Mexican Government must cease, until those instructions were received. I have found myself placed in a position, which no person can properly appreciate, unless he was here and familiar with the circumstances, by which I have been surrounded. To see my Govt. insulted, and that insult made the subject of boast in the streets by the partisans of the present administration and used for the purpose of making political capital seemed to demand

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<sup>34</sup> Rejón to Shannon, November 6, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Shannon to Rejón, November 8, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Rejón to Shannon, November 21, 1844, *ibid.*

a more prompt and decisive course than the one I have adopted. --On the other hand, had I demanded my passports at once, I might have been charged with acting with too much precipitancy and without a due regard to the probable consequences resulting from such a step.<sup>37</sup>

Duff Green was in Mexico City advising Shannon on the appropriate course to follow throughout the exchange with Rejón in October and November. Green thoroughly approved of Shannon's notes and probably strongly influenced their contents. Shannon apparently made the decision to suspend diplomatic relations, however. That ill-advised action painted him into a corner where he could be of no usefulness to his government. Although he did not obtain his passports and leave Mexico until the second week of May, 1845, he performed no functions of significance after mid November, 1844.<sup>38</sup>

During December, Tyler released the Shannon-Rejón correspondence to the Congress and the press hoping that the insulting tone of Rejón's notes would win support for the administration's annexationist efforts.<sup>39</sup> Darkhorse Democratic presidential nominee James K. Polk had already been elected in November on an expansionist platform and Tyler's goal seemed more attainable than ever. Finally, on February 28, 1845, the House of Representatives completed the desired legislative process by passing the joint resolution annexing Texas.

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<sup>37</sup> Shannon to Calhoun, November 12, 1844, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Pitchford, "Diplomatic Representatives to Mexico," pp. 258-62, 272-73, 280-81; Pletcher, Diplomacy of Annexation, p. 167; Glenn W. Price, Origins of the War with Mexico: The Polk-Stockton Intrigue (Austin, Texas, 1967), pp. 38-40.

<sup>39</sup> Washington Madisonian, December 12, 21, 24, 27, 1844; Merk, Slavery and the Annexation of Texas, pp. 101-117.

Tyler signed it on March 1.<sup>40</sup>

On March 29, 1845, the new Polk administration's Secretary of State, James Buchanan, forwarded a letter to Mexico City recalling Shannon. The communication expressed regret that Shannon had suspended relations without prior consultation with his government. Such an act had not been in the best interests of the United States. Buchanan observed:

It is probable that nothing could have been more agreeable to the Mexican Government than to learn from your note . . . that unless his previous notes . . . should be withdrawn all further official intercourse between you and the Government of Mexico would be suspended . . . His prompt refusal to withdraw these notes has placed you in such a position that you have never since been able to press upon Mexico the numerous claims which we have upon her justice, independently of the Texas question. She has been relieved from these demands, whilst our citizens have continued to suffer from the delay.

The Secretary of State concluded: "While . . . the President does not intend to censure your conduct, he is clearly of [the] opinion that your services in Mexico can no longer prove useful to your country."<sup>41</sup>

On May 8, Shannon requested his passports from the Mexican Foreign Office. He received them on the ninth and proceeded on May 14 to Vera Cruz.<sup>42</sup> Once again bandits held up his stage before he reached the safety of that city. The voyage to New York was

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<sup>40</sup>Washington Globe, February 27, 1845; Washington Madisonian, February 28, March 1, 1855.

<sup>41</sup>Buchanan to Shannon, March 29, 1845, Instructions, Mexico.

<sup>42</sup>Shannon to Luis G. Cuevas, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, May 8, 1845, Dispatches, Mexico; Cuevas to Shannon, May 9, 1845, ibid.

accomplished in twenty-four days. After spending a short time in New York and Washington, Shannon returned to St. Clairsville.<sup>43</sup>

Shannon's dispatches to Calhoun and his lengthy exchanges with Rejon indicated that, like the studious lawyer that he was, he had done his homework on Mexican-American affairs before assuming his diplomatic post. He could recite and debate in great detail the history of the past relations between the two nations. Otherwise, he did not exhibit the talents required to cope adequately with his responsibilities. While somewhat overstated, a sympathetic assessment of Shannon's problems as a diplomat written by "Per Se," the Ohio Statesman's Washington correspondent, offered some perceptive insights.

There is too much frankness in Shannon for diplomacy. Diplomacy, as we comprehend it, embraces a long correspondence in which facts, suppositions, palliations, qualifications, compliments, assertions, retractions, demands and concessions are so inexplicably mixed up as to leave the readers, and the writers themselves, in an impenetrable fog. Shannon is too much of a Buckeye for a diplomatist. He is too given to the expression of his opinions in understandable English. Daniel Webster is accounted on the other hand, an admirable diplomatist, well versed in all the trickery of this wiry business. But after all, Shannon's diplomacy is the right sort for the Mexicans. They can only understand an Irishman's hint, that fundamental Hibernian diplomacy of a knock on the head, or a kick in the ribs.<sup>44</sup>

Shannon's belligerent, chauvinistic attitude reflected, of course, the tone of Calhoun's instructions. With the administration energetically pursuing Texas annexation, with Mexico claiming that such a move was an act of war, and with Mexico reopening hostilities with Texas, it

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<sup>43</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, June 17, 1845; Pitchford, "Diplomatic Representatives to Mexico," pp. 277-78.

<sup>44</sup> Ohio Statesman, December 26, 1844.



would have been difficult in 1844-45 for a highly skilled, experienced diplomat to cope with the complexities of the American minister's post in Mexico City. Shannon devotedly tried to meet effectively the challenge before him, but he failed.

Following his return to St. Clairsville in July, 1845, Wilson Shannon turned his full attention to his law practice until 1849.<sup>45</sup> Other than speaking occasionally in Belmont and surrounding counties during the fall election campaigns, he seems to have remained aloof from political affairs. The one exception was in the presidential canvass of 1848 when he campaigned throughout the state for his longtime favorite candidate, Lewis Cass.<sup>46</sup>

Shannon was one of those many individuals who was engulfed by the California gold fever which swept the nation in late 1848 and 1849. It is little wonder that men from St. Clairsville and elsewhere joined the forty-niner pilgrimage in light of the wildly exaggerated reports emanating from the gold fields. The Belmont Chronicle reported on January 19, 1849, for instance, that chunks of pure gold weighing as much as 300 pounds were being found with some frequency! Prior to that report, on January 5, the Chronicle revealed that "the California fever still rages in St. Clairsville. A company is about organizing here with a capital of ten thousand dollars for the purpose of sending out persons to that country."

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<sup>45</sup> St. Clairsville Gazette, September 11, 1846; ibid., September 29, 1848.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., October 2, 1846, October 4, September 8, 29, October 20, 1848; "Wilson Shannon," U. S. Mag. and Demo. Rev., p. 177.

The organizer and financier of the St. Clairsville company was Wilson Shannon. Apparently dissatisfied with the income from his law practice, he decided to seek his fortune in the California streams and hills. At first planned as a company of twenty-five men, the group was augmented to sixty by the time the main contingent left St. Clairsville on February 14, 1849.<sup>47</sup>

There were several routes available for traveling to California. The most popular choices were the strenuous overland routes. Sea routes included the long journey from New York around Cape Horn or travel from New York to Mexico by sea, across Mexico by land, and on to San Francisco by boat. A third alternative was to travel by sea from New York to Panama, to cross the isthmus, and to take a boat from Panama City to San Francisco. The Panama route was the easiest, most expensive, and quickest, often taking no more than thirty-five days.<sup>48</sup> Shannon and one or two other members of the St. Clairsville company chose the Panama route and the others sailed around Cape Horn.<sup>49</sup>

All of the members of Shannon's company reached California without difficulty early in June. Jonas Spect of Circleville, Ohio, wrote on June 18: "In my last visit to Sacramento, I met Ex-Governor Shannon, with a company of Buckeyes, with his pickaxe and

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<sup>47</sup> Belmont Chronicle, February 16, 1849; Ohio Statesman, March 3, 1849.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Thomas, "The Impact of the Gold Rush on Ohio and Ohioans" (unpublished Master's dissertation, Department of History, The Ohio State University, 1949), pp. 47-50.

<sup>49</sup> Belmont Chronicle, February 23, April 13, 1849.

shovel on his shoulders, just departing for the mines. The old Governor is in good health and fine spirits."<sup>50</sup> Another Ohioan wrote in August that the Shannon group was at work on the Uba river, seventy miles from Sacramento.<sup>51</sup>

Early letters from the St. Clairsville Argonauts were optimistic in tone. J. C. Johnson reported that they were averaging two to three ounces of gold daily per man some of the time. The big strike was anticipated any moment!<sup>52</sup> Shannon wrote that "the mere business of mining is pleasant, you have regular meals, a good tent to sleep in, and washing out the gold is exciting."<sup>53</sup>

The mood of the writers began to change in November, however. Almost all of the company, including Shannon, became ill late in the fall and early winter and one young man, John Gilliland, died.<sup>54</sup> The Cleveland Herald reported on February 23, 1850, that the company had found approximately two thousand dollars in gold at one location, but had subsequently scoured the area for over eighty miles without finding any more. On February 15, 1850, the Belmont Chronicle declared that letters received recently indicated that the prospects of the company were "gloomy." On March 15,

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Ohio Statesman, August 25, 1849. Also see Belmont Chronicle, October 19, 1849.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Ohio Statesman, November 10, 1849.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Belmont Chronicle, November 30, 1849.

<sup>53</sup> Wilson Shannon to his family, August 12, 1849, Ohio Statesman, November 10, 1849.

<sup>54</sup> Belmont Chronicle, December 14, 1849.

an announcement appeared in the Chronicle that the company had disbanded and that Shannon was practicing law in San Francisco. J. C. Conwell wrote from Sacramento on May 12, 1850, that the St. Clairsville contingent was like the beard on a boy's face--"a good deal scattered."<sup>55</sup>

It was reported that Shannon and his partner, a Colonel Munford from Virginia, were making "a fortune" in San Francisco.<sup>56</sup> Shannon told a different story in a letter written to his family on August 26, 1850.

This is a bad place for me at this time. Everybody in the west knows me, and many think they have claims on me on the score of political favor; and for mere support. They come here without a dollar, wherewith to buy a crust of bread, and they are continually calling upon me for aid. I cannot refuse them. It is hard to see a respectable man in a cold and selfish community like this, without a dollar, and nothing to eat and no place to sleep. This is a terrible tax upon me, and I must quit the place as soon as possible.<sup>57</sup>

By the end of January, 1851, Shannon was apparently satisfied that he had recouped the losses incurred by the failure of the St. Clairsville company. He left San Francisco then and arrived in St. Clairsville the third week of March.<sup>58</sup> Like many other forty-niners, he had discovered that most of the thrills attached to seeking gold in California were provided by the feverish anticipation of the experience rather than its reality.

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<sup>55</sup>Quoted in ibid., August 9, 1850.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., April 19, July 19, September 27, 1850; Cleveland Herald, May 25, 1850.

<sup>57</sup>Quoted in ibid., October 28, 1850.

<sup>58</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, March 21, 1851.

Upon his return, Shannon resumed his law practice in St. Clairsville. He practiced alone.<sup>59</sup>

In the fall of 1852, Democrats in the Seventeenth congressional district, comprised of Belmont, Guernsey, Monroe, and Noble counties, nominated William C. Walton to run for Congress. To quiet some of the dissension arising in the past between representatives of the four counties, a resolution was approved mandating that the district's nominee, if elected, was to serve only one term. Every two years a new candidate from one of the other counties would be selected.<sup>60</sup>

To the consternation of the group, Walton died on September 6, and they had to find another candidate. They then chose Shannon. He had not solicited the nomination and, indeed, had made it clear in the past that he was not interested in holding public office again. Nevertheless, he agreed to serve the one limited two-year term designated for the Belmont County representative.<sup>61</sup> He defeated his opponent in the October election, N. Hollister, by a margin of 1078 votes.<sup>62</sup>

In December, 1853, Shannon took his seat in the Thirty-third Congress. Probably on the basis of his former diplomatic post in Mexico, he was placed on the foreign affairs committee.<sup>63</sup> He gave

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., July 18, 1851.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., September 3, 1852; Belmont Chronicle, August 27, 1852.

<sup>61</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, September 3, 17, 24, 1852.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., October 22, 1852. <sup>63</sup>Ibid., December 22, 1853.

no speeches during his term and apparently did not even make brief remarks in any of the debates. The only significant act of his brief congressional span was his vote for the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854.<sup>64</sup> Shannon had supported Lewis Cass for President for many years and wholeheartedly endorsed Cass' advocacy of popular sovereignty as a solution to the problem of slavery in the territories. Senator Stephen A. Douglas' incorporation of that principle into his Nebraska bill accorded fully, therefore, with Shannon's convictions.<sup>65</sup> After completing his congressional service in the spring of 1855, Shannon once again resumed his oft-neglected law practice in St. Clairsville.<sup>66</sup> The significance of the Kansas-Nebraska act and his vote for it were soon to become much more obvious.

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<sup>64</sup>Ohio Statesman, May 24, 1854.

<sup>65</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, August 4, October 20, 1848, January 1, 15, 1852.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., July 19, August 23, 1855.

## Chapter V

### GOVERNOR OF KANSAS TERRITORY, 1855

Before retiring permanently from public life in 1856, Wilson Shannon undertook a herculean task whose complexities dwarfed the formidable difficulties he confronted while governor of Ohio and minister to Mexico. He endeavored to govern Kansas Territory in 1855-1856 during its most turbulent stage of settlement under the popular sovereignty provisions of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The controversies generated nationwide by those provisions and their implementation had assumed such intensity by the time Shannon arrived in the territory that the "Kansas Question" had become the dominant political issue in America.<sup>1</sup>

Many southerners were determined to develop Kansas as a slave state while their northern opponents demanded that it be free. Consequently, antislavery and proslavery forces began collecting funds and recruiting settlers to send to the territory immediately after the passage of the act in May, 1854. The New England Emigrant

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<sup>1</sup>Charles M. Correll, "The Kansas Territory, May 30, 1854-January 29, 1861," Kansas: The First Century, ed. John D. Bright (New York, 1956), I, 104; Kenneth S. Davis, Kansas: A Bicentennial History (New York, 1976), pp. 65-66; James A. Rawley, Race and Politics: "Bleeding Kansas" and the Coming of the Civil War (Philadelphia, 1969), pp. vii, 109, 136.

Aid Company organized by Massachusetts educator, politician, and entrepreneur, Eli Thayer, spearheaded the northern campaign. United States Senator David R. Atchison, Dr. Benjamin F. Stringfellow, and other Missouri border leaders dominated the southern efforts.<sup>2</sup>

A significant number of participants on both sides shared to some degree the convictions expressed by Atchison in his nineteenth century version of the domino theory. Victory in Kansas, he asserted, would enable the slavocracy to extend to the Pacific; defeat would result in the loss of Missouri, Texas, Arkansas, and the other territories.<sup>3</sup> Men who believed that they were playing for stakes of that magnitude could be expected to exhibit strong emotions, assume extreme, uncompromising positions, and commit overzealous acts.

By the fall of 1855, over 20,000 settlers had surged into the territory seeking land, an improved livelihood, political power, and, in some cases, plunder. The majority, which included many of

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<sup>2</sup> Lester B. Baltimore, "Benjamin Stringfellow: The Fight for Slavery on the Missouri Border," Missouri Historical Review, LXII, No. 1 (October, 1967), 14-29; Samuel A. Johnson, The Battle Cry of Freedom: The New England Emigrant Aid Company in the Kansas Crusade (Lawrence, 1954), pp. 7-8; William E. Parrish, David Rice Atchison of Missouri: Border Politician (Columbia, 1961), pp. 160-65.

<sup>3</sup> Atchison's viewpoints are in David R. Atchison to W. B. Wilson, et. al., September 12, 1855, in Atchison, Kansas, Squatter Sovereign, November 13, 1855. For the opinions of other participants see William L. Barney, The Road to Secession: A New Perspective on the Old South (New York, 1972), p. 15; Elmer LeRoy Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas, 1854-1858," Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as KSHS Collections), ed. William E. Connelley (Topeka, 1910-1928), XV, 334-48; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 3-6; James C. Malin, "The Proslavery Background of the Kansas Struggle," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, X (December, 1923), 385-405.



Wilson Shannon's fellow Buckeyes, came from the Ohio River valley states. Regardless of their antecedents, most settlers were drawn there primarily by economic considerations rather than by motives related to the slavery issue. Territorial tensions mounted, nevertheless, as many of the newcomers aligned themselves with one or the other of the opposing factions.<sup>4</sup>

Disputes over land claims also adversely affected relationships among the early emigrants. Although the territory was opened for settlement on May 30, 1854, virtually none of the land soon occupied in eastern Kansas was officially surveyed and available for purchase until the following year. The resultant confusion and uncertainty about land titles and boundaries led to many of the proslavery-antislavery personal confrontations arising during the territorial period. The slavery issue, however, was the dominant divisive influence among the settlers.<sup>5</sup>

The specific proslavery strategy for winning Kansas was to secure political dominance in the territory prior to the anticipated

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy (Urbana, 1967), pp. 97-108, 114-15; Paul W. Gates, Fifty Million Acres: Conflicts over Kansas Land Policy, 1854-1890 (Ithaca, 1954), pp. 1-4; Russell K. Hickman, "The Reeder Administration Inaugurated," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXXVI, Nos. 3, 4 (Autumn, Winter, 1970), 424-55; William O. Lynch, "Popular Sovereignty and the Colonization of Kansas from 1854 to 1860," Mississippi Valley Historical Association Proceedings (hereafter cited as MVHA Proceedings), IX (1917-1918), 380-92; James C. Malin, John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six (Philadelphia, 1942), pp. 498-501, 509-20; David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861, completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), pp. 201-07.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 202-07; Gates, Fifty Million Acres, pp. 1-105; Malin, John Brown, pp. 501-08.

influx of free soil settlers and then to legislate firm legal safeguards for slavery. That policy was successfully inaugurated with the election in October, 1854, of John Whitfield, the proslavery candidate for congressional delegate, followed by the election of a proslavery legislature in March, 1855. Both proslavery and anti-slavery adherents engaged in fraudulent voting in the two elections, but the wave of Missourians who crossed the border to cast Kansas ballots dwarfed the transgressions of the antislavery men. Such excesses constituted an unnecessary and monumental tactical blunder. Even in the March election there was probably a proslavery majority among the bona fide settlers. Southern interests could have triumphed legitimately. The reckless course adopted enabled the nation's antislavery politicians and press to propagandize effectively for years thereafter about the "bogus" elections, legislature, and legislative laws.<sup>6</sup>

The new legislature convened during July and August, 1855, and adopted a reasonable code of general laws modeled on those of Missouri. Unfortunately, an outrageously harsh slave code was also enacted. It prescribed the death penalty for anyone involved by word or deed in encouraging slaves to rebel or escape. Additional provisions effectively barred antislavery men from voting and office-holding even though they were to be taxed like all other settlers. Finally, the seven antislavery legislators victorious in May in the

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<sup>6</sup>William E. Connelley, A Standard History of Kansas and Kansans (Chicago, 1918), I, 333-51; Mary J. Klem, "Missouri in the Kansas Struggle," MVHA Proceedings, IX (1917-1918), 393-404; Malin, "Pro-slavery Background," pp. 286-99; Potter, The Impending Crisis, pp. 200-202; Charles Robinson, The Kansas Conflict (Lawrence, 1898), pp. 92-120.

few district reelections ordered by territorial Governor Andrew Reeder were expelled and replaced by the proslavery winners in the March elections.<sup>7</sup>

Antislavery leaders responded to the political victories and heavy-handed measures of their opponents by adopting a policy of "repudiation." The supremacy of federal laws and officials was acknowledged, but the authority of the "bogus" legislature, of the laws it passed, and of its appointed officials was disavowed. As a corollary to the repudiation policy, efforts began early in the summer of 1855 to organize a free-state government operating under its own body of laws. Seven meetings and conventions passed resolutions endorsing the free-state movement and listened to speakers somewhat hypocritically depict the immorality and illegality of the proslavery legislature.<sup>8</sup> An additional free-state countermeasure was to establish several secret military societies equipped with Sharps rifles, the most advanced weapon available. The rifles were provided primarily by officials of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Similar proslavery societies, commonly dubbed "blue lodges," formed

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-58; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 368-69; Potter, The Impending Crisis, p. 204; Daniel W. Wilder, Annals of Kansas (Topeka, 1875), pp. 52-54, 56-59; St. Louis Daily Missouri Democrat, August 15, 1855.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 103-07; William Lawrence, Life of Amos A. Lawrence (1888; rpt. Freeport, New York, 1971), pp. 94-96, 100-102; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 121-22, 142-52; Leverett W. Spring, Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union (Boston, 1885), pp. 62-64; Wilder, Annals, pp. 51, 54; Lawrence, Kansas, Herald of Freedom, August 18, September 8, 1855; A. A. Lawrence to Franklin Pierce, July 15, 1855, Lawrence to Charles Robinson, August 10, 1855, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers, Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS microfilm copy).

in Missouri in 1854 were not nearly as well-armed.<sup>9</sup>

While the contending parties were organizing in Kansas Territory, President Franklin Pierce adhered to a non-intervention policy. He was determined to administer the Kansas-Nebraska Act as impartially as possible and give popular sovereignty a fair trial. Influenced by his Jeffersonian belief in the virtues of minimal government, Pierce believed that the appointed and elected officials and the citizens of the territory should be free in internal affairs to shape their own destiny. This laissez faire stance obviously placed great responsibility upon the territorial chief executive.<sup>10</sup>

The first territorial governor appointed by Pierce was Andrew H. Reeder, a prominent attorney from Easton, Pennsylvania. Reeder was a staunch administration Democrat committed to the principles of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and not averse to southern political viewpoints. After arriving in Kansas in October, 1854, he was led by his lack of administrative experience and desire for personal financial gain into acts which enveloped him in controversy.

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<sup>9</sup> W. H. Isely, "The Sharps Rifle Episode in Kansas History," American Historical Review, XII (1907), 546-66; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 123-28, 136-37; Klem, "Missouri in the Kansas Struggle," pp. 389-99; Lawrence, Amos Lawrence, pp. 95-98; Malin, John Brown, pp. 520-23; Parrish, David Atchison, pp. 163, 167-68; A. A. Lawrence to J. B. Abbott, August 11, 1855, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers; Charles Robinson to Eli Thayer, July 26, 1855, Charles and Sara T. D. Robinson Papers, Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS microfilm copy). Robinson's letter states: "The rifles in Lawrence have had a very good effect, and I think the same kind of instruments in other places would do more to save Kansas than almost anything else."

<sup>10</sup> Roy F. Nichols, Franklin Pierce: Young Hickory of the Granite Hills (2d ed. rev.; Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 417-18, 441-44; Washington, D. C., The Daily Union, October 6, 30, December 6, 1855.

He clashed repeatedly with the legislature, engaged in improper land speculations, and eventually aligned himself with the free-state party interests. Succumbing to intense pressure from Senator Atchison and other disenchanted southern representatives, Pierce removed Reeder from office on July 31, 1855.<sup>11</sup>

Southern spokesmen in Kansas preferred that Daniel Woodson, secretary of the territory and a proslavery Virginian, replace Reeder. Pierce, however, offered the gubernatorial post first to Pennsylvania Congressman John Dawson, who declined, and then to Wilson Shannon. Although he later asserted that he neither expected nor desired the appointment, the Ohioan accepted it. He probably owed his selection to the personal influence in the administration of his former brother-in-law, Commissioner of Indian Affairs George Manypenny. It is quite possible that Manypenny also persuaded his good friend, Senator Atchison, who chaired the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, to support Shannon's candidacy or, at least, not oppose it. Shannon's qualifications matched the administration's requirements exactly. He was a northerner, a steadfast National Democrat, a proponent of popular sovereignty, and the possessor of

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<sup>11</sup>Margaret Hawthorn Cobb, "Andrew H. Reeder and the Territorial Beginnings of Kansas," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1938), pp. 19-49, 54-56; William E. Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors (Topeka, 1900), pp. 11-36; "Governor Andrew H. Reeder," Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as KSHS Transactions), ed. F. G. Adams (Topeka, 1875-1908), I-II, 145-152; Russell K. Hickman, "Reeder Administration," pp. 305-455; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 407-15; Wilder, Annals, pp. 36-54; Washington, D. C., National Intelligencer, August 2, 1855; New York Tribune, August 8, 1855.

high level executive experience.<sup>12</sup>

Editorial uncertainty and confusion about Shannon's position on slavery and other issues produced an exceedingly diverse northern and southern press reaction to his appointment. The President's organ, the Washington Daily Union, assured its readers that "Governor Shannon's attainments, his large experience in public affairs . . . , his sound discretion, and his unquestioned integrity, eminently fit him for the delicate and responsible position to which he has been called." George W. Brown's Lawrence, Kansas, Herald of Freedom, a paper partially financed by the Emigrant Aid Company, promised that Shannon's advent would be welcomed by the free-state men so long as he made no attempt to enforce the laws of the Kansas legislature. The Ohioan's hometown newspaper, the St. Clairsville Gazette, proudly claimed, "No better appointment could have been made than this. Gov. Shannon is just the man to meet the state of things in . . . Kansas." Other editors disagreed. The nation's most influential newspaper, Horace Greeley's New York Tribune, charged that Shannon was an "active doughface" chosen " . . . to act as the bill-signing automaton for the Atchison and Stringfellow ruffians." John Wentworth, of the Chicago Democrat, asserted that the new governor's goal was " . . . to make Kansas a slave state." The proslavery press in Kansas and elsewhere, on the other hand, was unhappy that Daniel Woodson or some other southern man "sound on

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<sup>12</sup>Nichols, Franklin Pierce, p. 418; Parrish, David Atchison, pp. 126, 129-31, 172-73; Leavenworth Kansas Weekly Herald, August 18, 1855; New York Daily Times, August 9, 1855; Washington Union, August 11, 17, 1855.

the goose" (committed to the slavery system) had not been selected. Benjamin Stringfellow's brother, John, complained in the Atchison Squatter Sovereign that the administration had ignored the wishes of "ninety-nine one-hundredths of our citizens" in "saddling" the territory with another northerner as governor who might well prove to be as objectionable as Reeder. Stringfellow added, "Mr. Shannon may be a reliable man . . . , but coming as he does from the state that produces a [Joshua] Giddings, a [Benjamin] Wade, and a [Salmon] Chase, we cannot but regard him with suspicion." Surely the cruelest and most unwarranted cut of all was in the Lexington, Missouri, Express. Shannon (age fifty-three) was " . . . an old, worn out, broken down politician . . . " tainted with free soil antecedents. "When," asked the Express in a question that must have startled Pierce if he saw it, "will the administration be done with this catering to the morbid abolition sentiment of the North?"<sup>13</sup> At the outset of his gubernatorial service, therefore, a pattern in the press of misrepresenting Shannon's character, motives, and abilities was established which prevailed throughout his term of office.

Both the physical and political "dimensions" of Shannon's new domain were awesome. Kansas Territory encompassed over 126,000 square

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<sup>13</sup> Washington Union, August 11, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 1, 1855; St. Clairsville Gazette, August 16, 1855; New York Tribune, August 11, 1855; Chicago Democrat, n.d., quoted in The [Boston] Evening Post, September 11, 1855, in Thomas H. Webb Kansas Scrap Book (hereafter cited as Webb Scrap Book), Kansas State Historical Society, V, 158; Squatter Sovereign, August 21, 1855; The Lexington [Missouri] Express, n.d., quoted in Kansas Weekly Herald, August 25, 1855. For additional press reactions see Webb Scrap Book, V, 53-158; Ohio Statesman, August 12, 1855; Daily Missouri Democrat, August 22, 1855.

miles. It stretched from Nebraska Territory on the north to the Indian territory (later Oklahoma) on the south and from Missouri westward to the Rocky mountains. In addition to an estimated 20,000 white settlers occupying the territory by September, 1855, there were nearly 17,000 Indian inhabitants. Most of the often troublesome responsibility for managing Indian relations did not rest with the governor, however, but with George Manypenny's Bureau of Indian Affairs and the United States Army troops stationed at Forts Riley and Leavenworth. Shannon devoted his attention to the rapidly expanding white population situated in the eastern third of the territory, ". . . a rich prairie region diversified by valleys, limestone ledges, and woods of elm, cottonwood, sycamore, and walnut."<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately for Shannon, Reeder had bequeathed him a political time bomb. The nation's press and politicians constantly engaged in partisan debate over the future of slavery in Kansas. Antislavery Republican leaders had decided, in fact, to make the status of Kansas the central issue of the 1856 presidential campaign. They attacked Pierce's Kansas policies at every opportunity in the Congress, in editorial columns, and in political meetings across the land. The emotions stirred and released by such agitation evoked an angry

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<sup>14</sup>The population estimate is in John Calhoun to William L. Marcy, February 16, 1856, "Administration of Governor Shannon" (hereafter cited as "Shannon Administration"), KSHS Transactions, V, 261. The descriptive quotation is in Allan Nevins, Ordeal of the Union: A House Dividing, 1852-1857 (New York, 1947), II, 302. Another excellent description is in Davis, Kansas, pp. 7-12. For Indian affairs see W. Stitt Robinson, Jr., "The Role of the Military in Territorial Kansas," Territorial Kansas: Studies Commemorating the Centennial (Lawrence, 1954), pp. 70-100; Gates, Fifty Million Acres, pp. 5-8, 15-22.



southern response quieted only by the Civil War. Because Kansas was the focal point of this game of president-making, national political considerations constantly intruded, with adverse effects, upon Shannon's conduct of territorial affairs. Another disruptive influence derived from the success of northern press propagandists in convincing their southern readers that thousands of ardent anti-slavery settlers armed with Sharps rifles were being dispatched to Kansas each month by the New England Emigrant Aid Company and other sponsors. Such propaganda heightened the apprehensions of the proslaveryites, of course, led to excessive reactions to territorial developments, and discouraged any thought that the settlement of the territory would proceed peacefully. Within Kansas, furthermore, the arbitrary acts of the "bogus" proslavery legislature and the anti-slavery countermovement to create a separate free-state government greatly exacerbated the antagonistic feelings already existing between the opposing factions. Lastly, the steady influx of settlers continually generated new complications and controversies related to land claims. Thus Shannon was confronted as he assumed office with a vastly more complex and potentially explosive set of conditions than was normally present in newly settled territories.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Washington Union, October 6, 28, November 4, 13, 1855; Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York, 1973), pp. 418-528; Malin, John Brown, pp. 498-534, 593-602; Malin, "Proslavery Background," pp. 285-305; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 301-23, 332-46, 380-98, 408-83; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 407-18, 425-34, 441-56, 464-65, 473-83; Bernard A. Weisberger, "The Newspaper Reporter and the Kansas Imbroglia," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXVI (1950), 633-56.

The limited powers vested in the territorial chief executive proved wholly insufficient for the task confronting Shannon. He was authorized to set election dates and judge election results, call special sessions of the legislature, and veto legislative acts. His veto could be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the legislature. He also commissioned officials appointed under territorial laws, was responsible for enforcing all laws, and could grant pardons and reprieves. Most importantly, the governor served as commander-in-chief of the territorial militia. That peace-keeping body, however, was non-existent when Shannon reached Kansas. The militia proved so unmanageable once it had partially organized in the fall that, after one disastrous experience with its services in the Wakarusa War in December, Shannon wisely refused to commandeer it for any purpose. The county sheriffs and the United States Marshal for Kansas, Israel B. Donelson, were proslavery partisans who provoked more lawlessness than they restrained. The United States Army troops constituted, in fact, the only reliable force that the governor could call upon to maintain order. Unfortunately, Pierce and his advisers adamantly opposed the use of troops for such a purpose because they were convinced that it would never be necessary and that the political repercussions would harm the President's prospects in the 1856 election. In a practical sense, therefore, Shannon was forced to rely primarily upon the prestige rather than the power of his office and upon his personal political skills to secure the cooperation of the settlers in resolving the disputes

which plagued the territory during his administration.<sup>16</sup>

Shannon's appointment as Kansas territorial governor had been announced in Washington on August 10. Two weeks later, he and his son John left St. Clairsville bound for Kansas. John was to serve as his father's private secretary. They arrived on September 1 in Westport, Missouri. That community of approximately 800 residents was just two miles from the temporary capitol of Kansas Territory, the Shawnee Methodist Indian Mission.<sup>17</sup>

In a brief impromptu speech to a group of Kansas legislators and local citizens who had gathered that evening to greet him, Shannon clearly and forcefully outlined his territorial duties and policies. He had come to rectify the mess left by Reeder. In accordance with his oath of office and his instructions, he intended to ensure that the laws, territorial and national, were henceforth upheld. The legislature was undeniably a proper legal body, he asserted, since its status had been officially confirmed by both Governor Reeder and the Kansas judiciary. The appropriate recourse

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<sup>16</sup>U. S., Statutes at Large, An Act to Organize the Territories of Nebraska and Kansas, 33d Cong., 1st Sess., 1854, House Rept. 236, X, 284; Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, December 11, 1855 "Executive Minutes of Governor Shannon" (hereafter cited as "Shannon Executive Minutes"), KSHS Transactions, III, 299; William L. Marcy to Wilson Shannon, February 16, 1856, "Shannon Administration," p. 261; Wilson Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856, and also in the Washington National Intelligencer, November 29, 1856 (the article is a lengthy, detailed defense of his conduct in Kansas); Washington Union, October 6, December 6, 1855; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 407, 425-34, 442, 446-49; Robinson, Jr., "Role of the Military," pp. 71-72, 88-89, 96-98.

<sup>17</sup>New York Tribune, August 28, 1855; Daily Missouri Democrat, August 23, September 10, 1855; Washington Union, August 11, 1855.

for those objecting to the personnel and the allegedly unconstitutional acts of the legislature was available through the ballot box and the federal courts. He particularly deplored the revolutionary efforts of some territorial residents to resist and nullify the legislature's enactments. Lastly, Shannon observed that the commerce and general welfare of Missouri and Kansas were "intimately connected" because they were adjoining territories for over 200 miles. While he understood, therefore, why Missourians were so deeply concerned about the course of Kansas development, ". . . nothing was to be gained on either side by keeping up a border feud, but, on the contrary the settlement, growth, and prosperity of both would be . . . promoted by cultivating harmony and the most friendly relations."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to reflecting the obligations mandated by his oath of office, Shannon's statements primarily reiterated the public position on Kansas affairs of the administration.<sup>19</sup> His speech bluntly affirmed his determination to sustain the orderly legal processes required to implement popular sovereignty in the territory. Unfortunately for Shannon, his declarations were recast into an entirely different affirmation by the antislavery press.

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<sup>18</sup>Wilson Shannon to G. W. Brown, October 6, 1855, Herald of Freedom, October 27, 1855; Daily Missouri Democrat, September 10, 1855.

<sup>19</sup>Washington Union, September 20, October 6, 12, 1855; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 407, 411-14. Attorney General Caleb Cushing authored many Union editorials on Kansas and other subjects of major significance to the administration. Ibid., p. 279; Claude M. Fues, The Life of Caleb Cushing (New York, 1923), II, 137, 147-58.

One listener in Shannon's Westport audience was James Redpath, a young (age 21), talented abolitionist correspondent for the St. Louis Daily Missouri Democrat. Obviously angered by the governor's views about the legality of the proslavery legislature and other matters, Redpath filled a long column in the Democrat with misrepresentations and denunciations of the speech. His account contained two crucial distortions. Shannon was quoted, first of all, as flatly stating that it would be beneficial to both Missouri and Kansas for their institutions to harmonize. Secondly, the implications of that recommendation seemed to be confirmed when the governor, according to Redpath, concluded his comments by asserting that he was "for slavery in Kansas."<sup>20</sup>

Publication of Redpath's version of the speech in the Democrat, the New York Tribune, the Washington National Intelligencer, and many other newspapers brought down an avalanche of public criticism upon Shannon. A petition demanding his removal from office was circulated among free-state settlers in Kansas and, filled with many signatures, forwarded to the President. Distress over his alleged indiscreet remarks temporarily prevailed among the Ohioan's friends and within administration ranks. Most noticeably upset, it was reported, was Secretary of State William L. Marcy, his immediate superior.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, September 10, 1855; Jim A. Hart, "James Redpath, Missouri Correspondent," Missouri Historical Review, LVII, No. 1 (October, 1962), pp. 70-78.

<sup>21</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, October 23, 30, 1855; New York Herald, n. d., quoted in ibid., September 19, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 8, 29, October 13, 27, 1855; National Intelligencer, September 17, October 10, 1855; New York Times, September 18, 1855;

Assisted by some friends and sympathetic editors, Shannon circulated a series of letters among various newspapers in which he vigorously and convincingly attacked Redpath's misrepresentations. Perhaps his most telling argument was that he had been appointed territorial governor partly because of his deep, longstanding commitment to the doctrine of popular sovereignty. Under no circumstances, therefore, had he or would he subvert the workings of that doctrine in Kansas by making public statements for or against slavery. His rebuttals, nevertheless, seem to have only minimally reduced the national impact of Redpath's column.<sup>22</sup>

As could be expected, the proslavery press reacted favorably to Shannon's address. John Stringfellow, who was speaker of the House in the territorial legislature as well as co-editor of the Atchison Squatter Sovereign, noted approvingly, "Those who heard

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New York Tribune, September 14, October 8, 1855; St. Clairsville Gazette, September 20, October 25, 1855. Relevant articles from many northern newspapers are in Webb Scrap Book, V, 103-211, VI, 1-203.

<sup>22</sup>Shannon's most extensive rebuttal appears in Herald of Freedom, October 27, 1855, and also in St. Clairsville Gazette, October 25, 1855. Briefer responses by him are in ibid., October 11, 1855; Ohio Statesman, October 6, 13, 1855; Washington Union, October 9, 19, 23, 1855. For other critiques of Redpath's report and support for Shannon's representations see Daily Missouri Republican, October 1, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, October 20, 1855; St. Clairsville Gazette, October 11, 18, 25, November 22, 1855; Ohio Statesman, October 6, 7, 1855; Washington Union, October 6, 9, 23, 1855. In the Daily Missouri Democrat, September 27, 1855, the editor claimed that Redpath's excellent stenographic skills ensured the accuracy of his accounts. The Democrat of November 10, however, contained Redpath's admission that he did not take notes of the speech, but relied upon his memory. He also reported that a personal discussion with Shannon in mid-October failed to resolve their differences about the Westport address.

him [Shannon] assure us that he . . . made the best possible impression upon the minds of his hearers. He did not let fall a word which a Pro-Slavery, or any other right-minded man would wish to have changed . . . ."<sup>23</sup> Lucian Eastin's Leavenworth Kansas Weekly Herald praised Shannon as " . . . an honest, honorable, national man . . . who promises to act up to the letter and spirit of the Kansas bill . . . ."<sup>24</sup> Neither Stringfellow nor Eastin, however, mentioned a pronouncement by the governor in favor of slavery in Kansas. They obviously would have headlined such a statement had it actually been made. After interviewing friends who had heard the speech, Henry C. Pate, a correspondent for the proslavery Daily Missouri Republican, even went so far as to deny that Shannon said anything that could be construed as an endorsement of slavery. Eastin's Herald printed a similar denial and vehemently denounced the distortions of the "abolitionist" press.<sup>25</sup> As a final consideration in evaluating Redpath's veracity, it should be noted that he was a zealous abolitionist and free-state activist who later admitted that he " . . . went to Kansas; and endeavored personally and by my pen to precipitate a revolution." Shannon was the first major victim of Redpath's propagandistic

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<sup>23</sup> Squatter Sovereign, September 11, 1855; Wilder, Annals, pp. 43, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, September 22, 1855.

<sup>25</sup> Daily Missouri Republican, October 1, 1855; Daily Missouri Republican, n. d., quoted in St. Clairsville Gazette, October 25, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, September 22, October 20, 1855.

efforts.<sup>26</sup> On October 6, the thoroughly disgusted governor wrote his Ohio friend and editor, Sam Medary:

There is one thing I would wish to impress on the Democratic editors East: to receive everything from this territory with great caution. It is the great factory of falsehood and materials with which politicians in the East expect to make political capital.<sup>27</sup>

The Westport speech imbroglio was the first of many losing encounters Shannon had with the fourth estate while he was territorial governor. The only newspapers to maintain regular correspondents in Kansas during his term in office were three influential antislavery journals, the Daily Missouri Democrat, the New York Tribune, and the New York Times. Redpath of the Democrat was joined by William A. Phillips, Thomas Wentworth Higginson ("Worcester"), and Hugh Young ("Potter") of the Tribune and William Hutchinson, James M. Winchell, and Samuel F. Tappan of the Times. Other significant antislavery reporters who sporadically covered Kansas territorial affairs included Richard Hinton, Richard Realf, and John Kagi. All of the writers listed became active participants in the

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<sup>26</sup> Hart, "James Redpath," pp. 70-78; Weisberger, "The Newspaper Reporter," pp. 637-38, 646; James Redpath, The Roving Editor; or, Talks with the Slaves in the Southern States (New York, 1859), p. 300. Redpath's version of the Westport speech received the historian's imprimatur in Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 390; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, p. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Letter quoted in St. Clairsville Gazette, October 25, 1855. As Shannon correctly noted, the press furor over his speech was ". . . convenient for the anti-administration papers . . . because it gives them a chance to assail the administration" on the eve of elections in Ohio and Pennsylvania, and was ". . . convenient for the abolitionists because it gives them material with which to agitate the public mind on the subject of slavery and abuse the South." Shannon to A. H. Patterson, September 26, 1855, Ohio Statesman, October 13, 1855, reprinted in Washington Union, October 19, 1855.



free-state movement and served as its resident propagandists. All but Young and Higginson also became "earnest supporters" of the fanatical abolitionist, John Brown. Realf and Kagi even joined Brown's band in the late 1850's and Kagi was killed in the Harpers Ferry raid in 1859.<sup>28</sup>

The picturesque reports these partisan correspondents sent east generally depicted a gallant band of God-fearing, abstemious, antislavery heroes and heroines battling to save Kansas from hordes of proslavery Missouri "border ruffians." The latter were typically portrayed as

"hard-featured and whiskey-flavored, unkept, unshaved," and unwashed. They were forever "drinking, gambling, . . . blaspheming," an "obscene, depraved, brutish . . . race of beings," talking mainly of "killing Abolitionists in Kansas," and as "ignorant and unpolished as their 'acts' demonstrated they were unprincipled and violent."<sup>29</sup>

Given the pre-eminent position as spokesman and prime example of this new breed of "sub-human" degenerates, the "border ruffians," was Senator David Atchison. The esteem indicated by his colleagues in the United States Senate when they elected him president pro

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<sup>28</sup> New York Times, September 6, 1856; C. B. Galbreath, "John Henry Kagi: Biographical Sketch," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Society Publications, XXXIV (1925), 263-91; Richard J. Hinton, John Brown and His Men, (New York, 1894), pp. 40-41; Richard J. Hinton, "Pens That Made Kansas Free," KSHS Collections, VI, 371-82; Malin, John Brown, pp. 31-131; Weisberger, "The Newspaper Reporter," pp. 633-56.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 635-56. The quote is on page 650 and is a composite statement formulated by Weisberger from a variety of press sources. For other examples of typical antislavery press commentaries see Daily Missouri Democrat, December 22, 27, 1855, April 28, 1856; New York Times, February 6, March 27, May 8, 22, 1856; New York Tribune, May 11, June 15, October 6, 29, November 3, December 31, 1855, March 21, May 13, 1856.

tempore sixteen times between 1846 and 1854 clearly did not influence the judgments about his character and competence rendered by the antislavery press.<sup>30</sup> The derogatory attributes ascribed to the "border ruffians" were automatically bestowed by the antislavery journalists upon Shannon and other officials and settlers in Kansas who aligned themselves with the proslavery interests. By the time Shannon left office, for instance, Phillips, Redpath, and their colleagues had convinced many Americans that the governor had been drunk "at every opportunity" since arriving in the territory. The fact was that throughout his life he seldom consumed alcoholic beverages of any kind. Truth had to yield, nevertheless, as it often did in "Bleeding Kansas," to the propagandists' desire to blacken the image of the "enemy."<sup>31</sup>

The most important antislavery journals published in the territory in 1855-1856 were the Kansas Tribune, Herald of Freedom,

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<sup>30</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, September 13, December 24, 27, 1855; New York Tribune, September 8, 1855; Parrish, David Atchison, pp. 63-64, 164-65; P. Orman Roy, "David Rice Atchison," DAB, I, 402-03.

<sup>31</sup> Weisberger, "The Newspaper Reporter," pp. 650-52. The drunkenness charges against Shannon are discussed on p. 650. A convincing refutation of those charges is in Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856. For examples of antislavery journalistic stereotyping see Daily Missouri Democrat, December 22, 1855; New York Times, May 2, 1856; New York Tribune, January 14, August 22, September 9, 16, 1856. Although he filled the pages of the New York Times with the biased accounts of his Kansas correspondents, editor Henry J. Raymond finally was moved by his sense of journalistic ethics to complain about reportorial excesses to William Hutchinson. "I wanted . . . facts--seen not through party prejudices but dispassionately--and this is precisely what it seems almost impossible to get from Kansas. Everybody who goes there becomes at once a jealous, red hot party man." Raymond to Hutchinson, September 18, 1857, William Hutchinson Papers, Kansas State Historical Society.

Kansas Free State, Kansas Freeman, and the Kansas State Journal.

The first three listed were situated in the major free-state center of Lawrence (the Tribune moved to Topeka in November, 1855), and the others were in Topeka. The Herald of Freedom, edited by George W. Brown and partially financed by the Emigrant Aid Company, was much more influential than the other publications. Copies of its issues were widely circulated in the north and its most significant columns reprinted in many newspapers. Brown demonstrated skills as a propagandist comparable to Redpath, Phillips, and other Kansas correspondents and played a major, often controversial role in territorial developments.<sup>32</sup>

The national proslavery press failed to mount an effective response to the antislavery journalistic crusade. The four proslavery newspapers published in the territory while Shannon was governor, the Kansas Weekly Herald, Squatter Sovereign, Kickapoo Pioneer, and the Lecompton National Union (after May 3, 1856), provided the only regular coverage of Kansas affairs by proslavery correspondents. They seem to have received much less personnel and financial assistance from sources outside the territory than did the local antislavery publications.<sup>33</sup> Proslavery editors tended to omit or to gloss over reports of troubles in Kansas for fear of adversely

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<sup>32</sup>G. Raymond Gaeddert, "First Newspapers in Kansas Counties," Kansas Historical Quarterly, X, No. 1 (Spring, 1941), 6-18; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 89-91; Malin, John Brown, pp. 63-77; Wilder, Annals, pp. 38-39, 43, 52.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 40, 43, 54, 97; Gaeddert, "First Newspapers in Kansas," pp. 4-6, 9-10; Malin, John Brown, pp. 33-62.

affecting the recruitment of southern emigrants to go there. When provoked enough, however, the proslavery sheets tried to emulate Horace Greeley's "brimstone journalism." All problems plaguing Kansas settlers were blamed upon the lawless, revolutionary actions of the fanatical abolitionists comprising the free-state movement and all alleged "border ruffian" depredations were either denied or declared justifiable. Such partisan commentaries, typical of both proslavery and antislavery writers, were a major factor in creating a disastrous spirit of hatred and alienation between supporters of the opposing forces in Kansas. As Wilson Shannon discovered to his dismay and disgust, extremism, not moderation, was the prevailing spirit in "Bleeding Kansas."<sup>34</sup>

Lecompton, an undeveloped townsite situated approximately fifty-five miles west of Kansas City and only 12 miles west of the New England Emigrant Aid Company's major settlement at Lawrence, had been designated by the legislature to be the permanent territorial capital. The necessary living accommodations were not ready for occupancy there until late March, 1856, so Shannon resided at the temporary capital, the Shawnee Mission, for the first seven months of his term in office.<sup>35</sup> Although the legislature had adjourned on

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.; Weisberger, "The Newspaper Reporter," pp. 647-56. For examples of radical proslavery journalism see Kansas Weekly Herald, October 20, December 15, 1855, May 24, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, March 13, April 24, September 11, October 2, 1855, March 4, 11, 1856.

<sup>35</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, March 22, 1856; New York Tribune, November 14, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, November 13, 1855; Franklin G. Adams, "The Capitals of Kansas," KSHS Collections, VIII, 333-39; John W. Barber and Henry Howe, All the Western States and Territories

August 30, many of its members remained at the mission to greet formally the new governor when he arrived from Westport early on Monday morning, September 3. O. H. Brown, a member of the House, eloquently welcomed Shannon "in the name of the people of Kansas" and assured him that "when you grasp the hand of our pioneers you may trust your honor in their custody. We have no Catalines here . . . , no cowards with their stilettos--no assassins of reputation. Here man walks abroad in the majesty of his maker."

In his optimistic, statesmanlike response Shannon declared:

I come amongst you, not as a new adventurer seeking to better his fortune and then return home, but as one desiring for himself and family a permanent location; and it shall be my highest ambition to devote my humble efforts to the promotion of the interest, happiness and prosperity of this Territory.

While acknowledging that there had been and undoubtedly would continue to be differing opinions among the territory's settlers on questions of public policy, he was confident that "by respecting the opinions and even prejudices of each other, and cultivating a social feeling, we will soon harmonize, and learn to act together for the benefit and advancement of our highly favored country."

The governor deplored the extensive publicity the press had given to the "irregularities" in the first territorial elections while minimizing " . . . the bloody riots that have characterized the elections in some of the states, and the lawless mobs that have disgraced some of our large cities." In conclusion, he asserted that "we have no security for person or property except by the

maintenance of law and order, and interest and duty both unite in enforcing on us the obligation to maintain each." The governor's non-partisan, mildly phrased, and constructive address received some journalistic notice, but appears to have been generally eclipsed from public view by the press reaction to Redpath's report of Shannon's Westport remarks.<sup>36</sup>

The governor's new home, the Shawnee Mission, had been founded in Wyandotte County in 1830 by the Reverend Thomas Johnson of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. The mission was moved in 1839 to its Shawnee land site, one mile from the Missouri state border and two miles from Westport. In that location it served as an important outpost of civilization on the frontier. Many travelers stopped there briefly while on their way westward via nearby branches of the Santa Fe and Oregon trails.

The three large brick buildings ("besides workshops and out-houses") constructed at the mission provided the only facilities in the territory in which the legislature could comfortably convene. One of the brick structures housed a large chapel and schoolrooms in which 100 to 200 Indian children were taught vocational skills. Legislative sessions were held in the chapel. Another building was the mission's boarding house and included a dining hall capable of serving nearly 300 people. James Redpath composed a vivid description

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<sup>36</sup>The speeches of Brown and Shannon are printed in Kansas Weekly Herald, September 8, 1855; National Intelligencer, September 17, 1855; Washington Union, November 18, 1855. Also see Daily Missouri Democrat, November 10, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 22, October 27, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, September 11, 1855; Wilder, Annals, p. 56.

of the luncheon scene there while the legislature was in session  
in August:

The dining room is a long, lofty, dingy apartment, at the further end of which (one smells on entering it) the kitchen is situated. Two parallel tables support the fare . . . . The left hand table is appropriated to the . . . members of both Houses, Judges, the Governor . . . and the young ladies who may be out visiting the Legislature, and the wives of the various "Courts" and other sons of Blackstone. The right hand table is appropriated by outsiders in general--officers, distinguished strangers, reporters, printers, and often clergymen.

Our fare is good, but simple, and toujours la même. It consists of liquors, sweet milk and pure water in unlimited quantities. --"Solids:" Corn-bread, wheat-bread, boiled or roast beef, and boiled ham. Vegetables: Potatoes, tomatoes, boiled cabbages, cucumbers, . . . boiled corn, boiled corn-heads. Pies: Sometimes a piece of blackberry pie, but generally none. Aids to consumption: Hunger. No butter or wine allowed. Puddings: None. Extras: Grace before meat.

The third major building was a thirteen-room, two story farmhouse. Shannon lived on the second floor where he also had an office. According to a New York Tribune reporter,

The Governor's public room was certainly not a palace. I have no wish to be critical, but had Mr. Dawson seen the location and general conveniences of the place the present incumbent occupies before he refused the offered governorship, there would have been good reason for his want of ambition.

It seems that in absolutely none of its aspects was Shannon's experience as territorial governor to be a bed of roses.<sup>37</sup>

Shannon was surrounded at the mission by a group of ardent proslavery counselors. They included the Reverend Johnson, who was the president of the Council (upper house) of the legislature as well

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<sup>37</sup> Redpath's report is in Daily Missouri Democrat, August 23, 1855. The description of Shannon's public room is in New York Tribune, November 2, 1855. Also see ibid., June 11, 1855; Herald of Freedom, October 13, 1855; Adams, "Capitals of Kansas," pp. 333-37; Robert W. Richmond, Kansas: A Land of Contrasts (Saint Charles, Missouri, 1974), pp. 33-34.

as head of the mission, Samuel J. Jones, newly appointed sheriff of Douglas County where both Lawrence and Lecompton were situated, and Daniel Woodson who, as secretary of the territory, was the second ranking territorial official and the governor's chief aide.

Johnson, a slaveowner, had conducted the affairs of the mission for many years " . . . with great devotion and ability and with much success."<sup>38</sup> An eastern visitor, who was critical of his slaveholding, described Johnson as

. . . a large well-looking man, of grave deportment and speech, with a temperament rather phlegmatic and a square, practical cast of countenance that guarantees his fidelity to the matter-of-fact details of business, but gives no promise whatever of creative intellect or the high generous impulses of the man of imagination.<sup>39</sup>

Jones retained his position of assistant postmaster at Westport while also serving as sheriff of Douglas County. One of the most controversial figures in the "Bleeding Kansas" imbroglio, he has been appropriately described by the historian, Leverett Spring, as a mixture of black and white, "a man of great energy, noise, violence, courage, and sincerity." Jones was exceedingly popular with his fellow Missouri "border ruffians."<sup>40</sup> Woodson was a tall, handsome,

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<sup>38</sup> Adams, "Capitals of Kansas," pp. 333-34.

<sup>39</sup> New York Tribune, June 11, 1855. For additional comments on Johnson see Herald of Freedom, October 13, 1855.

<sup>40</sup> Spring, Kansas, pp. 87-88; Potter, The Impending Crisis, pp. 207-09, 220; Herald of Freedom, December 27, 1856, October 31, 1857. In the sources cited and in other contemporary and historical descriptions of Jones he is presented as the Westport postmaster. According to a report in the New York Times, December 24, 1855, Albert G. Boone, grandson of the famous Daniel Boone, was the postmaster and Jones his "deputy." "Literal," who wrote the report, implied that his information stemmed from a personal conversation with Boone on December 7.



and affable Virginian, thirty-one years old. While in Virginia he had achieved some prominence as the editor for several years of the Lynchburg Republican. As previously noted, he had been the first choice of the southern interests in Kansas to replace Reeder as governor.<sup>41</sup>

No effort was required by the territorial proslavery clique to prevent a rapprochement between the governor and the free-state forces. Shannon had always been a Jeffersonian, states' rights Democrat, trained as a lawyer and citizen to believe that a democratic society should operate through legal orderly processes established by the majority. A lifelong opponent of the antislavery movement, he considered the denunciations of the Constitution and appeals to "the higher law" of antislavery leaders as transgressions against the nation's most efficacious political and legal principles. Although he believed that the laws sustained the right of citizens to own slaves, he thought that the limitations upon that right set forth in the doctrine of popular sovereignty represented a reasonable application of the constitutional powers of Congress and of the rights of the majority in a territory. Like President Pierce, he deplored the illegal intervention by many Missourians in the first territorial elections. He had no authority, no power

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<sup>41</sup>J. N. Holloway, History of Kansas from the First Exploration of the Mississippi Valley to its Admission into the Union (Lafayette, Indiana, 1868), p. 202; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, pp. 91-93; "Hon. Daniel Woodson," The United States Biographical Dictionary: Kansas (hereafter cited as Kansas Biographical Dictionary) (Chicago, 1879), pp. 222-23; Daily Missouri Democrat, August 25, 1855; New York Tribune, August 8, 1855.

to reverse the electoral results, however, and had to accept the basic political conditions that existed in Kansas as of September 1, 1855.<sup>42</sup>

By the end of August, the free-state interests had clearly indicated in numerous meetings their intention of using the past election irregularities as the justification for pursuing their agreed-upon policy of repudiation, a course independent and in defiance of the legally recognized political institutions and officials of the territory. As a major step in formally structuring the free-state movement, one hundred delegates and several hundred spectators convened at Big Springs, a campground near Lawrence, on September 5, just two days after Shannon arrived at the Shawnee Mission. The assembly's purpose was to unify the diverse free-state elements in the territory into an effectively organized Free State party and to consider the best course of action to pursue in advancing the territory toward statehood. Led by James Lane, former Democratic lieutenant-governor (1849-1853) of Indiana and congressman (1853-1855), and ex-governor Andrew J. Reeder, the group passed resolutions denying that it was dominated by abolitionist interests, recommended the exclusion by law of both slave and free blacks from the territory (the famous "black law" clause), urged all Whigs and Democrats to join together to support the new party, and called for another convention to meet at Topeka on September 19 " . . . to consider the

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<sup>42</sup> Wilson Shannon to G. W. Brown, October 6, 1855, Herald of Freedom, October 27, 1855; St. Clairsville Gazette, August 4, 25, October 19, 1848, October 2, 1856; Washington Union, October 6, 12, 1855; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, pp. 40-42, 59-60.

propriety of forming a state constitution." Additional resolutions prepared especially by Reeder disowned and disavowed " . . . with scorn and indignation the contemptible and hypocritical mockery of a republic government . . . " represented by the legislature and asserted that "we owe no allegiance or obedience to the tyrannical enactments" of that "spurious" body. The most ominous resolution of all proclaimed:

. . . We will endure and submit to these laws no longer than the best interests of the Territory require, as the least of two evils, and will resist them to a bloody issue as soon as we ascertain that peaceable remedies shall fail, and forcible resistance shall furnish any reasonable prospect of success; and that in the meantime we recommend to our friends throughout the Territory the organization and discipline of volunteer companies and the procurement and preparation of arms.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to Passing such belligerent resolutions, the convention nominated Reeder to run for territorial delegate to Congress in opposition to the proslavery incumbent, John Whitfield. As a final independent gesture, the delegate election was held on October 8 even though the legislature's officially ordained date was October 1.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>The resolutions and a report of the proceedings are in Herald of Freedom, September 8, 1855. Other useful sources are New York Tribune, September 21, 1855; Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery, pp. 104-08; R. G. Elliot, "The Big Springs Convention," KSHS Transactions, VIII (1903-1904), 362-377; James C. Malin, "The Topeka Statehood Movement Reconsidered: Origins," Territorial Kansas: Studies Commemorating the Centennial (Lawrence, 1954), pp. 33-50; Rawley, Race and Politics, pp. 94-95; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 169-74; Wendell H. Stephenson, "The Political Career of General James H. Lane," Publications of the Kansas State Historical Society (hereafter cited as KSHS Publications), III (1930), 43-49; Wilder, Annals, pp. 75-77.

<sup>44</sup>Herald of Freedom, September 8, October 13, 1855; New York Tribune, September 21, October 22, 26, 1855.

At the Topeka meeting on September 19, the free-state representatives voted to hold an election on October 8 for delegates to be sent later that month to a state constitutional convention at Topeka. A seven-man Executive Committee of Kansas Territory, chaired by James Lane, was established to supervise the elections and other aspects of the Topeka statehood movement. The October 8 elections took place without incident.<sup>45</sup>

The constitutional convention, meeting from October 23 to November 11, formulated a constitution for a Free State government, set December 15 as the date for a popular vote on ratification of the document, and petitioned Congress to admit Kansas as a state under the new constitution. In anticipation of an affirmative popular vote for the proposed constitution, elections for a full slate of territorial officials and a legislature were scheduled for January 15.<sup>46</sup>

Many of the decisions made at the constitutional convention and in the earlier September meetings were hotly debated and, in some instances, very reluctantly accepted by many of the participants. For instance, the free-state settlers from the western

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., October 22, 26, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 22, October 13, 1855; Wilder, Annals, pp. 62-67; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 50-51.

<sup>46</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, November 9, 13, 14, 17, 20, 22, 1855; Herald of Freedom, October 27, 1855; New York Tribune, November 17, 20, 26, 28, 1855; Malin, "Topeka Movement Reconsidered," pp. 54-68; Charles Robinson, "Topeka and Her Constitution," KSHS Transactions, VI, 291-305; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 51-54; "The Topeka Movement: Record of the Executive Committee of Kansas Territory," KSHS Collections, XIII, 125-66.

states tended to be both antislavery and anti-Negro as were many of their compatriots from other sections. Their successful efforts at all three conventions to provide for the exclusion of free blacks from the territory was vigorously contested by the abolitionists in attendance.<sup>47</sup> The most important question dividing free-state interests in and out of Kansas, however, was how far and how fast to move toward the creation of a territorial government to be erected in opposition to the existing, governmentally sanctioned, political structure. One of the main directors and financiers of the Emigrant Aid Company, Amos A. Lawrence, perceptively articulated the views of the more conservative antislavery elements in a letter he wrote on August 10, 1855, to the company's chief resident Kansas agent, Charles Robinson:

. . . I infer that the spirit of the settlers has been raised so high that they are ready to repudiate the present Legislature . . . , and to resist its requirements . . . .

But many are willing to go further, and to resist the U. S. government, if it should interfere. For this I can see no apology; nor can there ever be good cause for resisting an administration chosen by ourselves . . . .

There is another reason of a more precedential kind, viz, that whoever does this is sure of defeat. We are a law abiding people, and we will sustain our own government, "right or wrong." Any movement aimed at the government destroys at once the moral force of the party, or organization, which favors it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, November 17, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 8, 1855; New York Tribune, November 17, 20, 28, 1855; Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery, pp. 97-115; Malin, John Brown, pp. 510-20; Malin, "Topeka Movement Reconsidered," pp. 38-47, 53-59; Rawley, Race and Politics, pp. 94-96.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence to Robinson, August 10, 1855, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers. Also see Herald of Freedom, September 8, 22, 1855; New York Tribune, November 17-28, 1855; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 103-09, 128-33; Malin, John Brown, pp. 509-31; Malin,

Although Robinson, James Lane, ex-governor Andrew Reeder, and other free-state leaders in Kansas shared Lawrence's concern about directly defying the United States government, the conventions held and actions taken in the fall of 1855 had taken the Topeka statehood movement past the point of no return.

James Lane, who had emigrated to Kansas in April, 1855, emerged during the fall conventions as the chief spokesman for the free-state westerners. Presenting himself at first as a Douglas Democrat, he and a few others made an abortive attempt in June to organize a Democratic party in the territory. After some hesitation, he then cast his lot at the end of the summer with the free-state movement. A flamboyant, charismatic personality, he filled his speeches with sarcasm, invective, and dramatic gestures which captivated his frontier audiences and earned him a large following. Over six feet tall, he was exceedingly slim with a long, narrow, hollow-cheeked face framed by an unkempt mass of long hair and a beard. His rather bizarre wardrobe has been described as "demoralized."

Born and raised a Hoosier, Lane became a lawyer, commanded a regiment in the Mexican War, served as Democratic Lieutenant-governor of Indiana from 1849-1853, and, like Shannon, was a member of the Thirty-third Congress from 1853-1855. The two men became acquainted in Washington although no special friendship seems to have developed. Shannon probably noted with interest that Lane

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"Topeka Movement Reconsidered," pp. 33-68; Potter, The Impending Crisis, pp. 202-15; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 121-80.

was married to a granddaughter of General Arthur St. Clair in whose honor Shannon's hometown of St. Clairsville was named. Historical hindsight seems to substantiate the contemporary assessment of Lane made by future United States Senator John J. Ingalls:

He had an extraordinary assemblage of mental, moral, and physical traits, and, with even a rudimentary perception of the values of personal character as an element of success in public affairs, would have been a great leader . . . . He was the object of inexplicable idolatry and unspeakable execration . . . . His enemies alleged that to reach the goal of his ambition he had no conviction he would not sell, made no promise he would not break, and had no friend he would not betray.<sup>49</sup>

Many of the settlers from the northeast, particularly those from the New England states, looked to Dr. Charles Robinson as their leader rather than Lane. There were few similarities between the two men. Born and raised in Massachusetts, Robinson was tall, handsome, well-groomed, gentlemanly, and reserved in deportment. After practicing medicine in New England for some time, he joined the Gold Rush to California in 1849, was imprisoned briefly over troubles arising from claims disputes, served in the California legislature, edited a newspaper in Sacramento, and returned to Massachusetts in 1851. That same year he married Sara T. D. Lawrence, member of a prominent Massachusetts family.

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<sup>49</sup> Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," is the standard modern biography. A description of Lane's personality, physical appearance, dress, and speaking style is on pp. 160-61. His acquaintance with Shannon is mentioned on p. 48. The quotation by Ingalls is in John James Ingalls, A Collection of the Writings of John James Ingalls (Kansas City, Missouri, 1902), pp. 454-55. For other assessments of Lane see Herald of Freedom, April 12, 1856; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, pp. 370-75; "General James Henry Lane," Kansas Biographical Dictionary, pp. 487-90; Leverett W. Spring, "The Career of a Kansas Politician," American Historical Review, IV (1898), 80-104; Wendell H. Stephenson, "James Henry Lane," DAB, IV, 576-78.

In 1854 Eli Thayer appointed Charles Robinson to be the chief resident agent in Kansas for the New England Emigrant Aid Company. He led several bands of settlers to the territory in 1854-1855, founded the free-state center of Lawrence, and clearly emerged during the summer and fall of 1855 as, alongside Lane, one of the two dominant figures in the free-state movement. Although lacking Lane's oratorical skills and popular appeal, he gained respect for his outstanding political and business acumen. An ambitious and occasionally unscrupulous man, he provided a much needed shrewd, conservative counterbalance to the sometimes hot-headed and impetuous Lane. Often in contention for control of the free-state movement, Robinson and Lane, nevertheless, constituted a formidable, resourceful team who forged the disparate antislavery forces in Kansas into a group unified sufficiently to survive numerous crises and ultimately to demoralize and defeat their proslavery adversaries.<sup>50</sup>

The series of actions taken in the fall by the free-state representatives at Big Springs and at the two Topeka conventions

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<sup>50</sup> Charles Robinson, The Kansas Conflict (Lawrence, 1898), discusses Robinson's entire public career in Kansas, but concentrates primarily on the territorial period. For contemporary press assessments see Herald of Freedom, December 29, 1855, April 12, 1856; New York Tribune, November 20, 1855. Two major biographies are Frank W. Blackmar, The Life of Charles Robinson, the First State Governor of Kansas (Topeka, 1902), and Don W. Wilson, Governor Charles Robinson of Kansas (Lawrence, 1975). Also see Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 376-78; Wendell H. Stephenson, "Charles Robinson," DAB, VII, 34-36. Sara T. D. Robinson, Kansas: Its Interior and Exterior Life (Boston, 1856), is Mrs. Robinson's lively polemical account of territorial developments from the earliest settlements in 1854 to the fall of 1856. The volume was widely read and proved to be one of the most influential antislavery works published in the 1850's. Wilder, Annals, p. 109. Mrs. Robinson depicts Shannon as a weak, vacillating, drunken dupe of the "border ruffians" (see pp. 87-88, 92, 112-30, 146-59, 226-41, 256-58):



constituted, as Samuel Johnson has noted, "a revolution against the de facto government of the territory." As the chief executive of that de facto government, Wilson Shannon was understandably outraged at the free-state revolutionary course and, publicly and privately, vigorously condemned its perpetrators.<sup>51</sup> The Ohioan, it should be noted, actually sympathized with free-state grievances against the more obnoxious laws enacted by the proslavery legislature. He flatly stated to a New York Times correspondent, in fact, that the territorial slave code and repressive election laws were a "dead letter" and would never be enforced.<sup>52</sup> His comments confirmed what was becoming obvious to others as well.

Even before Shannon arrived in Kansas, Amos Lawrence, who had family connections with President Pierce, informed Charles Robinson: ". . . I do not believe the present administration will attempt to impose the Missouri code upon the citizens of Kansas."<sup>53</sup> Further confirmation of Shannon's assertions came from, of all people, James Redpath, who proudly boasted in an October 16 dispatch to the Daily Missouri Democrat that all three antislavery newspapers printed in Lawrence had, since their respective inceptions, been denouncing

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<sup>51</sup> Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 108-09; Herald of Freedom, October 27, November 17, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, November 24, December 12, 22, 1855; New York Tribune, November 29, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, November 27, 1855; Washington Union, November 29, 1855; Wilson Shannon to John A. Halderman, October 9, 1855, John A. Halderman Papers, Spencer Library, University of Kansas.

<sup>52</sup> New York Times, December 17, 1855.

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence to Robinson, August 10, 1855, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers; Lawrence, Amos Lawrence, p. 88.

with impunity the legislature and the institution of slavery. In so doing, they " . . . had violated the twelfth section of 'the Black Laws of Kansas,' and defied 'the powers that be' . . . to execute that celebrated statute."<sup>54</sup>

Antislavery propagandists conveniently ignored the fact that the "black laws" were, indeed, a dead letter and continued to emphasize the existence of such statutes as evidence of the tyrannical conditions imposed by the Kansas legislature upon the free-state settlers. Shannon had some justification, therefore, for his complaints about "bogus" propaganda being circulated to discredit the "bogus" legislature and territorial officials.<sup>55</sup> Most significantly, the continued illegal political actions of the free-state men and their refusal to seek redress of their grievances in the federal courts strengthened the governor's conviction that, like freesoilers and abolitionists he had encountered elsewhere, they were bent on revolution and destruction of the Union as it presently existed.<sup>56</sup> His views concurred fully with those of the Pierce administration. A constant stream of editorials and other articles in the Washington

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<sup>54</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, October 23, 1855. For additional comments about the "black laws" as a dead letter see St. Joseph [Missouri] Cycle, n.d., quoted in ibid., September 15, 1855; New York Tribune, October 2, 1855.

<sup>55</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, November 27, 1855, January 1, 1856; Herald of Freedom, October 13, 27, 1855; New York Times, September 22, November 10, 29, December 6, 1855; New York Tribune, September 25, October 2, 6, 8, 17, December 3, 29, 1855.

<sup>56</sup>Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, November 28, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 292-94; Herald of Freedom, October 27, November 17, 1855; New York Times, November 26, December 17, 1855.

Union denounced the free-state "revolutionary" movement, deplored the "provocations" of the New England Emigrant Aid Company and other antislavery interests which had induced many of the excessive proslavery actions, and castigated abolitionists in general as "disunionists." The Union particularly emphasized the point that the free-state forces, who so self-righteously condemned the illegal acts of the proslavery men, were attempting to rectify the situation in Kansas by blatantly violating the law themselves. Both Shannon and Pierce failed to discern any validity in the free-state argument that two wrongs would somehow make things "right" in the territory.<sup>57</sup>

While the free-state movement was formalizing its structure, the opposition was not dormant. On August 29-30, the proslavery men met at the Shawnee Mission to renominate John Whitfield to be territorial delegate to Congress.<sup>58</sup> The nominee campaigned vigorously in September throughout the territory, even speaking once in Lawrence.<sup>59</sup> Although Shannon had been in Kansas less than a week, he joined Whitfield for one day, September 6, for an appearance at Wyandot. The two men had become friends while serving together in the Thirty-third Congress. Shannon wished to refute publicly some false charges made about Whitfield's actions as a delegate in

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<sup>57</sup> Washington Union, September 23, October 6, 12, 16, 28, November 4, 13, 1855; New York Tribune, October 8, 1855; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 412-14.

<sup>58</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, September 7, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, September 8, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, September 5, 1855.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., September 11, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 22, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, September 15, 22, 1855.

Washington and to express his general admiration for the capabilities of the candidate.<sup>60</sup> Although the governor obviously could not be expected to accept the validity of Reeder's nomination as congressional delegate and illegal election by the "revolutionary" free-state movement, his remarks at Wyandot elicited another wave of condemnations in the nation's antislavery press. The essence of the denunciations was that Shannon had further indicated his commitment to the proslavery cause by speaking favorably about Whitfield in public when his "proper" course was to remain aloof from the campaign in a non-partisan stance.<sup>61</sup>

The congressional delegate election was the first election held in the territory since the legislative elections in March. Whitfield easily won the October 1 election authorized by the legislature. Antislavery adherents boycotted that election just as their opponents scornfully ignored the illegal October 8 free-state election won by Reeder.<sup>62</sup> Both Whitfield and Reeder declared their intentions to be seated by Congress as the official delegate from

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., September 15, 1855; St. Clairsville Gazette, October 18, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, September 11, 1855.

<sup>61</sup>Boston Atlas, October 11, 1855, in Webb Scrap Book, VI, 44; Daily Missouri Democrat, November 10, 1855; Herald of Freedom, September 22, October 13, 27, November 17, 1855; New York Times, September 18, October 16, 1855; St. Clairsville Gazette, October 18, 1855.

<sup>62</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, October 20, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, November 10, 1855; New York Times, October 16, 1855; New York Tribune, October 15, 17, 22, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, October 16, 1855; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, p. 108.

Kansas Territory.<sup>63</sup> Thus further emphasis was given to the political alienation of the competing territorial factions and to the one-sided, partisan nature of their respective political activities.

The proslavery response to the rise of the Free State party was to organize formally a "Law and Order" party. A committee of proslavery men appointed at a meeting in Leavenworth on October 3 issued a call for "all lovers of law and order" in the territory to meet in a "Grand Mass Convention" at Leavenworth on November 14.<sup>64</sup> Focusing on the inflammatory rhetoric exhibited, several historians have misrepresented this convention as a successful effort on the part of the radical followers of David Atchison and other zealous proslaveryites to strengthen their influence in Kansas.<sup>65</sup> There were indeed numerous radical representatives present among the nearly two hundred delegates, but also in attendance were many more moderate elements. The latter included Democrats who remained loyal to the national administration despite, in some cases, disagreement with Pierce's Kansas policies, delegates who opposed the revolutionary excesses of the free-state movement even though they desired a free Kansas, and proslavery adherents not aligned with the

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<sup>63</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, November 3, 1855; New York Tribune, September 21, October 17, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, November 13, 27, 1855.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., October 23, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, November 10, 1855.

<sup>65</sup> A. T. Andreas, History of the State of Kansas (Chicago, 1883), p. 114; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 417-20; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, p. 110; Malin, "Proslavery Background," p. 299; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 409; Parrish, David Atchison, pp. 179-80.

Atchisonites.<sup>66</sup> The most important fact to note in evaluating the convention is that it was controlled by the moderate western national Democrats led by Governor Shannon and John Calhoun, federal surveyor-general of the territory. The governor chaired the assembly, the resolutions committee, and a committee appointed to prepare an "address" to the citizens of the United States. Calhoun, a close Illinois friend of Senator Stephen A. Douglas, prepared the resolutions adopted and assisted Shannon in writing the "address." Of the twelve delegates who served with Shannon and Calhoun on the committee to prepare the convention's "address," eight were from northern states, five were from border states (none from Missouri), and only one was from the South. The two major speeches, delivered by Shannon and Calhoun, and the convention's resolutions were highly partisan denunciations of the free-state "revolutionaries," but they were no more extreme in tone than some of the speeches and resolutions emanating from earlier free-state meetings. Much more significant, however, were the moderate policies advocated: strict adherence to the popular sovereignty principles of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and a rejection of interference in the internal affairs of Kansas by Congress and citizens outside the territory. The emphasis and intent of the resolutions was to call for vigorous, but legal, political action to "crush" the free-state movement. According to Calhoun, the overriding goal of the moderates directing

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<sup>66</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, November 26, 1855; New York Times, December 8, 1855; New York Tribune, November 29, 1855; Malin, John Brown, p. 518.

the convention was to displace Atchison's "proslavery" party with a "states' rights" party based on policies broad enough to win the support of both proslavery and free-state Democrats as well as states' rights Whigs. He was confident that that goal had been achieved at the convention and optimistically reported to Douglas: "Thus order and consistency are established by the democratic party in Kansas and the extravagant follies of Atchison and Co. are repudiated."<sup>67</sup>

Shannon was vehemently denounced by his antislavery contemporaries for assuming a major role in such a partisan convention. His conduct has also been condemned by several historians.<sup>68</sup> He seems much more deserving of praise rather than censure for his

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<sup>67</sup> Calhoun's report to Douglas, which contains an extensive explanation of the motives and tactics of the moderates at the convention, is in John Calhoun to Stephen A. Douglas, November 27, 1855, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, University of Chicago. Shannon's enthusiasm for holding the convention is expressed in Wilson Shannon to John A. Halderman, October 9, 1855, Halderman Papers. A lengthy report of the proceedings including resolutions passed and the names of many of the delegates and lists of members of the various committees is in Squatter Sovereign, November 27, 1855. Shannon's remarks are summarized in ibid.; New York Times, November 26, 1855; New York Tribune, November 21, 1855. Calhoun's speech is in ibid., November 29, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, November 24, 1855. The convention's address, "To the Citizens of the United States and of The Territory of Kansas," is in ibid., December 22, 1855.

<sup>68</sup> For criticisms by contemporaries see Boston Atlas, n.d., quoted in Kansas Weekly Herald, December 15, 1855; Daily Missouri Democrat, November 28, 1855; Herald of Freedom, February 16, 1855; New York Times, November 26, 1855; New York Tribune, November 21, 28, 29, 1855; William A. Phillips (New York Tribune correspondent), The Conquest of Kansas by Missouri and Her Allies (Boston, 1856), pp. 148-50; Sara T. D. Robinson, Kansas, 114-17. For historians' criticisms see Andreas, History of Kansas, pp. 114-15; Frank W. Blackmar, ed., Kansas: A Cyclopedia of State History (Chicago, 1912), II, 676; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, pp. 45-49; Spring, Kansas, pp. 83-84.

temporarily successful efforts to wrest from the Atchison radicals direction of the forces opposing the Free State party, to reassert the rule of law in the territory, and to secure an affirmation from the Leavenworth assembly of the delegates' devotion to national principles. For Shannon, furthermore, to lead the "law and order" faction in the territory toward a more moderate position while its opponents were pursuing an increasingly radical course was a noteworthy feat of statesmanship. Unfortunately, developments beyond Shannon's control soon nullified any spirit of moderation engendered at the Leavenworth convention.

The virtually bloodless proslavery versus free-state confrontation celebrated in Kansas history as the Wakarusa War brought the year 1855 to a highly dramatic conclusion in the territory. The political exertions and highly publicized military preparations of the free-state movement during the fall had angered and alarmed proslavery adherents in Kansas and in the Missouri border counties. There was a growing sentiment among the proslaveryites that the "revolutionary" activities centered in the free-state stronghold, Lawrence, had to be curtailed.<sup>69</sup> The provocative incident required to galvanize the proslavery forces into positive action soon occurred.

On November 21, a dispute over a land claim near Hickory Point in Douglas County resulted in the fatal shooting of Charles Dow, a free-state settler from Ohio. Dow was killed by Franklin

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<sup>69</sup>Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, November 28, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 292-94; Malin, "Proslavery Background," pp. 298-300; Potter, The Impending Crisis, pp. 204-07.



Coleman, a former Virginian, who apparently acted in self-defense. Since the vast majority of settlers in the area were free-state supporters, Coleman accepted the advice of his friends and fled that evening to the Shawnee Mission to turn himself over to Governor Shannon and subject himself to the legal processes applicable to his situation.<sup>70</sup> Dow's friends, led by Jacob Branson, met at Hickory Point on November 22, passed resolutions declaring that Coleman, the "murderer," must be brought to justice, and appointed a vigilance committee of twenty-five to implement the resolutions.

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<sup>70</sup>G. Douglas Brewerton, The War in Kansas: A Rough Trip to the Border (New York, 1856), pp. 223-32. Brewerton's volume is a superb source for most aspects of the Wakarusa War. It is primarily a compilation of his reports while serving in December, 1855, and January, 1856, as a correspondent in Kansas for the New York Herald. He interviewed a few of the major and many of the minor participants in the war and included their accounts verbatim in his dispatches accompanied by many of the most relevant messages, proclamations, and other documentary materials. Shannon's account received the most attention (forty-one pages). Other interviewees included Charles Robinson and Franklin Coleman. Another extensive compilation of eyewitness accounts is in U. S., Congress, House, Report of the Special Committee Appointed to Investigate the Troubles in the Territory of Kansas, 34th Cong., 1st Sess., No. 200, 1856, (cited hereafter as Howard Committee Report), pp. 1040-1116. Those appearing before the committee included Shannon, Robinson, Coleman, and Daniel Woodson. For Coleman's testimony see pp. 1052-1056. Other useful contemporary resumes of the war are in Daily Missouri Republican, December 24, 1855; Herald of Freedom, December 15, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, December 15, 1855; John Brown to his wife and children, December 16, 1855, John Brown Papers, Kansas State Historical Society. Also see Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 151-228; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 181-219; Sara T. D. Robinson, Kansas, pp. 104-64. The correspondents in Kansas sent daily lengthy dispatches about the war to their journals. For examples see Daily Missouri Democrat, December 8, 10, 12, 17, 19, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 1855; New York Times, December 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 20, 24, 28, 1855; New York Tribune, December 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 28, 29, 31, 1855. The relevant official documents are published in "Shannon Administration," pp. 243-47; "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 291-301.

Branson and other members of the committee threatened the lives of Coleman's friends, Josiah Hargis and Harvey Moody, who had witnessed the shooting, as well as Harrison Buckley and others. In addition, the homes of Coleman, Hargis, and Buckley were burned to the ground. Sixteen terrified proslavery families living at Hickory Point then fled to Missouri where accounts of their experiences were widely disseminated.<sup>71</sup>

On the basis of Buckley's charges that Branson had threatened his life, a justice of the peace at Lecompton issued a warrant for Branson's arrest. Sheriff Jones of Douglas County and a ten-man posse apprehended Branson at Hickory Point early on the morning of November 27 and proceeded toward Lecompton. A well-armed band of fifteen free-state stalwarts intercepted the posse en route and forced Branson's release. The rescuers, led by former Buckeye S. N. Wood, rode on to Lawrence while the empty-handed Sheriff returned to Lecompton.<sup>72</sup>

Wood and others called out Lawrence's citizens that same morning to explain what had occurred and to prepare for the possible consequences. Convinced that there might be a strong proslavery reaction to the Branson rescue, the gathering established a Committee of Public Safety, selected Dr. Charles Robinson to serve as Military Commander of the Free-State army, dispatched

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<sup>71</sup>Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 150-55, 280-83.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., pp. 151-57; S. N. Wood to the Editor, December 19, 1855; Daily Missouri Democrat, December 22, 1855; Charles Howard Dickson, "The True History of the Branson Rescue," KSHS Collections, XIII, 280-95.

messages calling for aid to free-state settlements throughout the territory, and began enrolling men in the "army." The approximately eight hundred enlistees were immediately put to work throwing up breastworks, organizing as military companies, and drilling. James Lane, formerly an officer in the Mexican War, supervised most of the town's military preparations. Meanwhile, Branson left the community with all members of his rescue party whose ranks included three Lawrence residents.<sup>73</sup>

Sheriff Jones was understandably outraged over the illegal seizure of his prisoner. He knew some of the rescuers were from Lawrence and concluded that the entire operation had been concocted there. Although convinced that Branson and some of the rescue party were secreted in Lawrence, Jones was certain that he could not make arrests in that community with a normal posse. Citizens there had warned him on several occasions that he would be violently resisted if he attempted to do so. The free-staters simply refused to accept his official status and cooperate with him in any situation because he was an appointee of the "bogus" legislature.<sup>74</sup> It is not so surprising, therefore, that Jones decided to take the rather drastic action of dispatching messages on November 27 to his friends in Kansas and Missouri asking for their assistance in recovering Branson and "enforcing the laws." The proslavery "posse," including

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<sup>73</sup> Herald of Freedom, December 15, 1855, September 6, 1857; New York Tribune, December 8, 1855; Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 159, 294-97, 310-12.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 155-57, New York Tribune, December 29, 1855.

approximately 1200 Missourians, which assembled in two camps near Lawrence in the next few days undoubtedly exceeded the sheriff's most sanguine expectations. Among the out-of-state intruders was a company of two hundred Platte County rifleman led by Senator David Atchison.<sup>75</sup>

Shannon, who was at the Shawnee Mission some thirty miles from Lecompton, learned of the Branson rescue when a note from Jones was delivered to him about 8:00 P. M. on November 27. The message stated that a party of forty men had seized Branson from the posse and that an "armed rebellion" had commenced. It requested that Shannon call out 3,000 men to "carry out the laws." No mention was made of the communications to the Missourians.<sup>76</sup>

The governor's response was determined by several considerations. He already had received numerous reports about free-state terrorism and property destruction at Hickory Point, about the repudiation policies of the free-state movement, and about extensive secret free-state military preparations. Shannon was also informed of the large influx of armed settlers into Lawrence apparently

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., December 17, 22, 29, 1855; New York Times, December 12, 13, 18, 1855; Daily Missouri Democrat, December 17, 21, 1855; Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 165-71. According to Shannon, the Missourians' ranks included ". . . not only her young men, but her grey-headed citizens . . . ; the man of seventy winters stood shoulder to shoulder with the youth of sixteen . . . . Volunteers brought with them not only their sons, but their grandsons to join, if need be, in the expected fray." Ibid., p. 166. Co-editor Robert Kelley informed his readers that he was joining the march on Lawrence and expected to "wade waist deep in the blood of the abolitionists." Squatter Sovereign, December 4, 1855.

<sup>76</sup>Jones to Shannon, November 27, 1855, printed in Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 159-60.

gathering to resist any effort by the sheriff to recover his prisoner. The obvious, logical implication of this combination of developments was that the free-state forces had commenced a campaign of overt resistance to the territorial authorities. A full-scale state of anarchy seemed to be in the offing.<sup>77</sup>

The governor felt compelled, consequently, to issue instructions on November 27 to Generals William Richardson and Hiram J. Strickler, commanding the two divisions of the Kansas militia, to collect whatever forces they could and march to the aid of Jones. The orders firmly stipulated: "The forces under your command are to be used for the sole purpose of aiding the Sheriff in executing the law, and for none other."<sup>78</sup> As a means of encouraging volunteers to join the militia, which had just begun to organize, Shannon issued a proclamation on November 29 requesting that all "well-disposed persons" in the territory offer their services to the sheriff at Leecompton.<sup>79</sup>

The governor was fully aware that 3,000 men were neither needed by Jones nor available from the partially organized militia. He did assume that at least 500 volunteers could be secured, a force sufficient for Jones' needs. Shannon neither desired nor anticipated any intrusions from Missouri, particularly since the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 159-61, 165-66; Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, November 28, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 292-94.

<sup>78</sup> The orders are in ibid., pp. 291-92.

<sup>79</sup> Proclamation in ibid., pp. 294-95.

seat of the troubles, Lawrence, was forty miles from the border.<sup>80</sup> Certainly he and the national administration had clearly set forth their objections to any repetition of the Missourians' previous incursions and the proslavery men had seemed to accept that position at the "Law and Order" convention just two weeks earlier.

In an exceedingly perceptive commentary written on November 28 before he knew Missourians were entering the territory, the governor informed President Pierce of the events of the past week and indicated some of the forces shaping them. He stated that recent developments had convinced him that the secret free-state military organization in the territory intended to carry out the threats of its leaders to resist the laws by force. The time had arrived, Shannon asserted,

. . . When this armed band of men, who are seeking to subvert and render powerless the existing government, have to be met and the laws enforced against them, or submit to their lawless dominion. If the lives and property of unoffending citizens of the Territory cannot be protected by law, there is an end to practical government, and it becomes a useless formality.

The letter's concluding comments proved to be unusually prophetic:

The excitement along the borders of Missouri is running wild, and nothing but the enforcement of the laws against these men will allay it. Since the disclosure of the existence and purposes of this secret military organization in this Territory, there has been much excitement along the borders of Missouri, but it has been held in check heretofore by assurances that the laws of the Territory would be enforced and that protection would be given to the citizens against all unlawful acts of this association. This feeling and intense excitement can still be held in subordination if the laws are faithfully executed; otherwise there is no power here that can

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<sup>80</sup> Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 161-64; Shannon to Pierce, November 28, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 292-94.

control this border excitement, and civil war is inevitable. This military organization is looked upon as hostile to all Southern men, or rather to the law-and-order party of the Territory, many of whom have relations and friends, and all have sympathizers in Missouri; and the moment it is believed the laws will not furnish adequate protection to this class of citizens against the lawless acts of this armed association, a force will be precipitated across the line to redress real and supposed wrongs, inflicted on friends, that cannot be controlled, or, for the moment, resisted. It is in vain to conceal the fact: we are standing on a volcano; the upheavings and agitations beneath, we feel, and no one can tell the hour when an eruption may take place. Under existing circumstances, the importance of sustaining the sheriff of Douglas county, and enabling him to execute his process, independent of other considerations connected with the peace and good order of society, will strike you at once; and to do this by the aid and assistance of the citizens of this Territory, is the great object to be accomplished, to avoid the dreadful evils of civil war. I believe this can be done. In this, however, I may be mistaken.<sup>81</sup>

On November 30 and December 1, Shannon finally began to receive reports at the mission about the large contingents of Missourians gathering near Lawrence. He also was informed that only some 250 settlers had volunteered for territorial militia duty and that probably as many as 1,000 free-state men were busily fortifying Lawrence. Alarmed at the wholly unexpected escalation of the size of the forces involved in the confrontation and at the unwelcome presence of the Missourians, the governor moved decisively to change the course of events before a major collision occurred.<sup>82</sup> He telegraphed Pierce on December 1 requesting authority to use the federal troops at Fort Leavenworth to "preserve the peace" and support the sheriff in serving his "legal process" in Lawrence, alerted

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Shannon to Pierce, December 11, 1855, ibid., pp. 299-301; Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 164, 171.

Colonel E. V. Sumner, the Leavenworth commandant, as to his intentions, and directed Sheriff Jones and the militia officers to keep their forces some distance from Lawrence to prevent any "effusion of blood" before the federal troops arrived.<sup>83</sup>

Pierce replied somewhat evasively to Shannon in a message received on December 4 that "the preliminary measures necessary to be taken before calling out troops will be promptly executed, and you will then be fully advised." The communication was promptly relayed to Sumner. The colonel indicated on December 5 that he would march immediately for Lawrence, then retracted the promise later in the day, asserting that he must wait for direct orders from Washington.<sup>84</sup>

On the morning of December 5, two young men from Lawrence, C. W. Babcock and G. P. Lowry, reached the Shawnee Mission with a message from the town's leaders asking for the governor's protection against the "armed mob" congregated at their gates. The visitors tried to correct Shannon's views about the community's role in the Branson rescue. They explained that only three of the fifteen men in the rescue party were from Lawrence, that none of the party were there now, and that most of the townspeople did not support the

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-75; Shannon to Pierce, December 1, 1855, "Shannon Administration," p. 243; Shannon to Sumner, December 1, 1855 (a typed copy of a "true" manuscript copy), Daniel Woodson Papers, Kansas State Historical Society; Shannon to General Richardson, December 2, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 295-96; Shannon to Jones, December 2, 1855; *ibid.*, p. 295.

<sup>84</sup> Pierce to Shannon, December 3, 1855, "Shannon Administration," p. 243; Shannon to Sumner, December 4, 1855, (a typed copy of a "true" manuscript copy), Woodson Papers; Sumner to Shannon, December 5, 1855 (two messages), "Shannon Executive Minutes," p. 296.



lawless actions taken to free Branson. Babcock and Lowry claimed, furthermore, that the community had fortified itself for defensive purposes, not to resist the laws or attack proslavery settlers. Shannon responded by listing some of the free-state pronouncements and acts which had clearly placed the movement in a position of defiance of territorial officials and laws. He agreed, on the other hand, that if it was actually true that the townspeople were not harboring Branson and his rescuers and preparing to prevent their apprehension, then the entry into Lawrence by the sheriff with a large armed force would be wholly unwarranted.<sup>85</sup>

Although only partially convinced of Lawrence's "innocence," the governor decided to hasten immediately to the vicinity of the town to ascertain personally the facts of the situation and, if appropriate, to attempt a peaceful resolution of the confrontation. He first traveled to nearby Westport to recruit Postmaster Albert Boone, an influential leader of the Missourians, to accompany him on his peace mission. Shannon and Boone then proceeded to General William Richardson's camp near Lawrence on the Wakarusa River, arriving early on December 6. The other proslavery forces were in General Hiram Strickler's camp eighteen miles distant near Lecompton.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>"Testimony of G. P. Lowry," Howard Committee Report, pp. 1076-1080; "Testimony of Wilson Shannon," ibid., pp. 1104-1108.

<sup>86</sup>Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 177-81; New York Times, December 7, 24, 1855.

In a conference that evening with thirty leaders from both camps, the governor explained that his twin objectives were to "prevent the effusion of blood" and "to vindicate the supremacy of the laws." His request for their full cooperation in that endeavor elicited exactly one favorable response. The other leaders wanted to attack and completely subjugate the town or, at the very least, force the residents to surrender their dreaded Sharps rifles. With the hope of forestalling any precipitous moves, Shannon stated that he would discuss a settlement with the free-state leaders on the next day.<sup>87</sup>

More persuaded than ever that he must have federal troops, the governor dispatched an urgent request to Sumner to march immediately to Lawrence. He assured the colonel that Pierce would approve and warned him that the proslavery forces before the town were virtually uncontrollable. The message concluded, "It is peace, not war, that we want, and you have the power to secure peace." Sumner, still awaiting orders, refused to budge. His reply was not received until December 10.<sup>88</sup>

On the afternoon of December 6, an accidental encounter four miles from Lawrence produced the only fatality inflicted by the partisans of one side upon their adversaries in the Wakarusa War. Three free-state men, Thomas Barber, his brother Robert, and

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<sup>87</sup> Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 181-82.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp. 182-83; Shannon to Sumner, December 6, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 296-97; Sumner to Shannon, December 7, 1855; ibid., p. 299.

his brother-in-law Thomas Pierson, were stopped while riding from Lawrence to their homes, seven miles distant, by a party of fifteen proslavery leaders on their way to confer with Shannon at the Wakarusa camp. Among the fifteen were the Kansas militia's General William Richardson, Major George W. Clarke, who was a Pottawatomie Indian agent, Judge Sterling Cato of the territorial Supreme Court, and Colonel James Burns of Weston, Missouri. Clarke and Burns, advancing ahead of the others, ordered the "suspicious-looking" free-staters to fall in with the proslavery group. When the three angrily refused to do so, pistols were drawn (Clarke drew first), shots were exchanged, and Thomas Barber was fatally wounded. Although the participants in the tragic affair were uncertain about whose bullet hit Barber, Clarke, a friend of Shannon, was held responsible by the free-state men. He thus became a major villain in the "Bleeding Kansas" scenario just as Barber became a free-state martyr in the antislavery press exemplifying the brutality of the "border ruffians." Barber's killing was decidedly ill-timed in relation to the governor's peace mission.<sup>89</sup>

Shannon spent most of December 7 in Lawrence conferring with Charles Robinson and James Lane, the free-state leaders. They assured him that, in the future, no one in Lawrence would obstruct the serving of legal processes or the execution of the territorial laws. They reserved the right to test the laws in the federal courts,

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<sup>89</sup> Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 137-43, 318-31; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 211-15; Herald of Freedom, December 15, 22, 29, 1855, April 5, 1856; New York Tribune, December 22, 29, 1855.

however. These policies were, of course, exactly what Shannon had been recommending since he had arrived in Kansas. The governor's suggestion that the free-state men surrender their Sharps rifles to himself or General Richardson was flatly rejected and not pressed. Satisfied that most Lawrence citizens had no connection with the Branson rescue and that the guilty parties had left the area, Shannon agreed with the free-state spokesmen that there was no justification for an assault upon the town. He proposed that a final peace treaty be drafted the next day and released after federal troops were on the scene to preserve order. Colonel Sumner, he was confident, would respond to his last message.<sup>90</sup>

After discussing the tentative arrangements with Shannon late that evening, some of the proslavery captains reluctantly consented to support plans for a peaceful withdrawal of their forces. The prospects for irresponsible acts by some of the undisciplined proslavery contingents were so great, however, that the governor ordered Richardson and Strickler to halt any movements against Lawrence with the full force under their command, if necessary.<sup>91</sup>

The final peace terms were arranged in Lawrence on December 8. That evening, Shannon, Robinson, and Lane met with the proslavery captains to secure their acceptance of the agreement. Three tense,

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<sup>90</sup>Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 186-89, 298-99; "Testimony of Wilson Shannon," Howard Committee Report, pp. 1104-1109; "Testimony of Charles Robinson," ibid., pp. 1088-1089; Shannon to Pierce, December 11, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 299-301; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 201-02.

<sup>91</sup>Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 189-90.

heated hours of debate ensued. The three negotiators vigorously extolled the wisdom of their arrangements, but reports of the meeting indicate that the most renowned "border ruffian" present, Senator Atchison, delivered the most persuasive speech favoring a peaceable settlement. "If you attack Lawrence now," he warned, "you attack it as a mob, and what could be the result? I tell you it would cause the election of an abolition President, and the ruin of the Democratic party. Wait a little . . . ." The proslavery representatives finally consented, somewhat ominously in terms of the future, to "wait a little" and send their forces home. That same night a free-state hand of fate in the form of a howling blizzard descended upon Kansas dropping temperatures far below zero and providing an additional incentive for the proslavery men to disband.<sup>92</sup>

The "peace treaty," whose terms later became the subject of a dispute between Shannon and the free-state negotiators, stated:

WHEREAS, There is a misunderstanding between the people of Kansas, or a portion of them, and the Governor thereof, arising out of the rescue, near Hickory Point of a citizen under arrest, and some other matters:

And whereas, a strong apprehension exists that said misunderstanding may lead to civil strife and bloodshed:

And whereas, it is desired by both Governor Shannon and the citizens of Lawrence and vicinity, to avert a calamity so disastrous to the interests of the Territory and the Union; and to place all parties in a correct position before the world, now, therefore, it is agreed by the said Gov. Shannon, and the undersigned, citizens of said Territory, in Lawrence now assembled, that the matter now in dispute be settled as follows, to wit:

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., pp. 191-96, 299; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 202-05; Kansas Weekly Herald, December 15, 1855. Atchison's remarks are reported in St. Louis Intelligencer, December 24, 1855, quoted in Daily Missouri Democrat, December 25, 1855.

We, the said citizens of said Territory, protest that the said rescue was made without our knowledge or consent; but that if any of the citizens of the town of Lawrence have engaged in said rescue, we pledge ourselves to aid in the execution of any legal process against them. That we have no knowledge of the previous, present or prospective existence of any organization in said Territory for the resistance of the laws; and that we have not designed and do not design to resist the legal service of any criminal process therein; but pledge ourselves to aid in the execution of the laws, when called upon by the proper authority in the town or vicinity of Lawrence. And that we will use our influence in preserving order therein; and we declare that we are now, as we always have been, ready at any time to aid the Governor in securing a posse for the execution of such process. Provided that any person thus arrested in Lawrence or vicinity, while a foreign force shall remain in the Territory, shall be duly examined before a United States District Judge of said Territory, in said town, and admitted to bail. And provided further, that all citizens arrested without legal process by said Sheriff's posse, shall be set at liberty. And provided further, that Gov. Shannon agrees to use his influence to secure to the citizens of Kansas Territory remuneration for any damages suffered, or unlawful depredations, if any have been committed by the Sheriff's posse in Douglas County. And further, Gov. Shannon states that he has not called upon persons resident in any State to aid in the execution of the laws, and that such as are here in the Territory are here of their own choice, and that he does not consider that he has any authority or legal power so to do, nor will he exercise any such power. And that he will not call on any citizens of any other State who may be here. That we wish it understood that we do not express any opinion as to the enactments of the Territorial Legislature.<sup>93</sup>

The language of the treaty was purposefully vague at some points, but the intent was clear and was reinforced by the verbal assurances exchanged. Shannon was pleased because he had secured the commitments he believed essential to the maintenance of an orderly society in the territory, the pledges to accept without resistance the serving of criminal processes and to "aid in the

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<sup>93</sup>Herald of Freedom, January 12, 1856.

execution of the laws."<sup>94</sup> Robinson and Lane personally promised Sheriff Jones, furthermore, that he would be able to make arrests in Lawrence if he possessed the proper legal warrants.<sup>95</sup> Within the next few days, in fact, six men involved in the Branson rescue were arrested, arraigned before a justice of the peace, and freed pending further legal action in the territorial court. None of the six was ever prosecuted, however.<sup>96</sup>

In a rather astounding finale to the Wakarusa War, Governor Shannon, Sheriff Jones, and several other leaders from the pro-slavery camp spent Sunday, December 9, socializing with the citizens of Lawrence. That evening they were guests at a party in the partially constructed Free State Hotel. During the festivities, an alarmed Robinson came to the governor with a report that a large body of men were preparing to attack the town. Outraged at this threatened disruption of the peace, Shannon, at Robinson's insistence, signed a statement prepared by the doctor authorizing the community to defend itself. The rumored assault never materialized.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Shannon to Pierce, December 11, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 299-301; Brewerton, War in Kansas, p. 192.

<sup>95</sup> Jones to Robinson and Lane, January 15, 1856, Robinson and Lane to Jones, January 16, 1856, Jones to Robinson and Lane, January 16, 1856, printed in Kansas Weekly Herald, January 26, 1856. The first two letters also appear in Herald of Freedom, January 19, 1856. Also see Jones to the Editor, January 23, 1856, Kansas Weekly Herald, February 2, 1856, and editorial commentary in ibid., January 26, 1856.

<sup>96</sup> Herald of Freedom, October 17, 1857; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 164-65, 167.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 153-54; Shannon to G. Douglas Brewerton, December 25, 1855, printed in Herald of Freedom, February 9, 1856

The authorization was clearly intended for use in that one specific instance. Nevertheless, copies of it were promptly given to reporters in the town and soon appeared in the antislavery press along with reports that the governor had been shrewdly maneuvered into giving the free-state men permanent authority to arm and defend themselves.<sup>98</sup> A justifiably aggrieved Shannon later wrote:

It did not for a moment occur to me that this pretended attack on the town of Lawrence was but a device to obtain from me a paper which might be used to my prejudice. I supposed at the time that I was surrounded by gentlemen and by grateful hearts, and not by tricksters, who, with fraudulent representations, were seeking to obtain an advantage over me. I was the last man on the globe who deserved such treatment from the citizens of Lawrence. For four days and nights, and at the cost of many valuable friends, whose good will I have forfeited by favoring too pacific a course, I had labored most incessantly to save their town from destruction and their citizens from a bloody fight.

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It is an exhibition of base ingratitude and low trickery, which should render infamous the name of every one connected with it.<sup>99</sup>

While it is possible, as Robinson claimed, that he did not intentionally deceive Shannon, the doctor and Lane clearly engaged in "low trickery" in their representations to the citizens of Lawrence about the intent and meaning of the peace treaty terms.

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and in Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 197-200; Robinson to G. W. Brown, February 14, 1856, Herald of Freedom, February 16, 1856.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., "Testimony of Wilson Shannon," Howard Committee Report, pp. 1103-1104; Daily Missouri Democrat, December 27, 1855; Herald of Freedom, December 15, 1855, February 2, 16, 1856; New York Times, December 28, 1855; New York Tribune, December 29, 1855, January 8, 14, 1856; Springfield, Massachusetts, The Republican, December 29, 31, 1855, Webb Scrap Book, VI, 245, 258.

<sup>99</sup> Shannon to G. Douglas Brewerton, December 25, 1855, printed in Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 197-200.



The free-state negotiators claimed that they had yielded nothing of their repudiation policies with regard to the power and authority of territorial officials and laws. The final sentence in the treaty declaring "that we wish it understood that we do not express any opinion as to the enactments of the territorial legislature" was especially touted as a key "escape" clause even though it does not, in fact, seem to be so.<sup>100</sup> Conveniently ignored was the clause about persons "arrested without legal process by said Sheriff's posse" and some of the preceding statements which unquestionably indicated acceptance of the right of the sheriff, an official appointed by the proslavery legislature, to make arrests with a posse in Lawrence as long as he did follow the appropriate legal processes.

Additional confirmation of this understanding is found in an exchange of notes in mid January between Jones, who was incensed at the misrepresentations in the antislavery press, and the two free-state leaders. The sheriff's first note written on January 15 asked:

Did you or did you not pledge yourselves at a Council . . . on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of December to assist me as Sheriff in the arrest of any person in Lawrence against whom I might have a writ, and to furnish me with a posse to enable me to do so?

Although equivocally phrased, the response of Robinson and Lane revealed enough to affirm Jones' point.

In reference to your note of yesterday we state that at the time and place mentioned we may have said that we would

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<sup>100</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, December 27, 1855; Herald of Freedom, December 15, February 2, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, January 26, 1856; New York Tribune, December 29, 1855; New York Times, December 28, 1855. Robinson to G. W. Brown, February 14, 1856, Herald of Freedom, February 16, 1856, states no attempt was made to deceive Shannon.

assist any proper officer in the service of any legal process in this city, and also that no forcible resistance would be made to the arrest by you of one of the rescuers of Branson, as we desired to test the validity of the enactments of the . . . Kansas Legislature, by an appeal to the Supreme Court of the United States.

Disgusted by their ex post facto attempt to limit him to one arrest, Jones composed a second note on January 16 asking Robinson and Lane if they had not promised that he could execute any process in Lawrence at any time it was required. There was no immediate reply to the second query.<sup>101</sup>

Robinson's delayed final response to Jones' claims is a blatant example of arrogant duplicity.

As for the letters of Mr. Jones, who calls himself Sheriff of Douglas county, I never considered him a party to the settlement, and never made any statement to him inconsistent with the published terms of the treaty, . . . and whatever he may say to the contrary is without foundation in truth. He can make such use of his billingsgate as he likes. Some man once said "no gentleman will insult me, and no other person can." I am sorry, however, to lose the good opinion of Mr. Jones, but I am too poor to pay anything for it.<sup>102</sup>

As a further consideration in evaluating the veracity of the free-state negotiators in their comments about the peace arrangements,

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<sup>101</sup> All three notes appear in Kansas Weekly Herald, January 26, 1856. For further comments by Jones see ibid., February 2, 1856.

<sup>102</sup> Robinson to G. W. Brown, February 14, 1856, Herald of Freedom, February 16, 1856. The significance of the clause referring to arrests by the sheriff's posse seems to have dawned belatedly upon the free-state leaders. The clause appears in the "official" versions of the treaty published in the free-state papers, the Daily Missouri Republican, December 27, 1855, and the Herald of Freedom, January 12, 1856. It is deleted, however, from the version in the New York Tribune, December 29, 1855. The "laundered" version is also found in Dr. Robinson's Kansas Conflict, pp. 202-03; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 150-51; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, p. 222. None of the published contemporary or historical accounts of "Bleeding Kansas" notes the existence of two versions of the treaty.

it should be noted that all of Shannon's statements in the treaty about his past actions and future policy intentions were true.<sup>103</sup> The claim by Robinson and Lane that they had "no knowledge of the previous, present or prospective existence of any organization . . . for the resistance of the laws" was decidedly false. So, too, were their pledges for the future.<sup>104</sup>

As far as Shannon's role in the Wakarusa War is concerned, the contemporary antislavery accounts depicted him as a naive, indecisive dupe. Oblivious to the true conditions in the territory, he called out a non-existent militia and welcomed the intrusion of his Missouri friends. Finally realizing the possibly disastrous political consequences of an attack upon Lawrence, he frantically engaged in peace negotiations in which he was thoroughly outmaneuvered due, in part, to his inebriated condition. He received, in effect, much blame for the coming of the war and minimal credit for terminating it.<sup>105</sup> It is a deplorable fact that all or part of that distorted version of Shannon's actions appears in several modern monographs on "Bleeding Kansas" as well as in other

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<sup>103</sup> Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 149-303; Wilson Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.; Malin, John Brown, pp. 520-29; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 129, 203-09, 216-22.

<sup>105</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, December 27, 1855; Herald of Freedom, December 15, 1855, February 2, 1856; New York Times, December 28, 1855; New York Tribune, December 10, 29, 1855, January 8, 14, 1856; Springfield Republican, December 18, 24, 29, 31, 1855, in Webb Scrap Book, VI, 171, 207, 245, 258; T. H. Gladstone, The Englishman in Kansas (New York, 1857), pp. 272-74, 283-91; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 163-73, 209-10, 216-28; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 104, 112-22, 128, 140, 145-59.

influential historical works.<sup>106</sup>

Shannon was the subject of both praise and condemnation by proslavery adherents. Those who criticized him seem to have accepted the free-state interpretation of the peace settlement. "Kansas," writing to the St. Joseph, Missouri, Commercial Cycle, charged that the governor had sold out to the enemy, having acted as "a suppliant, a sycophant, a base, false-hearted, white livered, seeker of popular favor" rather than as "the avenger of violated law."<sup>107</sup> S. J. Leonard, in the St. Joseph Gazette, characterized Shannon's conduct in the confrontation as "pitiful," "contemptible," and "base."<sup>108</sup> Free-state leader Samuel C. Pomeroy, stopping overnight on December 18 at a hotel in Lexington, Missouri, heard many similar adjectives applied to Shannon by some forty Missouri participants in the "seige" of Lawrence with whom he spent an exceedingly sociable evening.<sup>109</sup> Unlike many other proslaveryites, the editors of the Squatter Sovereign expressed indirectly their disgust with the governor's

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<sup>106</sup>For examples see Jules Abels, Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty (New York, 1971), pp. 50-54; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 433-46; Eric Corder, Prelude to Civil War: Kansas-Missouri, 1854-61 (London, 1970), pp. 46-55; Allen Crafton, Free State Fortress: The First Ten Years of the History of Lawrence, Kansas (Lawrence, 1954), pp. 64-79; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 408-11; Nichols, Bleeding Kansas, pp. 48-79; Oates, John Brown, pp. 106-10; Rawley, Race and Politics, pp. 93, 96-97.

<sup>107</sup>"Kansas" to the Editor, January 15, 1856, St. Joseph Commercial Cycle, n.d., quoted in Herald of Freedom, February 2, 1856.

<sup>108</sup>S. L. Leonard to the Editor, January 15, 1856, St. Joseph Gazette, n.d., quoted in New York Tribune, January 28, 1856.

<sup>109</sup>Samuel C. Pomeroy to Thomas Webb, December 19, 1855, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers.

conduct. In a statement reflecting the prevailing attitude of frustration and disappointment among the "border ruffians," the editors lamented that had the sheriff remained in charge of the confrontation the "base, cowardly, sneaking free-state scoundrels" would not have gone unpunished and left free "to perpetrate their infamous outrages wherever they may find an unprotected pro-slavery family."<sup>110</sup>

Other proslavery accounts expressed approbation of Shannon's course, insisting that he had "vindicated" the laws and humbled the free-state leaders. The Weston [Missouri] Argus declared: "We are gratified . . . that Gov. Shannon, while administering the law rigidly, was able to administer it mercifully."<sup>111</sup> Lucian Eastin, a territorial militia general, proudly declared in his Kansas Weekly Herald that "the outlaws have been prostrated in their unholy attempts to subvert law and order to carry out their purposes and designs." He concluded: "It is much better that this affair terminated without bloodshed. Civil War is to be dreaded by all good citizens." Similar sentiments appeared in other proslavery journals.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Squatter Sovereign, December 25, 1855. Also see George W. Clark to John A. Quitman [U. S. Senator from Mississippi], January 29, 1856, Department of Archives and History, State of Mississippi, Jackson, Mississippi, for an extensive critical commentary by an important proslavery participant in the war and also a friend of the governor. I am indebted to Professor David E. Meerse, State University of New York at Fredonia, for bringing this letter to my attention.

<sup>111</sup> Weston Argus, n.d., quoted in Herald of Freedom, January 12, 1856.

<sup>112</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, December 15, 1855. For other favorable proslavery assessments see Baltimore Clipper, n.d., quoted

While it might have been advisable for the governor to investigate conditions at Lawrence more thoroughly before calling out the militia, it cannot be denied that he had abundant reasons before him to justify the move. In general, he seems to have acted wisely, decisively, and honorably in his conduct during the Wakarusa War. His major difficulties stemmed from the unwelcome intervention of the Missourians and from President Pierce's reluctance to authorize the use of federal troops in the territory to maintain peace. Left almost wholly to his own devices, Shannon's successful one-man peace crusade represents a remarkable achievement. As Allan Nevins observed in his Ordeal of the Union, "Had an attack on Lawrence begun, the loss of life might have stunned the country."<sup>113</sup> In a more pungent comment, a contemporary writer for the Baltimore Clipper asserted that without Shannon's prudent actions "torrents of blood might have been shed and our country disgraced by a civil war."<sup>114</sup> It is also undoubtedly true that the harmful consequences of a violent collision at Lawrence would have been monumental in their long-term divisive effects upon the citizens of Kansas. Shannon fully deserved the praise bestowed upon him by that reluctant peace-maker, David Atchison, for acting "the part of a firm and humane

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in Herald of Freedom, January 26, 1856; Daily Missouri Republican, December 21, 24, 1855; Squatter Sovereign, January 1, 22, 29, 1856.

<sup>113</sup> Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 410.

<sup>114</sup> Baltimore Clipper, n.d., quoted in Herald of Freedom, January 26, 1856.

officer and man."<sup>115</sup>

The Wakarusa War served as a painful, disillusioning learning experience for Shannon. As Douglas Brewerton indicates, two of the more obvious conclusions drawn from it by the governor were that he must indeed be "saved from his friends" and "preserved from his enemies."<sup>116</sup> In a dispatch written to Pierce on December 11, Shannon reviewed the developments of the past ten days and discussed the new insights derived from them.

Everything is quiet now, but it is my duty to say to you frankly that I have forebodings as to the future. The militia or volunteer corps cannot be relied upon to preserve the peace in these civil-party contests, or where partisans are concerned. A call on the militia will generally bring in conflict the two parties. I am satisfied that the only force that can be used in this Territory in enforcing the laws or preserving the peace are those of the United States; and with this view I would suggest that the Executive of this Territory be authorized to call on the forces of the United States when, in his judgment, the public peace and tranquility, or the execution of the laws, may require their assistance. Should there be an outbreak it will most probably be sudden, and before orders can be obtained from Washington the crisis will have passed.<sup>117</sup>

A similar message was also sent to Colonel Sumner at Fort Leavenworth.<sup>118</sup>

The President's response was revealed indirectly, but quite clearly, in his annual message delivered to Congress on December 31.

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<sup>115</sup> D. R. Atchison to the Editor, December 27, 1855, Kansas Weekly Herald, January 12, 1856.

<sup>116</sup> Brewerton, War in Kansas, p. 169.

<sup>117</sup> Shannon to Pierce, December 11, 1855, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 299-301.

<sup>118</sup> Shannon to Sumner, December 11, 1855 (a typed copy of a "true" manuscript copy), Woodson Papers.

Devoting only two very brief paragraphs to Kansas, the message declared that no acts "prejudicial to good order" had yet occurred in the territory "under circumstances to justify the interposition of the Federal Executive." Intervention would only be justified in the event of an "insurrection."<sup>119</sup> While Shannon had learned something from the Wakarusa War, Pierce and his advisers obviously had not. They continued to adhere to and justify the non-intervention policy established when Kansas was opened for settlement.

One advisor whose position gave him unusual influence in reinforcing the President's stance on the use of federal troops was Jefferson Davis, Secretary of War in the cabinet and former United States Senator from Mississippi. A close friend of Senator Atchison, Davis sympathized wholly with the proslavery interests in Kansas. Also, he was as convinced as Pierce that it was neither necessary nor wise to use the army as a territorial peace-keeping force.<sup>120</sup>

The President's rejection of Shannon's request for broad authority to use the federal troops in Kansas left the totally dismayed governor without any effective means of maintaining law and order. Carrying the implications of his December 11 note to Pierce to their logical conclusion, Shannon had determined that he would never again call out the territorial militia and he never did. Subsequent events in the territory confirmed the wisdom

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<sup>119</sup>"Franklin Pierce: Third Annual Message," in James D. Richardson (ed.), A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897 (Washington, 1897), V, 327-50.

<sup>120</sup>Nevens, Ordeal of the Union, II, 45-50, 122, 416; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 248, 473-74; Parrish, David Atchison, pp. 3, 172.



of his decision.<sup>121</sup>

Developments in the territory during the latter half of December left no doubt in Shannon's mind that future confrontations between proslavery and free-state forces were almost inevitable under existing circumstances.<sup>122</sup> Continuing on their previously charted extralegal course as if the Wakarusa War and its concluding arrangements had never intervened, the free-state settlers voted on December 15 to adopt the constitution prepared by the Topeka convention. A minor brawl devoid of serious injury occurred at Leavenworth when proslaveryites absconded with the ballot box. That was the only serious disturbance.<sup>123</sup> The free-staters met a week later in Lawrence to select a slate of officers for their territorial government. Dr. Charles Robinson was the gubernatorial choice and W. Y. Roberts was nominated to be his lieutenant governor. A small group of dissatisfied conservatives bolted the convention and nominated an "anti-abolition" ticket. The election of officers was scheduled to follow on January 15.<sup>124</sup>

A serious disruption of the peace occurred on the evening of December 22 in Leavenworth. A band of approximately fifty proslavery men from Kickapoo ransacked the offices of Mark Delahay's Kansas

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<sup>121</sup> Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Herald of Freedom, December 22, 29, 1855; New York Tribune, January 1, 1856; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 219-20.

<sup>124</sup> Herald of Freedom, December 29, 1855, January 12, 1856; New York Tribune, January 7, 1856; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 220-21.

Territorial Register and threw his press into the Missouri River. No one was injured in the affair. Delahay had come to the territory late in the summer of 1855 as an administration Democrat. Alienated by the conduct of the proslavery elements, he joined the free-state movement and was at the convention in Lawrence on the twenty-second. The convention nominated him to be the territorial representative in Congress.<sup>125</sup>

As the year 1855 concluded, it must have been quite discouraging to Governor Shannon to observe men and circumstances primarily beyond his control subverting his efforts to maintain the rule of law in Kansas. He had tried to establish the two conditions that seemed absolutely necessary to ensure tranquillity: the Missourians had to stay on their side of the border and the free-state men had to accept, at least to a limited degree, the authority of the governmentally sanctioned, legal officials of the territory. The course of events in December offered little hope, however, that the desired conditions would prevail in the new year ahead. Perhaps the most remarkable fact about Shannon's first four months in office was that, despite the occurrence of several minor and one major proslavery-free-state confrontation during that time, only three men had been killed and very little property in the territory damaged.<sup>126</sup> Partially due to the governor's dedicated peacemaking

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<sup>125</sup> Herald of Freedom, December 29, 1855; Washington Union, September 2, 1855; John G. Clark, "Mark W. Delahay: Peripatetic Politician," Kansas Historical Quarterly (Autumn, 1959), XXV, No. 3, 301-03.

<sup>126</sup> New York Tribune, September 16, 1856; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, p. 219.

efforts, "Bleeding Kansas" was still a journalistic image projected upon the national consciousness by antislavery propagandists, not a reality in the lives of the territory's citizens.

## Chapter VI

### GOVERNOR OF KANSAS TERRITORY, 1856

Wilson Shannon's experiences in Kansas in 1855 convinced him that he could not govern the territory in 1856 with the limited resources at his disposal. "Acts prejudicial to good order" were transpiring with some regularity despite the President's assertion to the contrary in his December 31 annual message. The progress of the Topeka statehood movement seemed, in particular, to set a provocation before the proslaveryites which had led and would almost certainly lead in the future to violent action. In desperation, Shannon decided that he must travel to Washington to plead personally his case for authority to use federal troops to maintain the peace. He left the territory on January 5.<sup>1</sup>

Rather than proceeding directly to Washington, Shannon stopped briefly at St. Clairsville to visit his long-neglected family and to attend to some personal business affairs. He had indubitably earned a respite from his gubernatorial duties and the continued severity of the Kansas winter lessened the prospects of any

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<sup>1</sup>Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856; Wilson Shannon to George W. Clarke, January 4, 1856, "[Letters Showing Proslavery Attitude During the Territorial Days of Kansas]," Miscellaneous Manuscripts Collection, Kansas State Historical Society.

large-scale disturbances. Arriving in St. Clairsville on January 23, Shannon remained until February 9. He then traveled to Washington, reaching there on February 14.<sup>2</sup>

In Kansas, in the meantime, free-state voters elected their slate of territorial officers and legislative members on January 15. At Easton, where the balloting was delayed until January 17, a skirmish between free-state militia and proslavery partisans resulted in the fatal shooting of one of the latter. The leader of the free-state forces, R. A. Brown, was brutally murdered in retaliation the following day.<sup>3</sup> This violent eye-for-an-eye exchange produced headlines about a new civil war in Kansas along with reports in the antislavery press that the Missourians were about to invade the territory again.<sup>4</sup> Asserting that they possessed "authentic information" that an "overwhelming force" was ready to enter the territory intending to "butcher" free-state citizens, the free-state leadership wired President Pierce on June 21 "respectfully demanding" that the

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<sup>2</sup>St. Clairsville Gazette, January 29, February 14, 1856; New York Tribune, February 15, 1856. James Répath reported at the end of January that all was quiet in Kansas partly because temperatures during the preceding six weeks had ranged from twenty-seven degrees below zero to ten degrees above. Daily Missouri Democrat, February 5, 1856. For another comment on the weather see New York Tribune, January 7, 1856.

<sup>3</sup>Herald of Freedom, January 19, February 2, 1856; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 453-54.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 454; Daily Missouri Democrat, January 19, 24, 29, 31, 1856; Herald of Freedom, January 19, 1856; New York Tribune, January 21, February 2, 4, 6, 1856; Ohio Statesman, February 2, 6, 8, 1856.

invaders be stopped by the federal troops at Fort Leavenworth.<sup>5</sup> A second communication to Pierce sent two days later "earnestly requested" that he immediately issue a proclamation forbidding the threatened invasion.<sup>6</sup>

Pierce was finally compelled to acknowledge that "acts prejudicial to good order" were arising in the territory. Consequently, he directed Attorney General Caleb Cushing to draft a special presidential message on Kansas to be presented to Congress on January 24. That body had convened the first week of December, but the House was still not organized. Due to the chaotic, transitional status of political parties at that time, none of the various factions had been able to form a coalition numerous enough to elect a Speaker. The business of the House could not proceed until that election occurred. The "Kansas question" constituted the most divisive issue among the members. Pierce and his advisers hoped that his message would persuade some reluctant congressmen to join the administration party and make it possible to break the deadlock over the speakership. Pierce's concerns about Kansas were heightened by his ardent desire to be renominated by the Democratic party. It was imperative that he establish himself in the most politically advantageous position possible vis-a-vis territorial affairs.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James H. Lane, *et. al.*, to Franklin Pierce, January 21, 1856, in Robinson, Kansas Conflict, p. 223.

<sup>6</sup> James Lane and Charles Robinson to Franklin Pierce, January 23, 1856, in *ibid.*, pp. 223-24.

<sup>7</sup> Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 425-28, 435-44.

Cushing's composition proved to be singularly unimaginative. The message was little more than a reiteration of previous administration pronouncements. Pierce charged that many of the territorial difficulties resulted from Andrew Reeder's misguided gubernatorial policies. The normal settlement of the territory had been disrupted by improper partisan activities on the part of both antislavery and proslavery interests, particularly the former. The President claimed, nevertheless, that the legislature had been duly elected and established as a legal body. The instigators of the Topeka statehood movement, therefore, were engaged in revolutionary acts which must be suppressed. He conceded that dire circumstances might require the use of federal troops to maintain law and order and promised that that would be done, if necessary. He also reaffirmed his reluctance to resort to such action. His wholly inadequate solution to territorial problems was to recommend that Kansas advance rapidly toward statehood assisted by a congressional enabling act. The only reference to Shannon in the message was in a brief statement noting that the territorial disturbances in December were "speedily quieted without the effusion of blood and in a satisfactory manner."<sup>8</sup>

Pierce's message failed to produce the desired results. Although the House finally organized on February 2, its choice for Speaker was a Massachusetts Republican, Nathaniel P. Banks. An administration majority in the previous House of 158 had disappeared

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<sup>8</sup>The message is in Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, V, 352-60. The limited territorial population precluded achieving the minimum requirements for statehood for several years. Rawley, Race and Politics, p. 118.

in the 1854 congressional elections, furthermore, and an anti-Nebraska plurality of approximately 117 took charge of the proceedings. The President's analysis of the Kansas controversy apparently won few, if any, converts while, at the same time, it provided additional controversial material for the press and politicians engaged in the national debate over Kansas affairs.<sup>9</sup>

None of the comments in the President's January message concerning the use of federal troops in Kansas offered any encouragement to Shannon. A presidential proclamation issued on February 11 seemed to offer help to the beleaguered governor, however. Confronted with the possibility of another "border ruffian" invasion of Kansas and with the impending inauguration on March 4 of the revolutionary free-state government, the administration decided to censure partisans of both groups. In the proclamation, the President condemned meddling in territorial affairs by all outsiders, directed unlawful combinations in Kansas to disband, and pledged that federal troops would be used whenever necessary to maintain peaceful, orderly conditions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 111-18; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 441-43. For contemporary reactions to the special message see Herald of Freedom, February 16, 1856; New York Tribune, January 26, 28, February 7, 13, 1856; Washington Union, January 26, February 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, March 1, 1856; A. A. Lawrence to Franklin Pierce, n.d., Lawrence to Charles Robinson, January 31, 1856, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers; J. W. Whitfield to George W. Clarke, March 1, 1856, "[Letters Showing Proslavery Attitude During the Territorial Days of Kansas]." The message was issued, according to an editorial in the New York Tribune, February 13, 1856, because ". . . the President is alarmed and aims to relieve his consternation by volubility of talk. It is the old device of whistling to keep the courage up."

<sup>10</sup> Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 443-44. The proclamation is in "Shannon Administration," pp. 259-60



Orders issued on February 15 implemented the proclamation by placing federal troops in Kansas at the governor's disposal under certain limited conditions. These specific conditions, ignored by historians, are vitally important because they governed Shannon's decisions during the events leading to the "Sack" of Lawrence. If he had been free to exercise his own judgment, the "Sack" undoubtedly would not have occurred. The orders stipulated that the governor was to call upon the troops only after "the ordinary course of judicial proceedings and the powers vested in the U. S. marshals [proved] inadequate for the suppression of insurrectionary combinations or armed resistance to the execution of the law." As if denying Shannon the authority to use the troops to prevent disturbances were not limitation enough, the orders also gave absolute discretion to the commanders as to whether they would respond to a request, the number of troops to be furnished, and the length of time they would serve the governor.<sup>11</sup> Lest Shannon fail to grasp the import of the orders, his new instructions received from Secretary of State William L. Marcy on February 15 declared: "The President is unwilling to believe that in executing your duties as Governor of the Territory there will be any occasion to call in the aid of the United States troops . . . , and it is enjoined upon you to do all that can possibly be done before resorting to that

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<sup>11</sup> Jefferson Davis to Colonel E. V. Sumner, February 15, 1856, Jefferson Davis to Brevet Colonel P. St. George Cooke [Fort Riley commandant], February 15, 1856, in ibid., p. 260.

measure . . . ."<sup>12</sup>

The governor had hoped to persuade Pierce to allow small army contingents to be stationed permanently at Leecompton, Topeka, and other strategic sites in the territory. The presence of the troops in various locations would provide a general territorial peace-keeping influence and make them readily available to quell disturbances in their respective areas. Thus the disreputable militia forces could be ignored. Since the administration's directives about the use of federal troops were essentially nothing more than reiterations of previous policies, the governor remained, as before, virtually powerless in the event of any disturbance short of revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Not only have many historians failed to appreciate Shannon's dilemma and assured us that he had discretionary power to use the federal forces,<sup>14</sup> but his contemporaries misconstrued the orders as well. Antislavery adherents feared that the President was, in effect, authorizing the utilization of the army to ensure victory for slavery in Kansas. Many of the proslavery men, on the other hand, were certain that that was Pierce's intent. The agent for implementing

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<sup>12</sup>W. L. Marcy to Wilson Shannon, February 16, 1856, in ibid., p. 261.

<sup>13</sup>Shannon to George W. Clarke, January 4, 1856, "[Letters Showing Proslavery Attitude During the Territorial Days of Kansas]"; Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>14</sup>Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 463; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom, pp. 148-49; Malin, John Brown, pp. 41-42; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 419; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, p. 444; Parrish, David Atchison, p. 194; Rawley, Race and Politics, p. 119; Wilson, Charles Robinson, p. 37.

the plot was to be the administration's faithful "servile tool," Governor Shannon.<sup>15</sup>

Although he arrived in Washington on February 14, Shannon's conference with the President and his advisers was delayed until February 16. The failure of the governor to win support for his views on the use of federal troops in Kansas is evidenced in his instructions from Secretary of State Marcy. Immediately following the meeting on February 16 Shannon left the capital bound for Kansas. Both he and the administration deemed it advisable that he return to the territory prior to the March 4 inauguration of the free-state Topeka government. It was feared that that occasion would provoke a new round of territorial disturbances.<sup>16</sup>

At the time of Shannon's departure, Congress was engaged in a heated debate over the Kansas controversy. In response to a request from the Senate, the administration released on February 18 a large collection of the most significant communications it had

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<sup>15</sup>For antislavery reactions see Daily Missouri Democrat, February 19, 1856; Herald of Freedom, March 8, 22, 1856; New York Tribune, February 13, 14, 15, 1856; M. W. Delahay to Charles Robinson, February 16, 1856, A. W. Reeder to Charles Robinson, February 18, 1856, Charles and Sara Robinson Papers; A. A. Lawrence to Samuel Hoar, February 21, 1856, New England Emigrant Aid Company Papers; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 248-53; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, p. 226; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 176, 185-86. For proslavery reactions see Kansas Weekly Herald, February 23, March 8, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, February 26, 1856; J. W. Whitfield to George W. Clarke, March 1, 1856, "[Letters Showing Proslavery Attitude During the Territorial Days of Kansas]." For pro-administration comments see Washington Union, February 15, 19, 1856.

<sup>16</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, February 18, 19, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, March 8, 1856; New York Tribune, February 18, 23, 1856; St. Clairsville Gazette, February 21, 1856.

sent and received during the Wakarusa War.<sup>17</sup> On February 19, the abolitionist junior Senator from Massachusetts, Henry Wilson, took the floor to deliver a vehement anti-administration philippic. His indulgence in inflammatory rhetoric and resorts to personal vilification probably were surpassed in the 1856 Kansas debates only in the famous "Crime Against Kansas" speech of his Massachusetts colleague, Senator Charles Sumner. Wilson reserved his most scurrilous personal comments for Shannon, whose long-delayed nomination as governor of Kansas Territory had been submitted to the Senate on February 3. Focusing on the governor's role in the Wakarusa War, Senator Wilson described Shannon as "Judas-like" and as an "imbecile" and a "common liar" who had made himself an object of derision by a public exhibition of gross intoxication. In at least a mild overstatement, the Senator concluded, "you may search the records of the country from . . . Jamestown to this day and you can find no instance of such incapacity, folly, and superadded criminality as Wilson Shannon displayed on that occasion."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> New York Tribune, February 21, 1856; Washington Union, February 20, 1856.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson's speech is in Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, 1856), pp. 92-95. For commentaries see Herald of Freedom, March 22, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, March 15, 1856; New York Times, February 19, 1856; New York Tribune, February 18, 21, 23, 1856; Washington Union, February 20, 1856. Wilson's reference to Shannon's intoxication stems from a story circulated in free-state ranks after the Wakarusa War ended. According to the story, the governor was so drunk at the "peace party" in Lawrence on December 8 that he was easily tricked by Robinson into signing an authorization for the citizens to arm themselves and defend the town. Robinson himself many years later declared that the account was absolutely false. "Address of Governor Charles Robinson: Territorial Governors," KSHS Transactions, I-II, 121. The story is repeated in John Brown

Senator James C. Jones of Tennessee rose on February 25 to present a generally efficacious rebuttal of Wilson's extravagant assertions. Jones ridiculed the pretensions to legality of the Topeka statehood movement, praised Shannon's efforts to maintain law and order in the territory, and critically reviewed some dubious episodes in the past life of "Governor" Charles Robinson. The Senator's closing remarks in defense of Shannon were not, unfortunately, as astute as his client might have desired.

Who will be able to stand when rumor is to assail the character of an honest and honorable man, and he is to be stricken down by senatorial indorsement of rumor? Whether he was drunk or not, I neither know nor care . . . . Suppose he was drunk! He had seen his countrymen arrayed in deadly hostility. He was the chief executive officer, to whose hands the destiny, the peace, the honor of that Territory was confided. With patriotic solicitude he mediates between the contending parties. After days of delay and anxiety he accomplishes the great work; and in the exultation of a generous and noble heart, he yields to a weakness that pertains to many of us . . . . As good men as the Senator from Massachusetts have been betrayed into such a weakness,

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to his wife and Children, December 16, 1855, Brown Papers, KSHS; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 227-28; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 152-54. While the literature on "Bleeding Kansas" usually refers to the alcoholic proclivities of Shannon and his alleged friends, the "border ruffians," there is no mention of drunken free-staters. It is rather surprising, therefore, to find references to liquor problems in Lawrence in the Herald of Freedom. The January 12, 1856, issue reported that citizens were selling spirituous liquors to the Indians and that "dead drunk" Indians were wandering around the town. There was an article in the March 1, 1856, issue about a meeting held on February 28 pursuant to a call by "many citizens" to consider ". . . what measures should be adopted by the friends of temperance in this town to retard the alarming growth of intemperance, and, if possible, to stop the sale of intoxicating liquors in our midst." The April 5, 1856, issue discussed the activities of the newly formed Lawrence Temperance Association. Lastly, the Herald of Freedom, December 27, 1856, praised "the ladies" for twice clearing the city of grog shops, but noted with alarm that two new shops were just "budding into life." Editor George W. Brown asked exasperatedly, "What must we do?"

and will be again. Where is your boasted charity?<sup>19</sup>

Shannon manifestly needed to be "saved from his friends" in Washington as well as in Kansas.

Henry Wilson's fierce assault seemed to confirm the widespread press rumors that there was strong senatorial opposition to Shannon's nomination. Historian Allan Nevins, confusing predictions with results, states that a "hard fight" did occur.<sup>20</sup> In actuality, Wilson delivered the only critical speech and the vote to confirm was a convincing fifty ayes to twelve nays.<sup>21</sup>

February was a month for Shannon to be criticized in the legislature of his home state, Ohio, as well as in Congress. The legislature received on February 5 a message on Kansas affairs from Governor Salmon P. Chase. The message set forth a brief anti-slavery version of past territorial developments and urged the General Assembly to "express the sense of the people of Ohio" in resolutions supporting the free-state movement. The remarks included a specific charge that Shannon had called the Missourians across the border in the Wakarusa War. The legislators responded to Chase's request by passing resolutions endorsing the Free-State government, requesting that Kansas be admitted to the Union as a

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<sup>19</sup> Jones' speech is in Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st Sess. (Washington, 1856), pp. 95-102. It also appears in Washington Union, March 31, 1856.

<sup>20</sup> Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 419. For reports of opposition to the nomination see Herald of Freedom, January 12, 26, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, January 26, March 8, 1856.

<sup>21</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, March 8, 15, 1856; New York Tribune, February 21, 1856. There is no record of the vote in the Congressional Globe.

free state, and directing Ohio's congressmen to vote to seat Andrew Reeder as the territorial delegate to Congress.<sup>22</sup> It must have been a shock to Shannon when he opened his March 1, 1856, copy of the Kansas Weekly Herald and saw the following headlines: "War Message of Gov. Chase of Ohio" and "War on Kansas by Ohio."

While on his way from Washington to Kansas, Shannon was delayed for nearly two weeks at St. Louis waiting for the ice to break up on the Missouri River. He did not reach the territory until the second week of March.<sup>23</sup> In the interval, the free-state legislature convened as scheduled in Topeka, inaugurated "Governor" Charles Robinson and other officials, prepared a petition to Congress requesting admission as a state under the Topeka Constitution, and optimistically selected James Lane and Andrew Reeder to be United States Senators-designate. The body then adjourned until July 4.<sup>24</sup> After Shannon returned to the territory, therefore, he had to contend with a formally organized, thoroughly illegal rival government.

During the latter part of March, Shannon and other territorial officials moved from the Shawnee Mission to the permanent capital site, Lecompton. Among the developers of the townsite were several prominent proslavery figures including Secretary of the Territory

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<sup>22</sup>The message and resolutions are in the Herald of Freedom, February 23, 1856; New York Tribune, February 11, 1856; Ohio Statesman, February 6, 1856. Also see ibid., February 8, 1856.

<sup>23</sup>New York Times, March 18, 1856; St. Clairsville Gazette, March 27, 1856.

<sup>24</sup>Herald of Freedom, March 8, 15, 1856; New York Tribune, March 20, 21, April 4, 9, 1856; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, p. 228, Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 59-61.

Daniel Woodson, Sheriff Samuel J. Jones, and Dr. Aristides Rodrigue. They had thoughtfully named one of Lecompton's thoroughfares "Shannon Avenue." Living conditions were relatively primitive in the capital, but a legislative assembly hall and minimally adequate housing accommodations were available. In its new location, the official territorial government was flanked by the free-state centers of Lawrence, twelve miles eastward, and Topeka, ten miles to the west.<sup>25</sup>

Shannon optimistically wrote to Secretary of State Marcy on April 11 that, following the adjournment of the Topeka legislature, ". . . all excitement growing out of their meeting has passed away, the laws are being regularly enforced, and order seems to prevail to as great an extent as might be expected, under all the circumstances, throughout the Territory." Noting that arms were still being smuggled into the territory, however, the governor warned: "I still have my misgivings as to the future. There are factious spirits here who seem to desire a conflict of arms . . ." <sup>26</sup> The administration was already confronted in Washington with "factious spirits" emanating from the Kansas controversy and they soon materialized in the territory, as well.

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<sup>25</sup>For descriptions of Lecompton see Nichols, Bleeding Kansas, p. 89; New York Tribune, November 14, 1855; Kansas Weekly Herald, July 28, September 15, October 27, 1855. A report in the Herald, May 17, 1856, stated that twenty-five houses had been built during the spring, but two or three more hotels were needed to accommodate residents and visitors. Town company officials are listed in ibid., September 15, 1855. The Tribune issue cited mentions "Shannon Avenue."

<sup>26</sup>Shannon to William L. Marcy, April 11, 1856, "Correspondence of Governor Wilson Shannon" (cited hereafter as "Shannon Correspondence"), KSHS Transactions, IV, 385-86.



One of the first orders of business in the United States House of Representatives after organizing on February 2, 1856, had been to decide which man to seat as the territorial delegate from Kansas, the officially elected John Whitfield or the free-state claimant, Andrew Reeder. After much debate, both men were rejected. The anti-Nebraska majority insisted that no decision should be made until the facts concerning the elections held in Kansas could be more fully ascertained. On March 19, accordingly, a three-man committee was established to "inquire into and collect evidence in regard to the troubles in Kansas."<sup>27</sup> Speaker Banks appointed two free soil Republicans, William A. Howard of Michigan (chairman) and John Sherman of Ohio, and one Whig, Mordecai Oliver of Missouri, to conduct the investigation.<sup>28</sup> John Stringfellow's Squatter Sovereign reflected the general proslavery reaction to the formation of the committee by complaining bitterly about ". . . the unprecedented attempt on the part of the House to constitute itself a grand inquisition--a usurpation of power without a parallel in our history . . . ."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The evolution of the congressional debates with editorial commentaries can be followed in New York Tribune, February 18, 21, March 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 20, 21, 1856. Also see Daily Missouri Democrat, February 2, March 13, 1856. The official record is in Appendix to the Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st sess., pp. 451-64, 691. The resolutions establishing the committee are on p. 710. Also see Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 460-62.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 728. Contemporary biographical sketches of the appointees are in Herald of Freedom, April 19, 1856; New York Tribune, March 27, 1856. The Kansas Weekly Herald, April 19, 1856, condemned Howard as a "nigger worshipper" and Sherman and all of the committee's staff as "Black Republicans."

<sup>29</sup> Squatter Sovereign, April 15, 1856. Also see ibid., April 22, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, April 19, 1856; Parrish, David Atchison, p. 198.

Armed with the power of subpoena, with the authority to secure military protection, if necessary, and with sufficient funds and staff to perform its task, the committee arrived in Lecompton on April 18. Collecting documents and conducting hearings at Lecompton, Lawrence, Leavenworth, and other sites, the investigators interviewed 323 witnesses, predominantly antislavery men, in four months. Shannon appeared briefly before the committee on June 9 to defend his role in the Wakarusa War. His comments primarily repeated the version of events which he had related to Douglas Brewerton for publication in the New York Herald. The heated exchanges at the sessions almost erupted into violence on several occasions.<sup>30</sup> In their findings and recommendations included in the "Howard Committee" report submitted to the House on July 2, Howard and Sherman declared that the official territorial elections for congressional delegate and the legislature had been fraudulent and thus invalid. New, tightly regulated elections were recommended. Oliver's minority report was diametrically opposed to most of the views of Howard and Sherman.<sup>31</sup> The House had 20,000

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<sup>30</sup> Descriptions of the committee's activities are in Herald of Freedom, April 26, May 10, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, June 28, 1856; New York Times, May 12, 13, 19, 23, 27, 1856; New York Tribune, April 26, 28, May 13, 15, 17, 19, 24, 26, 29, June 3, 7, 1856; John Sherman, Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate and Cabinet (Chicago, 1895), I, 114-31; Amos Townsend (chief clerk of the committee), "With the Kansas Congressional Committee of 1856," Magazine of Western History, VII, No. 5 (1888), 487-505. Shannon's testimony is in Howard Committee Report, pp. 1102-1110. See Brewerton, War in Kansas, pp. 159-200, for similar statements by Shannon.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Committee Report, pp. 1-22. For the majority's findings see pp. 1-17. For Oliver's findings see pp. 18-22.

copies of the full report (1,338 pages) printed and 200,000 copies of the findings and conclusions only. As anticipated, the report proved to be a useful campaign document for the Republican cause in 1856.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to House actions on Kansas, an important debate developed in the United States Senate in March. As a response to the President's recommendations on January 24, Stephen A. Douglas submitted on March 12 a majority report on Kansas affairs from his Committee on Territories. The report was essentially an endorsement of the administration's views and policies supplemented with Douglas' opinions concerning the proper implementation of popular sovereignty in the territories. Five days later, Douglas introduced a bill authorizing statehood for Kansas as soon as it attained a population of 93,420. Vermont Republican Jacob Collamer presented a minority committee report sustaining the Kansas free-state movement and recommending immediate statehood for the territory under the Topeka constitution. William H. Seward of New York subsequently introduced a bill incorporating Collamer's suggestions.<sup>33</sup> On April 7, Lewis Cass of Michigan presented a "Memorial" from the Topeka legislature requesting the same actions already espoused

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<sup>32</sup> Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 460; Correll, "The Kansas Territory," p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas, pp. 491-99; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 420-26; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 445-48; Glyndon G. Van Deusen, William Henry Seward (New York, 1967), pp. 168-69. For press reactions see National Intelligencer, March 21, April 10, 1856; New York Tribune, March 14, 21, 24, April 10, 26, 1856; Washington Union, March 22, April 5, 19, 1856.

in Seward's bill.<sup>34</sup> The vigorous senatorial debate generated by the conflicting proposals continued into the summer adding much heat and little light to the Kansas controversy. Ultimately, no constructive advance toward statehood for Kansas was achieved.<sup>35</sup>

As far as Shannon's gubernatorial responsibilities were concerned, the sustained agitation of the Kansas "question" by the House and Senate during the early months of 1856 was one of several significant developments progressively undermining the prospects for sustained territorial tranquillity. As the weather moderated in April, a new wave of emigrants surged into Kansas. James Lane, Andrew Reeder, and other free-state emissaries traveled throughout the north during the winter and spring propagandizing effectively on behalf of their cause and promoting emigration by antislavery settlers. The antislavery press also enthusiastically cooperated in the emigration campaign.<sup>36</sup> With growing apprehension,

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<sup>34</sup>U. S., Congressional Globe, 34th Cong., 1st sess., pt. 1, p. 826; Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas, pp. 499-501; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 60-67. For press comments see National Intelligencer, April 15, 1856; New York Tribune, April 9, 11, 12, 16, 1856.

<sup>35</sup>Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas, pp. 502-05, 524-28, 533; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 426-27, 471-72; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 475-80; Rawley, Race and Politics, pp. 122-29, 153-58.

<sup>36</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, April 25, 1856; Herald of Freedom, January 12, 19, March 1, 15, 1856; New York Times, January 31, April 2, 4, 10, May 9, 1856; New York Tribune, January 22, 26, February 12, 16, 18, 27, March 14, 19, 21, April 4, 7, 10, 21, 23, 30, 1856; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 427-28, 430-31; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 224-25; Sara Robinson, Kansas, p. 196; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 68-72.

proslavery leaders observed that a steadily increasing proportion of the newcomers to Kansas were from the north. Despite an intensive campaign on the stump and in the southern press, Atchison and his lieutenants failed to persuade any sizeable body of southerners, particularly slaveowners, to migrate to the territory.<sup>37</sup> In desperation, bands of Missourians began harassing the incoming northern settlers by inspecting their belongings, by confiscating weapons, and by sometimes forcing the emigrants to turn back eastward. This reprehensible activity expanded to such a degree during the spring and early summer that, by late June, the river was virtually closed to northern emigrant parties. This river "blockade" and the events leading to it added new substance to the antagonistic relationship between the opposing territorial factions.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Herald of Freedom, January 12, February 2, 9, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, January 12, February 23, 1856; New York Times, March 24, April 18, 1856; New York Tribune, March 18, 19, 27, April 15, 22, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, March 4, April 15, 29, May 13, 1856; Avery Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (2d ed. rev.; Chicago, 1957), pp. 372-73; Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas," pp. 346-51; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 479-80; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," p. 71. The largest single southern emigrant party was organized and financed by Colonel Jefferson Buford of Alabama. The party of approximately 400 men embarked from Mobile on April 11 and entered Kansas on May 2. They scattered seeking permanent homesites. Many of the party later participated in the "Sack of Lawrence" and the guerrilla warfare in the summer of 1856. Walter L. Fleming, "The Buford Expedition to Kansas," American Historical Review, VI, No. 1 (October, 1900), 33-48; Herald of Freedom, February 2, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, March 1, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, February 26, 1856; Daily Missouri Republican, April 21, May 6, 1856.

<sup>38</sup> New York Times, July 11, 1856; New York Tribune, July 7, 9, 17, 1856; Craik, "Southern Interest in Territorial Kansas," pp. 370-72; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 479-83; Parrish, David Atchison, p. 205; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 225-26, 273-74, 287-88, 316-18; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 71-72.

Meanwhile, other seriously disruptive incidents were occurring in the territory. Samuel N. Wood, leader of the Branson rescue operation which had triggered the Wakarusa War, had fled from Kansas in December and had spent the winter lecturing in the north. He returned to Lawrence on April 15 at the head of a party of 100 settlers. This unexpected intelligence was relayed to Sheriff Jones of Douglas County, who still possessed a warrant for Wood's arrest. Accompanied by his deputy, Jones, now also a United States deputy marshal, apprehended Wood in Lawrence on April 19. The prisoner's friends promptly disarmed the sheriff and his deputy and temporarily restrained them while Wood escaped. In the face of such a provocative act, Jones' reaction was amazingly mild. He returned to Lecompton, secured warrants against some of those who had freed Wood, and returned with a posse of four men on April 20 to serve his new warrants in Lawrence. Forcibly resisted again by those he tried to arrest (one of them struck him in the face), Jones put to the test the promises made to him in December by Lane and Robinson. Not only had he been assured that he would be able to serve legal processes in Lawrence, but he had also been told that the town's law-abiding citizens would assist him if he encountered difficulties in performing such duties. He called, therefore, for some of the men in the unfriendly crowd that had gathered around him to aid his posse. No volunteers were forthcoming, so the outmanned posse returned empty-handed to Lecompton.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Wilson Shannon to W. L. Marcy, April 27, 1856, "Correspondence of Governor Geary" (cited hereafter as "Geary Correspondence"),

Continuing to act contrary to the "bloodthirsty" image he had with the free-staters, the sheriff asked Governor Shannon for a small posse composed of federal troops. The "civil authority" in the person of Sheriff Jones had been unable to fulfill his responsibilities and the lawless acts of Lawrence's citizens posed a serious threat to the maintenance of law and order in the territory. Shannon felt justified, therefore, in interpreting his instructions from Washington broadly enough to call for military aid. After outlining the sheriff's difficulties, Shannon stated in his dispatch written on April 20 to Colonel Sumner at Fort Leavenworth:

To call on any of the citizens of the county to accompany the sheriff and aid in overpowering the resistance on the part of the defendants, that is anticipated, would most probably lead to a conflict which, when once commenced, it is difficult to foresee where it might end, but in the use of the U. S. troops, no personal or party feelings can exist on either side, and their presence will most likely command obedience to the laws. I have to ask you, therefore to detach to this place immediately an officer with six men to . . . assist the sheriff . . . in the execution of . . . his warrants. . . . 40

Sumner apparently concurred with the governor that such a minimal involvement of federal troops in territorial peacekeeping efforts was acceptable and complied promptly with the request. At the same time, the colonel informed the mayor of Lawrence that a detachment of troops was to assist Jones and urged the mayor to discourage

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KSHS Transactions, IV, 405-08; Samuel J. Jones to Shannon, April 20, 1856, ibid., pp. 408-09. Shannon's letter is an excellent detailed summary of Jones' difficulties. Press accounts are in Herald of Freedom, April 26, 1856; New York Times, May 2, 1856; New York Tribune, May 2, 3, 1856.

<sup>40</sup>Shannon to Sumner, April 20, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," p. 409.

any resistance on the part of the town's citizens.<sup>41</sup>

Jones and his posse of troops made six arrests on April 23 and camped in Lawrence that evening. He intended to search Lawrence on the following day for Samuel Wood and several others named in his warrants. Capricious fate intervened at that point when a young, impulsive free-state avenger, J. P. Filer, shot the sheriff in the back while he was standing in a tent. Filer left the scene undetected.<sup>42</sup>

Jones was thought to be mortally wounded, so press headlines across the country proclaimed his assassination. He unexpectedly recovered from the severe spinal wound, but remained partially paralyzed for the rest of his life. A large gathering of Lawrence's citizens passed resolutions condemning the deed and offering a five hundred dollar reward for the unknown assassin.<sup>43</sup> Such actions had no mitigating effect, however, upon the anger and desire for revenge provoked among the proslavery men by the shooting of one of their most popular leaders. After April 23, proslavery leaders began serious consideration of various plans for concerted actions designed to force the citizens of Lawrence to acknowledge the authority of

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<sup>41</sup>Sumner to Shannon, April 21, 1856, ibid.; Sumner to the Mayor of Lawrence, April 22, 1856, "Shannon Administration," p. 262.

<sup>42</sup>Shannon to Marcy, April 27, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 405-08; Herald of Freedom, April 26, 1856; New York Times, May 3, 1856; New York Tribune, May 3, 1856. Filer was identified as the assassin years after the incident. Spring, Kansas, p. 110.

<sup>43</sup>Shannon to Marcy, April 27, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 405-08; Herald of Freedom, April 26, May 3, 1856; New York Times, May 3, 7, 8, 1856; New York Tribune, May 8, 10, 1856; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 464.



the territorial laws and officials.<sup>44</sup>

Shannon sent a long dispatch to Washington on April 27 detailing the disastrous developments of the previous week and their potential consequences. He observed that the large spring influx of emigrants from both the north and the south enhanced the problems of governing the territory, angrily condemned the continuance of free-state military preparations and defiance of the territorial authorities, and warned Marcy that "we are threatened on all sides with most serious difficulties, and . . . a dangerous crisis is rapidly approaching."<sup>45</sup> The administration offered no assistance to alleviate his fully justified and soon realized apprehensions.

The course of territorial affairs in May was determined by men and events largely beyond Shannon's control. The first significant developments occurred when Chief Justice Samuel D. Lecompte's division of the United States District Court for Kansas Territory convened at Lecompton on May 5. The judge instructed the grand jury to begin an investigation into the possible existence of treasonous "combinations" and activities in the territory. On the opening day, the proslavery-oriented grand jury made a presentment to the court declaring that Lawrence's fortress-like Free State hotel and two free-state presses, the Herald of Freedom and the Kansas Free State, were offensive "nuisances" which should be "abated." The presentment

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<sup>44</sup> Shannon to Marcy, April 27, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 405-08; Herald of Freedom, May 3, 1856 (contains a collection of proslavery press comments); Spring, Kansas, pp. 110-11.

<sup>45</sup> Shannon to Marcy, April 27, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 405-08.

constituted legally nothing more than an expression of opinions held by the jurors. The grand jury also began summoning witnesses including Charles Robinson and Andrew Reeder. Both Robinson and Reeder balked at making appearances. Almost immediately the jurors commenced issuing indictments against those who failed to respond to a summons and against various free-state leaders for "usurpation of office." The grand jury's efforts were climaxed on June 20 by the indictment for treason of Robinson, Reeder, James Lane, and four other free-state officials.<sup>46</sup>

At the time the court began its sessions, Reeder was assisting the congressional Howard Committee in conducting hearings at the Free State hotel in Lawrence. When United States Deputy Marshal William Fain attempted to arrest Reeder on May 8 in the committee's hearing room, the former territorial governor forcibly resisted and threatened Fain's life. Many of the 100 Lawrence citizens in the room cheered Reeder and appeared ready to come to his aid. Fain wisely abandoned his mission and returned to Lecompton.<sup>47</sup>

Reeder fled from the territory and Lane was already elsewhere. Robinson was apprehended while trying to escape and held for several

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<sup>46</sup>C. S. Griffin, "The University of Kansas and the Sack of Lawrence: A Problem of Intellectual Honesty," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXXIV, No. 4 (Winter, 1968), 412-17; James Malin, John Brown, pp. 49-50; James Malin, "Judge Lecompte and the 'Sack of Lawrence,'" May 21, 1856, "Kansas Historical Quarterly, XX, No. 7 (August, 1953), 470-71, 490-92; New York Times, May 13, 19, 20, 1856; New York Tribune, May 19, 1856.

<sup>47</sup>Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18; Herald of Freedom, May 10, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, May 17, 1856; New York Times, May 20, 1856; New York Tribune, May 19, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, May 13, 20, June 10, 1856.

months along with other indicted free-state leaders in a temporary camp established near Lecompton. The Free State government had been quickly and efficiently decapitated.<sup>48</sup>

The citizens of Lawrence and free-state officials now had resisted a federal court and a federal official, Deputy Marshal Fain. Previous questionable free-state claims that they defied only territorial laws and officials were clearly inapplicable. United States Marshal Israel B. Donelson, a proslavery partisan, had a number of warrants to serve in Lawrence. He determined that Fain's experience justified the drastic action of releasing a proclamation on May 11 calling on the "law-abiding" citizens of the territory to gather immediately at Lecompton to assist him in serving his warrants.<sup>49</sup> With the shooting of Sheriff Jones fresh in their memories, approximately 800 proslaveryites responded in the next few days to the marshal's proclamation. Among the "law-abiding" citizens were David Atchison and his Missouri company of Platte County Rifles, John and Benjamin Stringfellow, and Colonel Jefferson Buford.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., June 10, 1856; New York Tribune, June 5, 13, 1856; Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 235-39, 261-63, 279-83; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 219-28, 252-54, 258-72, 300-26, 337-41; Spring, Kansas, pp. 112-18; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 68-70; Wilson, Charles Robinson, p. 42.

<sup>49</sup> Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18. The proclamation is in J. M. Winchell, et. al. to Franklin Pierce, May 22, 1856, "Memorial to the President from Inhabitants of Kansas" (cited hereafter as "Kansas Memorial"), "Shannon Correspondence," p. 392.

<sup>50</sup> "Kansas Memorial," ibid., pp. 392-403; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 471-72; New York Times, May 9, 1856; New York Tribune, May 20, 21, 22, 1856.

While sharing Donelson's anger over the latest difficulties in Lawrence, Governor Shannon was appalled at the marshal's proclamation. The governor objected vehemently to the use of proslavery partisans as a posse and tried to persuade Donelson to accept, as an alternative, a posse of federal troops. Although Shannon had no authority to call upon the military for such services, he and Sumner had decided to resort to the use of small detachments of troops in situations they thought posed a threat to territorial peace. Donelson adamantly refused Shannon's offer, however, insisting that he must have a force large enough to invest Lawrence, if necessary, to impose upon its citizens a proper respect for federal and territorial laws and officials. At that point, the governor was rendered powerless. The marshal had full and independent authority beyond Shannon's jurisdiction to summon a civilian posse if he so desired. In addition, Shannon's instructions received in his conference with Pierce and Marcy on February 16 most explicitly stipulated that he resort to the use of federal troops only after the marshal's powers had been exercised and proved inadequate.<sup>51</sup> Sheriff (and deputy marshal) Jones' situation in April had fallen, albeit dubiously, within the guidelines set forth. But he had asked for federal troops. Donelson, on the other hand, rejected a federal posse and entertained no doubts about the adequacy of his resources. Under the applicable directives,

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<sup>51</sup>Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18; Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

therefore, Shannon could not interfere with the marshal's actions.<sup>52</sup>

Between May 12 and May 20 the terrified citizens of Lawrence negotiated with Shannon and Donelson, endeavoring to make arrangements guaranteeing the safety of their lives and property. The Lawrence spokesmen claimed that they were not guilty, as charged, with defying laws and the authority of public officials. Their fervent assurances that they would be model law-abiding citizens in the future were received with well-deserved skepticism by the governor and the marshal.<sup>53</sup> Shannon's conviction that the Lawrencians had brought the current crisis upon themselves was reflected in his unsympathetic reply on May 12 to a communication he had just received. After stating specifically that he would not interfere with the marshal's posse, the governor declared:

If the citizens of Lawrence submit themselves to the Territorial laws, and aid and assist the Marshal and Sheriff in the execution of process in their hands, as all good citizens are bound to do when called on, they . . . will entitle themselves to the protection of the law. But so long as they keep up a military or armed organization to resist the Territorial laws, and the officers charged with their execution, I shall not interpose to save them from the legitimate consequences of their illegal acts.

Donelson expressed the same sentiments in a letter sent to Lawrence on May 15.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> ibid.

<sup>53</sup> "Kansas Memorial," "Shannon Correspondence," pp. 392-99.

<sup>54</sup> Shannon to C. W. Topliff, et. al., May 12, 1856, "Kansas Memorial," in ibid., p. 394; I. B. Donelson to G. W. Deitzler and J. H. Green, May 15, 1856, "Kansas Memorial," in ibid., pp. 395-96.

Both Donelson and Shannon sought to protect the safety of the citizens of Lawrence by personally urging the various groups in the posse collected at Lecompton to refrain from violence unless the marshal met resistance. The response was not encouraging. Many of the men insisted that the most obvious symbols of the New England Emigrant Aid Company and the free-state movement, the Free State hotel and the two presses in Lawrence, must be "abated."<sup>55</sup>

The infamous "Sack" of Lawrence by a sizeable portion of the proslavery posse occurred on May 21. While Donelson retained most of the posse on a hill overlooking the town, Deputy Marshal Fain entered it with a small detachment and made three arrests without incident. After Fain's return, the posse was dismissed by the marshal. Sheriff Jones, although barely able to ride his horse, was present with several warrants in hand and promptly commandeered all those who would join him to form a sheriff's posse. Unable to find anyone named in his warrants, Jones and his posse took out their long-standing grievances against the free-staters by demolishing the hotel, the two presses, and the home of "Governor" Charles Robinson. An undetermined amount of looting of shops and homes also ensued.<sup>56</sup> Such developments were neither anticipated nor desired by some of the most prominent men present. David Atchison, Colonel Buford, the sheriff

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<sup>55</sup> Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Herald of Freedom, April 25, 1857, January 16, 1858; Kansas Weekly Herald, May 24, 31, June 7, July 12, 1856; National Intelligencer, May 31, June 5, 1856; New York Times, May 23, 26, 30, 1856; New York Tribune, May 26, 27, 29, 30, June 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, May 27, 1856.

himself, and others attempted to control their subordinates, but had only limited success.<sup>57</sup>

As thoroughly reprehensible a deed as it was, the truly amazing feature about the "Sack" was that so little harm was inflicted upon the town and its citizens. No fighting occurred, the only fatality resulted when a proslavery man was hit by a brick falling from the chimney of the hotel, and the only serious property damage was that already indicated. Since the value of the major item destroyed, the hotel, was estimated to be \$25,000, it seems unlikely that the total damages incurred exceeded \$75,000.<sup>58</sup> With their usual devotion to the free-state version of truth, James Redpath, William Phillips, and the other antislavery newsmen in Kansas reported that Lawrence was in ashes, that men were killed and women were ravished, that damages exceeded \$150,000, and other gory details.<sup>59</sup> Such provocative yellow journalism completely buried one highly significant fact: after two years of agitation and controversy "Bleeding Kansas" was still virtually bloodless. The killing of two free-state men in the week immediately preceding the "Sack"

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., June 24, 1856; "Kansas Memorial," "Shannon Correspondence," pp. 392-403; Spring, Kansas, pp. 124-25; Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.; New York Tribune, June 3, 1856; Malin, "Judge Lecompte and the 'Sack of Lawrence,'" pp. 465, 581-84. Griffin, "University of Kansas and the Sack of Lawrence," p. 410, indicates the estimated value of the hotel.

<sup>59</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, May 26, 27, 28, 31, June 6, 1856; National Intelligencer, May 31, 1856; New York Times, May 26, June 6, 1856; New York Tribune, May 26, 27, 29, June 9, 1856; Weisburger, "The Newspaper Correspondent," pp. 645-47.

brought the grand total of deaths attributable to territorial proslavery-antislavery confrontations to seven.<sup>60</sup>

The antislavery press had an abundance of villains to excoriate in their discussions of the "Sack of Lawrence." Sheriff Jones was given the preeminent role in the tragic affair, but considerable blame was also attached to Judge Lecompte, Marshal Donelson, David Atchison, and, of course, Governor Wilson Shannon. The charges most commonly expressed against Shannon were that he had actively conspired with his proslavery friends to perpetrate the "Sack," that he had heartlessly rejected pleas for succor from the helpless, law-abiding citizens of Lawrence, and that he had failed at a crucial time to exercise the authority given to him in February to resort to federal troops to preserve order and to protect citizens in the territory.<sup>61</sup>

Not only did the press fail to appreciate the governor's dilemma concerning his authority vis-a-vis the independent powers of Marshal Donelson, but President Pierce also seemed ambivalent, if not confused, with regard to the conditions set forth in the applicable administration directives. Word of the "Sack" had not reached Washington when Pierce sent an anxious inquiry to Shannon on the morning of May 23:

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<sup>60</sup>Robinson, Kansas Conflict, p. 219; New York Tribune, September 16, 1856.

<sup>61</sup>Daily Missouri Democrat, May 23, 26, 27, 28, 31, June 2, 1856; New York Times, May 23, 24, 26, 27, 1856; New York Tribune, May 23, 26, 29, 30, June 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 1856; Malin, John Brown, pp. 92-96.



Has the United States Marshal proceeded to Lawrence to execute civil process? Has military force been found necessary to maintain civil government in Kansas? If so, have you relied solely upon the troops under the command of Colonels Sumner and Cooke? If otherwise state the reasons. The laws must be executed; but military force should not be employed until after the Marshal has met with actual resistance in the fulfillment of his duty.

A second presidential communication to Shannon on May 23 stated:

I hope that before this reaches you decisive measures will have been taken to have the process in the hands of the Marshal quietly executed. My knowledge of facts is imperfect; but with the force of Colonel Sumner at hand, I perceive no occasion for the posse, armed or unarmed, which the Marshal is said to have assembled at Lecompton. The instructions issued to yourself and Colonel Sumner during your last visit to this city must be efficiently executed. Sufficient power was committed to you, and you must use it.

Obedience to the laws and consequent security to the citizens of Kansas are the primary objects. You must repress violence in whatever form it may manifest itself.<sup>62</sup>

Since the Democratic National Convention was scheduled to convene in ten days, the second message may have constituted an effort on Pierce's part to place himself in as advantageous a posture as possible on the public record. Regardless of the motivation, the President's comments did not accurately reflect established policies and seemed to be an attempt to shift responsibility for whatever might occur at Lawrence onto the shoulders of Shannon and Sumner.<sup>63</sup>

Governor Shannon responded to Pierce on May 31 with a summary of the events related to the "Sack" and with a justification of the

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<sup>62</sup>Pierce to Shannon, May 23, 1856 (two messages), "Geary Correspondence," p. 414.

<sup>63</sup>For the convening of the Democratic National Convention see New York Tribune, June 3, 6, 1856. The implications of the dispatches are discussed in ibid., June 11, 1856.

course he had pursued. In reference to Donelson's posse, he noted:

Had the Marshall called on me for a posse, I should have felt myself bound to furnish him with one composed entirely of United States troops. Knowing this to be the case, and feeling satisfied that with a posse composed of such troops the parties to be arrested would evade the service of process, he determined, by virtue of the legal powers vested in him as Marshal, to summon his own posse. . . .

The communication closed with details about his extensive use of troops since the "Sack" while endeavoring to control the numerous territorial disturbances arising since May 21.<sup>64</sup>

A final note from Pierce sent on June 6 before he had received Shannon's message demanded an explanation for the governor's failure to acknowledge the two May 23 dispatches. The message also angrily declared:

If the civil authorities, sustained by the military force under the command of Colonels Sumner and Cooke, placed at your disposal, are not sufficient to maintain order . . . you should have advised me at once. I hardly need repeat the instructions so often given. Maintain the laws firmly and impartially, and take care that no good citizen has just ground to complain of the want of protection.<sup>65</sup>

Such advices had been presented; but, as Shannon later bitterly observed, Pierce had refused to listen.<sup>66</sup>

Although convinced that he could not intervene in Marshal Donelson's actions on May 21, Shannon had decided to activate a plan he and Sumner had devised to forestall similar developments in the

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<sup>64</sup>Shannon to Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18.

<sup>65</sup>Pierce to Shannon, June 6, 1856; *ibid.*, p. 421.

<sup>66</sup>Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

future. Territorial conditions seemed to mandate a resort to federal troops on a fulltime basis to maintain peace between the opposing factions. Such troop utilization conflicted with the administration's instructions even more than the temporary employment of troops as a posse, but the two men hoped to demonstrate its wisdom in practice.<sup>67</sup> While Donelson's posse was at Lawrence on May 21, Shannon drafted a note to Sumner requesting that cavalry companies be situated until further notice at Lecompton, Lawrence, and Leavenworth, the main sites of disturbances in the territory. The colonel promptly complied, stationing two companies at Lecompton and one each at Lawrence and Leavenworth.<sup>68</sup> The implementation of this new policy was, however, as the old cliché observes, "too little, too late."

On May 24, John Brown, a fanatical abolitionist emigrant from Ohio, led his small band of followers to several proslavery homes along Pottowatomi Creek in southeastern Kansas where they brutally murdered five men and boys. Some of Brown's sons had settled in Kansas in the spring of 1855. Their father had joined them in October and had been in Lawrence during the last few days of the Wakarusa War in December. The "Pottowatomi Massacre" was his retribution for earlier killings of free-state settlers and the

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<sup>67</sup> Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.; Shannon to Sumner, May 21, 1856, ibid., p. 419; Sumner to Major J. Sedwick, May 22, 1856, in "Report of the Secretary of War, December 1, 1856" (cited hereafter as "Davis Report"), KSHS Transactions, IV, 436.

"Sack of Lawrence."<sup>69</sup>

In Washington on May 22, Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina had administered a severe caning to Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts for slanderous remarks contained in the Senator's philippic on "The Crime Against Kansas" delivered the preceding day.<sup>70</sup> The Pottowatomi Massacre joined "bleeding Sumner" and the "Sack of Lawrence" in a collection of sensational press headlines at the end of May and early June which concentrated national attention more than ever on the travails of "Bleeding Kansas."<sup>71</sup> The tragic developments injected new vitality into the Kansas crusade, north and south. Many mass meetings were held, funds and weapons were energetically collected, and new bands of settlers were hurried westward to join their compatriots in the territory.<sup>72</sup>

In Kansas, meanwhile, Brown's murderous acts, in particular, triggered a wave of guerrilla warfare lasting nearly a month. Partisan bands engaged in a series of skirmishes, in depredations

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<sup>69</sup> Westport Border Times, May 27, 1856, quoted in Kansas Weekly Herald, May 31, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, June 10, 17, 1856; New York Tribune, June 4, 12, 1856; Malin, John Brown, pp. 15-16, 61-62, 94-106, 293-404; Stephen B. Oates, To Purge This Land With Blood: A Biography of John Brown (New York, 1970), pp. 126-41.

<sup>70</sup> New York Times, May 24, 1856; New York Tribune, May 21, 23, 26, 27, 1856.

<sup>71</sup> Malin, John Brown, pp. 89-116; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 435-50, 474-76; Oates, To Purge This Land, p. 114; Weisberger, "The Newspaper Reporter," pp. 644-48.

<sup>72</sup> New York Tribune, June 10, 12, 14, July 4, 1856; New York Times, May 26, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, June 10, 17, 24, July 8, 1856; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 446-50, 478-80; Oates, To Purge This Land, pp. 141-46.

against property, and in terrorizing and occasionally killing citizens. Shannon called on Colonel Sumner for all the troops at his disposal. Detachments charged with restoring peaceful conditions were dispatched to the most troublesome areas in the territory.<sup>73</sup>

On June 4, the governor issued his own version of Pierce's February 11 Kansas proclamation. He ordered all unlawful military combinations to disperse, declared that all aggression from without Kansas would be repelled, and pledged that all law-abiding citizens regardless of party would be treated alike and protected by the territorial authorities.<sup>74</sup> He implemented the proclamation by taking the rather drastic step on June 12 of commandeering Colonel Phillip St. George Cooke's troops at Fort Riley, 140 miles inside the eastern boundary of Kansas, to bolster Sumner's forces. The military energetically pursued their task. They forced the guerrilla bands to disperse or leave Kansas, made arrests where necessary, and generally pacified the territory by the third week of June.<sup>75</sup> A New York Tribune chronology of events in Kansas, published in September, 1856, listed only ten fatalities resulting from the May-June period of violence.

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<sup>73</sup>Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, May 31, 1856, "Geary Correspondence," pp. 414-18; Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, June 17, 1856, "Shannon Correspondence," pp. 386-89.

<sup>74</sup>"Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 312-13.

<sup>75</sup>Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, June 17, 1856, "Shannon Correspondence," pp. 386-89; Kansas Weekly Herald, June 21, 1856; New York Times, June 21, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, July 1, 1856; Malin, John Brown, pp. 117-22. The military complement in Kansas consisted of 570 cavalrymen, 350 at Fort Leavenworth and 220 at Fort Riley. Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

But there was also much destruction of private property.<sup>76</sup>

The governor offered an impartial analysis of territorial problems to Pierce in a communication of June 17:

It is . . . outside interference in the affairs of this Territory that is creating nine-tenths of all the difficulties we have to encounter here. The approach of armed bodies of men from Missouri, or the North, furnishes an excuse to the opposing party to collect together men and keep up their military organization throughout the whole country. . . . If the influences outside of the Territory would cease to act, and let us alone to manage our own affairs, I would guarantee order and quiet in the Territory in ten days, through the agency alone of the United States troops. The truth is, that a large majority of the citizens of both parties desire tranquillity, and denounce in the strongest terms all outside influences that are seeking to manage and control the affairs of Kansas.<sup>77</sup>

Shannon must have been encouraged when the Washington Union printed his proclamation in its June 14 issue accompanied by a brief editorial praising his "firm, temperate, and impartial stand." His appreciation for such praise from the administration's organ was probably tempered considerably, however, by the release to the press of Pierce's two May 23 dispatches to Shannon concerning conditions at Lawrence. According to the New York Tribune's interpretation of the messages, ". . . the whole responsibility for the existing state of lawless violence in the Territory is fixed upon Shannon."<sup>78</sup>

During the second week of June, Shannon determined that he had endured long enough in an office which, as he described it, was

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<sup>76</sup> New York Tribune, September 16, 1856; Wilson Shannon to Franklin Pierce, June 17, 1856, "Shannon Correspondence," pp. 386-89.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.      <sup>78</sup> New York Tribune, June 11, 1856.

plagued with more "perplexities and difficulties" than any other in the government. He prepared a letter of resignation and informed Daniel Woodson and others of his intention. His many friends among the proslavery party in the Lecompton area urged him to reconsider. To his subsequent profound regret, he agreed to remain in office.<sup>79</sup>

Following the curtailment of the June guerrilla warfare, Shannon was confronted with the possibility of a new crisis arising should the Free State legislature reconvene in Topeka on July 4 as scheduled. Since there was opposition within the free-state ranks to such an action under the prevailing circumstances--their leaders were either out of the territory or were incarcerated--the governor doubted that the legislature would assemble. Fearing the consequences if it did, he stated in a June 23 dispatch to Sumner:

I need not say to you that if this legislative body should reassemble on the 4th proximo, that those within and without the Territory who desire to bring about a conflict of arms between the two parties, would eagerly avail themselves of such an occasion to reorganize their military companies and commence hostilities against their political opponents. Indeed, it is impossible to doubt that if this body meets, enacts laws, and seeks to enforce them, that civil war will be the inevitable result. Two governments cannot exist at one and the same time in this Territory in practical operation.

Shannon added that the body was clearly illegal under the organic act establishing the territory. Therefore, if it did assemble at Topeka or elsewhere, he wanted Sumner to disperse it, "peaceably if you can, forcibly if you must." In closing, Shannon explained that he was leaving that day for St. Louis to make long-delayed

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<sup>79</sup>Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

arrangements for the construction of some public buildings in Leocompton. He planned to return before July 4.<sup>80</sup>

After reaching St. Louis on June 27, Shannon wired the President that peace had returned to the territory and could be maintained as long as a sizeable contingent of troops remained at his disposal. Shannon also informed Pierce of his decision to disperse the Topeka legislature if it met and included in his transmission a copy of Sumner's instructions.<sup>81</sup> There was no reply from Washington to the governor's telegram.

Shannon had arranged for his wife to meet him in St. Louis and accompany him to Kansas. Her arrival was delayed, however, and the governor was unable to make the thirty-hour return trip prior to July 4 as he had intended.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, when the unexpected happened and the Topeka legislature did convene, Acting Governor Daniel Woodson and Colonel Sumner had to cope with the situation. Woodson and Sumner shared Shannon's view that the actions of the free-state legislators constituted insurrection under the terms of President Pierce's February 11 Kansas proclamation.<sup>83</sup> Woodson, accordingly, prepared a proclamation banning the legislative sessions.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.; Shannon to Sumner, June 23, 1856, "Shannon Executive Minutes," pp. 315-16.

<sup>81</sup> Shannon to Pierce, June 27, 1856, ibid., pp. 317-18.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.; Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Woodson to Colonel E. V. Sumner, June 30, 1856, "Davis Report," p. 447; Sumner to Colonel S. Cooper [Adjutant General], August 11, 1856, ibid., pp. 450-51; Sumner to Cooper, August 31, 1856, ibid., pp. 452-53.



An accompanying statement noted that Sumner would enforce the proclamation.<sup>84</sup>

In an effort to avoid military involvement, United States Marshal Israel B. Donelson read the proclamations of Pierce and Woodson to both houses of the legislature on July 4. Only a few members responded by withdrawing from the chambers, so Sumner, who had a detachment standing by, intervened and personally ordered the assembly to disband. Those present promptly complied and no disturbances ensued.<sup>85</sup>

The dispersal of the Topeka legislature provoked a new antislavery press uproar about the federal reign of "despotism" in Kansas.<sup>86</sup> The administration reacted to the outcry by chastising Colonel Sumner for misinterpreting Pierce's proclamation and exceeding his instructions.<sup>87</sup> Pierce had known, of course, what Shannon had ordered Sumner to do on July 4 and had not objected. Colonel Sumner

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., pp. 449-50.

<sup>85</sup> Colonel E. V. Sumner to Colonel S. Cooper, July 7, 1856, ibid., pp. 448-49; Sumner to Cooper, August 11, 1856, ibid., pp. 450-52; New York Times, July 14, 18, 1856; New York Tribune, July 10, 14, 15, 19, 30, 1856; Cora Dolbee, "The Fourth of July in Early Kansas, 1854-1857," Kansas Historical Quarterly, I (1931-1932), 307-25.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-66; Boston Atlas, July 24, 1856, Webb Scrap Book, XV, 111; Hartford, Connecticut, The Courant, July 23, 1856, ibid., p. 93; Milwaukee Daily Sentinel, July 25, 1856, ibid., p. 119; New York Times, July 14, 18, 1856; New York Tribune, July 18, 19, 30, 1856.

<sup>87</sup> Colonel S. Cooper to Colonel E. V. Sumner, July 21, 1856, "Davis Report," p. 452; Sumner to Cooper, August 11, 1856, with indorsement by Jefferson Davis, August 27, 1856, ibid., pp. 450-52; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, p. 478.

obviously served as a convenient scapegoat.<sup>88</sup> Shannon's absence from the territory enabled him to escape the brunt of the press condemnation.<sup>89</sup> Although possible, it seems unlikely that he intentionally planned his trip to St. Louis in order to be absent from the territory on July 4. His readiness to confront controversial situations had been well-established.

With or without any impetus from adverse press notices, both Shannon and Sumner were about to be replaced. The controversial role of the military in Kansas had become such a concern of Congress in the aftermath of the "Sack of Lawrence" that the Senate had discussed the advisability of dispatching Lieutenant General Winfield Scott to the territory to take charge of the troops. Representatives of the Democratic Presidential nominee, James Buchanan, urged Pierce to send Scott to Kansas and to maintain a strong military presence there. Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, who needed more cavalry to fight the Indians, and proslavery lobbyists such as Missouri's

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<sup>88</sup> Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>89</sup> President Pierce and Colonel Sumner were the most prominent subjects for denunciation. A report in the New York Tribune, July 19, asserted: "Today, Franklin Pierce has done what has only been done thrice in the annals of history. Oliver Cromwell forcibly dissolved the Long Parliament; Napoleon . . . dispersed the National Assembly; and now, Franklin Pierce has employed the national troops to enter the hall of representatives of a free people, and drive them from it. That such despotism should have begun to form a part of our governmental policy, is a startling fact . . ." Also see ibid., July 14, 15, 18, 30, 1856; New York Times, July 14, 18, 1856; Dolbee, "The Fourth of July," pp. 64-66.

Benjamin Stringfellow called for a reduction in force.<sup>90</sup> Shannon's impartial use of federal troops had antagonized the "border ruffians."<sup>91</sup> Pierce reacted on June 27 to the various proposals by appointing a trusted friend, Brigadier General Persifer F. Smith, to head the Department of the West. That command included Kansas.<sup>92</sup> Shortly after Smith established his headquarters at Fort Leavenworth on July 7, Colonel Sumner departed on leave.<sup>93</sup>

By July, 1856, Wilson Shannon had become too much of a political liability in a presidential election year to be left in office. The politicians and the press, north and south, blamed him for many of the troubles in Kansas during the preceding twelve months. Proslavery spokesmen charged that the governor had been too lenient toward the abolitionist revolutionaries in the territory. Free-state men claimed that he had been too tyrannical. His removal would lift a millstone from the neck of the Democratic Party and, in particular, James Buchanan.<sup>94</sup> Yielding to entreaties from both factions, Pierce

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<sup>90</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, June 14, 19, 21, 1856; New York Tribune, June 14, 19, 21, 1856; New York Tribune, June 12, July 8, 1856; Washington Union, June 12, 1856; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 474-75.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.; New York Times, August 19, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, July 8, August 12, 1856; Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>92</sup> Jefferson Davis to Brigadier General P. F. Smith, June 27, 1856, "Davis Report," pp. 425-26.

<sup>93</sup> Major General Persifer F. Smith to Colonel S. Cooper, July 14, 1856, ibid., pp. 457-58.

<sup>94</sup> Shannon to "The American Public," October 2, 1856; New York Times, August 19, 1856; New York Tribune, July 7, 10, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, August 12, 1856; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, p. 59; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 478-790.

appointed John Geary on July 28 to replace Shannon. Geary, a former army officer and one-time mayor of San Francisco, was confirmed by the Senate on July 31, but did not arrive in Kansas until September 9.<sup>95</sup>

While his fate was being determined in Washington, Shannon was fully occupied with his responsibilities in Kansas. Territorial conditions remained fairly stable and peaceful from late June until the second week of August. Some minor disturbances persisted during the interval, but they did not stem primarily from partisan political disputes. Colonel Cooke, the Fort Riley commandant, informed Washington on June 18: "The disorders . . . have . . . changed their character, and consist now of robberies and assassinations, by a set of bandits whom the excitement of the times has attracted hither."<sup>96</sup> The "civil war" in Kansas was far from over, however.

During the latter part of June, rumors and press reports began circulating about a projected invasion of Kansas from the north by large, armed antislavery groups. James Lane and other free-state leaders had devoted the spring and early summer to speaking in the north and recruiting emigrants. Since the "border ruffians" were blockading the Missouri River, the free-staters devised an alternate land route through Iowa and Nebraska to be used by northern emigrant parties. By the end of July, a group of approximately 400

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 479; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, pp. 61-62; Squatter Sovereign, August 19, 26, 1856.

<sup>96</sup> Colonel P. St. George Cooke to Colonel S. Cooper, June 18, 1856, "Davis Report," pp. 443-44; Major General Persifer F. Smith to Colonel S. Thomas [Assistant Adjutant General], July 26, 1856, ibid., pp. 458; Smith to Thomas, August 1, 1856, ibid., pp. 458-59; New York Times, June 21, 1856; Malin, John Brown, pp. 117-22.

settlers had congregated in Nebraska City under the nominal direction of James Lane. Preceded earlier by a few small parties, the main body of antislavery emigrants, ominously dubbed "Lane's Army of the North" by the press, crossed the border into Kansas on August 7. Although most of the group were bona fide settlers, many of them were also well armed and were prepared to serve the free-state cause in whatever capacity they were needed.<sup>97</sup> They did constitute to some extent, therefore, an antislavery army invading the territory.

Some time before August 7, a proslavery spy had infiltrated Lane's camp. He returned to Kansas with an alarming report of the arms he had seen and the plans he had heard discussed. Shannon forwarded the information to General Smith at Fort Leavenworth and requested that the general "take the field with the whole disposable force in the Territory" to prevent Lane's threatened "invasion." Ignoring an abundance of evidence from Shannon, in the press, and from other sources, Smith concluded that the governor's anxieties were founded solely on exaggerated rumors. The general exercised the discretionary clause in his instructions and rejected Shannon's entreaty.<sup>98</sup>

Soon after entering Kansas, Lane left his "army" and hurried to Lawrence. He collected a large body of free-state partisans there

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<sup>97</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, August 30, 1856; New York Tribune, August 9, 11, 25, 30, 1856; Squatter Sovereign, July 15, August 5, 1856; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 510-22; Malin, John Brown, pp. 117-24; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 71-75.

<sup>98</sup> Major General Persifer F. Smith to Colonel S. Cooper, August 11, 1856, "Davis Report," p. 460; Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

and attacked the proslavery settlement of Franklin on August 12. This assault inaugurated the most intense, destructive period of the "Bleeding Kansas" trauma.<sup>99</sup> Still slow to react, General Smith finally ordered all of his troops into the field on August 22. A second pacification of the territory was not accomplished until late September after Shannon's departure.<sup>100</sup>

In the meantime, Governor Shannon engaged in one final act of statesmanship for the benefit of his unappreciative constituency. Several major skirmishes between the opposing forces occurred during the five days following the battle at Franklin. A few men were killed, many were wounded, and prisoners were taken by both sides.<sup>101</sup> The governor managed to persuade the leaders of the largest marauding bands to accept a truce on August 17. Shannon, Major John Sedgwick, who commanded a cavalry detachment near Lecompton, and several proslavery representatives met that same day with free-state leaders in Lawrence and negotiated a prisoner exchange and a peace agreement. The latter, unfortunately, was subsequently ignored.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.; Major General Persifer F. Smith to Colonel S. Cooper, August 22, 1856, "Davis Report," pp. 460-62; Major John Sedgwick to Major George Deas, Adjutant General, Department of the West, August 17, 1856, ibid., pp. 462-63; New York Tribune, August 21, 26, 28, September 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 16, 1856; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 522-24; Malin, John Brown, pp. 124-31; Stephenson, "Political Career of James Lane," pp. 75-80; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 483-86.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., pp. 485-86; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 524-32; Major General Persifer F. Smith to Colonel S. Cooper, August 22, 1856, "Davis Report," pp. 460-62.

<sup>101</sup> New York Tribune, September 16, 1856; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 524-35.

After the negotiations were concluded, a "thin," "care-worn," and "sober" Shannon delivered a brief farewell speech to the crowd that had gathered to ascertain the results of the meeting.

I wish . . . to set myself right before the people of Lawrence. I have been traduced and misrepresented through the press, my motives . . . have either been misunderstood or purposefully aspersed, and things have been said of me which never happened. I desire now to say, while I remain in office, that I have never done a single act but what I believed would best subserve the interests of the whole people. God knows, I have no ill feelings against any man in this Territory . . . .

I came down here for purposes of peace, to try and adjust a serious difficulty between the people now in the Territory. In a few days my successor will be among the people of this Territory; and I desire now to say that the last few days which remain of my continuance in office will be devoted . . . to the carrying out [of] the terms of agreement . . . . I trust that the result of this agreement will be the final settlement of all strife and difficulty . . . . Fellow citizens of Lawrence, before leaving you I desire to express my earnest desire for your health, happiness and prosperity. Farewell!<sup>102</sup>

Shannon returned to Lecompton late on August 17, having been highly alarmed by what he encountered in Lawrence. He dispatched a message to General Smith stating that over 800 men were gathered in the free-state center preparing to attack Lecompton. "It would seem," he declared, "that the business of 'wiping out,' as it is called, of the Pro-Slavery party has been commenced . . . . Under these circumstances, I have to request you to send from the fort all your disposable force."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>The conference and the speech are reported in New York Tribune, August 29, 1856. For the negotiations also see Major John Sedgwick to Major George Deas, August 17, 1856, "Davis Report," pp. 462-63.

<sup>103</sup>Shannon to Smith, August 17, 1856, ibid., pp. 461-62.

On August 18, the thoroughly demoralized governor addressed a note of resignation to the President. Although a notice of his removal from office had appeared in the Kansas Weekly Herald as early as August 9, Shannon had not yet been officially notified by the administration. He informed Pierce:

Having received unofficial information of my removal from office, and finding myself here without the moral power which official station confers, and being destitute of any adequate military force to preserve the peace of the country, I feel it due to myself, as well as to the Government, to notify you that I am unwilling to perform the duties of Governor of this Territory any longer.

You will therefore consider my official connection with this Territory as at an end.<sup>104</sup>

A few days later, he left the territory bound for the much more congenial environs of St. Clairsville, Ohio.

In the press reactions to Shannon's removal, the New York Tribune's Kansas correspondent, William A. Phillips, facetiously commented:

Poor Shannon's head at last falls into the bucket. If the Border Ruffians ducked him in the Kaw last night, according to promise, it would have been a magnificent termination to his gubernatorial dignity; a sublime apotheosis to his authority. Poor Shannon! He has done a great deal of dirty work for little thanks. Let Doughfaces and Pro-Slavery hookers generally read the lesson.<sup>105</sup>

The New York Times declared that "we are willing to swap without stopping to inquire: Who is Geary?" The Times also wondered if Shannon would stop at Westport to make another speech similar to the one he had made just prior to entering Kansas a year

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<sup>104</sup> Shannon to Pierce, August 18, 1856, "Shannon Correspondence," p. 403.

<sup>105</sup> New York Tribune, August 16, 1856.



earlier.<sup>106</sup> No more sympathetic was John Stringfellow's Squatter Sovereign, which remarked: "We attach little importance to the change, as we are still to be cursed with a Northern man."<sup>107</sup> In light of such typical commentaries, Shannon must have treasured Lucian Eastin's statement in the Kansas Weekly Herald.

We cannot refrain . . . from awarding all praise and honor to Gov. Shannon for the bold and independent course he pursued . . . and assuring him on retiring from office that he will long be remembered by the people of Kansas for his many noble and endearing virtues.<sup>108</sup>

On October 2, 1856, ex-Governor Shannon released a lengthy rebuttal to the multitude of charges preferred against him by the critics of his conduct in Kansas. The statement was published on that date in the St. Clairsville Gazette, and, subsequently, in the Washington National Intelligencer, November 29, 1856. Explaining that the administration had never informed him of the grounds for his removal, he expressed his opinion that the action implied an endorsement by the President of the assertions of his detractors. He felt compelled, therefore, to present his defense to the public. As key points, he noted that it was unthinkable after the Wakarusa War for him to call out the militia, that federal troops, in a practical sense, were not placed at his disposal by the February directives from the administration, and that some timely utilization of the troops was only possible because of Colonel Sumner's willingness to

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<sup>106</sup> New York Times, August 19, 1856.

<sup>107</sup> Squatter Sovereign, August 12, 1856.

<sup>108</sup> Kansas Weekly Herald, August 9, 1856.

exceed his instructions. In addition, Shannon commented on the inhibiting influence of his February instructions upon his course prior to the "Sack of Lawrence." Shannon also reviewed his unsuccessful efforts to prod General Persifer F. Smith into blocking the entrance of "Lane's Army of the North" into the territory and denounced the political pressures exerted in Washington against the use of federal troops to maintain peace in Kansas. Those pressures had intimidated General Smith and "paralyzed" the army. The central theme of Shannon's presentation was that the administration had failed to sustain him with the resources he required to cope effectively with the complex responsibilities of his office. His disgust with Pierce was bluntly expressed:

I now aver it to be true, and challenge contradiction, that from the day I was appointed up to the time of my removal, the only acts done by the President to preserve peace in the Territory, or insure the execution of the law, were the issuing of his proclamation last February, and his letter of instruction to me, accompanied by copies of the instructions to Col. Sumner and Col. Cooke of the same month . . . . I repeat that these are the only acts to which he can point as having any agency in the affairs of Kansas, unless indeed, the act of superceding [sic] Col. Sumner can be claimed as one.

Shannon's defense concluded with a "vindication of his private character" against the accusations of intemperance that the antislavery press and politicians had foisted upon him. His unequivocal rejoinder stated:

How this charge ever originated I know not. The truth is, it is seldom I ever taste spirituous liquor of any kind, and every one who knows me, either here at home, or while I resided in Kansas, will attest the truth of this declaration. The charge is basely false, false at all times and places, and no man who ever knew me, and my habits, ever made the charge.

An accompanying statement affirming his assertions was signed by

sixteen of his prominent Belmont County friends. The list included three former congressmen, William Kennon, William Kennon, Jr., and B. S. Cowen, a former United States Senator, Benjamin Ruggles, a Methodist preacher, R. E. Carothers, and a well-known abolitionist lawyer, Thomas H. Genin. Others named included former legislators of all parties and several lawyers.<sup>109</sup>

It is inconceivable that Shannon would issue such an avowal and permit his friends to endorse it publicly if his assertions were false. There is, in fact, nothing in the historical record either before or after his term as governor to sustain the charges of the antislavery propagandists. Regardless of the validity of Shannon's defense of his conduct in Kansas, the important point to Horace Greeley of the New York Tribune and his cohorts was that an "irresolute" proslavery territorial governor had been forced to return to private life.<sup>110</sup>

Neither his contemporaries nor historians have treated Wilson Shannon kindly in evaluating his conduct as governor of Kansas Territory.<sup>111</sup> As indicated in the preceding discussion of

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<sup>109</sup> Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856; Shannon to "The American Public," National Intelligencer, November 29, 1856.

<sup>110</sup> New York Tribune, September 8, 1856.

<sup>111</sup> For judgments by contemporaries see John H. Gihon, Geary and Kansas (Boston, 1857), pp. 53-65; Gladstone, The Englishman in Kansas, pp. 272-92; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 149-50, 163-73, 220-28; Charles Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 212-13, 240-63; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 87-88, 112-30, 146-59, 226-41, 256-58; Hanna Anderson Ropes, Six Months in Kansas (Boston, 1856), pp. 137-42. For judgments by historians see Jules Abels, Man on Fire: John Brown and the Cause of Liberty (New York, 1971), pp. 51-53, 99; Davis, Kansas,

his gubernatorial services, their adverse judgments of him frequently reflect a strong antislavery bias often coupled with an ignorance of some of the most relevant facts. Considering his position as a central figure of authority in an intensely controversial situation, the lack of objectivity among his contemporary judges is understandable. Unfortunately for Shannon's historical reputation, the most popular, widely read, contemporary publications on Kansas territorial affairs were written by antislavery partisans like William A. Phillips of the New York Times and Mrs. Charles Robinson.<sup>112</sup> These volumes are still available in many libraries.

James Malin, Paul W. Gates, Robert Johannsen, and a few other historians, while not concentrating on Shannon's role, have endeavored to correct the distortions prevailing in modern historical depictions of "Bleeding Kansas."<sup>113</sup> The revisionists have had only limited success. Recent monographs and textbooks continue to perpetuate antislavery viewpoints and clichés about drunken "border

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pp. 51, 61; Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, pp. 37-60; Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 389-90; Nichols, Franklin Pierce, pp. 478-79; Oates, To Purge This Land With Blood, p. 100; Rawley, Race and Politics, pp. 92, 158; Wendell H. Stephenson, "Wilson Shannon," DAB, VII 20-21.

<sup>112</sup>James Malin, "Notes on the Writing of General Histories of Kansas," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXI, No. 3 (Autumn, 1954), 184-223.

<sup>113</sup>For some of the more important revisionist writings see Berwanger, The Frontier Against Slavery; Gates, Fifty Million Acres; Robert W. Johannsen, "The Lecompton Constitutional Convention: An Analysis of Its Membership," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXIII, No. 3 (Autumn, 1957), 225-43; Johnson, Battle Cry of Freedom; Malin, John Brown; Malin, "Judge Lecompte and the 'Sack of Lawrence'"; Malin, "Proslavery Background"; Malin, "The Topeka Statehood Movement"; Nichols, Bleeding Kansas; Nichols, Franklin Pierce; Parrish, David Atchison; Rawley, Race and Politics.

ruffians," "wars," and "bloody battlefields."<sup>114</sup> Even when the discussion is relatively non-partisan, as in a text by Professors Harry J. Carman, Harold C. Syrett, and Bernard W. Wishy, readers are most likely to remember the illustration, reminiscent of the rape of the Sabine women, which accompanies the narrative of the "Sack of Lawrence."<sup>115</sup> James Malin's major revisionist study of John Brown, published in 1942, contains a fifty-seven page chapter whose subheading is "The June-July [1856] Peace."<sup>116</sup> It seems appropriate, therefore, to question David Potter's declaration in his recently published work, The Impending Crisis, that "throughout the summer and early fall of 1856, armies marched and counter-marched . . . ,"<sup>117</sup> or the similar assertion by Stephen B. Oates that "unbridled guerrilla war raged in the territory in June and

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<sup>114</sup> For examples see Abels, Man on Fire, pp. 50-53, 59, 88; Thomas H. O'Connor, The Disunited States: The Era of Civil War and Reconstruction (New York, 1975), pp. 50-56; Corder, Prelude to Civil War, pp. 17-18, 24-26, 73; Davis, Kansas, pp. 37-71; David Lindsey, Americans in Conflict: The Civil War and Reconstruction (Boston, 1974), p. 66; Oates, To Purge This Land With Blood, p. 157; Potter, The Impending Crisis, p. 213-14; Rawley, Race and Politics, pp. 99, 158; Thomas A. Bailey, The American Pageant: A History of the Republic (5th ed.; Lexington, Massachusetts, 1975), pp. 421-22; Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion: A History of the American Frontier (4th ed.; New York, 1974), pp. 515-17; John M. Blum, et. al., The National Experience (4th ed.; New York, 1977), pp. 303-05; James I. Clark and Robert V. Remini, We the People: A History of the United States (Beverly Hills, California, 1975), p. 284; Carl N. Degler, et. al., The Democratic Experience (3d ed.; 1973), pp. 226-27; John A. Garraty, The American Nation: A History of the United States (3d ed., New York, 1975), I, 376-79; Richard Hofstadter, et. al., The United States (4th ed.; Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1976), p. 275.

<sup>115</sup> Harry J. Carman, et. al., A History of the American People (3d ed.; New York, 1967), pp. 615-16.

<sup>116</sup> Malin, John Brown, pp. 117-69. <sup>117</sup> p. 213.

July, and neither Shannon nor the U. S. Army could check it."<sup>118</sup>

Potter and Oates are models of restraint compared to Ray A. Billington, however, who claims in his popular textbook on the American frontier that "for three months crops were neglected as bands of 'Border Ruffians' or nothern bushwackers roamed the territory, burning, pillaging, and murdering, until the sky over the war-torn region was alight from flaming dwellings."<sup>119</sup>

A partial explanation for the misrepresentations found in many recent publications is that scholars persist in confusing the image of "Bleeding Kansas" projected upon the national political scene by contemporary propogandists with the actual conditions in the territory. Although the exaggerated nature of contemporary accounts is frequently mentioned, two statistics usually cited by historians to demonstrate that Kansas really "bled" are that approximately 200 persons were killed and \$2,000,000 in property damages was incurred between the opening of settlement in 1854 and the fall of 1856. Those figures appear, for instance, in James F. Rhodes' classic work published in 1896, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850, and they are cited in recent volumes by Ray A. Billington, David Lindsey, James Rawley, and others.<sup>120</sup> Since most of the alleged bloodshed and destruction

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<sup>118</sup> Oates, To Purge This Land With Blood, p. 156.

<sup>119</sup> Billington, Westward Expansion, p. 517.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.; James Ford Rhodes, History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 (New York, 1896), II, 216; Lindsey, Americans in Conflict, p. 66; Rawley, Race and Politics, p. 160; Clark and Remini, We the People, p. 284; Hofstadter, et. al., The United States, p. 275; Garraty, The American Nation, p. 379.

occurred during Wilson Shannon's term as governor, the statistics and their validity are a significant consideration in evaluating his performance.

Studies published in recent years by two staff members of the Kansas State Historical Society, Nyle Miller and Robert Richmond, assert that fewer than sixty persons died during the entire territorial period (1854-1861) in incidents related to political controversies.<sup>121</sup> Only thirty-three killings were listed in a detailed chronology of territorial developments between May 27, 1854, and September 1, 1856, published in the New York Tribune, September 16, 1856. While contemporary press accounts cannot be considered wholly reliable, it is unlikely that the antislavery and proslavery editors overlooked many opportunities to eulogize new martyrs for their respective crusades. The total number of politically-oriented deaths reported in the territorial press (1854-1861) definitely falls within the "under sixty" figure claimed by Miller and Richmond. At least twenty of those slayings occurred after Shannon left office.<sup>122</sup> One or two good cowtown brawls or skirmishes with the Indians could produce a casualty list of that magnitude. Even amidst the more civilized environs of Louisville, Kentucky, election day riots in August, 1855, produced over

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<sup>121</sup> Nyle Miller, "Kansas Newspapers to 1900," Kansas: The First Century, ed. John D. Bright (New York, 1956), I, 511; Richmond, Kansas, p. 61.

<sup>122</sup> This evaluation is based upon the writer's survey of killings reported in the Herald of Freedom, Kansas Weekly Herald, Squatter Sovereign, and New York Tribune.

twenty-five fatalities on that single day.<sup>123</sup> The same newspapers carrying headlines about the "war" in Kansas in the summer of 1856 contained headlines about the "war" (with the Indians) in Oregon, about vigilante committee violence in California, and about election day riots in New Orleans.<sup>124</sup> Placed, as it should be, in the general context of American society in 1855-1856, the number of lives lost in the territorial political controversy indicates that, relatively speaking, "Bleeding Kansas" exhibited a modest puncture wound rather than a ruptured artery.

Both the estimates of killings and of property damages in "Bleeding Kansas" apparently originated in a report prepared for the Kansas legislature in 1859 by a claims commission. The legislature hoped to secure reimbursement from the national government for territorial residents who had incurred losses during the disturbances arising between November 1, 1855 and December 1, 1856. An earlier, poorly managed investigation had been conducted in 1857 by H. J. Strickler, a general in the territorial militia. Strickler had received and evaluated 357 claims totaling \$301,225 and had allowed \$254,279. The 1859 commission, headed by Edward Hoogland,

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., August 9, 13, 1855; Ohio Statesman, August 9, 1855; Washington Union, August 17, 1855.

<sup>124</sup> Daily Missouri Democrat, June 19, July 15, 19, 1856; National Intelligencer, June 27, July 3, August 7, 15, 18, 1856; New York Tribune, June 13, 14, 16, July 15, 29, August 30, 1856. The Squatter Sovereign, June 10, 1856, contained an article about the massacre of five settlers on Pottowatomi Creek and another article about the brutal slaying of a family of seven in Missouri. The bodies of the father, mother and five children were left in their home which was set on fire by the murderers.



received claims in the amount of \$438,950 from 463 citizens. The commission ultimately validated 417 claims totaling \$412,987. Claims were not submitted in 1859 by 161 persons who had done so in 1857.<sup>125</sup>

While the statistics compiled by the two investigations undoubtedly do not reflect all of the damages inflicted in 1856, they surely offer a helpful basis for making a general estimate. Included in the 1859 claims approved are those for some of the largest known losses such as the Lawrence Free State hotel (\$49,772), Charles Robinson's home (\$23,953), and the Herald of Freedom press equipment (\$12,569). The 1859 commission's assertion that damages "could not have been less than . . . \$2,000,000" seems quite extravagant in light of their own statistics. Since the purpose of the report was to gain sympathy and reimbursement for the claimants, inflated estimates were desirable, of course. On the basis of the findings of the inquiries and of the detailed accounts of territorial affairs provided by contemporaries and such historians as William Connelley and Daniel Wilder, \$1,000,000 would seem to be a generous estimate of the total losses incurred by the early Kansas settlers.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>"Report of Gen. A. J. Strickler, Commissioner for Auditing Claims for Kansas Territory" (cited hereafter as "Strickler Report"), Herald of Freedom, January 22, 1859; "Report of Edward Hoogland, Henry J. Adams, and Samuel A. Kingman, Commissioners of Claims" (cited hereafter as "Hoogland Report"), ibid., July 16, 1859.

<sup>126</sup>ibid.; Sara Robinson, Kansas; Phillips, Conquest of Kansas; Connelley, Kansas and Kansans, I, 306-554; Wilder, Annals, pp. 43-253.

As a final consideration in judging the extent of the territorial trauma while Wilson Shannon was governor, it should be noted that over 20,000 settlers were in Kansas by the fall of 1855 and large numbers followed in 1856.<sup>127</sup> Most of the violent partisan encounters occurring in 1855-1856 involved small groups totaling fewer than twenty-five men. The largest confrontation at Lawrence in December, 1855, brought forth 2500 participants.<sup>128</sup> The obvious conclusion is, as Charles Correll observes,

. . . that the great majority of the settlers in the new territory were busy on their claims breaking the sod, raising crops, building their shanties, and getting their families established, while the disorders that gave the territory its reputation as "Bleeding Kansas" . . . involved only a small part of the population.<sup>129</sup>

Ely Moore, Jr., a prominent early Kansan, once remarked, ". . . had Shannon possessed the wisdom of Solomon and the courage of Caesar, he could not have successfully administered the affairs of Kansas during his gubernatorial incumbency."<sup>130</sup> Not only Shannon, but five other governors and five acting governors who endeavored to rule Kansas during its brief territorial period, 1854-1861, could attest to the difficulties of their office. Although most of them possessed considerable ability, they all experienced more failures

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<sup>127</sup> John Calhoun to William L. Marcy, February 16, 1856, "Shannon Administration," p. 261; Lynch, "Popular Sovereignty and the Colonization of Kansas," pp. 380-88.

<sup>128</sup> New York Tribune, September 16, 1856; Wilder, Annals, pp. 43-112.

<sup>129</sup> Correll, "The Kansas Territory," p. 105.

<sup>130</sup> Ely Moore, Jr., "The Story of Lecompton," KSHS Collections, XI, 470.

than successes in discharging their gubernatorial responsibilities.<sup>131</sup>

It was Shannon's great misfortune to take charge of Kansas just as the free-state movement began to implement actively its policy of repudiating territorial laws and officials and to institute its own independent political system. This "secessionist," insurrectionary activity would be intolerable to any established government, yet the nation's antislavery spokesmen insisted that the free-state men had formed the territory's only legitimate political structure. Because of President Pierce's non-intervention policy vis-a-vis the internal affairs of Kansas, the entire responsibility for coping with the incredibly complex and awkward territorial situation rested on the shoulders of Wilson Shannon.

The governor's Jeffersonian states' rights convictions, his lifelong antipathy to the antislavery movement, and the authority under which he assumed office inescapably associated him with the established territorial government and its proslavery leaders. Although he had strong political and social beliefs, Shannon always placed them in the context of a firm commitment to justice and the rule of law in human society. He acknowledged the legitimacy of the

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<sup>131</sup> Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, provides an extensive sketch of the services of each governor. A list of the governors and the dates of their terms of office is on pp. 140-43. Four governors and three acting governors had already served in Kansas by January, 1858, when the Leavenworth Weekly Times, January 9, 1858, reported that at a gathering with some friends in New York ex-Governor Reeder had remarked, ". . . We think of calling a convention of the Governors of Kansas, in order to compare notes and decide upon some plan to quiet agitation and settle the affairs of 'Bleeding Kansas.'" One friend replied "Well, I think you are likely to have a full meeting."

major free-state grievances against the proslavery legislature, the fraudulent voting involved in the legislative elections and the offensive nature of the slave codes enacted. Furthermore, he responded positively by informing the free-state men that the obnoxious laws were a "dead letter" and by urging that the election results be rectified by recourse to the federal courts and the ballot box. When the free-staters finally acted as he had suggested and rejoined the normal political process in 1857, they won control of the legislature and dominated the territory's political evolution thereafter.<sup>132</sup> There was, however, no acceptance by antislavery leaders in 1855-1856 of such a rational procedure.

In deed as well as word, Shannon attempted to establish his honorable, humane policies. He solicited pledges from the proslavery men at the Leavenworth "Law and Order" convention that intervention in territorial affairs by non-residents would be opposed. He negotiated a peaceful end to the Wakarusa War and applied the lessons learned from that experience. He left the territorial militia in limbo thereafter and he assured the free-state leaders that he expected them to abide by only the criminal and civil laws generally accepted in American society.<sup>133</sup> He pleaded with the administration to authorize him to use the federal troops, the only viable force available in Kansas to sustain a peaceful, orderly society.

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<sup>132</sup>Robinson, Kansas Conflict, pp. 344-69.

<sup>133</sup>Charles Robinson to G. W. Brown, February 14, 1856, Herald of Freedom, February 16, 1856.

As a reward for his dedicated efforts, Shannon was ridiculed, villified, and treated with contempt by partisans of both territorial factions. Robert Johannsen's description of Stephen A. Douglas' plight in the Senate in 1856 depicts Shannon's dilemma as well: "Each concession to the arguments of the opposition was greeted by taunts and sarcasm rather than by the spirit of conciliation he had hoped to promote."<sup>134</sup>

Shannon discovered that both the proslavery and free-state parties were committed to the dubious moral premise that "the end justifies the means." The supposedly virtuous New Englanders led by Charles Robinson proved to be just as duplicitous as Atchison's "border ruffians." In that connection, James Christian, the law partner in 1858 of James Lane, once declared that Wilson Shannon was the most "lied upon" man in the territory.<sup>135</sup> The free-state "tracts" published in 1856 by Mrs. Charles Robinson and William Phillips offer abundant evidence to support Christian's contention.<sup>136</sup>

In October, 1856, Shannon wrote: "Had the terms of the [Wakarusa War] settlement been adhered to in good faith, the Territory would this day be in a prosperous and happy condition instead of being torn to pieces by violence and civil war." In Shannon's opinion, the

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<sup>134</sup>Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas, p. 528.

<sup>135</sup>James Christian, "The First Sacking of Lawrence," Lawrence, Kansas, Western Home Journal, May 27, 1875. For comments on Christian see James Malin, "Judge LeCompte and the 'Sack of Lawrence,'" p. 581-82.

<sup>136</sup>Phillips, Conquest of Kansas, pp. 114-18, 165-70, 223-28, 323-26; Sara Robinson, Kansas, pp. 87-88, 92, 104, 112-118, 147-54, 227, 238, 256-58.

key item in the peace treaty was the agreement by the free-state representatives to cease their resistance to normal legal processes.<sup>137</sup> Since the major traumatic episodes during his governorship, the Wakarusa War and the "Sack of Lawrence," resulted directly from specific acts of resistance to the legal authority of Sheriff Jones of Douglas County or the United States Marshal and his deputies, Shannon's views may be valid. The excessive proslavery response to those free-state actions created the climate and triggered the retaliatory movements which produced "Bleeding Kansas." "Governor" Charles Robinson positively gloats in his memoir, The Kansas Conflict, about the success the free-state men had in goading the "border ruffians" into reactions which disgraced the proslavery cause and supplied abundant resources for the imaginative pens of the antislavery propagandists.<sup>138</sup>

As Wilson Shannon learned and his successor, John Geary, demonstrated, orderly conditions in the territory could only be maintained with the aid of an adequate complement of strategically placed federal troops.<sup>139</sup> Governor Shannon persistently advocated such a policy, of course, but the administration refused to provide the resources he so desperately needed. The consequences were tragic for Shannon, Kansas, and the nation. Two partisan groups, each pursuing its own version of the "higher law," made confrontation

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<sup>137</sup> Shannon to "The American Public," St. Clairsville Gazette, October 2, 1856.

<sup>138</sup> pp. 216-19, 256-58, 260-61.

<sup>139</sup> Connelley, Kansas Territorial Governors, pp. 61-93.

rather than compromise a recurring territorial experience in 1855-1856. Due significantly to the governor's statesmanlike efforts and influence, actual bloodshed and property damages during his year in office were kept to relatively modest proportions in comparison to the consequences of violence occurring in some other territories and in some states.<sup>140</sup>

George W. Brown, editor of the Lawrence Herald of Freedom, had his press destroyed during the "Sack" and was one of the free-state leaders arrested and detained in a camp near Lecompton. After reflecting for many months upon the course of territorial events in 1856, Brown published in his revived journal an exceedingly fair and perceptive evaluation of Shannon's conduct as governor:

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<sup>140</sup>"The Year of Violence: 1855" is the title of a chapter in Allan Nevins' Ordeal of the Union. In addition to referring to election-day riots in Louisville and New Orleans, he notes that there were also bloody, destructive riots in Cincinnati, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, and elsewhere. Participants were often armed with muskets, pistols, knives, and clubs. Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, II, 404. There were three major riots in Baltimore in 1856. In just one of them, five men were killed and forty-five injured. Richard Hofstadter and Michael Wallace, eds., American Violence: A Documentary History (New York, 1970), pp. 93-94. Conditions were so disorderly in San Francisco in 1855-1856 that a Second Vigilance Committee was established in May, 1856, to restore order. Over 100 persons had been murdered in the city in the six months prior to the committee's creation. Gertrude Atherton, California (rev. ed.: rpt. Freeport, New York, 1971), pp. 170-217. During the summer of 1856, violence reigned on the frontier in Oregon, Washington, and Florida where the United States Army waged war on the Indians. New York Tribune, May 17, July 1, 1856. Forms of violence other than those inflicted by one man upon another also seemed to diminish the magnitude of the travails of "Bleeding Kansas." Sixty-six people were killed, for instance, in a railroad accident in July, 1856. That same month, a boiler explosion on a coastal passenger steamboat killed six and seriously injured sixteen. Ibid., July 26, 28, 30, 31, 1856. It is obvious that violence, in various forms, was experienced by many Americans in 1855-1856.

Gov. Shannon . . . , with proper advise [sic] and backing from Washington . . . would have made a Very good governor. Very many of his official acts deserve reprobation, and probably are partially ascribable to the unwise policy of the Free State party in keeping wholly aloof from him, while the Pro-slavery party always had access to his ear . . . . Had the Free State party pursued the same policy towards him they did towards Reeder, or have subsequently towards Governors Geary and Walker, we might have expected different action on his part. Looking back upon his entire administration, and knowing many things of him which has [sic] never reached the public, we are frank to admit, that if he had been sustained, as he should have been by Washington, and been advised instead of reprimanded and loaded down with unreasonable instructions, such as no man could execute, he might . . . have been our Governor still, and been giving very general satisfaction.<sup>141</sup>

Several Years later, Shannon, himself, had the final say about his gubernatorial ordeal. "Govern the Kansas of 1855 and '56," he exclaimed, "you might as well have attempted to govern the devil in hell."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Herald of Freedom, November 14, 1857. For a description of Brown's experiences see Ibid., November 1, 1856.

<sup>142</sup> Spring, Kansas, p. 187.



## Chapter VII

### EPILOGUE: THE "FOREMOST" LAWYER IN KANSAS

The twenty years following Wilson Shannon's resignation from the governorship of Kansas Territory constitute in many ways the most remarkable period in a life filled with notable experiences. At the age of fifty-five when most men in the mid-nineteenth century were contemplating retirement, Shannon moved his family and his legal career to the relatively rough frontier setting of Kansas. Situated among many people who had considered him a bitter enemy in 1856, he proceeded to earn their respect and even affection. After just a few years in Kansas, he had established himself as its preeminent general legal practitioner.<sup>1</sup> While he resolutely refused invitations to run for public office, he accepted the role of "Grand Old Man" of the Kansas Democracy and contributed as best he could to the building of a strong Democratic Party in the territory and state.<sup>2</sup> There is little indication that he slowed down much in any of his activities until he was well into his seventies.

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<sup>1</sup>Lawrence Daily Tribune, August 31, 1877.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., August 20, 28, 1864, September 21, 1866; Lecompton Kansas National Democrat, August 20, 1857, August 4, 18, October 6, 1859, August 28, 1864; Topeka Kansas State Record, September 11, 1872; Wilder, Annals, pp. 376, 444, 578, 585.

After leaving Kansas under considerable duress in August, 1856, Shannon remained at his home in St. Clairsville only until the end of the year. He had decided that, despite his traumatic experiences as governor of "Bleeding Kansas," the territory provided the best prospects for his future welfare and that of his family. During the first week of January, 1857, Shannon reappeared on the streets of Lecompton.<sup>3</sup>

Before the end of August, 1857, the former territorial governor had formed a law partnership with Robert S. Stevens.<sup>4</sup> Stevens was a prominent figure in Kansas business affairs during the late 1850's and early 1860's. He headed the Lecompton Town Corporation in 1857-1858 and was deeply involved in various territorial land speculations. During the winters of 1858 and 1859, Stevens was in Washington promoting the land interests of his clients with the General Land Office and with the Congress.<sup>5</sup> His prolonged absences probably forced Shannon to assume responsibility for more than his share of the firm's business.

Shannon's office was conveniently situated in Lecompton next door to the government land office, which opened for business on

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<sup>3</sup> Lecompton Daily Union, January 8, 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Kansas National Democrat, August 20, 1857.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., July 30, August 20, 1857, June 17, July 22, August 19, 26, 1858, May 12, 1859; R. S. Stevens to O. C. Brown, August 21, 1858, February 18, 1860, Orville C. Brown Papers, Kansas State Historical Society; R. S. Stevens to James Denver, April 25, May 24, 1858, James Denver Papers, Kansas State Historical Society.

September 1, 1857.<sup>6</sup> In addition to promoting their own land investments, Shannon and Stevens acted as brokers for land sales for many other individuals. The volume of their business is indicated by an advertisement in the Leocompton Kansas National Democrat, January 13, 1859, in which they offered over 15,000 acres for sale. Sometime during the latter part of 1859 the two men apparently decided to practice alone and dissolved their partnership.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Shannon's concentration on legal matters related to land sales, his talents before the bar led to his involvement between 1858 and 1862 in several highly publicized cases of a different nature. In one of the most significant cases he undertook, he defended in 1858 his old free-state nemesis, James Lane, against a charge of murder. Lane and another free-state leader, Gaius Jenkins, had engaged in a prolonged dispute early in 1858 over ownership of a section of land near Lawrence. Finally, an armed confrontation occurred on June 3, 1858, and Lane fatally wounded Jenkins. Shannon was one of three lawyers hired by the defense. At the trial, held from June 15 to June 30 in Lawrence, the defense contended that Jenkins had no right to the disputed claim, that he had harassed Lane, and that Lane had acted in self-defense. The arguments were persuasively presented and the defendant was acquitted "in consequence of the failure of 'probable' proof to show that the crime of 'willful murder' had been committed by

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<sup>6</sup> Kansas National Democrat, August 26, 1858; Wilder, Annals, p. 134.

<sup>7</sup> Kansas National Democrat, December 15, 1859.

General Lane."<sup>8</sup>

The following year, 1859, Shannon acted as the defense attorney in another trial that received much newspaper publicity. During the latter part of the 1850's, the free-state center of Lawrence served as a home for several free blacks and as a temporary refuge for many fugitive slaves from Missouri. Dr. John Doy was one of the citizens of Lawrence active in assisting the fugitives to proceed farther north to permanent freedom. On January 25, 1859, Dr. Doy and his son left Lawrence driving two wagons containing eleven free blacks and two escaped slaves. Their destination was Iowa. The caravan had not gone far before it was stopped by a band of Missourians and forced to proceed to Weston, Missouri. Doy and his son were subsequently incarcerated in the jail at Platte City, Missouri, charged with "abducting niggers."

There was a strong reaction among Kansans against the "kidnapping" of the Doy's. The legislature went so far as to pass an act directing the governor to employ counsel for the defendants and appropriating \$1,000 to cover expenses. The former editor in the late 1830's and 1840's of the Columbus Ohio Statesman, Samuel Medary, was governor of Kansas Territory in 1859. Fully conversant with Wilson Shannon's legal talents, Medary picked the former Ohioan

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<sup>8</sup>William Connelley, "The Lane-Jenkins Claim Contest," KSHS Collections, XVI, 21-176. This article contains a compilation of all of the most relevant documents concerning the claim dispute and Lane's trial. Among the documents included are the lawyers' briefs presented at the trial. Also see Herald of Freedom, June 5, 19, 26, July 2, 24, 31, 1858, March 26, 1859; Lawrence Republican, July 1, 1858.

and the territory's attorney general, A. C. Davis, to serve as the Doys' counsel.

Shannon's first act was to ask for a change of venue for the proposed trial from Platte City to St. Joe, Missouri, where he thought a more "objective" climate existed. The request was granted and the trial began on March 26. The prosecution was so poorly executed that the defense was able to demonstrate that the Doys were at work in Lawrence at the time they were alleged to have been aiding fugitive slaves. The trial ended in a hung jury, with eleven of the twelve jurors voting for acquittal.

Dr. Doy was retained in custody while his son was released and a new trial for the elder Doy was scheduled for June 20. Confronted by a prosecution which was much better prepared for the second trial, Shannon failed to prevent a verdict of guilty. The defendant was given a five-year prison sentence. Such a result was unacceptable to Lawrence's antislavery men, however, and they determined to have the last word on the Doy affair. On July 23, ten stalwart Lawrencians freed Doy from the St. Joe jail and returned in triumph to the Kansas free-state center.<sup>9</sup>

The Lane murder trial and the Doy trials were the most famous court cases involving prominent Kansas figures in the late

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<sup>9</sup>An excellent discussion of all aspects of the Doy affair is in Theodore Gardiner, "An Episode in Early Kansas History: The Doy Rescue," Twenty-fourth Biennial Report of the Kansas State Historical Report of the Kansas State Historical Society (Topeka, 1924), pp. 68-75. For press accounts see Daily Missouri Democrat, March 29, 31, 1859; Herald of Freedom, February 5, 26, March 5, 26, April 2, July 30, 1859; Lawrence Republican, February 3, 10, 17, 24, March 31, April 7, June 30, July 28, 1859. For Samuel Medary's appointment as territorial governor see Wilder, Annals, p. 190.

1850's. As a major participant on behalf of the defense in both instances, Shannon played a role which forced many of his former free-state critics to evaluate him much more favorably than had seemed possible previously.

In 1861, Shannon again demonstrated a remarkable ability to convert his bitterest free-state enemies into trusting friends by acting as a lawyer for former free-state governor, Charles Robinson. After years of frustration, Kansas had finally been admitted as a state to the Union in January, 1861. In anticipation of favorable congressional action on the statehood petition, state officers had already been chosen in elections held December 1, 1859. Robinson, the choice for governor, assumed office in February, 1861.<sup>10</sup>

As had been true throughout the territorial period, Robinson and James Lane continued in the early 1860's to struggle for dominance in Kansas political affairs. Lane's political influence received a major boost when he was elected United States Senator on April 4, 1861, by the legislature. After publicly attacking Robinson's capabilities and integrity on several occasions in 1861, Lane and his followers attempted to unseat the governor at the end of that year by resorting to a technicality in the state constitution. They claimed that, since Robinson had been elected in December, 1859, he had served the two-year term prescribed in the constitution. The Lane faction conducted a new election for state officers on November 5, 1861, and insisted that the results be accepted as official. The State

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<sup>10</sup>Wilson, Governor Charles Robinson, pp. 70-72.

Board of Canvassers, headed by Charles Robinson, threw out the results. When the Lane men appealed the board's action to the Kansas State Supreme Court, Robinson turned to Shannon to protect the rights of the "legitimate" state officials. The Supreme Court readily accepted Shannon's argument that Robinson's term as governor had not started until he assumed office and, on January 14, 1862, rejected the Lane faction's petition.<sup>11</sup>

Within a few months, Shannon was once again acting as Charles Robinson's attorney. Having failed with one ploy to unseat the governor, the Lane men tried another, the impeachment process. A long drought in Kansas in 1859-1860 had had a devastating impact upon the economic welfare of the territory's citizens and government. Soon after Kansas was admitted to the Union in 1861, the legislature tried to raise badly needed operational funds by approving two bond issues totalling \$170,000 in value. When private brokers were unable to sell the bonds, Governor Charles Robinson, Secretary of State John W. Robinson, and Auditor George S. Hillyer were authorized to arrange for the sales. No progress was made until Shannon's former law partner, Robert S. Stevens, became involved in the sales effort. He purchased \$29,000 worth of the bonds for forty cents on the dollar and arranged to sell his purchase and most of the other bonds to the United States Department of the Interior at a price of eighty-five cents on the dollar. Under the terms of his employment as a sales agent for the state, Stevens retained twenty-five cents

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 68-84; White Cloud Kansas Chief, January 16, 23, 1862.

out of each dollar's worth of state bonds be sold. Hillyer and John Robinson had worked with Stevens in Washington to consummate the transaction. They thought they had done as well as could be expected in light of the state's low economic rating with investors.

Once the details of the bond sales became widely known in Kansas, however, many citizens thought the state had been badly cheated by Stevens. Unfortunately for Governor Robinson, he was involved in some joint business ventures with Stevens. James Lane and his supporters used that connection to allege that the three state officials charged with managing the bond sales had conspired with Stevens to defraud the state out of much of the funds it should have received from the sales. Following a brief investigation by a special committee, the Lane-dominated legislature adopted resolutions impeaching the two Robinsons and Hillyer.<sup>12</sup>

In their trials held in Topeka during the first week in June, 1863, both John Robinson and George Hillyer were removed from office upon being found guilty of knowingly letting the state be defrauded in the bond sales. At Governor Robinson's trial, which followed on June 16, Wilson Shannon conducted the defense. Testimony in the two previous trials had clearly shown that the more questionable aspects of the arrangements with Stevens had been made in Washington by John Robinson and Hillyer without the governor's involvement or approval. Consequently, Shannon addressed the Kansas Senate for

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<sup>12</sup>Wilson, Governor Charles Robinson, pp. 85-92; Lawrence Republican, February 13, March 13, May 8, 1862; White Cloud Kansas Chief, February 13, 20, 27, March 6, 1862.



just five minutes to reiterate the obvious fact that no evidence of Governor Robinson's complicity in the affair existed. The vote was eighteen to three for acquittal. While the case did not place much of a demand upon Shannon's legal talents, his participation in it did reflect the prestige he had attained in Kansas legal circles.<sup>13</sup>

Many years later, in 1874, Shannon again acted as a defense attorney in the impeachment trial of a state official, Kansas treasurer Josiah Hayes. Hayes was charged with misusing state funds, with misrepresenting the "true condition" of the treasury to a board of examiners, and with numerous other irregularities in discharging his responsibilities. Before the preliminary actions in the trial were completed in May, 1874, Hayes resigned. The Kansas Senate then promptly terminated its prosecution of the case.<sup>14</sup>

In May, 1862, just prior to the first impeachment trials, Shannon moved his family from Lecompton to Lawrence. Since the state's governmental and legal activities were centered by that time in Lawrence and Topeka, it was inconvenient for Shannon to remain in Lecompton.<sup>15</sup> The former proslavery territorial governor remained in Lawrence and practiced law there alone or with his sons, Wilson, Jr., and Osburn, until his death in 1877. He became

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., June 12, 26, 1862; Lawrence Republican, June 19, 26, July 3, 1862; Cortez A. M. Ewing, "Early Kansas Impeachments," Kansas Historical Quarterly, I, No. 4 (August, 1932), 307-25; Wilson, Governor Charles Robinson, pp. 92-95.

<sup>14</sup>Lawrence Tribune, March 7, May 14, 1874; Cortez A. M. Ewing, "Notes on Two Kansas Impeachments," Kansas Historical Quarterly, XXIII, No. 3 (Autumn, 1957), 281-85; Wilder, Annals, pp. 642-644.

<sup>15</sup>Lawrence Republican, May 8, 1862.

a neighbor and esteemed friend of many of his former free-state adversaries.<sup>16</sup>

Elliott V. Banks, who served as the reporter for the Kansas State Supreme Court in the latter part of the 1860's, was a young lawyer living in Lawrence in 1862. In a letter written on May 3 to a friend in New York, Banks described the members of the Lawrence bar and rated their capabilities. His assessments of Wilson Shannon and his son were particularly informative. The letter stated:

First among the list I will mention Gov. Shannon and Son [Wilson Shannon, Jr.] . . . . This old gentleman is a grave dignified gentlemanly man, a first rate lawyer, as good as any in the state, a measured positive talker who makes his gestures with his whole arm and outstretched forefinger, ingenious long-headed and full of fun--not in his speeches but by way of pointed side remarks when the rest are talking . . . . He goes in . . . in general principals--as one has to here. He is tall well built but not fat or handsome, looks a little old, has a strong manly deep voice and looks somewhat farmer-like in appearance and dress . . . . His son is about 22--a graduate, fat--a little thick and lazy but sensible and clever goodnatured and observing the green in practice. Will grow into a solid man . . . . The Shannons have as large a practice as any . . . .

The letter listed nineteen other lawyers practicing in Lawrence.<sup>17</sup>

During the 1860's and early 1870's, Shannon appeared regularly before the Kansas State Supreme Court in Topeka and the state's Fourth District court, which held its sessions in Lawrence. The impressive, diversified list of clients that he represented

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<sup>16</sup>Lawrence Tribune, August 31, 1877; Lawrence Western Home Journal, September 6, 1877; Lawrence Jeffersonian Gazette, April 11, 1901.

<sup>17</sup>Elliott V. Banks to John Hutchings, May 3, 1862, Banks Papers.

before the state Supreme Court included the state of Kansas,<sup>18</sup> the Union Pacific Railway Company,<sup>19</sup> the Educational Association of Christian Churches of Kansas,<sup>20</sup> James DeLong (mayor of Leavenworth),<sup>21</sup> the commissioners of Miami County,<sup>22</sup> Mary E. Lane (wife of James Lane),<sup>23</sup> and the United States of America.<sup>24</sup>

In one of his most unusual state Supreme Court cases, Shannon revealed a high degree of commitment to the code of chivalry by defending, in 1865, the honor of a Wyandotte County madam, Annis Dey. Miss Dey sued one of her customers, John T. Swartzel, for slander because, in a fit of anger, he told her, "Shut your mouth, you damned whore." Damages of \$2,000 were awarded to the aggrieved lady in the original trial in the Wyandotte District court. Swartzel appealed the verdict on the basis that the damages were excessive.

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<sup>18</sup>The State of Kansas, ex rel. F. G. Hunt v. Calvin Meadows, Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Courts of the State and Territory of Kansas (2d ed.; Topeka, 1881), I, 91-98 (hereafter cited as Kansas Reports).

<sup>19</sup>Commissioners of Douglas County and Others v. Union Pacific Railway Company, ibid., V, 374-79.

<sup>20</sup>Educational Association of Christian Churches of Kansas v. A. Hitchcock, ibid., IV, 29-34.

<sup>21</sup>Independence Town Company v. James DeLong, ibid., XI, 123-30.

<sup>22</sup>Commissioners of Miami County v. Robert Brackenridge, ibid., XII, 96-103.

<sup>23</sup>Mary E. Lane v. National Bank of the Metropolis, ibid., VI, 49-52.

<sup>24</sup>The United States v. Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Galveston Railroad Company, Appearance Docket B, Second Circuit Court of the United States, District of Kansas, pp. 135-51, Federal Records Center, Kansas City, Missouri.

The Supreme Court agreed and ordered the district court to hold a new trial.<sup>25</sup>

Wilson Shannon's most significant case and greatest triumph in his distinguished legal career was the Osage ceded lands case which was in litigation from 1870 to 1876. During the 1860's, the Osage Indians ceded in trust to the United States Government several million acres of tribal lands in southeastern Kansas. The lands were to be sold by the government and the proceeds given to the Indians. By the end of 1867, over 10,000 settlers had staked claims on the Osage lands and were making payments. In the meantime, lobbyists for two railroad corporations, the Leavenworth, Lawrence, and Galveston Railroad Company and the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad Company, succeeded in securing congressional legislation granting a right of way for the two lines through the Osage ceded lands. The right of way consisted of a ten-mile-wide strip of land covering nearly one million acres.

After Congress and the Department of the Interior refused to block the railroad land grab, a Settlers' Protective Association was formed by the thousands of individuals threatened with displacement and they began a suit at the district court level to protect their interests. As the case slowly proceeded through the courts on its way on appeal to the United States Supreme Court, the settlers turned, in 1873, to Wilson Shannon to direct their legal strategy. H. C. McComas, J. E. McKeighan, and Jeremiah S. Black were other

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<sup>25</sup> John T. Swartzel v. Annis Dey, Kansas Reports, III, 238-43.

prominent lawyers also hired by the settlers.<sup>26</sup> According to the Lawrence Republican, however, Shannon was the key figure in preparing the briefs for the United States Circuit Court and Supreme Court presentations.<sup>27</sup>

In June, 1874, Shannon argued the settlers' case successfully before the United States Circuit Court for Kansas. Slightly over a year later, in October, 1875, Jeremiah S. Black, made the final presentation before the United States Supreme Court. The right of the settlers to retain their lands was upheld.<sup>28</sup> The favorable results for the settlers converted the former villainous proslavery governor of "Bleeding Kansas," Wilson Shannon, into a state hero. The case was a highly fitting climax to his legal career.<sup>29</sup>

Although Shannon devoted himself to his law practice during the last twenty years of his life, he also was involved intermittently in Democratic political activities. He refused to run for public office, but presided at several territorial and state conventions.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>C. E. Cory, "The Osage Ceded Lands," KSHS Transactions, VIII, 187-99; Wilder, Annals, p. 645.

<sup>27</sup>Lawrence Republican, August 31, 1877. For Shannon's role also see Wilson Shannon to the Editor, n. d., Topeka Daily Commonwealth, December 19, 1873.

<sup>28</sup>Lawrence Tribune, August 23, 1874; Leavenworth Daily Times, April 11, 1876; Wilder, Annals, p. 645.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., August 31, 1877.

<sup>30</sup>Kansas National Democrat, August 18, 1859; Lawrence Tribune, September 21, 1866; Topeka Commonwealth, June 11, 1872; Topeka Kansas State Record, September 11, 1872; Western Home Journal, September 19, 1872.

Furthermore, he was an official delegate to the Democratic National Conventions of 1864 and 1872.<sup>31</sup> There is no indication that he attempted to play any role other than that of an elder statesman in party affairs.

Symbolically speaking, the climax to his long and distinguished political career came on September 11, 1872. Both the Democratic state convention, chaired by Wilson Shannon, and the Liberal Republican state convention, presided over by Charles Robinson, met that day in Topeka. After conducting brief separate sessions, the two groups adjourned and then united in a joint session. The unanimous choice for presiding officer of the joint meeting was Wilson Shannon.<sup>32</sup>

During his years as a private citizen in Kansas, Wilson Shannon's family was a source of both much joy for him and much sorrow. His wife, Sara Osbun Shannon, seems to have been an ideal companion. A popular hostess in Lawrence, she was described as "a woman of great personal attractions, beautiful and accomplished, and noted for her dignity of manner and that oldtime courtesy which continued to the end, and which gained for her the respect of all who had the privilege of her acquaintance."<sup>33</sup> Sarah outlived her husband by four years.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.; Kansas National Democrat, August 28, 1864.

<sup>32</sup>Kansas State Record, September 11, 1872.

<sup>33</sup>"In Memoriam," The Kansas Churchman, January 15, 1881, p.75.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

The Shannon's eldest son, John (born 1834), became a lawyer and was active in Democratic territorial politics. In 1857 and in 1859, he served on the Lecompton town council. He died in 1860 before much of his apparently bright potential could be realized.<sup>35</sup> As previously noted, Wilson, Jr. (born 1839), practiced law with his father. Like his brother John, Wilson, Jr., displayed a talent for politics. In 1868, he was a member of the Kansas delegation to the Democratic National Convention and, in 1872, was the Democratic party's unsuccessful candidate for the position of secretary of state of Kansas. At the time of his death in 1873, Wilson, Jr., was considered to be one of the most talented young politicians in the Kansas Democracy.<sup>36</sup> Osbun Shannon (born 1843), displayed little interest in politics. In addition to practicing law with his father, he founded a newspaper in 1882, the Lawrence Jeffersonian Gazette, and served as postmaster of Lawrence from 1885 to 1889. He lived until 1901.<sup>37</sup> The fourth Shannon son, Albert (born 1849), died at the tragically young age of nineteen in 1868.<sup>38</sup>

When Mary Shannon (born 1836) married a career army officer, Thomas W. Sherman, she added a prestigious name to the list of family relatives. Sherman achieved the rank of brevet major general

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<sup>35</sup> Lecompton Weekly Union, June 19, 1857; Kansas National Democrat, July 30, November 5, 1857 July 14, 1859, April 12, 1860.

<sup>36</sup> Leavenworth Daily Conservative, February 28, July 31, 1868; Lawrence Tribune, September 19, 20, 25, 1873.

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence Jeffersonian Gazette, April 11, 1901.

<sup>38</sup> "Shannon Family Record."

in the Union army during the Civil War and retired with the full rank of major general in 1870.<sup>39</sup> Little is known about Susannah Shannon (born 1844) other than that she married a Mr. Eccleston and resided in Leavenworth.<sup>40</sup> Sara (born 1852) proved to be Wilson Shannon's most renowned offspring. Acclaimed as one of the greatest beauties of her age in America, she was described by another young lady living in Lawrence in the late 1860's as "the most beautiful human creature I ever saw--brown hair, limpid, lustrous eyes of grey, a perfectly modeled nose, delicately curved mouth, and fine complexion."<sup>41</sup> While still very young, Sara became a close friend of Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer and his wife, who were stationed for some time at Fort Leavenworth. When Colonel Custer acted as the host in St. Louis for the Russian Grand Duke Alexis during the Duke's tour of America in 1872, Sara served as one of the hostesses for the royal visitor. The Duke was so smitten by her beauty that he subsequently tried unsuccessfully to persuade her to join his entourage at Topeka.<sup>42</sup> In later years, Sara married

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<sup>39</sup>"Thomas West Sherman," The Twentieth Century Biographical Dictionary of Notable Americans, ed. Rossiter Johnson, IX (Boston, 1904), [no page numbers]; Kansas National Democrat, July 5, 1860; Western Home Journal, September 6, 1877.

<sup>40</sup>Lawrence Tribune, August 31, 1877.

<sup>41</sup>Kate Stephens, "Judge Nelson Timothy Stephens," KSHS Collections, XIV, 29-30.

<sup>42</sup>For Sara's friendship with the Custers see Leavenworth Commercial, July 24, 1870. Her experiences with the Grand Duke Alexis are reported in Lawrence Tribune, January 23, 1872. I am indebted to Mrs. Minnie Dubbs Millbrook, Topeka, Kansas, for bringing the sources cited above to my attention.



John Walsh of St. Louis and lived there and in Washington, D. C.<sup>43</sup>

After outliving four of his five sons (one by his first wife and three by his second), Wilson Shannon died in Lawrence at the age of seventy-five on August 30, 1877.<sup>44</sup> Many of the most prominent lawyers and politicians in Kansas attended his funeral. According to the Lawrence Tribune, eighty-two carriages and buggies formed the funeral procession to the cemetery.<sup>45</sup> An indication of the high esteem in which he was held was that Lawrence's most distinguished resident, John P. Usher, Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Interior from 1863 to 1865, delivered Shannon's eulogy before the Douglas County bar.<sup>46</sup> The press and his eulogists agreed that, for many years prior to his death, Wilson Shannon had been the "foremost" general legal practitioner in Kansas and had died beloved by all who knew him well.<sup>47</sup>

In evaluating Wilson Shannon's role in nineteenth century American society, one particularly significant observation applies to his entire public career. He was cursed with incredibly bad timing in relation to the economic, political, or, with regard to his Mexican assignment, diplomatic conditions prevailing when he

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<sup>43</sup> Lawrence Tribune, August 31, September 3, 1877; "Shannon Family Record."

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Tribune, August 31, 1877.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., September 3, 1877. <sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., August 31, September 3, 1877; Western Home Journal, September 6, 1877; Solon O. Thacher, et. al., "Resolutions of Respect--Memorial, October 1, 1877," Douglas County, Kansas District Court Journal, L (1876-1877), 593-94; Simpson, Hon. Wilson Shannon, pp. 9-11.

assumed each of his three major public positions. While he tried to govern Ohio, the state and the nation were in the midst of a severe economic depression. His party was badly divided during that same period over banking and currency issues, but was dominated by a majority faction of radical antibank ideologues who refused to assess realistically the resources required for a viable economy. The radicals rejected Shannon's more moderate economic views and never let him implement properly the policies that he believed would most adequately resolve Ohio's fiscal problems.

Short of war itself, America's relations with Mexico could not have been much worse than they were when Shannon assumed his duties as minister to Mexico in August, 1844. The Tyler administration was, over Mexico's vehement protests, nearing success in the fall of 1844 in its efforts to annex Texas, the British were trying to undermine American efforts to arrange for a peaceful annexation, and the Mexicans claimed that they were preparing to invade Texas. Mexico insisted, furthermore, that the annexation of Texas by the United States would constitute an act of war. Since President Tyler and Secretary of State Calhoun would stop at nothing less than annexation, peaceful relations and constructive diplomacy between the United States and Mexico in 1844-1845 were vitually impossible.

In Kansas, Shannon's honorable reputation was almost destroyed by the propaganda buzzsaw perpetrated by the antislavery interests. He found himself caught in the middle between two inflexible factions committed to opposing versions of the "higher

law" with regard to the slavery issue. The contending forces refused to compromise rationally their differences and insisted upon achieving their ends through whatever means proved necessary. Prohibited by the Pierce administration from using the only viable peacekeeping force in the territory, the United States Army troops, Shannon was virtually powerless as governor to restrain the lawless, violent actions of the free-staters and the proslaveryites.

Shannon's performance as minister to Mexico was inept and non-productive. His achievements as a politician in the more congenial environs of his native state, Ohio, exhibited a quite different quality, however. He advanced to the forefront of Democratic political ranks to become governor of Ohio in 1838 with very limited experience to guide him and at a younger age than any other individual who has held that office. By the end of his first term as governor, Shannon had demonstrated so conclusively that he was one of the most talented speakers, campaigners, and political managers in his party and in the state that he received two more consecutive gubernatorial nominations. On two occasions, in 1840 and in 1842, he contended for the Ohio governor's chair with Thomas Corwin, who had already attained a national reputation as a political orator and debater. Shannon's showing in 1840 was respectable, though a losing cause, and his triumph in the 1842 confrontation left no doubt that he was popular with his Ohio constituency and was able to hold his own against the best Whig politicians in the state. As governor, Shannon tried to act as a bridge builder between the radical and conservative factions in his party. He advocated

constructive banking and currency reform measures designed to eliminate the abuses of the existing credit system, not to destroy it. In his recommendations to the legislature on other matters such as education, facilities for the mentally ill and handicapped, and electoral reform, he exhibited a commendably enlightened, progressive attitude. In general, Shannon conducted himself with honor and ability in the office of governor of Ohio and offered constructive leadership to his party and to all Ohioans. The highly limited resources of his position and the previously mentioned adverse economic and political conditions affecting his performance prevented him from translating a significant portion of his worthy objectives into operational policies before he left the gubernatorial office in 1844.

From the time of the Wakarusa War in Kansas in December, 1855, until the end of his service as territorial governor in August, 1856, Shannon endeavored in statesmanlike fashion to maintain peace between the proslavery and antislavery forces. He tried to establish viable alternatives to dissension and conflict by instituting a reasonable rule of law in Kansas which would be fair and just to all citizens. Although he was unable to achieve the orderly society he envisioned, Shannon's actions undoubtedly saved many lives and significantly reduced the level of violence occurring while he was governor. A perusal of the primary sources on "Bleeding Kansas" provides abundant evidence that he was often projecting the most rational, humane viewpoints of any political spokesman in the territory in 1855-1856. It was Shannon's personal tragedy and the nation's that

his sensible voice of moderation was usually ignored.

As a lawyer in Ohio and Kansas, Shannon adhered to the highest professional standards of integrity and industry. His excellence was achieved more as the result of his scholarly approach to his legal responsibilities than through the brilliance of his intellect. According to his peers, no lawyer was better prepared for his courtroom appearances than Wilson Shannon.<sup>48</sup>

Many Kansans living today on the former Osage ceded lands owe a debt of gratitude to Shannon for his major contribution to the successful prosecution on behalf of their ancestors of the Osage ceded lands case in the 1870's. That case undoubtedly represents the pinnacle of his distinguished legal career.

Wilson Shannon demonstrated high political skills as governor of Ohio and exhibited notable talents as a lawyer. In terms of his personality and character, he seemed to persuade ultimately all who knew him well, friend or foe, that he was a decent, honorable individual with an above average dedication to promoting the welfare of his fellow man. He was an outstanding American of his time who, in public life, never had the good fortune to be in the right place at the right time.

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<sup>48</sup>Simpson, Hon. Wilson Shannon, pp. 9-11.

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