

WAS AT BIRTH OF PARTY

SURVIVOR IN KANSAS OF FIRST REPUBLICAN CONVENTION.

Old Gentleman, Rich in Reminiscences, Who Tells of Webster in His Caps and Other Leaders.

Living alone in a little cabin on the Kansas prairie, is an old man who helped to organize the Republican party, who was a delegate to the Pittsburgh convention, where the party first took definite shape, who was founder and editor of the first Republican newspaper in this country, the Kansas City Star. He was the intimate friend of Horace Greeley, William H. Seward, Thaddeus Wood and others of illustrious memory. He saw Lincoln nominated for President, and he saw him after he was dead.

This old man is Martin C. Rice. He expects to attend the Republican National convention in Philadelphia next month, and there meet the 15 survivors of those who assembled with him in Pittsburgh, Pa., the winter of 1855 to nominate new principles and to bring into existence the new Republican party. The people of Philadelphia have invited these 15 survivors of that first Republican convention to be the guests of the city during the National convention. Mr. Rice has received no invitation yet, because, he supposes, the committee having the matter in charge does not know where he is.

Six miles north of the village of Hamilton, Greenwood County, Kan., there stands on a knoll of the broad prairie a single weather-bitten cabin with a single room. Its one door, which is a window, faces the east. One small cottonwood tree at the side of the door reaches scarcely above the low roof. There is not another tree or object near it, nothing but the undulating prairie and the waving grass, reaching away for miles and miles, in the distance, far to the east, a thread of green trees, winding across the landscape, marking the course of a creek. Here in solitude profound lives the man whose youth was so full of stirring events. He calls himself a relic of old times.

A reporter for the Star went to his door last week. The old gentleman was lying on his bed. The door stood open, and with his head propped up on his hand he was gazing over the prairie. He had been watching the meadow jacks and the wild doves and the butterflies busy in the prairie flowers. He sprang to his feet and came out with his hand extended in welcome. He is a tall, thin man, with a long, thin face, his eyes keen, his head covered with a thick mass of white curls and his hair as white as his hair. He reminded me of the picture of John Brown, the famous Kansan, who made history of deeds done not so very far from this lone cabin: there was a suggestion of Lincoln and of Thaddeus Wood in his face. He had the Puritan cast of face that one meets in out-of-the-way towns on the western coast of New England, and indeed, his grandfather was the master of a whaling vessel that sailed out of New Bedford.

"You're welcome," he said. "I just returned from town."

"From Hamilton?"

"Yes."

"Why, that's six miles away. You didn't walk it, did you?"

"I walked there and back this morning, 22 miles. I walk it when the roads are rough. When they are smooth, I ride my wheel."

"I ride a bicycle?"

"Why, yes. I rode it to Lawrence, 100 miles, last summer, and I expect to ride it there again this summer. If I had thought about it earlier, I could have ridden my wheel to Philadelphia to the convention."

"And how old are you?"

"I suppose I am 70 years old. If it becomes important, I make it a little older. I was born in St. Louis County, N. Y. My father was a pioneer in that country, and when I was born, being the first-born, the date of my birth was put upon a hewn log. It was in the month of January, 1830, and I was yet a child, and the date of my birth was transcribed to another tree. That was our family register."

He had inside the little house took up nearly all the room. The space under the bed was filled with books, mostly law books, and there were books on shelves all over the room.

"I am a lawyer, you see," he said laughing. "I studied law and went through college at home, and had a large law practice in Westfield, N. Y., before I started in newspaper work. I am now a lawyer, and am going to write some of the things I say, let me correct some misstatements that are going the rounds of the press. I rode to the Republican convention party was born in Michigan. I was born in New York, and this is how it came about. Leaving out of my story all references to the stirring events that preceded the organization of the party, the repeal of the Missouri compromise, the policy of President Pierce, the fight over the attempt to extend slavery into free states, the Nebraska bill, the Kansas slave law, the struggle over Kansas and like matters, all of which is familiar history to all, we come to the winter of 1854-1855, when I was a lawyer in Westfield."

"In that winter Seward, Greeley, Clapp, of the Buffalo Express, Raymond, of the New York Times, and other leaders decided to hold a meeting, at which the Whigs of New York would organize a new party. It was a sort of secret matter. Seward then had a land office in Westfield, and Patterson, who had been a clerk in the land office, was his agent there. It was decided to hold the meeting in Mayville, N. Y., and there it was held in January, 1855. At that meeting the great Republican party was born, and adopted its platform of free trade, free coinage, and the overthrow of the great Governor, Fremont, who was a slaveholder. Patterson, who was a slaveholder, and others spoke. We passed resolutions at that meeting which were taken to the Republican National convention in 1856, and which were almost word for word as the first National platform of the Republican party. So you see, I am right when I tell you that the Republican party was born in New York, in the Courthouse of Mayville."

The First Republican Newspaper.

It was decided at this Mayville meeting that the new political movement began there ought to have a newspaper. There was a lawyer then, in Westfield, and had declined views, and had frequently expressed them in the press, so I was selected to start this newspaper, and a week or two after the Mayville meeting I issued the first number of the Westfield Republican, the first Republican paper ever printed, and I was the first Republican editor. I published that paper 15 years, and then sold it. It is running yet.

"At the Mayville meeting a convention was called to meet in Pittsburgh, Pa., the winter of 1855, and R. B. Fenton, who was a lawyer, was selected as delegate to the Pittsburgh convention. In the meantime I had made my newspaper a power in the state, and I was able to give the south-west of the new movement that was gaining strength day by day, and as the time of the convention drew near, Fenton and I went to Pittsburgh to represent them both by proxy in the Pittsburgh convention. I went there, but was snowed out of Ohio and arrived a little late, but in time to hear the great speeches. At this convention the Republican National Convention was called for June 15 following in Philadelphia. Horace Greeley and I rode home together from the Pittsburgh convention, and we went up through Ohio to Cleveland, and then to New York City. I was in Chicago at the second Republican National convention, in May, 1860, a year later, when Lincoln was nominated, and the press went from New York, and all through the convention sat near the

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