

THE KNOW-NOTHINGS OF HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

By SPESSARD STONE



John Darling

The demise of the Whigs in the 1850's led to the emergence of the Know-Nothing, or American party, whose members included many prominent citizens in Hillsborough County.

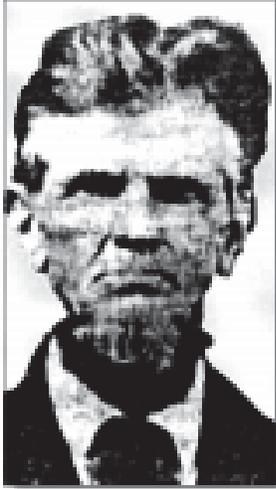
In Florida the defeat in 1852 of the Whig candidates, George T Ward for governor and Edward Carrington Cabell for Congress, severely weakened the Whigs, and the conflict over the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 rendered the party its death blow.¹ In

moral outrage to the latter the Republican Party arose, while also came forth the Know-Nothing, or American Party, from which in Florida many former Unionist Whigs formed their own unique party.

Nationally, Know-Nothingism was infamous for its anti-Catholicism and nativism, of which Rufus Choate epitaphed, "Any thing more low, obscene, feculent the manifold heavings of history have not cast up."² In Florida the Know-Nothings followed a slightly different drummer and presented themselves as a loyal, patriotic party striving for a legal solution to slavery within the Union, without any overt hostility against Florida Catholics, and only to a lesser degree anti-immigrant.³ In Hillsborough County, however, the party deviated from the state lead in two significant tenets, being strongly anti-Catholic and anti-foreign.

The genesis of the Know-Nothings in Florida is inexact as the organization was characterized by secretiveness and its reply when queried by nonmembers, "I know nothing," thus its designation.⁴ As early as April 1854, meetings of the party were noted in the press, but not until June 17, 1854 did a Tallahassee newspaper refer to the gatherings as those of Know-Nothing lodges.⁵

The leader of the Hillsborough County Know-Nothings was John Darling of Tampa. Born in Groton, Vermont on August 16, 1808, he, while serving in the U. S. Army, had come to Fort Brooke and served there and at other posts during the Second Seminole War (1835-42) as an ordnance



Leroy Lesley
Photo from *Tampa*
Tribune
June 3, 1956



Enoch Collins
Photo from *Tampa*
***Tribune*,**
Nov. 16, 1953

sergeant. Discharged, he settled in Tampa where in 1848 he became a business partner of Thomas P. Kennedy, a Philadelphia native, who had arrived in 1840 at Fort Brooke where he'd gained business acumen as a sutler during the Second Seminole War. The firm of Kennedy & Darling, with its store and warehouse on the corner of Whiting and Tampa streets, soon emerged as the financial backbone, not only of Tampa, but the entire southwest area of the state.⁶

John Darling soon became involved in civic affairs. In 1851 he was appointed a member of the first State Board of Internal Improvements and reappointed in 1853. In 1854 he was elected president of the board of trustees of the village of Tampa. Of great interest to Darling and Tampa was Sen. David L. Yulee's Florida Railroad charter which called for rails from Fernandina to Tampa, with a branch to Cedar Key.⁷ Jesse Carter had been elected in October 1854, as Hillsborough County's Democratic representative in the General Assembly. The railroad issue was preeminent to Carter, but the following letters show Senator Yulee was already distancing himself from Carter.

(Yulee's railroad on March 1, 1861 reached Cedar Key, but Tampa was without a railroad until 1884.)⁸

On October 6, 1854 from Tampa, Carter wrote to Yulee:

"The returns of the Election here are all in & I hasten to give you the results. My majority over Mr. [Christopher Q.] Crawford is 119 ... I was denied a defense through the columns of the Corrupt & rotten Herald, which made it obligatory on me to take the stump & make my defense before the people which I did against the combined opposition of the Herald, *Magbee*, *Gettis*, *Darling*, & several other kindred spirits ... it could not have escaped your observation that I was carrying you & the *Rail Road* ... In addition to other measures of opposition a "Know nothing" Society was organized here under the auspices of my opponent after the canvas opened, & every effort made to carry them against me upon the ground of my friendship to you of foreign birth ... *You are firmly established in Hillsborough Co.* & yet you have turned a deaf ear ... You may very really imagine my mortification to learn ... you have left for St. Augustine *without even a line from you.*"⁹

On November 21, 1854, Carter penned to Yulee:

"Notwithstanding my great triumph the Rail Road question is kept alive by those opposed as one of the means of your defeat, & at the same time intending it shall, if possible, recoil upon me. The reports brought

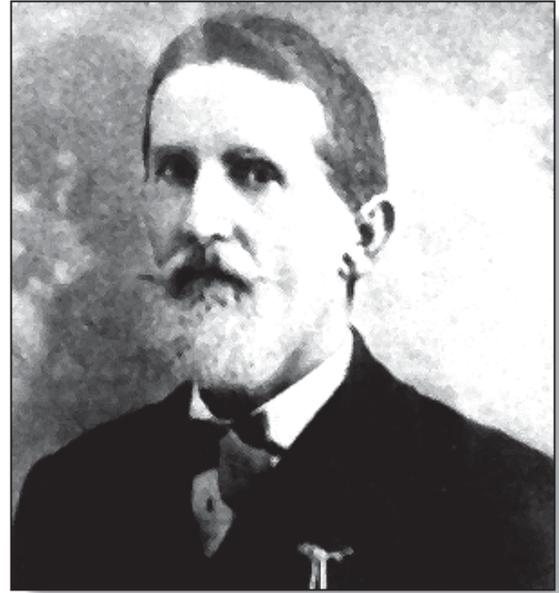


Joseph Moore

Photo from *Hillsborough Lodge*
No. 25 E & A.M. 1850-1976

here by Bradly, Hope, & others have given a new impulse to the question & you *must make public at once* the new *state of things*. And let me say this now. If you are looking to this legislature for a *branch* charter that *branch must be for Cedar Keys & not Tampa*. Take the position as one that the termini of the *main trunk* is at Tampa & that a *branch* will be extended to Cedar Keys, & make this public immediately."¹⁰

At the national convention of the American party in June 1855, at Philadelphia, Southerners dominated. A proslavery resolution was passed and former President Millard Fillmore was nominated for President.¹¹ The Know-Nothing National Council from Florida was: T. Y. Henry, William Judge, A. G. Lamberton, W. W.



Edward T. Kendrick

Photo by Krista K. Theiler from
framed copy at Hillsborough
County Historical Museum and
Library, Tampa.

McCall, John Darling, Allen G. Johnson, and Thomas Randall.¹²

Darling had been elected May 7, 1855, as Hillsborough County's representative to succeed Carter who had resigned due to the railroad issue. When it was learned that Darling had joined the Know-Nothing Party, "Democrat" reproved: "Col. Darling was nominated from the fact that he had held himself out for years as a thorough Democrat ... that they voted for him almost unanimously, indeed so strong was their faith that the Catholic Democrats voted for him..."¹³

Darling countered:

"The Native American Party was fully organized in this county and known to exist ... my offense is that I knew I was a Know-nothing and did not make the fact "Publicly

known"...One would suppose from what "Democrat" says that I was a person of vast concern to the "democratic party, , the very corner stone of its political fabric ... Yet, if any "sound democrat" voted for me, believing that I was in favor of Foreigners or Roman Catholics, holding office in the United States or under, or by the authority of the United States Government, they never had any such assurances from me, but the contrary were my frequently and openly expressed opinions above board ... I had my appointment as a Delegate to the National Council before I was nominated for Representative. I feel under obligation to the "sound democrats" for their support, not because I was a Know Nothing, but because I was "sound" on the railroad issue and they knew it, neither will I believe I was voted for upon any other issue..."¹⁴

A meeting of the Anti- Know-Nothing Democratic Party, with sixty-five members enrolled, at the courthouse in Tampa on August 4, 1855, with William Cooley as the chairman, Cotton Rawls, president, and John Jackson secretary, unanimously adopted resolutions, which included support of the National Democracy "who patriotically defended and supported the Kansas-Nebraska acts and sustained the Fugitive Slave law against the combined forces of Know-Nothings, Freesoil and Abolitionism opposition against "Intolerance of any denomination of Christians, and making religious creeds or faith in native born or naturalized citizens a test for the qualifications to fill office."¹⁵

An anonymous Know-Nothing of Tampa defensively responded:

"The establishment or prohibition of slavery under the constitution of the United States can be accomplished by state sovereignty alone... The American Party will, therefore, maintain that neither the Congress nor the territory, nor both together, can establish or prohibit slavery in a territory of the United States; that no Constitution can be admitted into the Union by Congress establishing or prohibiting slavery ... The American Party affirms and will maintain the Fugitive Slave Law ... The doctrine of the American Party is "that in all doubtful or disputed points it may only be legally ascertained and expounded by the judicial power of the United States," and that "obedience" is due to the laws, whether National, State or Municipal, until they are either repealed or declared unconstitutional by the proper authority ... the know-nothings do not prefer Catholics for office-If the antis do, they have the right to exercise the privilege-Know Nothings think Catholics are not qualified for office in the United States ... The American Party will not pretend to say whether President Pierce could or could not be elected without the support of the Foreign and Catholic vote, but it does say that the Foreign and Catholic vote has been allowed by his administration to obtain an undue weight in the government, unprecedented in former years and dangerous to the liberties of the country, calculated in a few years to subvert our democratic institutions and replace them by those of the countries from whence this Foreign and Catholic vote has come."¹⁶



Edward A. Clarke
Photo courtesy
of Julius
J.Gordon



Joseph B. Lancaster
Photo from *Tampa
Times*,
Jan. 1, 1955

At Tampa on September 15, 1855, the American Party held its convention. The Rev. Leroy G. Lesley, a Methodist minister and cattleman who had come to Tampa in 1848, was chosen as chairman; and as secretary, Dr. D. A. Branch. Henry A. Crane, a New Jersey-born newspaperman, Enoch Collins, and Edmund Jones were appointed a committee for the preparation of business. In eight resolutions justification was offered for the party's incipient secrecy, deemed no longer necessary. A constitutional union party, differing from the national party on certain key issues, was presented in the last four resolutions.¹⁷

"Fifth, Resolved, That we do not construe the 8th article of the Platform as Applying to *American Born Catholics who do not hold allegiance to the Pope of Rome*. Sixth, Resolved, That we are proud of the position which the Party occupies on the slavery question; the secession of the Abolitionists from the Philadelphia Convention having purged the Party of Abolitionism. Seventh, Resolved, That none are of the American Party who do not stand upon the Platform, and that we will never affiliate or cooperate with the Abolitionists, nor are we or the American party responsible for their opinions or acts. Eighth, Resolved, That in

the American Platform are laid down those broad Constitutional principles which, if carried out in good faith, will infallibly perpetuate the *Government and Union* of the United States of America; and it is only by carrying out those principles that we pledge ourselves to support the Union-not an unconstitutional Union but a Union based upon the Constitution."¹⁸

Nominated for county offices for the October election were: J. L. Lockhart, judge of probate; E. T. Kendrick, sheriff, R. H. Hardee, clerk of circuit court; commissioners: J. P. McMullen, J. T. Givens, Joel Knight, Joseph Moore; Lewis Lanier, county surveyor.¹⁹

Henry A. Crane and others were attacked by "Jefferson:"

"The Democracy of Hillsborough threw the gauntlet of defiance for *public discussion* to the Know-Nothings. As yet, we are sorry to say that the gage has been accepted but by two men, and both of whom are Methodist ministers...A certain long-legged ex-editor of the *Tampa Herald* in its palmyest days shrinks from the public contest, and like a craven knight sculks around corners, belching forth his diatribes against Catholics and *furriners*... The afore-said ex-editor boldly asserts that the Pre-termitters have more than 200 members of the midnight lodges enrolled, among whom are most of the *principal men* in the county."²⁰

A secret member of the American party about this time was Madison Post, then Receiver of Public Moneys at the Land Office, whose party status threatened loss of this Federal position, so he withdrew.²¹

In response to the letter to a Jacksonville paper by "Hillsborough" in which he censured John Darling, "Laureta" reprimanded "Hillsborough" for his chameleonic party loyalty:

"Within the last twelve months, several very important political changes have taken place in the young, *green-bud-of-the-Law's-mind* - an evidence of the profundity of his intellect, of his quick unerring comprehension, or of his ready adaption of himself, to the appropriate principles which time with its inevitable mutations are every developing. Up to about a year ago "*Hillsborough*" had been, and apparently intended remaining inseparably connected with the Whig cause, but soon we find him rather closely associated with the Know Nothings, and as strongly attached, as he formerly pretended to be, to the Whig cause. Soon afterwards, however, little to our astonishment, we perceive that he has disappeared from the American ranks, "dishonorably," and in the same manner espousing *publicly* the National-Democratic-Anti-American party ... Being born in America with Foreign principles, and *Stamina* not of such a brilliant character as would induce the "Know-Somethings" - literally, to solicit his name in their catalog. I presume he will stick to the party of which he is at present a conspicuous member. The Foreign party, consisting of Foreigners, deluded and dishonorably withdrawn Know Nothings, Native Americans with Foreign feelings and sentiments, and office holders or such persons as would so disgrace themselves, as to conceal their *true*

Hillsborough County.	
Hillsborough, the glorious Hillsborough, the home of the boys that gave Billy Bowyer's men such a trashing last summer, and also the stamping ground of John Darling and Joe Lancaster, the notorious Know Nothings, has gone democratic by an overwhelming majority. The following is the vote for Governor:	
For M. S. Perry,	318.
For D. B. Walker,	167.
Majority for Perry,	151.
For Congress.	
Geo. S. Hankins,	318.
J. M. Baker,	168.
Majority for Hankins,	150.
State Senator.	
John Estabrook, (Dem.)	307.
M. C. Peterson, (K. N.)	150.
Majority for Estabrook,	157.
Assemblyman.	
Samuel Gettis, (Dem.)	302.
J. H. Lancaster, (K. N.)	144.
Majority for Gettis,	158.
H, w! another such a blow Would kill every Sam in the county O!	

Jacksonville, Florida News, October 11, 1856. "Sam" was a figurative character used by the Know Nothings to describe themselves and their activities.

principles for the purpose of deceiving the Northern President with Foreign principles, thereby continuing in office which, perhaps, only pays the incumbents expenses."²²

"Hillsborough" uncannily resembles Tampa attorney James T. Magbee, who had represented the county three times as Democratic state representative. "Laureta" continued:

"He says, 'Col. Magbee occupies much the same ground that he did in 1850-52.' And I must admit that I admire so far as I can comprehend,



Hillsborough County Courthouse, constructed 1854-55

and appreciate, the sublimity of thought, and the profound style or manner, with which he disposes of this, as well as of several of his other subjects. Col. M., since 52, has I am told, shown a willingness to be the candidate of the Whig party. He, Col. M., at present holds office under President Pierce, but do not understand me, that his doing so, is the cause of his advocating in his feeble manner the sentiments of the Foreign party, for I really believe that he does so, from principle along-*being born in America with no other, than Foreign sentiments and feelings.* I could say a much for several of the *dominicco* party.²³

"He says, 'I knew that Mr. D. Was a Know Nothing, but could not tell my most intimate friend so.' Did he not tell some of his "Intimate friends"

several of the *secrets* previously to his having withdrawn "dishonorably"? I do not accuse him of committing such an act, but it would not have been much worse than leaving the order as he did."²⁴

On September 15, 1855, the Alafia Convention of the Democratic Party met with Francis M. Durrance as chairman and Henry L. Mitchell as secretary. The assembly endorsed the resolutions of the Anti- Know-Nothing Democratic meeting held at Tampa on August 4 and nominated: Simon Turman, Sr., judge of probate; Henry Parker, sheriff; Joab Griffin, clerk of circuit court; commissioners: M. C. Brown, Benjamin Moody, Francis M. Durrance, William Wiggins; Michael Garrison, county surveyor.²⁵

In October slightly over 300 Hillsborough voters continued the status quo by returning

Democrats to the aforementioned offices by majorities of about fifty-six percent.²⁶

"Kleber" crowed:

"It is my painful duty to inform you that Col. Darling's darling is no more. He breathed his last on Monday evening, 1st October, 1855 ... the Democratic party murdered Col. Darling's hopeful boy ... Where are those *two hundred stout-hearted Americans* who were members of the Nignasus of Hillsborough in April last. They have fled before the corporal's guard, those straw led men! ... A word about the departed fusion Sheriff. After his death, (I. e. defeat) his body was completely analyzed, and to the utter amazement of the horror-stricken people, he was found to consist of the following ingredients, to wit: Eight grains of Democracy (this he received in the Democratic cradle), three scruples of Whiggery, and one pound of Know Nothingism; enough of combustion to have destroyed Sebastopol ... We will be troubled with Sam no more. He has become quite an orderly boy, and I don't think he will be interrupting the honest old farmers of Hillsborough again."²⁷

While going down to defeat in Hillsborough County, the local American Party was encouraged by victories elsewhere, i.e., in Duval, Nassau, Wakulla, Franklin, and Marion counties. On December 3, 1855, the party convened at Tallahassee to organize statewide. Elected president of the gathering was Thomas Brown, former Whig governor. Of special significance was the state party's adoption of a resolution against a religious test for office.²⁸

On June 2, 1856, at Tallahassee, the Know-Nothings assembled for their convention with Richard Keith Call, presiding. Nominated for governor was David S. Walker of Tallahassee and James M. Baker for Congress. They would face the Democrats' Madison S. Perry of Alachua County for governor and George S. Hawkins of Jackson County for Congress. A severe blow to the state party occurred at the national convention that same month when stricken from the platform was "Section Twelve" of the party platform of 1855, which denied Congress the power to limit slavery or prevent admission of a state to the Union on its slave status, which the Democrats soon exploited.²⁹

At the courthouse In Tampa on July 24, 1856, the Know-Nothings of Tampa, with John Darling presiding, held a meeting for the purpose of appointing delegates to the county and district party conventions. Although a goodly number of delegates were chosen, enthusiasm was lacking.³⁰ County delegates selected were: E. A. Clarke, Wm. G. Ferris, J. K. Glover, G. L. Johnston, D. A. Branch, M. L. Shannahan, R. Duke, John Sewell, James Stephens, and John L. Branch. The District delegates were: Q. J. Pinkard, H. D. Kendrick, S. B. Todd, A. Miranda, John Darling, M. McCarty and John T Givens.³¹

Statewide the American party attained its peak strength in the elections in October and November, 1856. David S. Walker carried twelve of the thirty counties, but Madison S. Perry won by a margin of 6,214 to 5,894, while the Democrats also captured the Congressional seat for George S. Hawkins and carried the state for James Buchanan by a vote of 6,358 to 4,833.³² Locally in the General Assemble race on October 6, 1856, Tampa attorney, James Gettis, trounced

Joseph B. Lancaster by a margin of 302 to 143.³³

John Darling commiserated with David S. Walker:

"I fear the result will be as you suppose that you and Baker are beaten, but Perry's majority over you will not I would suppose give him much satisfaction..."³⁴

"This District the 20th gave Perry about 160 majority .. I had little else to hope for, but when our party deserts both their principles and their colors as they have done in Manatee and, as I believe in Levy also, put their opponents into office. I am excessively annoyed at the utter hopelessness of maintaining a contest against such exhibition of policy in our own party. With a decided majority in both these counties the Americans have sent Democrats to the General Assembly..."³⁵

"Of course I cannot yet form any conception of the composition of the General Assembly, but if the Democrats have gained in the Senate that gain will not exceed the new districts and we still have a majority there. In the House one lost in Hillsborough & one in Leon, one gained in Putnam & one in Columbia. As far as I have heard but 6 American are elected in East & South Florida. Nassau, Volusia, Orange, & Brevard to be heard from..."³⁶

"I myself know of a large number of voters who have said that nothing but the pay for volunteers enticed them to vote against us and that they

should certainly go the Fillmore figure in November."³⁷

"Genl [Jesse] Carter has taken the field with 150 of the state troops and it is not likely these men will get to the polls. I have, therefore, every reason to believe that this district will give a majority for Fillmore and Donelson [Andrew Jackson Donelson, Fillmore's running mate] and I cannot divine any earthly reason for this untimely movement of Genl Carter's unless it is the apprehension that the district will go any how for F & D and they wish to have the removal of these 150 vols which they will call Buchananers to accomplish the result. Genl Harney is expected here next month and the movement of the state troops is well calculated to embarrass his plan of campaign..."³⁸

The American Party, thereafter, rapidly disintegrated. In the 1857 Hillsborough County elections, the Know Nothings did not field a slate of candidates.³⁹ Most Of its members joined the Democratic Party and, as often with proselytes, most became fervent adherents of the new faith:

John Darling (1808-92) from 1859-61 was a county commissioner and in 1862 was appointed by C. S. A. President Jefferson Davis as receiver of monies for the Confederate States land office in Tampa. A lifelong bachelor, he was fourteen times Worshipful Master of Hillsborough Lodge No. 25, Free and Accepted Masons. In 1897, John Darling Lodge No. 154 was created and named in his honor.⁴⁰

Madison Post (1815-67) was in 1858 elected mayor of Tampa and, during the Civil War,

served as tax assessor and Confederate Deputy Marsha.⁴¹

Leroy G. Lesley (1808-82) served as captain of his own Militia company in the Third Seminole War and as captain of his own Confederate cow cavalry company in the Civil War.⁴²

Henry A. Crane (c1810-88) remained steadfast. A newspaperman, he had published the *Tampa Herald* and was editor of the *Florida Peninsular*. During the Third Seminole War, he served as a lieutenant under Capt. Leroy G. Lesley and during the Civil War as a captain, later major in the Second Florida Cavalry, U. S. Army. After the war, the Republican Crane settled in Key West where he served as clerk of the circuit court and as state senator. He was also editor of the *Key West Dispatch* and, subsequently, founder and editor of the *Key of the Gulf*.⁴³

Although tainted with chauvinism, the American Party offered a last opportunity for the moderate, Southern unionists. The victory of the radical Democrats opened the gates to secession and the Civil War.

ENDNOTES:

¹ Charlton Tebeau, *A History, of Florida (Coral Gables, sixth printing, 1976), p. 176.*

² Samuel Elliot Morrison, *The Oxford History of the American People*, (New York, 1965), pp. 590-591

³ Arthur W. Thompson, "Political Nativism in Florida, 1848-1860, A Phase of Anti-Secessionism," reprinted from *The Journal of Southwest History*, Vol. XV, No. 1, February, 1949), pp. 43, 50.

⁴ Morrison, op. cit., p. 590.

⁵ Thompson, op. cit. p. 42.; Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, June 17, 1854.

⁶ Theodore Lesley, "John Darling, Pioneer Merchant Was Beloved Leader of Tampa," *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, February 3, 1957; Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida*, 1950, p. 313.

⁷ Lesley, op. cit.

⁸ Tebeau, op. cit. p. 191; Gary R. Mormino and Anthony P. Pizzo, *Tampa: The Treasure City*, 1983, p. 77.

⁹ Carter to Yulee, October 6, 1854; (David Levy Yulee Papers, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Carter to Yulee, November 21, 1854.

¹¹ Morrison, op. cit., p. 591.

¹² *Charleston Daily, Courier*; June 11, 1855.

¹³ Tallahassee *Floridian and Journal*, June 2, 1855; Jacksonville *Florida News*, July 28, 1855.

¹⁴ *Tampa Florida Peninsular*; August 4, 1855.

¹⁵ Jacksonville *Florida News*, August 11, 1855.

¹⁶ Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, September 6, 1855.

¹⁷ *Tampa Florida Peninsular* September 29, 1855.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Jacksonville, *Florida /News*, September 1, 1855.

²¹ *Tampa Florida Peninsular*, December 8, 1860.

²² Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, September 27, 1855.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

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- ²⁵ Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, September 29, 1855.
- ²⁶ Jacksonville *Florida News*, October 13, 1855.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, October 20, 1855.
- ²⁸ Thompson, op. cit., pp. 45-46.
- ²⁹ Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, June 7, 1856; Thompson, op. cit., pp.
- ³⁰ Tallahassee *Floridian & Journal*, August 23, 1856.
- ³¹ Jacksonville *Florida Republican*, August 20, 1856.
- ³² Thompson, op. cit. p. 48; Allen Morris, *The Florida Handbook 1977-1978* (Tallahassee, 1977), pp. 488, 492.
- ³³ Jacksonville *Florida News*, October 11, 1856.
- ³⁴ Darling to D. S. Walker, October 21, 1856; Internal Improvement Trust Fund, General Correspondence 1855-56, R. G. 593, S. 914, Fla. State Archives.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ Tampa *Florida Peninsular* July 25, 1857, October 3, 10, 1857.
- ⁴⁰ Lesley, op. cit., *Hillsborough Lodge No., 25, F & A.M. 1850-1976*, p. 9.
- ⁴¹ Grismer, op. cit., p. 324., Leland Hawes, "Former Rebels Saw Error of their Ways", *Tampa Tribune*, June 3, 1990.
- ⁴² Grismer, op. cit., p. 322.
- ⁴³ Canter Brown, Jr., *Florida's Peace River Frontier*, 1991; pp. 108, 128, 159, 423; Charles E. Harrison, *Genealogical Records of the Pioneers of Tampa and of Some Who Came After Them*, 1914, p. 149. Crane did have one lapse from his Unionism. On November 24, 1860, he signed a petition of Hillsborough Countians calling for a convention to consider secession and not "to sub it to Black Republican Rule." See Tampa *Florida Peninsular*, December 1, 1860.

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