

## The Free Soil Party

### The Party's Formation

The national Free Soil party was organized in August of 1848 at a convention in Buffalo, New York. The forthcoming U.S. presidential election of 1848 was the immediate event which spurred the creation of this party. The two major political parties of the time had just announced their candidates at their national conventions in Philadelphia and Baltimore. The Democratic candidate, Lewis Cass, and the Whig candidate, Zachary

Taylor, were both in favor of the continuation of slavery and its extension into the western territories. Finding this an insupportable position, many dissidents from both parties decided to form a new political party--the Free Soil party. This new national party based its name on the principle that the United States should not extend slavery into the western territories and that the land should be worked solely by free

NORTHAMPTON COURIER.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16, 1848.

FREE SOIL NOMINATIONS.

FOR PRESIDENT,

MARTIN VAN BUREN  
OF NEW YORK.

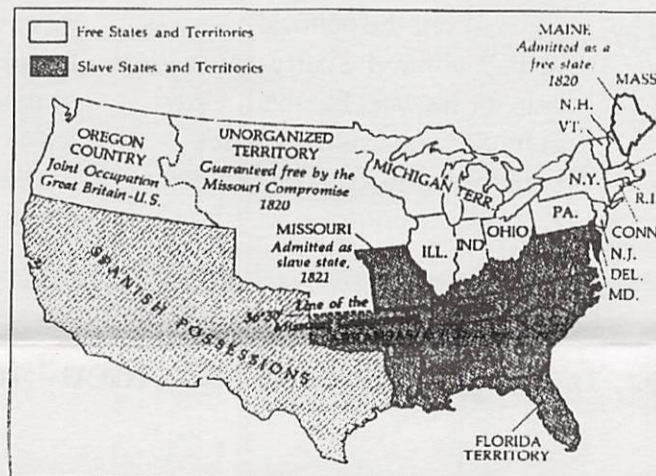
FOR VICE PRESIDENT,

CHA'S FRANCIS ADAMS  
OF MASSACHUSETTS.

Buffalo Convention.

laborers. At the Buffalo constituting convention, members selected former President Martin Van Buren as their candidate for the 1848 presidential election.

### Defining A Strategy



As a coalition of radical abolitionists, the Free Soil party got its members from Democrats and Whigs who had been fighting slavery as a moral cause for years without much success. Salmon P. Chase, credited with making the Free Soil party an influential movement, had previously organized the Liberty party for a

similar purpose of uniting abolitionists but it was ineffectual. As its successor, the Free Soil party introduced a new stance into politics by making abolition a political rather than a moral cause. Instead of arguing against slavery on a moral basis, the Free Soilers put forth economic and political reasoning. They explained that the

economy of the nation and its political balance of power would change if slavery was extended into the West. If the western territories entered the Union as slave states, then the slave states would outweigh the free ones politically, and slaves would force free laborers out of jobs and land.

## A Local Meeting



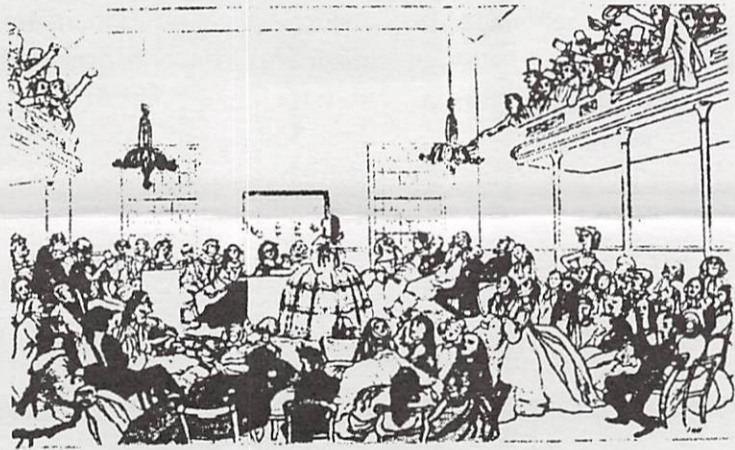
Support for the Free Soil party was strongest in central New York, Pennsylvania, New England and areas in the West which had been settled by New Englanders. The convention which created the party was held in New York state and many local meetings were held to pick delegates to send to it. In Seneca Falls, the Free Soil party had its first meeting in June of 1848. Most of the people who attended this meeting were white middle to upper class men who were largely mill owners, merchants or professionals. These men shared not only similar socio-economic

status but were all very involved in the administration of their town and the social reform causes which were sweeping it. Coming from diverse political party affiliations they came together to stop the expansion of slavery and were united by this common goal. Jacob Chamberlain, Ansel Bascom, Henry Stanton, Charles Hoskins, and Nathan Milliken were elected by the Seneca Falls party to represent their group at the Buffalo national convention. Minutes of party conventions and local meetings were covered in The Free Soil Union, a Seneca Falls paper which Milliken published.

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## Support for Women's Rights

As a progressive party which was trying to stop slavery, it is not surprising that the Seneca Falls Free Soilers also supported increasing women's rights. In 1848, the first Women's Rights Convention was held at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls. A large number of those who attended it had Free Soil ties. The Declaration of Sentiments, the document which made up the bulk of the convention's agenda, was signed by one hundred supporters. Thirty two of those people were from Seneca Falls itself, and of that number, twenty three were Free Soil members. Although Henry



Stanton did not attend the convention, the political contacts he had within the party were a great help for his wife, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was the event's primary organizer. The Women's Rights Convention was a suitable

meeting for the Free Soilers to gain more exposure for their party because their presence was a display of their new found unity. It also gave them an opportunity to develop their thoughts about other social and political issues.

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## “Free soil, free labor, free speech, and free men” forever

Although the Free Soil party disintegrated in the mid 1850s, it was able to unite large numbers of Northerners into an anti-slavery coalition. Particularly in New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, and many western states, Free Soil candidates did very well in winning many state assembly and national senate elections. During the later 1840s

and 1850s, American politicians had been searching for a strong and unifying party, since the Whigs had collapsed and the Democrats were constantly in opposing factions. The Free Soil party would not be the end of this search, as it was not strong enough to erase traditional political party lines on a national level. However, it did give its

successor, the Republican party, radical and experienced leadership as well as established political networks. Despite its short national life, the Free Soil party firmly established the abolition of slavery as an issue of nationwide political importance.