Above, an early illustration of Lecompton Constitution Hall, where the Proslavery Lecompton constitution was drafted in 1857. The constitution was repudiated by the people of Kansas August 2, 1858, under the propositions of the English bill, a compromise worked out in congress by William H. English of Indiana. Sketch reproduced from "Kansas Historical Collections," v. 8 (1903-1904), p. 340. Below, a photograph of the white frame building which is now owned by the Rebekah Lodge No. 698 at Lecompton. The National Historic Landmark property is still used for meetings.
THE ENGLISH BILL: AN ATTEMPT TO COMPROMISE THE LECOMPTON DILEMMA

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THE CASUAL motorist driving along Interstate 70 between Lawrence and Topeka is probably totally unaware of the rather rural village of Lecompton.¹ No exit provides easy access to the unpretentious community which does not even possess a magnificent monument proudly recounting the stirring events of a century past. Fallen into equal obscurity is William H. English, a mid-19th-century Indiana congressman. But things were far different in the spring of 1858 when the frontier town and the Hoosier representative briefly dominated the national news.

In the pre-Civil War era the political effects of Kansas extended far beyond its territorial borders. The dominant Democratic party, suffering internal dissension since the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska act in 1854, faced further disruption in 1858. The request for statehood under the Lecompton constitution proved to be a severe test for popular sovereignty and for the Democratic party. This potential of Kansas for creating national discord multiplied because congressional consideration of the constitution coincided with the 1858 midterm elections.²

Fraud and unrepresentative elections characterized the constitutional convention which opened at Lecompton in September, 1857. A Proslavery legislature, meeting at Lecompton in January, ignored Gov. John Geary's advice to delay statehood, and overrode his veto of the bill. Geary's obstinance displeased the new President.³

Following his March, 1857, inauguration, Pres. James Buchanan almost immediately selected Robert Walker, a fellow Pennsylvanian then living in Mississippi, as Geary's successor. The territorial secretary, Frederick P. Stanton, utilizing his power as acting governor, proceeded with the legislative plans for a June 15 election of convention delegates.⁴ Walker's inaugural address, delivered at Lecompton in late May, accepted the legality of a convention called by a legislature existing under congressional authority, and noted the Kansas-Nebraska act provided that "the people of Kansas... by a majority of their own votes," must decide the slavery question for themselves. He urged all voters to participate "freely and fairly" in the upcoming election, specifically warning the Free-State people not to stay home, let a minority write the constitution, and then hope to defeat it at a later time. Walker keenly realized the entire nation watched Kansas to see if territorial self-government could actually work within a framework of the slavery controversy.⁵ His sound advice fell on deaf ears. Adhering to their determination to support only a Free-State movement, approximately 7,000 of the 9,000 possible voters did not participate in the June election.⁶ Facing only nominal ballot box opposition, the Proslavery group carried the day, and thus its delegates dominated the upcoming Lecompton sessions.⁷ The die was cast and the nation rapidly raced toward a new crisis.

1. The overall character of Lecompton has changed little over the years. A contemporary noted in 1856 that "Lecompton is on a pretty site, [and] has the merit of not being densely crowded."— "Notes on the Proslavery March Against Lawrence," Kansas Historical Quarterly, v. 11 (February, 1942), p. 57. The frame building known as "Constitution Hall," where the controversial Lecompton constitution was written, still stands.
2. For a general background of the national political strife of this era, see Roy F. Nichols, The Disruption of American Democracy (New York, Macmillan Company, 1948), and Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln (2 vols., New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), v. 1.
7. Johannsen provides an excellent summary of the men elected to the convention. He notes that the attitude of such modern historians as Nevins and Nichols in degrading the Lecompton convention is influenced by the role the document played in further
The constitutional convention began September 7, and soon recessed to await the outcome of the October territorial legislative elections. Following a Free-State victory at the polls, the convention delegates returned to Le- compton and worked untiringly in one last supreme effort to bring Kansas into the American balance of power as a slave state. Realizing a Proslavery document would never be approved by the present Kansas electorate, the convention ultimately permitted voters to ratify the constitution with or without slavery, but provided no opportunity to reject the entire document. No matter which alternative the voter selected, slave property then in the territory would not be disturbed. On December 21 the constitution with slavery was selected by 6,226 men while only 569 voters preferred it without. It was immediately sent to the nation’s capital for final acceptance or rejection.

Even before the referendum occurred, Buchanan committed his administration to accept the upcoming Kansas vote, whether the decision be for or against slavery, as being the speediest and most legal means of ridding the nation of a vexious question since domestic tranquility was “of greater importance than the mere temporary triumph of either of the political parties in Kansas.” He assumed submission of the slavery provision met the requirements of the Kansas-Nebraska act. Illinois Democratic Sen. Stephen A. Douglas openly disputed that assertion, created a serious rift in party ranks, and actively led the opposition. When Governor Walker arrived in Washington, D.C., he incurred Buchanan’s wrath by vigorously supporting Douglas’s anti-Lecompton stance. He was immediately replaced by James W. Denver, territorial commissioner of Indian affairs, who was appointed acting governor. Despite Buchanan’s optimism, the struggle for political sectional supremacy continued, aided and abetted by continuing events in Kansas. The new territorial legislature, elected in October, met two months later and immediately set January 4 as election day for state officials while at the same time holding a new referendum on the proposed constitution. Lecompton’s opponents could only hope that popular sentiment would change the presidential course; but it did not. On a mild winter day, which passed uneventfully in Lecompton, the Free-State majority rejected the constitution by a 10,000 vote margin.

Marcus J. Parrott, the Republican territorial congressional delegate, although still unaware of the results in mid-January, confidently expected something definite “to take place after the reception of the returns.” He soon became painfully aware that the overwhelming decision only made Buchanan more determined to press “with great power” his policy of forcing the Lecompton constitution upon Kansas, congress, and the Democratic party. The Republicans often feared he would succeed. Parrott advised friends to “be prepared for the worst.”

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9. Zornow, Kansas, p. 78. When an Eastern newspaper later inquired why the Free-State men allowed the Lecompton constitution to be accepted with a slavery clause in the first place, a Kansas editor replied “the slavery question never has been fairly submitted to the people with federal complicity, and the pretended submission through the Lecompton Constitution was a mere farce.”—Herald of Freedom, Lawrence, April 3, 1858. Previous territorial experiences provided arguments both for and against popular ratification. Of 63 state constitutions adopted between 1776 and 1858, 30 were popularly ratified and 33 were put into force by conventions. Of greater significance, however, was the weighty fact that 11 of the 14 most recently adopted Western documents were ratified by popular vote. Clearly the trend of Jacksonian Democracy pointed toward voter participation. A more detailed analysis may be found in Phillip S. Klein, President James Buchanan, A Biography (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), p. 305.

IGNORING Governor Denver’s advice to shift the responsibility back to Kansas, the President pursued his established position in a special message on February 2, in which he submitted the Lecompton constitution to congress vigorously urging its adoption as the best means for restoring peace to a badly distracted country. His decision was firmly based upon the legality of the territorial assembly and the validity of the constitutional convention. Kansas complied with federal requirements by submitting the slavery portion to the people in the December vote. Prompt admission would end the Kansas question, fulfill the national policy of nonintervention, localize the slavery question, and banish it from congress “where it has always exerted a baneful influence throughout the whole country.” His conclusion concisely summarized his anxiety for the future of the Union which plagued his White House years. Thus Buchanan adhered unwaveringly to his position of attempting to maintain peaceful coexistence between the sections. Such a course, designed in part at least to pacify the dissatisfied South, ultimately proved to be a gigantic blunder. Would congress agree with his position?

The presidential message opened the congressional battle in earnest. Senate Democrats, caucusing that evening amid “much unanimity,” agreed to resolve the problem as rapidly as possible. However, before coming to a vote in late March, Sen. John J. Crittenden proposed an amendment referring the constitution back to Kansas for popular ratification. Without much ado the measure was decisively defeated and the White House temporarily triumphed when the Kansas bill carried by a vote of 33-25. Douglas and three other Northern Democrats voted with the Republicans. Despite Douglas’s defection, the Washington, D. C., Evening Star considered the senate Democracy still true to “the great principles of the Nebraska act,” while another capital journalist confidently expected a similar victory would soon occur in the house. Such wishful thoughts were, however, difficult to transpose into reality. In stark contrast to the relatively easily gained senate victory, the real battle for Lecompton’s passage occurred in the lower house where the presidential program sailed much less smoothly.

House debate on Kansas opened February 5, and immediately resulted in a struggle between the administration forces, which wished to refer the Lecompton constitution to the territorial committee under Georgia’s Alexander H. Stephens, and the Douglas Democrats who preferred sending it to a select committee with powers to investigate. This issue placed anti-Lecompton Democrats on the Republican side, and the Lecomptonites labeled it an “abolition scheme,” designed to maintain sectional controversy and provide political ammunition for the 1860 presidential election. The house finally voted 113-114 not to send the constitution to the territorial committee, and by a subsequent 114-111 decision created a special committee of 15 to be appointed by the speaker. Thus by a narrow margin the White House lost its initial house battle.

In early March Thomas L. Harris, the Illinois Douglas Democrat who chaired the select committee, blocked Stephen’s proadministration majority report hoping to delay its con-

13. Denver proposed giving congressional authority to the governor and territorial legislature to hold another election for convention delegates who would then send a constitution to the president. If this document did not conflict with the U.S. constitution, national laws, treaties, public lands, or other properties, then Kansas could be admitted by presidential proclamation. This would put the burden upon the territory, get rid of congressional interference, and at the same time, not harm the Democratic party, as well as ease the President out of a tight spot by getting Kansas into the Union. —Denver to Buchanan, Lawrence, January 16, 1858, Buchanan Manuscripts, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. For the presidential message, see Moore, ed., The Works of James Buchanan, v. 10, pp. 170-192. Georgia Cong. Alexander Stephens, leader of the administration faction in the house, claimed to have been extremely influential in writing that message. —Alexander Stephens to Linton Stephens, Washington, D. C., February 3, 1858, Stephens Manuscripts, Manhassetville College Library, Purchase, N. Y.

14. For the basic details of the issue before the senate, see the Evening Star, Washington, D. C., February 3, 18, March 16, 20, 23, and 24, 1858; Washington, D. C., National Intelligencer, February 5, 1858. When Douglas spoke on March 22 the crowd was so large extra police were used to maintain order. —Washington Intelligencer, March 24, 1858; Congressional Globe, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., v. 17, pt. 2, pp. 1258-1264. Only three Northern Democrats voted with the Republicans on the Crittenden proposal which was defeated 24-34, but on the final vote Douglas of Illinois, Stuart of Michigan, and Broderick of California were joined by Pugh of Ohio in voting against the Lecompton constitution.


16. Evening Star, Washington, D. C., February 6, 8, and 9, 1858. On this critical issue of sending the document to Stephens’s territorial committee the President had the support of 72 Southern Democrats (two were absent), 12 Southern Know Nothings, and 29 Northern Democrats. Twenty-two Northern Democrats voted against the administration. The absence of two Southern Democrats and two proadministration Northern Democrats obviously affected the results as the presence of only one would have provided the speaker with the opportunity to break the tie and give Stephen’s committee control over the bill.
gressional debut. The wily Georgian bypassed the chairman and published his document in the Washington Union's March 11 issue. The maneuver sparked a congressional struggle that lasted several days and resolved nothing. It did, however, enable William English to begin his role as a potential compromiser. Despite his plea for understanding and his assertion that a committee report was not binding upon congress, the anti-Lecomptonites remained unmoved; they would do nothing to parliamentarily facilitate a process that might create a new slave state. English firmly advocated constitutional resubmission while simultaneously warning his colleagues he would not vote for outright Lecomptonism for it did "not embody the will of the people." His March 9 speech failed to draw the party closer together and the entire episode seemed futile. However, the White House saw a significant result when English of Indiana, joined by Grosbeck, Lawrence, and Hall of Ohio, did not automatically go all the way with Harris. This was indeed "a favorable indication on their part. Though considered anti-Lecompton, they have not yet determined to break with the Democratic party. We have hopes of such men in the future." That small nucleus became increasingly significant to Lecompton's success in the house. As the house moved closer to an actual vote on the senate bill, English's desire to bridge the gap between the two factions brought him closer to national notoriety.

IN LATE March, 1858, William H. English was a young congressman caught in the midst of a very delicate political situation. He obviously read public opinion in Indiana's Second district clearly enough to understand outright support of Lecomptonism would result in a resounding defeat in the upcoming midterm elections. On the other hand, vigorous opposition to an administration controlled by his own party was an equally untenable position. Choosing either path could quickly end his budding career.

English's involvement in the Kansas embroglio heightened as the opposition presented a counter proposal. Pennsylvania Cong. William Montgomery, in cooperation with other anti-Lecompton Democrats, proposed a six-section substitute calling for new elections to a constitutional convention which could amend the document and submit it to a popular referendum. It also lowered the amount of federal land to be granted the new state making it consistent with the amount usually given a new member of the Union. Montgomery proposed sending the bill to the special committee, but Stephens preferred to consider it in his territorial committee. His motion was defeated 94-105 and the bill went to the special committee without a vote.20

Once again several Northern Democrats, voting with the Republicans, helped circumvent the Lecompton forces. The administration organ denounced the alliance and asked "how can any democrat, who means ever again to act and vote with old friends, give aid and comfort to such a movement as this?"21 The badly divided Democracy appeared in agreement on only one matter—the Lecompton debate should not be needlessly prolonged. Stephens, following a conference with Montgomery, announced on March 25, that the house would take up the senate bill at 1:00 p.m. Thursday, April 1.22 This provided the White House forces one week in which to change several anti-Lecompton Democratic votes. Compromise seemed imperative to several Northern Democrats.

Most Democrats hoped their differences could be resolved privately rather than subject themselves to further conflict. An administration cohort, John Cochrane of New York, presided over a fully attended caucus in the house

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17. Evening Star, Washington, D. C., March 4, 1858. Harris bitterly resented the fact that eight of the 15 committee members were proadministration and thus resorted to his power as chairman to delay Stephens' majority report.—Thomas L. Harris to Charles LaFollette, Washington, D. C., February 10 and 27, 1858. LaFollette Manuscripts, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield. Republicans considered the intentional imbalance "a gross abuse of power."—Hamlin to Morrill, Washington, D. C., February 16, 1858, Misc. mss.—Hamlin, KSHS.


20. Washington Intelligencer, March 16 and 17, 1858, Congressional Globe, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., v. 27, pt. 2, p. 1150. It is indicated in the letter of R. S. Stevens to Denver, Washington, D. C., April 3, 1858, "Denver Collection," KSHS, that Montgomery's plan was actually that of Governor Denver conveyed to the Pennsylvania congressman by Stevens.

21. Washington Union, March 21, 1858

chamber on Saturday evening, March 27. According to previous arrangements, no specific solutions were offered. However, it did adopt an English sponsored resolution empowering Cochrane to appoint a 20-man committee, including 10 members of each faction, "to confer together and ascertain whether anything can be done to secure harmony and concert of action" regarding Kansas. Their report would be considered by the caucus on Tuesday evening, March 30.  

When the committee met Monday evening a proposal that the document be submitted to the voters by the first state legislature, which would thus permit slavery in Kansas for at least three more years, was found unacceptable. English introduced a resolution providing "that the admission of Kansas is upon the fundamental condition that the people now have, and may at all times exercise, the right of altering, amending, or changing their Constitution at pleasure." The Lecompton block vehemently voted this down. Every anti-Lecompton suggestion was opposed by Buchanan’s supporters who thought their ideas were already in the senate bill "in substance." The Lecomptonites offered no proposals of their own and so the group adjourned without taking a firm position. Although the New York Tribune contended "Mr. English is the managing man," and reported that all day Monday he could be found in frequent conferences with Stephens and Pennsylvania’s Glancy Jones, it was obvious his well-intentioned efforts failed again.  

Immediately following that unproductive session, the 10 anti-Lecompton members caucused in a capitol committee room. Having found all their compromise proposals unacceptable they determined that nothing further could be accomplished at this time. There seemingly was little else they could do than to continue voting with the Republicans who were unified in their decision to stand by the Montgomery amendment. The following day English announced he would resume his former position "without further attempts at conciliation," and even the Republicans applauded "his good faith in tendering the olive branch to other Democrats." When the full caucus reconvened on Tuesday evening its ultimate decision to accept the senate bill with no amendments led to a vigorous anti-Lecompton reaction. Although several seemed willing to go all the way with the Republicans, English appeared reluctant to follow such a course if he hoped "to remain in public life after the close of the present congressional term." However his attempts to unite the party on a common platform seemed not only a failure but it perhaps also "fortified the Democratic opposition, and precluded all chance of reconciliation."  

23. Ibid, March 29 and 30, 1858; Washington Union, March 30 and 31, 1858; John Cochrane to English, Washington, D.C., March 29, 1858, English Manuscripts, 1858, The Republicans wondered if Stephens and Cochrane could deduce the anti-Lecomptonites "into any concessions inconsistent with their principles, their attitude and their honor."—New York Daily Tribune, March 29, 1858.  
24. Evening Star, Washington, D.C., March 30, 1858; New York Daily Tribune, March 30 and 31, 1858. English’s position reflected Hoosier opinion, “Be cautious ... and do not sacrifice the principle for the sake of the unity of the party at present for ... the people of Southern Indiana will not now wink at a compromise if the vital part is not there.”—L. C. Matthews to English, New Albany, Indiana, March 29, 1858, English Manuscripts, 1858.

26. Ibid, March 31 and April 1, 1858; Evening Star, Washington, D.C., March 31, 1858.
Anxiety for the future of the Union plagued the White House years of Pres. James Buchanan (1791-1868). Believing the admission of Kansas would localize the slavery question, he urged adoption of the Lecompton constitution and encouraged William H. English in his efforts to “end the dangerous agitation” in congress.

On the surface English appeared to be working primarily as a spokesman for the anti-Lecompton Democratic camp in order to quiet the Kansas turmoil on the basis of popular sovereignty, and thus reunite his badly fragmented party. But throughout those turbulent days of late March, he also enjoyed a confidential friendship with James Buchanan, which temporarily remained so secret that not even his closest correspondents ever questioned him about it and only occasionally did Republican newspapers even hint at a possible liaison with administrative supporters.

No remaining clue identifies who initiated this relationship. A March 22 note indicates Buchanan probably conferred with English on the Kansas question, and as a follow-up sent some ideas which he thought the congressman might find valuable. The President dangled further encouragement of political immortality by noting he considered “the present occasion the most fortunate of your life. It will be your fate to end the dangerous agitation, to confer lasting benefits on your country & render your character historical.” What politician could possibly resist the temptation?

English’s role in the Democratic caucus marked him as the leader of the possible conciliatory vote available within the anti-Lecompton group. Realizing his efforts were potentially damaging to the Republicans, party spokesmen occasionally criticized his ambivalent and possibly untrustworthy position. “In selecting Mr. English as the agent of this experiment, they knew their man,” wrote “INDEX” from Washington, D.C., to the New York Tribune. “His position has never been really fixed, and although a recent speech gave every assurance of decision, he has faltered since then, and is now counted with the South and its allies.” English carefully cut these comments from the newspaper and took them to the White House. Along with the clippings English enclosed a note, written in the house on March 31, offering personal observations on the upcoming Kansas vote, delineating possible alternatives, and specifically identifying his role as a presidential agent. English hastily delivered the note without asking to see the President personally. Upon receiving the message, Buchanan, noting the circumstances, immediately forwarded it to his trusted associate Howell Cobb, the secretary of the treasury, admonishing him that its contents “must be considered by you as perfectly confidential, but I think you ought to be aware of the information it contains. W. English’s name must not be used or communicated to anyone.” Obviously any hint that English was not working independently might frighten off wary anti-Lecompton Democrats which Buchanan wanted English to lead back into the fold.

While Congress debated Kansas waited, and the wait could be agonizingly long if a storm silenced the telegraphic wires and the slow-moving mails bearing more complete reports did not arrive rapidly enough. Governor Denver relied heavily upon his Washington

27. Buchanan to English, Washington, D.C., March 22, 1858, “Dickinsonians.” Buchanan section, Dickinson College Library, Carlisle, Pa. Unfortunately, the President’s suggestions for resolving the Kansas matter are no longer appended to the note.
29. Herald of Freedom, Lawrence, April 17, 1858.
country.” 34 Although Collamer shared his goals, he could offer no cheering prospects for Lecompton “will no doubt pass the Senate. Possibly it may fail in the House; but probably will pass. What then?” 35 Indeed this is precisely what the Free-State men across the nation repeatedly asked themselves.

John Stillman Brown of Lawrence admitted “our politics like the weather, are some what squally— If Congress forces upon us the Lecompton Constitution . . . there will be difficulty— We shall not stand it— Our dander is up . . . .” He hoped, however, the problem would not deter Free-State migration “for Kansas is sure to be Free. In two years there will not be a slave in Kansas— The facilities for running them off are numerous, and they will take passage in the underground railroad.” 36 The immediate future offered little brightness to abolitionists. Maine Sen. Hannibal Hamlin assured them “the Lecompton Const reeking all over with fraud is to be forced upon you by Cong. To this you may make up your mind. What will follow—God only can tell.” Kansas abolitionists, religious men though they may have been, were not content to rely entirely upon God to determine possible courses of action. A Lawrence resident assured George L. Stearns that if the Lecompton constitution is “forced upon us with a pro slavery government, the most fearful consequences will follow,” and E. B. Whitman further confirmed that his associates continually discussed, adopted, abandoned, and modified various plans to meet any emergency. On one matter, however, there was no debate; these Kansans harbored “an unchanging hatred of the instrument and a solemn determination to defeat its operation here in the territory.” 37 Would congressional compliance to presidential dictates trigger new waves of resistance? Trained political eyes carefully focused on the house of representatives.

34. Hutchinson to John Collamer, Lawrence, March 5, 1858, and Henry J. Raymond to Hutchinson, New York, N. Y., June 15 and December 22, 1858, “Hutchinson Collection,” KSHS.
37. Hamlin to Morrill, Washington, D. C., February 16, 1858, Misc. mas.—Hamlin, KSHS; E. B. Whitman to George L. Stearns, Lawrence, February 20, 1858, “Stearns Collection, Manuscript Dept., KSHS.”
ON APRIL 1 the initial Republican move to reject Lecompton outright lost 95-137 and Montgomery, on behalf of the anti-Lecompton Democrats, then offered the senate’s Crittenden amendment which was agreed to 120-112, and the amended bill immediately passed the house. On the following day the senate voted 32-23 to stand by their original measure causing the Washington newspapers to openly discuss the possibility of a conference committee. Republicans labeled this move “the last desperate reliance to carry Lecompton with a partial modification,” and charged the White House brought new pressure in order to change a few anti-Lecompton votes. Glancy Jones, Buchanan’s house manager, spared no effort in effecting the desired change.36 However, the anti-Lecompton representatives caucused on Friday morning, April 2, and agreed to stand firm.37

When Montgomery brought up the measure in the house on Thursday, April 8, he refused English’s request for permission to amend the bill. Reporters assumed he intended to introduce a conference proposal. The house voted to adhere to their position 117-111 with English and Hall, who had not voted on the roll call, joining the yeas at the completion of the balloting to make the final tally 119-111. The results left administration supporters “grave,” and “alarmed,” and rumor indicated the anti-Lecompton firmness caused “much dismay at the White House.”38 The hesitation of English and Hall gave Republicans ample reason to become increasingly wary of those who might lean toward a conference committee. Monday’s reports indicated both could be counted upon to vote for a conference while others who dared not openly move toward the administration position would simply be absent.39

On Tuesday the senate voted to insist upon their position and at the same time agreed to establish a conference committee to which Green, Hunter, and Seward were named. Buchanan’s face-saving device was now in English’s hands. At 1:00 p.m. Wednesday, April 14, Montgomery moved to insist upon the house bill and called the previous question which was voted down, opening the way for English to raise the idea of a conference committee. Reaffirming his position that he did not intend under any circumstances to vote for the senate bill, he was not at the same time, “unwilling to hear [the senate’s view points],” for they might prove beneficial and “I cannot see that harm is likely to result.” When the roll call ended the clerk tallied 108 ballots for each side. The speaker cast the deciding vote in favor of establishing the conference committee and appointed English, Stephens, and Howard to represent the house. English’s open transition into the administration’s good graces was complete. His next task was to devise a compromise which would not totally betray his constituents’ popular sovereignty principles.40

The committee disagreed upon the major issue of slavery in the territories and sought a basis of agreement upon a minor point—the federal land grant. The Lecompton convention requested an unusually large acreage which the committee trimmed by 20 million acres and offered Kansas a chance to accept or reject this modification of their original proposal by a popular vote. Hopefully this would obscure the real issue as much as possible and thus restore peace to both congress and the country. The compromise move was calculated to satisfy the advocates of popular sovereignty who demanded that Lecompton be resubmitted to a territorial vote. At the same time, those who opposed resubmission could claim it was the land proposal, and not the constitution, which was going before the electorate. Ambiguity hopefully made it more acceptable. Coupled with the land proposal was a statement that if the offer was rejected, Kansas would have to wait until its population warranted a representative in congress before reapplying for admission. The intent was, of course, to remove the Kansas question from national politics by immediate admission, or by delaying for some years.41 When English presented the issue in

36. Congressional Globe, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., v. 27, pt. 2, pp. 1435-1437; Evening Star, Washington, D. C., April 1 and 3, 1858. Joshua Giddings, a Republican congressman from Ohio introduced the motion to reject the constitution. The proposal was supported by all 92 Republicans who were joined by three Northern Democrats—Harris of Illinois and Chapman and Hickman of Pennsylvania—Washington Union, April 2, 1858, New York Tribune, April 3, 1858.


40. Congressional Globe, 35th Cong., 1st Sess., v. 27, pt. 2, pp. 1544-1547; Evening Star, Washington, D. C., April 9, 1858; Washington Union, April 14, 1858; Washington Intelligence, April 15 and 16, 1858; New York Daily Tribune, April 14, 1858.

41. Ibid., April 12 and 13, 1858.
the house he explained the substitute offered was the best the committee could agree upon "and in imposing a condition of admission it did not differ from either the Senate or the House Bill." 44

After a week of debate and parliamentary maneuvering, in which Harris and the anti-Lecompton group sought to kill the bill outright, the house finally came to a vote on April 30 and adopted the compromise proposal 112-103. 45 English's "plain, simple, and direct" measure, it was hoped, would "give peace to the country and relieve the national legislature of a subject which has not only engrossed nearly all its time, but has been a means of discord and estrangement between the members of the democratic party. . . . " The Union considered the victory "one of the most significant and important that has ever been won by the democratic party in the history of our country." The next evening public rejoicing resounded throughout the nation's capital and a crowd serenaded the President who assured them "the result will tend to promote the peace and prosperity of our glorious Union." 46

English did indeed accomplish the difficult task of compromising a burning issue. The solution he presented not only avoided civil strife for two more years, but permitted him to remain within the Democratic party and win reelection in the fall. This was achieved by providing a method whereby several Northern popular sovereignty Democrats could once again vote with the administration without violating their constituents' trust. His untiring effort was crucial to Lecompton's success in the house of representatives. Thus nine Northern Democrats who repeatedly voted against the administration through April 1, eventually changed their position. That shift is directly attributable to the efforts of William English. 47 The nine votes English influenced provided the administration with an effective victory margin. A few men, including the President, hailed him as a hero; many more condemned him as a traitor and a turncoat. Nowhere was the reaction against the Hoosier congressman and his namesake bill greater than in Kansas itself.

Throughout April Kansas politicians apprehensively watched congressional maneuvering and Republicans increasingly condemned any attempt to compromise and salvage Lecompton. The house delay permitted its opponents to assume "Lecompton is sinking," and Free-State editors immediately and joyously announced the constitution's demise, some even going so far as to hesitantly laud Douglas for his opposition. 48 Communities staged spontaneous celebrations and a Leavenworth visitor noted "a lot of powder has been burnt over it." Wisely, however, he cautioned that such frivolity may be premature for "Conference Committees, Administration patronage, a Lecompton Senate and Speaker, will eventually put it through." 49 Indeed the process was already underway. Bradford confided to Denver on April 1 that within 10 days a conference committee favorable to the senate bill would be created and another Washington source confidently stated "votes enough are secured & Lecompton will pass this week—four members offering to change, this makes a tie & the Speaker will untie." 50

Temporarily, however, events seemed to be favoring the anti-Lecompton forces. When the house and senate repeatedly insisted upon

44. Apparently feeling the committee would fail to agree upon a solution and be dissolved, there was little interest in its work. — Evening Star, Washington, D. C., April 16, 19, 21, and 23, 1856; Washington Union, April 17, 18, 23, and 25, 1856; Washington Intelligencer, April 23 and 24, 1856; Kansas Weekly Herald, Leavenworth, May 1, 1856. The Buchanan administration had a large role in developing the English bill. — Robert Toombs to Buchanan, Washington, D. C., April 18, 1856, Buchanan Manuscripts, HSP, and Jacob Thompson to English, n. p., n. d., English Manuscripts, 1856.


46. Washington Union, April 30, May 1 and 2, 1856; Washington Intelligencer, May 3, 1856.

47. The opponents had so secretly laid their plans & had so solemnly pledged each other not to divulge them, that nothing leaked out—Then they were all under sacred pledges one to the other & each to all, to stand by the programme laid down & under no considerations to be bought off. These agreements were all carried out by every man in the league save one, Dewart of Pa, who on Wednesday night, surrendered. — Stevens to Denver, Washington, D. C., April 3, 1856, "Denver Collection," KSHS. Voting for creating a conference committee were, in addition to English, Hall and Pendleton of Ohio, and O. Jones of Pennsylvania. Joining this group in supporting the passage of the English bill on April 30 were Foley of Indiana along with Cockrell, Cox, Grousbeck, and Lawrence, all of Ohio. Montgomery of Pennsylvania was absent.

48. Herald of Freedom, Lawrence, April 3 and 10, 1858; Freedom's Champion, Atchison, April 10, 1858; Kansas News, Emporia, April 10, 1858.

49. Freedom's Champion, Atchison, April 10, 1858; Sam. F. Tappan to Thomas W. Higginson, Lawrence, April 7, 1858, "Higginson Collection," Manuscript Dept., KSHS.

maintaining their own positions it appeared to Free-State editors that they were about to be saved by the inability of congress to compromise. "The last news from Washington is most glorious!" proclaimed Solomon Miller of the White Cloud Kansas Chief, as he announced Lecompton's collapse, and added he would enjoy seeing "Old Buck gnashing his teeth." The "swindle" was considered "about dead," by the Lawrence Republican, while the Atchison editor was certain it had already "died the death of a villain." Leavenworth celebrated again and the local Democratic editor gruffly complained the jubilee was so boisterously rowdy it kept respectable citizens awake until "the small hours of the morning." 51

With the appointment of the conference committee Kansas Republicans, ever distrustful of the Buchanan administration, justly feared a new plot would be devised to push Lecompton through the house. Hope for its defeat died, Washington friends wrote "to be ready for the blow," and the details of the English bill soon arrived in Kansas.52 "The friends of freedom ... burned their powder prematurely," moaned the Emporia News, while the Chindowan felt the Lecompton "Usurpation" would pass under some "odious form." As their highest hopes evaporated the Republicans became increasingly apprehensive.53

Administration Democrats viewed the same events quite differently. Their party organ in the territorial capital predicted certain victory, while the Leavenworth Herald was sure Kansas would henceforth have "a smooth sea and fair wind." 54 The solution offered by the English bill would "localize this question, and leave the settlement of it to the people of Kansas," emphasized the Lecompton Democrat, and accepting the congressional offer would "secure the peace and prosperity of Kansas at once." 55 Rejection and delaying admission would permit Black Republican agitation to continue unabated and result in a disunionist President in 1860. Sectional agitators should not be given the "Freedom to enslave white men by dissolving the Union." Surely Kansas would not follow "so suicidal a policy." 56 The bill's opponents were in decided disagreement with such an assessment.

"THE INFAMY IS CONSUMMATED," charged the Freedom's Champion, by Northern Democrats who abandoned the Montgomerie amendment because "the allures of office and the blandishments of power proved too strong for them." The "English Dodge" was "an infernal Swindle," so enormous it "must be apparent to all." Instead of settling the issue it merely reopened Kansas "for an indefinite and more serious strife than has yet been experienced." 57 Free-State men detested every feature of the English bill and scorned "the paltry acres of land with which unprincipled men have sought to purchase their manhood." The Southern slavery triumphed at last: "... it is Lecompton or nothing—a Slave state or none at all. The test is worthy of the Democratic party. ..." 58 "NO MORE EXTENSION OF THE FOOTPRINTS OF SLAVERY INTO FREE TERRITORY," wrote "A Republican" to the Grasshopper, Grasshopper Falls, while the Elwood Press urged defeating the referendum in order to "put at rest forever the idea of making Kansas anything but a Free State. ..." 59

The Democratic press saw the slavery issue in a different perspective. For example, the Lecompton Democrat unsuccessfully tried to convince Republicans that rejection of the English bill would in reality be a vote to retain slavery by remaining a territory, while acceptance and statehood would actually help make Kansas a free state more rapidly. The Republicans were not receptive to the argument.60 "English & Co. have hatched" a slave state, and the Republicans seemed determined to drown it in a flood of editorial ink. One writer who considered "it ... vague, uncertain, indefinite, equivocal, ambiguous, [and] paradoxical," found it "incredible that any man ... could be so ended with the

51. White Cloud Kansas Chief, April 15 and 22, 1858; Lawrence Republican, April 15, 1858; Freedom's Champion, Atchison, April 17, 1858; Lawrence Republican, April 24, 1858.

52. Herald of Freedom, Lawrence, April 24, May 8 and 15, 1858.

53. Emporia News, April 17, 1858; Quindaro Chindowan, April 17, 1858; Lawrence Republican, April 22, 1858.


55. Kansas National Democrat, Lecompton, May 20 and June 17, 1858.

56. Leavenworth Herald, June 19, 1858; Kansas National Democrat, Lecompton, July 1, 1858.

57. Freedom's Champion, Atchison, May 8, 1858; Quindaro Chindowan, May 8, 1858; Kansas Tribune, Topeka, May 8, 1858.


59. Grasshopper, Grasshopper Falls, June 12, 1858; Elwood Kansas Weekly Press, July 17, 1858.

60. Kansas National Democrat, Lecompton, July 22, 1858.
satanic as to be able to concoct a bill in which there is embodied so much of evil and so little of good." The English version, "more infamous and outrageous" than the original bill, was "born a traitor," and "will be executed as such." 61 The Hoosier congressman rapidly achieved notoriety.

The territorial Republican press freely misconstrued the English bill as an attempt to bribe voters into swallowing slavery and this rapidly became a favorite theme. It was a "paltry, meagre, miserable bribe," according to the Lawrence Republican, while the Freedom's Champion declared "The magnificent dowry which the Traitor's Insult pretends to grant is a miserable deception." 62 Surely the masses would spurn with "unmitigated scorn and contempt any attempt to approach them with a bribe." The Emporia News concurred and added, "Thank God the people . . . cannot be bribed." 63

Certainly all Democrats did not support the English bill, and former Acting Governor Stanton engaged in an extensive speaking tour opposing it, but most of their newspapers did try to show that it definitely was not a bribe. 64 "The grant is as large as is the practice of the Government to make, but by no means anything extraordinary," wrote the Herald of Freedom, Lawrence. Noting that Free-State editors "are running wild about THE BRIBE," the Minneola Statesman sought to set the record straight. "Now we do think . . . that the people of Kansas have too much sense to imagine for one moment that Government was attempting to bribe them by offering them the English bill." 65 An administration organ labeled the charge "another trumped up plan to make political capital." Surely, if the Democrats really wanted to bribe Kansas they would have offered more, not less land than originally requested. Besides, "the submission of the question of the land grants and the Constitution is one and the same, for the adoption of one is the adoption of the other, and the rejection of the one the rejection of the other." In reality, the English bill was "nothing more than a virtual submission of the Constitution." 66 Even the bill's opponents often agreed with the interpretation and one Republican admitted the so-called bribe did not contain as much land as other new states had gotten and termed this the "bare hook" that is held before us to "bite." 67

Congress was accused of trying to coax Kansas into the Union by holding a stick of candy in one hand and a whip in the other, for the bill also provided that if the congressional proposal was rejected, Kansas would remain a territory until its population warranted one representative in congress. Some Republicans wondered why a slave state could be admitted with fewer people than a free state. Others saw

61. Kansas Tribune, Topeka, May 8, 1858; Quindaro Chindowan, May 15, 1858; Freedom's Champion, Atchison, May 22, 1858.
62. Lawrence Republican, May 13, 1858; Freedom's Champion, Atchison, May 15, 1858.
63. Lawrence Republican, May 20, 1858; Kansas News, Emporia, May 8, 1858.
64. Herald of Freedom, May 15 and 22, 1858; Lawrence Republican, June 3, 1858; Weekly Kansas Herald, Leavenworth, July 17, 1858; Stanton spoke in Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Atchison, but failed to arrive in Ft. Scott as expected.—Herald of Freedom, June 5, 12, 19, and July 10, 1858; Weekly Kansas Herald, Leavenworth, July 31, 1858; William Weer to Hugh S. Walsh, Ft. Scott, July 13, 1858; "Locomotion Constitution Election Returns," Archives Department, KSHS, Western Argus, Wyandotte City, July 29, 1858.
65. Herald of Freedom, June 19, 1858; Minneola Statesman as cited in Herald of Freedom, June 19, 1858.
advantages to remaining a territory since the federal government would continue to provide the essential services and therefore local taxes would remain low. Democrats, however, considered this political buncombe, charging that in reality retaining territorial status would permit Republicans to continue sectional agitation.

Members of both camps keenly realized the ultimate decision would be made at the ballot box. When congress passed “the Conference fizzle on Kansas,” Pennsylvania Cong. Galusha A. Grow informed Charles Robinson that Eastern Republicans hoped the Free-State men would make “their assertions good against Le- compton by as large a majority as it is possible for them to give.” Robinson probably assured Grow, as he did Henry Wilson, that he was “unnecessarily alarmed,” since “the English ordinance is really no more & no less than Lecompton, except that it has less land than when we defeated it in Jan’y,” and therefore, 10,000 men would once again vote against it. The vote might possibly go as high as 12,000 to 15,000 since many Democrats would probably vote against it, for if admitted immediately the state government and congressional delegation would all be Republican. As Dwight Thacher, editor of the Lawrence Republican, traveled through the East during the summer he assured anxious inquirers that Kansas would indeed defeat the proposition overwhelmingly.

To achieve this much desired goal, Republican editors constantly harangued their readers to “Spurn the base and infamous proposition!” Voters were reminded that the English bill “conceals the hated Lecompton Constitution,” and admonished to “crash straight through the bait . . . and strike the monster.” The Herald of Freedom confidently predicted the measure would attract less than 500 votes and that the election “will whisper a tale in Mr. Buchanan’s ears which will surprise him.” Arguments against it were considered superfluous; one had only to remember the “meanness of . . . [those] who concocted and endorsed it.” Thus William English achieved instant and eternal infamy in Kansas for entering into a compact with Buchanan who used him “as a tool to extricate the fire-eaters from the dilemma which the total defeat of Lecompton would have placed them in—they having sworn to ‘march out of the Union’ if Lecompton ‘naked,’ was not passed.” English enabled congress to sneak out “of a very small hole,” and it immediately became a solemn Republican duty to see that this measure did not gain “the prestige of success.” A united stand against the “English juggle” became a cardinal principle and an election eve rally at Monrovia offered “three cheers for Free Labor, and three groans for the English swindle.” Repudiation at the ballot box was essential.

As KANSAS newspapers debated the English bill’s merits, the territorial government prepared for the upcoming referendum. Upon receiving official notification of the bill from Secretary of State Lewis Cass, Governor Denver immediately appointed a bipartisan election board. A gubernatorial proclamation established August 2 as election day, explained the congressional offer, and announced the polling places. The upcoming vote was a constant topic of debate. Republicans hoped for the largest vote possible in order to bury the constitution “so deep that no resurrection trump will ever reach it.” As was often the case, the Lawrence Herald wrote as though the vote would be on the constitution itself rather than on the land referendum, and regretted the people could not defeat it on an earlier date.

68. Kansas Weekly Press, Elwood, June 12 and July 31, 1858, Freedom’s Champion, Atchison, May 15 and 22, 1858; Quindaro Chitewater, June 5, 1858; Grasshopper Falls Grasshopper as cited in Herald of Freedom, June 19 and 26, 1858; White Cloud Kansas Chief, June 24, 1858; Weekly Kansas Herald, Leavenworth, July 10, 1858; Western Argus, Wyandotte City, July 20, 1858.

69. Galusha A. Grow to Charles Robinson, Washington, D.C., May 2, 1858, and Robinson to Henry Wilson, Lawrence, May 12, 1858, “Robinson Collection,” Manuscript Dept., KSHS.

70. Herald of Freedom, May 8, 1858, Kansas Leader as cited in ibid., May 22, 1858.

71. Lawrence Republican, June 17, 1858. A similar sentiment was expressed in a letter of Thomas Ewing, Jr., Leavenworth, May 15, 1858, when he wrote to Sen. James G. Blaine. That letter, originally published in the Portland (Maine) Advertiser, was copied in the Herald of Freedom, July 10, 1858.


73. Quindaro Chitewater, June 5, 1858; Kansas News, Emporia, May 8, 1858.

74. Grasshopper, Grasshopper Falls, June 12, 1858; Freedom’s Champion, Atchison, July 31, 1858. A similar derogatory cheer was rendered for both English and the administration during a mass meeting at Mound City—Herald of Freedom, May 22, 1858.

75. Kansas Weekly Herald, Leavenworth, May 29, 1858; Herald of Freedom, May 29 and June 5, 1858.

76. R. S. Stevens encouraged Denver to delay the election until late July for “time will strengthen the chances of success.”—Stevens to Denver, Washington, D.C., May 24, 1858, “Denver Collection,” KSHS. Lawrence Republican, June 10, 1858; Weekly Kansas Herald, Leavenworth, June 19, 1858; Kansas News, Emporia, May 22, 1858; Lawrence Republican, May 27, 1858; Herald of Freedom, May 29, 1858.
The opposition assumed the rejection would be "almost unanimous," but at the same time cautioned against overconfidence. Such unanimity decreased excitement considerably and the Leavenworth Journal predicted that while the election would turn out a large vote it would be one of the most quiet events ever held in Kansas.77

Full participation was constantly encouraged, interest heightened as the election drew near, and the opposition cautioned against ballot box frauds in a referendum "settling ... so momentous an issue." If the people will go to the polls "they will vote right, beyond a doubt." 78 Calling for a 12,000 opposition majority the Lawrence Republican emphasized that rejection would illustrate "the detestation, by a free, honest and generous people, of this low and contemptible cheat," designed to hide Lecompton.79 Taking it for granted that determined people would vote "PROPOSITION REJECTED," C. W. Brown admonished his readers "to write these words, nothing more, nothing less, upon your tickets." He hoped for 2,000 votes in Douglas county against it and added he would be disappointed if more than 75 local residents voted for it.80

Early reports indicated an anti-Lecompton win, but at least one Republican preferred waiting for the complete returns rather than believing rumors for "The Administration is something not to be dispised, and its whole weight will be thrown into the balance in favor of Slavery ... and I have not much faith in principle when policy hangs in the opposite balance." Such suspicions were unjustified for the official returns eventually indicated 12,254 voted against the English proposal while only 1,915 favored it.81 The results were indeed a crushing defeat for the Buchanan forces. Democratic analysts blamed "a great apathy which seemed to pervade our party," and the "absolute indifference" regarding the fate of the constitution. Some Democrats simply gave up on the slavery issue and did not vote while others were considered lukewarm toward the issue at best. One Lecomptonite admitted his own lack of zeal but also indicated he would "vote for it as a democrat measure." 82

The REPUBLICAN press lost no time in rejoicing over the English bill's resounding defeat. "FREEDOM TRIUMPHANT ... The People Victorious ... HEAR THE THUNDER! ... Kansas is Free," jubilantly proclaimed the Champion's editor, while the Lawrence

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77. Kansas News, Emporia, June 19 and 26, 1858; Herald of Freedom, July 3, 1858; Leavenworth Journal, July 8, 1858.
78. Lawrence Republican, July 15, 1858; White Cloud Kansas Chief, July 20, 1858; Leavenworth Journal, July 15, 1858.
79. Lawrence Republican, July 15, 1858.
80. Herald of Freedom, July 17, 1858. The editor should not have been too discouraged for Douglas county gave only 40 votes in favor of the English bill while opposing it with 1,783. The file of the election returns in the Archives Department of the KSHS contains some of the hand written ballots used in the referendum. They are small slips of blue paper. Obviously printed ballots were not provided.
82. W. R. Waterman to Walsh, Wabaunsee, July 20, 1858, "Lecompton Election Returns," Archives Dept., KSHS; Kansas News, Emporia, July 24 and August 7, 1858; Kansas Weekly Press, Elwood, August 21, 1858; Lawrence Republican, August 5, 1858; E. S. Wilkinson to Denver, Olathe, August 7, 1858; J. Williams to Denver, Ft. Scott, August 15, 1858, and Cary B. Whitehead to Walsh, Wathena, July 10, 1858, "Lecompton Election Returns," Archives Dept., KSHS; Several sources reported severe flooding and Republicans thought this decreased the anti-Lecompton vote.—Kansas News, Emporia, August 7, 1858; Kansas Weekly Press, Elwood, August 21, 1858.
Republican hoped the administration understood Kansas did not want Lecompton in any form. Thus died the "English Brat," and the event closed "the traitor's drama, at least so far as making Kansas a slave state is concerned." The issue was settled. "Lecompton was buried... beyond hope of resurrection, and with it, its framers, aidsers and abettors." The Chief immediately pictured a cannon captioned "Bring Out the Big Pistol," and a few weeks later declared the deceased "English Juggle... came up like a sparrowgrass, was cut down like a hoppergrass, and died like a Jack-ass." 

Meanwhile, Democrats rationalized the defeat into a victory for now there would be no Black Republicans in state offices or speaking for Kansas in the senate. "Surely, the vote... saved our Territory the disgrace of a Republican victory." Obviously voters wished to remain a slave territory, continue under federal protection, and retain Denver in office. Since some Democrats voted against the measure, Lecompton's defeat could not solely be a Republican victory; and although they may "sing psalms of glory... they are building upon a foundation of sand when they regard that election as a harbinger of future victories." The Argus considered the "question is now localized," and can offer no further damage to the Democratic party. "The last prop has been knocked from under the freedom shriekers, and their sole stock in trade is gone." 

Solving the problem of whether or not to accept the Lecompton constitution and the land provision offered in the English bill was the dominant issue with which political activists in Kansas concerned themselves in 1858. Little effort was expended determining what voting groups, if any, may have supported or opposed the congressional offer.

Did any factors differentiate the men who voted for and against the Lecompton constitu-

tion and the English bill referendum on August 2, 1858? Contemporary evidence available to researchers today permits a socio-economic analysis of some voters in that contest. Six precincts in five counties were investigated in which every vote was cast against the English bill. A comparison of the 1858 poll lists with the 1860 census rolls permitted the identification of 41.9 percent of those men who voted in the August referendum. Then three precincts were chosen in two counties in which a sizeable number of voters, varying from 45 to 50 percent, chose to support the English bill and 48.5 percent of these voters were identified. From this basis several tables were developed comparing specific factors between areas which totally rejected the proposal and areas which were divided in their preferences.

Nativities of voters within these two groups offer sharp contrasts as illustrated in Table I. Precincts totally rejecting the proposal were much more oriented toward Northern birthplaces, in addition to having a sizeable number of foreign born, and conversely had a much smaller voter group born in Southern slave states. The most distinctive feature about those precincts partially supporting the English bill is that over half of the identifiable voters were born in the South while at the same time having an almost total absence of New England Yankees and men born abroad. There was not much difference regarding those born in the Middle Atlantic and the Middle Western states.

83. Freedom's Champion, August 7, 14, 1858; Lawrence Republican, August 5, 1858.
84. Emporia News, August 14, 21, 1858; Herald of Freedom, August 7, 1858.
85. White Cloud Kansas Chief, August 5 and 19, 1858.
86. Western Argus, Wyandotte City, August 5, 1858.
87. Weekly Kansas Herald, Lavenworth, August 7, 1858; Western Argus, Wyandotte City, August 5, 1858.
88. Herald of Freedom, August 21, 1858; Kansas Weekly Press, Elwood, August 21, 1858.

89. The six townships studied which totally rejected the English bill were Pottawatomie (Coffey county), Jackson (Anderson county), Pottawatomie (Franklin county), Alma and Mission Creek (Lyon county), and Middle Creek (Lyon, now Miami county). The three precincts used to study divided townships include Kentucky (Jefferson county), and Paola and West (Lykins county). Both the original poll lists and the manuscript copies of the 1860 population census schedules are available in the Archives Dept., KSHS.
90. New England states represented are Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont; Middle Atlantic states are New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania; Middle Western states include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Ohio; Southern states having former residents living in these Kansas precincts were Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia.
91. The Republicans counted heavily upon anti-English bill support from the Germans and apparently were justified in their expectations.—Kansas Tribune, Topeka, May 8, 1858; Freedom's Champion, April 24 and August 7, 1858. The Herald of Freedom indicated several areas of German population in its July 17, 1858, issue. Those identifiable in the precinct returns and their majorities against the bill are Humboldt City, Allen county; 85-5; Eudora, Douglas county, 103-0; and Alma, Richardson county, 160.
TABLE I
NATIVITY OF VOTERS BY PERCENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of birth</th>
<th>Precincts totally rejecting English bill</th>
<th>Precincts partially rejecting English bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New England</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Western</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>55.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For sources of statistics in all tables, see footnote 89.

The age of voters participating in the election is another factor offering a contrast between these two groups and the summary is presented in Table II. In the precincts partially accepting the Lecompton constitution almost half of the voters identified were under 25 years of age as compared with only 25 percent in that age group in precincts totally rejecting the proposal. The opposite end of the scale was equally diverse. The group totally voting against Lecompton had 36.9 percent of their identifiable voters in the group over 40 years of age, while the group partially accepting Lecompton had only 26.7 percent of their voters in that category.

Table II
AGE OF VOTERS BY PERCENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Precincts totally rejecting English bill</th>
<th>Precincts partially rejecting English bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 29</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 and over</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An overwhelming majority of men in each group were farmers by occupation, as would normally be expected in a frontier situation. However, Table III further indicates those who totally rejected the proposal were far more rural in their orientation than the group partially accepting the English bill which shows the Lecompton constitution achieved wider support in the towns where the occupational profile was more diversified.

Table III
OCCUPATION OF VOTERS BY PERCENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation group</th>
<th>Precincts totally rejecting English bill</th>
<th>Precincts partially rejecting English bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laborer</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merch' &amp; Profes-</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sional</td>
<td>None given</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are extremely significant differences between the real estate holdings of the two groups as illustrated in Table IV. Slightly over half of the voters totally rejecting Lecompton represented the more substantial landowners having holdings valued over $1,000. This contrasts sharply with the area partially accepting Lecompton in which over half the voters fell into the lowest group which owned no property at all or held less than $100 worth of real estate. The two groups are, however, much more closely matched when considering personal property, although the group partially accepting the congressional offer still emerges with a higher percentage of its voters in the poorest category than does the group totally rejecting it. Since Table III indicates those favoring the English bill were more likely to be located in towns, serving as merchants, professionals, or skilled and unskilled laborers, it is possible that such men had more invested in items classified as personal property rather than a large investment in real estate. It is also obvious from Table IV that the areas rejecting Lecomptonism outright were in their totality slightly more wealthy than the regions where the constitution was at least partially acceptable.

Table IV
PROPERTY VALUE OF VOTERS BY PERCENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Precincts totally rejecting English bill</th>
<th>Precincts partially rejecting English bill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Real estate</td>
<td>Personal property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under $99</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100-$499</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$500-$999</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over $1,000</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A review of these four tables offers revealing comparisons. Voters in precincts totally rejecting Lecomptonism would more frequently be natives of free states, or have been born in Germany or the British Empire, be over 30 years of age, and would normally be a farmer possessing over $1,000 worth of real estate and personal property. It should be noted that birth in a Southern state does not automatically mean one will support the English bill for there were a substantial number of Southerners who obviously voted against it in those precincts studied. On the other hand, the profile of those precincts which partially accepted the English bill strongly indicates that Southern birth would often be a determining factor. Furthermore, the average supporter of Lecompton might possibly be a young man under 30 years of age who might be a farmer living near a rising town in which there would be a
substantial group of laborers. Despite his occupation, he would most likely be on the lower end of that community’s economic scale, probably holding less than $1,000 worth of real and personal property, and there is a good possibility he would own no real estate at all.

If occupation and real estate holdings indicate Lecompton’s supporters were less rural oriented than its opponents, where were these voters living in Kansas? Of the 126 precincts listed in the official returns the Lecompton referendum carried in 12, or 9.5 percent. Geographically, all these precincts are within counties located along the territory’s eastern edge, primarily in the central and northern portion, and with the exception of Lykins (presently known as Miami) and Linn counties, accessible via the Missouri and/or Kansas river valleys.¹⁰ Eleven other precincts supported the English bill with over 33 but less than 50 percent of the popular vote. Nine of these precincts are located within the same counties.¹¹ The English proposal gathered only nominal support in 81 additional precincts and was totally rejected in 52 others. The six counties of Atchison, Doniphan, Johnson, Jefferson, Leavenworth, and Lykins (Miami), formed the hard core of the support area. A total of 1,530 votes sustained the administration in these counties and provided the bulk of the 1,915 votes cast in favor of the English bill throughout the entire territory. Thus 79.8 percent of all ballots accepting the congressional offer were cast within the precincts of these six counties. But even in these counties the support was so weak that the English bill was soundly rejected.

Failure in Kansas was, however, only one aspect of the episode. A young Midwestern congressman survived a national tempest. William English successfully remained within the administration circle while at the same time alienating only a minority of the Douglas men in his district. Thus he was soon nominated for another term and within a few months won reelection. Although the English bill may not have ushered Kansas into the Union as a slave state it did return Bill English to congress, it did soft pedal Kansas as a national issue, and thus it helped delay the national holocaust for a few more years.

Kansas’ pioneer era coincided with the national struggle over slavery in the territories and the sparsely populated frontier communities centering in the Kansas river valley became the nation’s focal point in the 1850’s. As the pawn in the political game played by the South and the Buchanan administration it emerged as a turning point in the history of the Democratic party. The ramifications of Bleeding Kansas spread far beyond the territorial limits. Realizing the potentially lethal effect of supporting or opposing the Lecompton constitution, one moderate decided to save himself, his party, and hopefully his nation, by helping formulate an acceptable compromise. Congressman English wedded himself to the cause of Kansas and as a result of that union the Lecompton constitution and the English bill have enjoyed an infamous relationship and reputation from that day forward. Time not only heals, it also obscures, and today the town of Lecompton and the work of William H. English of Indiana are neither notorious nor controversial.

92. The 12 precincts in which the English bill gathered a majority vote were Williamsport 75.0 percent (Atchison county); Troy 53.5 percent and Wolfe River, 52.6 percent (Doniphan county); Rising Sun 58.3 percent (Jefferson county); Aubrey 54.3 percent, Oxford 53.1 percent, and Lexington 56.7 percent (Johnson county); Kickapoo 52.2 percent (Leavenworth county); Breckinridge 56.2 percent (Linn county); Paola 50.3 percent, Richardson 62.0 percent, and St. Maryville 53.4 percent (Lykins county).

93. Mt. Pleasant and Shannon in Atchison county; Iowa and Washington in Doniphan county; Shawnee in Johnson county; Jefferson in Jefferson county; Delaware and Alexandria in Leavenworth county. The only exceptions are Pleasant Grove in Greenwood county and Ogden in Riley county.