

1948

## Independentism: A Challenge to the Florida Democracy of 1884

Edward C. Williamson



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq>

University of Central Florida Libraries <http://library.ucf.edu>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in Florida Historical Quarterly by an authorized editor of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).

---

### Recommended Citation

Williamson, Edward C. (1948) "Independentism: A Challenge to the Florida Democracy of 1884," *Florida Historical Quarterly*. Vol. 27 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol27/iss2/6>

INDEPENDENTISM  
A CHALLENGE TO THE FLORIDA DEMOCRACY  
OF 1884

by EDWARD C. WILLIAMSON

*(I) A Political Regrouping*

After 1876 the Florida Republican party slowly dwindled away, for awhile holding its own in the coastal cities and a few counties of the so called "Black Belt." The Bourbon Democrats were in the saddle, pulling the wires and plucking what political plums there were. Confederate war veterans dominated the scene, causing frustration to many a younger Democratic politician. Therefore, it was not surprising that the election of 1884 saw a new party in the selection of candidates for state offices.

The population of Florida by the 1880 census was 269,493. Of these 142,605 were whites, of whom 84,678 were born in the state, 41,544 were born in the South other than Florida, and 8,680 were born in the North. There were 126,690 negroes; the total foreign born of both races was 9,909, mostly residing at Key West. <sup>1</sup> In the early 1880's Florida was in a period of development and population increase, by 1885 there being 338,406 people in the state. <sup>2</sup> Railroads were being built, land promotion companies were advertising in the North and in Europe, Hamilton Disston was attempting to drain the Everglades. From the grass roots in the peninsula state came a feeling of discontent and a fear of domination by outside capital.

The formation of the Independent party involved the interaction of several elements of behavior in Florida politics which would to some degree be paralleled in other southern states. However, the question of land owned by the Federal government tended to make the Florida case a unique one. Since the Spanish crown had ceded this vast area to the United States in 1821, various schemes had been proposed by an assortment of land speculators for the disposal of the Federal domain.

1. 10th Federal Census, 1880.

2. Florida State Census, 1885.

Congress had passed two internal improvement acts: the first, September 4, 1841, had granted the internal improvement lands proper, 500,000 acres, to the State; the second, September 28, 1850, had granted the whole swamp and overflowed lands within a state, made "unfit thereby for cultivation." Florida accepted the swamp and overflowed grant in 1851, and in January 1855 a law, said to be the product of the brain of David L. Yulee, was passed, providing for a liberal system of internal improvements.<sup>3</sup>

### *Florida Railroad Company*

Senator Yulee and other prominent Floridians organized the Florida Railroad Company in 1853 with the aid of Wall street interests of that era represented by E. N. Dickerson, and a railroad was built from Fernandina to Cedar Keys just prior to the Civil War. Because of the ravages of the conflict, the sparse population on the route of the road, and the limited reserve resources of the company, it went into receivership during Reconstruction; whereupon, Francis Vose of Boston, who had supplied iron for the road and held bonds guaranteed by the Internal Improvement Fund, went into the Federal court and tied up the Fund. Although Vose originally held only \$195,000 worth of bonds with \$228,000 outstanding, interest and expenses increased the debt which had been incurred before the war until in 1880 nearly \$1,000,000 was owed. Both Governor Stearns, the last Republican executive, and Governor Drew, the

3. *United States Statutes at Large*, Vol. 5, Chap. XVI; Vol. 9, Chap. LXXXIV, sec. 4; *Laws of Florida*, Chap. 610 [No. 1]; *Senate Journal*, A Journal of the Proceedings of the Senate of the State of Florida, 1909, pp. 244-270; The transactions of the Internal Improvement Fund bore no relation to State debt or revenues. The Internal Improvement Fund, consisting of proceeds from the sale of lands donated by the United States, is a trust under the management of certain State officials as a separate department of administration. The fund is responsible for its own obligations, and none of its assets can be diverted to other purposes than those of the fund—internal improvements, drainage, reclamation and settlement of land. Rowland H. Rerick, *Memoirs of Florida* (Atlanta, 1902). I, p. 352.

first Democrat after Reconstruction, attempted in vain to sell land and relieve the debt in order that the state might induce railroad builders to come in and construct roads much needed for development. Finally, Governor Bloxham in 1881 managed to interest Hamilton Disston, a wealthy Philadelphia saw maker and Republican politician, who purchased 4,000,000 acres of Florida Internal Improvement land for \$1,000,000. Thereupon, railroad building began on a large scale in Florida, between seven hundred and eight hundred miles being constructed by 1884.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately for Bloxham, there came a cry from the grass roots in Florida that he was giving away the domain of the state to a wealthy Northerner instead of selling it piecemeal to Florida farmers. This wave of protest against the existing land system of the state and the desire for cheap lands formed the keystone of the Independent movement.

Another grievance which the farmers had against the railroads was the matter of freight and express rates. An indignation meeting of Columbia county vegetable growers held March 22, 1881 was an antecedent of the Independent movement which showed the desire of Florida market gardeners for reasonable rates:

Whereas, The Southern Express Company has upon the eve of vegetable shipments, increased the tariff on transportation of peas, beans, and all light vegetables, fully sixty per cent; therefore, be it

Resolved, 1st. That we, the vegetable growers of Columbia county, regard this action upon the part of the Express Company as a direct attempt to throttle the enterprise of raising early vegetables for market, and unanimously condemn it. . . .

Resolved, 3d. That we labor, through an active and diligent committee, to remedy the evil by negotiating with the Florida Dispatch Line, or some other company that will insure us a speedy transportation of our garden products at a less rate than the present unjust one

4. Vose v. Reed, *et al.*, trustees (Woods 647) ; Rufus. E. Rose, *The Swamp and Overflowed Lands of Florida: The Disston Contract and Sale* (Tallahassee, 1916), pp. 1-5; D. L. Yulee to John A. Henderson, April 20, 1886, in *Times-Union*. May 23, 1886: *Minutes of The Internal Improvement Fund*, II, p. 501; Ruby Leach Carson, "William Dunnington Bloxham," (unpublished master's thesis, University of Florida, 1945), pp. 196-209 ; T. Frederick Davis, "The Disston Land Purchase," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XVII (1938-39), 200-210.

suddenly forced upon us by a company that has heretofore enjoyed our undivided patronage.

Resolved, 4th. That we earnestly ask the immediate and active co-operation of all Florida market gardeners for the accomplishment of a reasonable tariff per crate to the Atlantic and Western markets.<sup>5</sup>

This is an example of one of the chief complaints of farmers which led to the demand for a railroad commission.

### *The Independent Movement*

Many white voters, previously Democrats, were on the fence due to dissatisfaction with the Democratic administration because of the Disston sale and its pro-railroad policy, the bolder ones soon becoming Independents, while others held back looking askance at a coalition with Republicans. In the campaign of 1884 they would have to make up their minds; they were the balance of power and the future of the Independent movement would depend upon their decision.

The situation in Madison county, out of which Frank Pope emerged a state-wide figure, had a causal relationship to the Independent party. The bitter political conflict there, while not *sui generis*, played a decisive part in the emergence of a new faction in state politics.

### *Republican Ranks Divide*

In East Florida the colored voters led by former Congressman Josiah T. Walls of Gainesville were not satisfied with the Republican machine, having voted faithfully for the Republican ticket without receiving any comparable benefits.<sup>6</sup> The Radical machine seemed more interested in Federal patronage than in an aggressive campaign against the Democrats.<sup>7</sup> The latter, while soliciting colored votes, were unwilling to divide the offices with them. On the other hand the Independent

5. *Floridian*, April 5, 1881.

6. Fernandina *Mirror*, July 12, 1884; Palatka *Daily News*, Aug. 17, 1884.

7. Emory Fiske Skinner, *Reminiscences* (Chicago, 1908), pp. 153-169; Fernandina *Mirror*, July 19, 1884.

movement offered the colored voters a share in the government of the state if victorious.

A small faction of more liberal Republicans, led by politically ambitious Henry S. Sanford and former Governor Harrison Reed, hoped to wrest control of the party from the "Bisbee, Eagan, Martin ring," the leadership of the regular G. O. P. post-Reconstruction period being largely in the hands of Congressman Horatio Bisbee from the Second Congressional District covering East Florida, Dennis Eagan, who in the opinion of editor George R. Fairbanks of the Fernandina *Mirror* was the ablest man in the state Republican ranks, holding the office of collector of internal revenue at Jacksonville, and Malachi Martin, surveyor-general of the land office at Gainesville.<sup>8</sup>

The Conservative Democratic state administration after 1876 had followed the Republican line of encouraging business and capital to come into the state.<sup>9</sup> Although both governors, Drew and Bloxham, favored the building of railroads, neither was a member of the extreme pro-railroad faction of the Democratic party. In appealing to the rank and file the Democracy relied on being the party of the Confederacy, refreshing memories of the war at election time:

The land is full of rebels and a rebel flag they fly  
 They seem to hate the patriots who drain the surplus  
 dry . . . .  
 That rebel yell is raised again, in freedom's sacred  
 name  
 To drive the thieves and rascals out, and save the  
 land from shame  
 And honest men who love the right, and wish for  
 equal laws,  
 Are praying that God may bless that righteous rebel  
 cause

8. Fernandina *Mirror*, June 7, July 19, 1884.

9. Rembert W. Patrick, *Florida under Five Flags* (Gainesville, 1945). p. 97.

And when against corruption's rule its steady foes  
 rebel  
 Millions of throats will gladly join to raise the rebel  
 yell.<sup>10</sup>

(Anonymous)

*(II) The State Conventions*

Due to the antagonistic attitude taken by former Governor Frank Drew against the incumbent William D. Bloxham a delicate situation arose within the ranks of the Florida Democracy. Despite his victory over the Republican Marcellus Stearns in 1876 and the full endorsement of his administration by the Democratic convention of 1880, Drew was denied a renomination and Bloxham had been chosen as Democratic candidate for governor ;<sup>11</sup> therefore, on the eve of the 1884 convention, the wealthy lumberman of Ellaville, nursing a deep grudge, stated that he would not support Governor Bloxham should the latter be renominated. For that reason, although most counties had instructed their delegations to the Pensacola convention to vote for one of the two men, dark horses began to appear, the emphasis being on one who could harmonize both factions in this decidedly personal feud.<sup>12</sup>

*Independents Meet at Live Oak*

Favored at the outset by this lack of unity among their opponents, the Independents met on June 18 at Live Oak, the county seat of Suwannee, which by coincidence was the nearest town to ex-Governor Drew's residence at Ellaville. According to various newspaper estimates between sixty-seven and one hundred delegates from twenty to twenty-seven counties attended. Miles Mountien of Washington county was elected temporary chairman and Dr. G. Troup Maxwell, a Marion county

10. *Fernandina Mirror*, July 19, 1884.

11. Carson, "William Bloxham," pp. 132-136; *Floridian*, June 15, 29, 1880.

12. Carson, pp. 137-146; *Times-Union*, June 12, 15, 17, 18, 1884.

man, was chosen as permanent chairman. Dr. Maxwell was a former Democrat and an old hand at Florida politics as were many of the Independents. In the balloting for governor, Frank Pope of Madison defeated D. L. McKinnon of Jackson on the fourth ballot. Jonathan C. Greeley, a Republican, was nominated unanimously for lieutenant-governor after Maxwell had declined and the name of George W. Allen of Key West had been withdrawn. Maxwell, McKinnon and Pope made speeches arraiging the Bourbon Democracy, and a platform was adopted charging "radicalism with holding its corrupt tenure by the passions and prejudices born of that unhappy conflict." The principal issue was the Disston sale, the Bourbons being accused of dissipating the state's domain and of a policy unduly favoring the railroads. The platform went on to place the Independent party behind better education, a free ballot, a local option law and a railroad commission.<sup>13</sup>

State Senator Frank W. Pope of the Tenth District covering Madison county was, according to Charles H. Jones of the *Times-Union*, the organizer of the Independent movement.<sup>14</sup> Senator Pope was a young Madison lawyer, under thirty, gifted with a fine speaking voice, who had prior to becoming state senator held the office of mayor of Madison.<sup>15</sup> The *Land of Flowers*, a capital city newspaper, in calling Pope "a harum-scarum, the devil-take-the-hindmost young hotspur" presented the conservative view of the ambitious young politician.<sup>16</sup> Pope as a youth had been absent from Madison from 1867 till the winter of 1876-77, during part of which

13. W. T. Cash, *History of the Democratic Party in Florida* (Live Oak, 1936), 77 ; *Times-Union*, June 19, 1884 ; *Floridian*, June 24, 1884 ; *Land of Flowers* (Tallahassee), June 21, 1884 ; *Fernandina Mirror*, July 5, 1884; *Palatka Daily News*, Aug. 10, 1884. Cash gives the date of the convention as May 17; the *Times-Union* gives June 18.

14. *Times-Union*, June 20, 1884.

15. Kathryn Trimmer Abbey, *Florida, Land of Change* (Chapel Hill, 1941), 331; *Misc. Doc. No. 11*, 1st session 47 Congress 1881-82, 1032-Contested election of Bisbee vs. Finley from the 2nd Congressional District of Florida.

16. *Land of Flowers*, June 21, 1884.



time he visited the Montana mining area. Upon returning to Madison he had engaged in Democratic activities before the Democratic county organization rejected his nomination to the state senate; whereupon, he turned Independent.<sup>17</sup>

J. C. Greeley was a Jacksonville banker. The *Land of Flowers* reported that he was a fair-minded, honest, upright man, and one of the most trustworthy in the Republican party. It warned the Democrats that a blunder at Pensacola might possibly result in the election of the Independent ticket, as the majority of Florida voters were neither reasoners nor thinkers and could be easily influenced by a glib tongue and fair promises.<sup>18</sup>

Pope in his letter of acceptance put forth the claim that the political parties were aligned on an artificial basis from the Civil War: the basis was Bourbonism vs. Radicalism and the issue of race supremacy. The election of 1876, the standard-bearer of the new party asserted, rebuked Radicalism; he hoped this year to tear "the mask of Democracy from the equally hideous face of its twin brother Bourbonism." Greeley in accepting announced he was in favor of free schools, local option, a free ballot, a full vote and a fair count.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Democrats Meet at Pensacola*

On June 25 the Democratic convention met at Pensacola, the temporary chairman being William D. Chipley, West Florida railroad man and a prominent Pensacola politician. The presidency of the convention went to James F. McClellan of Jackson. In the balloting J. B. Johnston of Alachua nominated General W. Miller of Washington ; Francis. P. Fleming of Duval nominated General E. A. Perry of Escambia amid deafening cheers, with R. W. Davis of Clay seconding ; Church Croom of Hernando nominated Sam Pasco of Jefferson; and Col.

17. *Misc. Doc. No. 11*, 1032; *Floridian*, July 29, 1884; *Palatka Daily News*, Aug. 22, 1884.

18. *Land of Flowers*, June 21, 1884.

19. *Times-Union*, July 19, 1884.

McCaskill of Walton ended the nominations by placing the name of Comptroller W. D. Barnes of Jackson in the ring. Miller lacked strength, but on the first two ballots Barnes stayed up with Perry and Pasco; however, on the third round his delegates left him, and he dropped out. The convention was amused at a sally between two members: Nat Walker in voting announced that "Wakulla gives Perry four votes now, and the balance in November"; to which M. J. Solomons responded, "Liberty [county] is still solid-one vote for Samuel Pasco." When on the sixth ballot Perry had 177 of 292, lacking 18 of having the necessary two-thirds, Sam Pasco, who was at the time chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee, for the sake of harmony withdrew his name and moved that the General be nominated by a unanimous vote, which was done. Milton H. Mabry received the nomination for lieutenant governor, and Representative R. H. M. Davidson was renominated in the First Congressional District Convention, defeating Dr. R. J. Perry on the second ballot.<sup>20</sup>

In accepting the nomination General Perry announced that he had made no political alliances; therefore, he was pledged to no man or set of men, and his best efforts would be for the good of the state and the success of the Democratic party.<sup>21</sup>

Edward Aylesworth Perry was a native of Massachusetts, who after completing his education at Yale University came South to teach and then studied law, opening an office in Pensacola about 1857. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1861 he raised an infantry company in Escambia county as an independent organization, going with it to Virginia. The Second Florida regiment arrived at Richmond soon afterwards, and Perry's company was attached to it. At the battle of Williamsburg the regiment's commanding officer, Colonel George

20. Samuel Pasco Jr., "Samuel Pasco (1834-1917)," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, VII (1928-29), 137; *Fernandina Mirror*, June 28, 1884; *Floridian*, July 1, 21, 1884; *Land of Flowers*, June 28, 1884.

21. *Floridian*, July 1, 1884.

T. Ward, was killed ; thereupon, Perry was elected colonel by a large majority and led the regiment at Seven Pines, Richmond and at Fraser's Farm where he was wounded. The Fifth and Eighth Florida regiments came to Virginia in the fall and joining with the Second formed the Florida Brigade with Brigadier General Perry commanding. At Gettysburg the Florida unit suffered a greater proportion of casualties to its number than any other brigade engaged. General Perry was again wounded in the battle of the Wilderness. After the war he returned to Pensacola and resumed the practice of law.<sup>22</sup> An anecdote told by a veteran of the Florida Brigade well explains the respect which his command had for him:

Why, do you know that when I was in Perry's brigade trudging along the road one day in Virginia, played out from sickness and fatigue, he rode up, dismounted and made me ride his horse, while he walked and carried my gun ; and I have seen him do the same to others, and sometimes he made his officers dismount and turn their horses over to disabled soldiers during a long march.<sup>23</sup>

General Perry was the first Confederate soldier who had seen much fighting to be nominated for the gubernatorial office in Florida after Reconstruction; Milton Mabry, on the other hand, was a young man just turned twenty-three. A native of Alabama and a graduate of Cumberland University Law School, he had come to Leesburg, then Sumter county, in 1879 and was the law partner of State Attorney William A. Hocker, long a powerful figure in central Florida politics.<sup>24</sup>

### (III) Campaign Fireworks

The campaign, in contrast to the lukewarm contest of 1880, was carried on in a spirited manner with the

22. *Soldiers of Florida*, Fred L. Robertson, Compiler, (Live Oak, 1903), pp. 329-330; *Fernandina Mirror*, June 28, 1884 ; *Floridian*, July 1, 1884.

23. *Ibid.*, July 29, 1884.

24. *Ibid.*, July 1, 1884.

Independent newspapers hitting at the state administration and the Disston sale, the Democratic scribes just as energetically defending and counter-attacking. C. L. Fildes of the Gainesville *Bee*. (Ind.) and C. H. Jones of the *Times-Union* (Dem.) dropped their pens long enough to attempt a physical approach to their differences.<sup>25</sup> After their scuffle both returned to the editorial page to continue the feud: Fildes asserting that the nomination of Perry was dictated by Governor Bloxham and that he would get neither the Northern nor the young men's vote, Jones not concurring in this point of view. The *Bee* editor also announced that Pope would see to it that large unearned grants of land to railroads and corporations were returned and placed on the market subject to purchase by the poor man at the same price as the rich.<sup>26</sup> Jones, replying in the *Times-Union*, maintained that according to the Supreme Court only the grantor could declare lands forfeited.<sup>27</sup>

George R. Fairbanks, scholarly editor of the *Fernandina Mirror*, analyzed the Independent movement from the standpoint of a strict Democratic party man. According to the port city editor, no matter what the ideal may be upon which an independent party starts out, it inevitably lands in the bosom of the opposite party. He called the Florida Independents "dissatisfied men" and saw in their platform an attempt to unite the railroad commission issue with prohibition.<sup>28</sup> Other papers followed standard lines: a typical example was the Tampa *Tribune* calling Independentism "Republicanism with a thin veil," following the Democratic line of attack;<sup>29</sup> while the Madison *New Era* hewed to the Independent line by attacking the Bloxham administration.<sup>30</sup> The Tallahassee *Economist* injected a national note into

25. *Times-Union*, July 1, 1884.

26. Gainesville *Bee* quoted in the *Times-Union*, July 2, 4, 1884.

27. *Times-Union*, July 4, 1884.

28. *Fernandina Mirror*, July 5, 1884.

29. Tampa *Tribune* quoted in the *Times-Union*, July 3, 1884.

30. Madison *New Era* quoted in the *Floridian*, July 1, 1884.

the campaign by mentioning that James G. Blaine, the Republican Presidential nominee, was Disston's choice; therefore, the Disston men and papers would be for him.<sup>31</sup> This charge, although highly improbable in as far as it related to Florida, further muddied the water since the Democrats in the election were defending Disston and the Disston purchase.<sup>32</sup>

Along with the Drew-Bloxham controversy, the Independent movement fanned other feuds long smoldering under the blanket of party solidarity into full flame. St. Clair Abrams, Democratic political leader of Orange county, through his newspaper, the *Tavares Herald*, then in Orange, announced that he was not happy over the selection of Charles Dougherty from neighboring Volusia county as the Democratic nominee for Congress in the Second Congressional District. The *Herald* in coming out for Bisbee held to the Democratic side on all other offices.<sup>33</sup> Abrams was secretive concerning his reason for splitting the ticket, but Dougherty claimed that the enmity originated in a poker game during the last session of the legislature.<sup>34</sup>

Congressman Bisbee was not having clear sailing either. On June 28 at the Independent county convention for Alachua held in Gainesville, Josiah T. Walls, political leader of the colored voters, was in the chair. Delegates to the District and State conventions were elected on the basis of eight colored to four white; resolutions were reported favoring the nomination of Frank Pope and the ratification of the Independent party platform. Captain L. G. Dennis, a radical Republican, had difficulty in gaining the floor; furthermore, a resolution complimenting Bisbee was voted down, and Walls was endorsed for Congress.<sup>35</sup> Although later at the District Two Republican convention Bisbee was renominated by

31. Tallahassee *Economist* quoted in the *Times-Union*, July 2, 1884.

32. *Floridian*, Sept. 2, 1884.

33. *Palatka Daily News*, July 10, 1884; *Times-Union*, July 11, 1884.

34. *Land of Flowers*, Aug. 30, Nov. 8, 1884.

35. *Times-Union*, July 1, 1884.

vote of 71 to 12 over Walls,<sup>36</sup> the revolt was not so easily squelched. At an Independent convention of six counties Walls accepted the nomination for Congress,<sup>37</sup> making the race a three cornered one and dealing Bisbee's chances a solid blow, since he had always before been able to count upon a solid phalanx of colored voters.

Out in West Florida William D. Chipley, Democratic sachem, and D. L. McKinnon, Independent war chief, were carrying on their private feud via the newspapers but including only General Barnes, the Comptroller, in the controversy. McKinnon, a Marianna lawyer, claimed that the Pensacola and Atlantic Railroad Company, Chipley's child, was underassessed and accused Barnes of making a twenty percent reduction in the assessment. This the Comptroller denied, mentioning that what reductions made had been carried out by counties on the route and amounted to only \$1,610 out of \$25,811.26.<sup>38</sup> Chipley bluntly took the stand that his road was still assessed too high, commenting that when the railroad went into Marianna it took over five acres of McKinnon's land for which the Jackson man sued for \$2,000. He accused McKinnon of wanting the Comptroller to ruin the P. & A.<sup>39</sup>

### *The Divided Republicans*

The Radical Republicans with no ticket in the field forgot all about their old foes the Bourbon Democrats in order to deal properly with those who were stealing their thunder. The blast which Dennis Eagan gave Frank Pope resembled a Florida hurricane. The Collector, formerly leader of the Madison county Republicans, gave the *Times-Union* an interview in which he stated that Pope had to leave home because he had shot his school teacher; that after the election of Governor Drew, Pope returned to Madison and engaged as a Democrat in bitter

36. *Fernandina Mirror*, July 12, 1884.

37. *Ibid.*, July 19, 1884.

38. *Floridian*, Oct. 7, 1884; *Pensacola Commercial*, Oct. 22, 1884.

39. *Floridian*, Oct. 14, 1884.

and unscrupulous partisanship during which outrageous frauds were entered into and tissue ballots used by his faction in the 1878 election. In 1880, the Madison radical reminisced, Frank Pope appeared at the polls with other Democrats armed with rifles. In this election Frank Patterson, law partner of Pope, was killed and two colored men were held for trial. Pope volunteered his services to prosecute the accused and made violent speeches during the trial in order to incite the mob to violence in case the men were acquitted; furthermore, both negroes were murdered as a result. Collector Eagan's version of Pope's nomination as an Independent candidate for the State Senate was that when Theodore Willard secured the Democratic nomination, Pope went to the Republicans since his ambition had been thwarted. The Republican leader asserted that regardless of whether the Independent candidate received the nomination of the Republicans he would put his very best work into the campaign to defeat him.<sup>40</sup>

Chairman Edward M. Cheney of the Republican state committee, United States District Attorney, also announced to the *Times-Union* his opposition to the Independent movement. Cheney stated that Pope was a Democrat who had never evinced any sympathy with Republican principles or respect for Republicans ; therefore, he did not understand why he should claim or receive Republican support in preference to any other Democrat. He held that defeat would be preferable to alignment with the Independents, since a party made up of the worst elements of the other two was no improvement. According to the District Attorney, the Republican party was constantly growing in numbers, influence and respectability ; hence he saw no reason to disband. If the party did not win in 1884, it would in 1888. Cheney named United States Marshal Durkee and one or two other Federal officeholders as favoring the Independents and added in closing the interview that the seeming una-

---

40. *Times-Union*, July 16, 1884; *Floridian*, July 29, 1884.

nimity among the colored voters in favor of the third party had been worked up by leading politicians such as Walls, Wallace, Steward, Menard and others; however, the feeling was not genuine and would weaken later.<sup>41</sup>

J. N. Stripling, former Madison Republican and now the chairman of the Independent Executive Committee, took issue with the statements of Eagan and Cheney, calling Eagan a personal enemy of Frank Pope. He mentioned that for several years Eagan had had his office in Jacksonville, implying that he was out of touch with Madison politics. According to Stripling Pope, during the election of 1880, was sent for in his office as mayor because of a disturbance between Democrats and Republicans; upon arriving at the scene he held his rifle above his head and demanded that the crowd disperse: which it did. Stripling asserted:

This was the alleged "fraud" for which Mr. Pope was indicted as an accomplice, and not for "using tissue ballots." It should also be remembered that Mr. Cheney, our District Attorney, *nol prosd [sic]* this case. . . . Frank W. Pope, our Independent candidate for Governor, is not the "bold, bad man" that the Bourbons and a few of his personal enemies would have us believe.<sup>42</sup>

The showdown between the factions came at the Republican state convention held in Gallie's Hall at Tallahassee late in July. When L. G. Dennis of Alachua declared that he would not consent to 20,000 Republican voters surrendering to a little handful of men, there was an uproar of disapproval. John Wallace, leader of the colored of Leon county was reported as saying, "We are going to win this time." The Alachua county truck farmer, Walls, was in control, and the following strategy offered by him was adopted: the Independent candidates would be endorsed only, not nominated; since if Pope

41. *Ibid.*; *Times-Union*, July 16, 1884.

42. *Florida Journal* (Jacksonville), July 31, 1884.



and Greeley were nominated by a call of counties, they became the Republican nominees, giving the Democrats a potent weapon.<sup>43</sup>

Frank Pope told the convention: "I would as soon trust this government to the ignorant people as the educated. . . . we shall rout the plundering Democrats from yonder Capital in next November!" George R. Fairbanks reported that "Simple Simon" Conover (former Republican U. S. senator) was in attendance at the convention with the idea that an Independent legislature would send him back to Washington instead of Wilk Call. E. O. Locke, a Monroe county Republican, was nominated for Congress in the First Congressional District convention defeating Malachi Martin of Gadsden and S. C. Cobb of Escambia.<sup>44</sup>

The dilemma the Independents were in became more apparent as the campaign wore on. They needed the support of the Republicans to win, yet by accepting that support they alienated Independent Democrats still on the fence, particularly those in West Florida.<sup>45</sup> The financial situation added to the predicament; J. N. Strippling attempted to alleviate this by an appeal to friends of the movement throughout the State for subscriptions, saying frankly that Pope was not a wealthy man.<sup>46</sup> A third factor, Frank Pope's personal life, must also be taken into account, since most Democratic newspapers used it as a means of attack. The *Madison Recorder* published an account of the killing of J. T. Bristow which was given by J. B. Lipscomb Jr., who claimed to be an eyewitness. According to Lipscomb, Bristow gave Frank Pope a whipping with a chinquapin switch; whereupon, Frank returned later in the day with a gun and shot his school teacher, who died about twenty-four hours later. Lipscomb said that Judge James D. Beggs of Orlando would substantiate his story.<sup>47</sup>

43. *Land of Flowers*, July 29, 1884; *Times-Union*, July 25, 1884.

44. *Fernandina Mirror*, July 26, 1884; *Floridian*, July 29, 1884.

45. *Times-Union*, July 19, 1884.

46. *Floridian*, Aug. 5, 1884.

47. *Madison Recorder* as quoted in the *Floridian*, July 29, 1884.

(IV) *Soldier vs. Orator*

Leading politicians of the two parties mobilized forces to elect their candidates; speaking both in the heat of the summer noon and the cool of the evening. Both General Perry and Senator Pope toured the state. The *Columbia Star* (Lake City) reported that "Governor" Perry met enthusiastic receptions, stating that his opponents could find nothing in his career through which to attack him.<sup>48</sup> At Sumterville, accompanied by Col. S. I. Wailes, land commissioner of the Florida Railroad and Navigation Company, the Democratic nominee, speaking under an August sun, favored a new constitution. He stated that Northern Republicans upon moving to Florida were becoming Conservative Democrats; and he urged the colored voter to accept the offer of the Democrats for good government. What more could they want, he queried, than good schools, good government, low taxes and ample protection for themselves and their families? Milton Mabry, candidate for Lieutenant Governor, spoke next, assailing the Republicans; John Temple Graves, Sr., spoke on national issues. At Ocala the party was joined by State Senator A. S. Mann, a power in Hernando county politics for many years.<sup>49</sup>

Stumping the state, Pope spoke at Lake City in the midday heat. The Disston land sale and the proposed constitutional convention were his principal topics. He appealed to his audience to vote for him not as Democrats nor as Republicans but as honest men. Reading the Independent platform, the youthful politician asserted that they and not the Democratic party would give the negro his rights. Parson Thompson followed, advising the negroes to give up Cheney and Eagan in order to support Pope. The *Star* suggested that the high temperature of the hour was reflected in the speaking.<sup>50</sup>

Local political clubs were organized and meetings held to whip up enthusiasm. The *Palatka Daily News*

48. *Floridian*, Aug. 26, 1884.

49. *Times-Union*, Aug. 26, 1884.

50. *Ibid.*, Aug. 1, 1884; *Floridian*, Aug. 12, 1884.

reported a meeting of the Cleveland and Perry club of district five at which Judge Harrison, the first speaker, gave "a plain and convincing explanation" of the Diss-ton sale, being followed by E. S. Crill who further explained that transaction.<sup>51</sup> So it seemed that the main point of the Independent platform was taken quite seriously by the Democrats.

In Duval county the race was intense because both parties were well organized. Pope spoke at Jacksonville on July 31 at the St. James hotel in the evening; however, Perry waited until August 26 to address the voters of the east coast city. The first speaker on the Independent program was Dr. G. Troup Maxwell, who asked why the kindly feeling between the freedmen and their former masters which existed for a year or two after the war had disappeared. He endorsed Pope and Cleveland, indicating by the split ticket the quandary of the Independents on the national election. Pope, when it came his turn, assailed the *Times-Union* and reasserted his belief in democracy, declaring, "The people whether educated or ignorant could and should be trusted."<sup>52</sup>

In August Pope resigned as state senator.<sup>53</sup> At about the same time the *People's Journal* (Jacksonville), edited by J. W. Thompson, a colored man, came out for Perry; because, according to him, the best Republicans could not vote for Frank Pope. Thompson significantly mentioned Dennis Eagan as one of those Republicans who were against Pope. The *People's Journal* editor called Pope a "pitiful negro-killing Democrat," and the paper gave its support to Josiah T. Walls for Congress.<sup>54</sup> This bit of political strategy by the old Radical wing of the Republican party showed that they intended to play an active rather than a passive part in the election, and that

51. Palatka *Daily News*, Aug. 24, 1884.

52. *Times-Union*, Aug. 1, 1884.

53. *Land of Flowers*, Aug. 23, 1884.

54. *Floridian*, Aug. 19, 1884; *People's Journal* as quoted in the *Floridian*, Sept. 2, 1884; *Fernandina Mirror*, Aug. 16, 1884.

they favored a Democratic victory in the state elections in order to regain their control of the negro vote.

August sixteenth found the Independent speakers at the deep water harbor of Fernandina. Included on the rostrum of the Lyceum Hall in the evening were Frank Pope, J. C. Greeley, D. L. McKinnon and Dr. G. Troup Maxwell.<sup>55</sup> From there Pope went to Palatka, claiming to his audience at the St. Johns river town that according to history no political organization could reform itself. He acknowledged that the state lands must be sold; nevertheless, he did not think that they should be sold to a rich man in a body; instead, they should have been cut up and sold to actual settlers at \$.25 or \$.50 per acre by advertisement or proclamation. The standard bearer of the Independents announced that he stood for a better constitution.<sup>56</sup>

Toward the last of August Pope was still stumping Central Florida. His most enthusiastic supporter here was J. E. Alexander, who took over the *Enterprise Herald*.<sup>57</sup> In Volusia the Republicans faced a split, the old members resenting the influx of the new converts.<sup>58</sup> The Independent movement was having rough sledding also in Taylor county where after a political rallying was unsuccessful in forming a county organization.<sup>59</sup> Pope, however, continued to work hard; speaking at Leesburg then in Sumter county, he denied that he had promised any office to anyone. He did say that he would remember his friends and that he would not go into Democratic ranks to fill any offices.<sup>60</sup>

On August twenty-six at the Park Theatre in Jacksonville Governor Bloxham did not pull any punches in defending his administration. He condemned Independentism as "the thinnest gauze thrown around the profli-

---

55. *Ibid.*

56. Palatka *Daily News*, Aug. 22, 1884.

57. *Ibid.*, Aug. 24, 1884; *Floridian*, Aug. 19, 1884.

58. *Ibid.*

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*, Sept. 2, 1884.

gate carcass of Florida Radicalism." He quoted figures on the reduction of the state debt and on railroad bonds outstanding to show the economy of his administration. He denounced the Republican administration during Reconstruction, singling out for attack former Lieutenant Governor Gleason particularly. Pointing out that when he himself took office the Internal Improvement Fund was saddled with over \$1,000,000 debt at six percent interest, the Governor contended there was no feasible remedy other than a sale of a large body of land. In asserting that Disston paid cash for the 4,000,000 acres at twenty-five cents per acre, except for \$14,000 worth of coupon indebtedness which cost him ninety cents on the dollar, he disclosed that the state law offering homesteads at twenty-five cents per acre could not be in effect as long as the fund was controlled by the court. As proof of the success of the sale he mentioned the 700 to 800 miles of railroad constructed during his administration.<sup>61</sup>

In an attempt to hold dissatisfied Democrats in line, the leader of the Conservatives during Reconstruction warned:

It is an insult to our patriotism and common sense to say that another night of gloom and despair, such as we suffered from 1868 until 1877, shall again cast its dark mantle over our fair state, and we stand silent witnesses of her degradation and dishonor, amid the hellish orgies of an ignorant and ruthless fanaticism.<sup>62</sup>

Moving to Fernandina, the Democratic speaker took along the Jacksonville Silver Cornet Band. Perry in the island city's Lyceum Hall spoke of the determination that the state should henceforth be controlled by the conservative intelligence of the people and not go back

61. *Ibid.*; W. D. Bloxham, *The Disston Sale and the State Finances* (a political pamphlet containing the Park Theatre address, in the P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History).

62. *Ibid.*

again into the hands of ignorant Radicalism. According to his mathematics, the Democrats had nine-tenths of the intelligence and virtue of the state, the Republicans one-tenth. The Republican party, he maintained, was built on the solidification of the negro vote, being led by designing men who would bring back Reconstruction. Because of the capital now coming into Florida, he estimated that the colored man could make \$1.25 to \$1.75 per day instead of \$.50 to \$.65, and he told of a poor-white whose land had increased in value from \$400 to \$8,000 due to the coming of a railroad. The Confederate war veteran attacked the presumption of young men in forming the Independent party; they were soreheads in contrast to grey-headed old men, who, devoted to the service of Florida, asked no return. Since Dougherty was sick with a fever, the general spoke for him and assured the people of Amelia Island that the Democratic congressional candidate would get them twenty-five feet of water in their channel. Addresses by Charles E. Dyke and Milton Mabry rounded out the program.<sup>63</sup>

Both parties injected the racial-issue into the campaign. The Palatka *Daily News* printed a letter from T. L. McCoy, a freedman, favoring the *status quo* and mentioning that the sole dependence of the negro for their daily bread was upon the moneyed men of the South. McCoy accused the Republican leaders of being more prejudiced against the negro than was the liberal-minded Southern man.<sup>64</sup> R. C. Long, grandson of former territorial Governor R. K. Call, made what was interpreted as an anti-negro speech at Madison. The *Land of Flowers* carried an editorial favoring his stand and indicting the negro for having drawn the color line and voting in a solid phalanx against every interest of his white neighbor. It arraigned him for becoming a political slave and voting as a machine. The majority of whites, the *Land of Flowers* said, had nothing against

63. Fernandina *Mirror*, Sept. 6, 1884.

64. Palatka *Daily News*, Aug. 26, 1884.

a negro, but they should cease trying to make him a Democrat and vote him down at the polls, giving him a far better government than he was capable of giving himself.<sup>65</sup>

The *Floridian*, milder than the *Land of Flowers* and probably having more influence in party circles, in an editorial on Long's speech mentioned the fair dealing of Democratic control to the colored in schools and said that no colored leader had attempted to break the line in politics.<sup>66</sup> Sam Pasco as chairman of the Democratic State Committee continued in the same vein as the *Floridian* and made the statement that "the Conservative Democratic party of Florida has maintained the constitutional right of the colored man and has faithfully carried out and built up the public school system since its advent to power."<sup>67</sup>

On the other side of the fence or from across the tracks the colored editor of the *Key West News* charged the "studied and polished hypocrisy which the Bourbon leaders have displayed toward the colored people since the war has been and is remarkable only for its transparency."<sup>68</sup> The *Land of Flowers* retorted that it was a question of whether the white man or the negro with a handful of whites shall rule the state.<sup>69</sup> Interest in Key West centered, however, in the large Cuban vote. The *Tampa Tribune* reported hopefully that it didn't look much as if the Cuban vote was going solid for the Republican candidate since at two recent ratification meetings the Cubans were in full force at the Democratic gathering but absent from the Republican.<sup>70</sup>

Winding up his South Florida campaign at Bartow, Pope said that he would vote for Cleveland and Hendricks, and also stated that he would appoint qualified

65. *Land of Flowers*, Sept. 13, 1884.

66. *Floridian*, Sept. 23, 1884.

67. *Land of Flowers*, Sept. 27, 1884.

68. *Key West News* as quoted in the *Land of Flowers*, Sept. 20, 1884.

69. *Land of Flowers*, Sept. 20, 1884.

70. *Floridian*, Aug. 26, 1884.

negroes to office.<sup>71</sup> In analyzing the South Florida political situation the *Floridian* predicted that Northern Republicans in Volusia, Brevard, Orange, and Sumter would support Perry.<sup>72</sup> The Tavares *Herald* saw the danger of Pope's election as having passed and reported that Pope admitted that he had killed his school teacher. On Independentism it said:

It is the revolt not of the good, the pure, the patriotic among Southern Democrats, but of the violent and lawless element which made Ku-Kluxism possible, and which traded in tissue ballots and negro slaying as political factors.<sup>73</sup>

The Gainesville *Advocate* reported that George J. Alden of New Smyrna, Volusia county, former secretary of state under Governor Reed, was supporting Perry and was stating that many other white Republicans of Volusia would do likewise.<sup>74</sup> Thus it would appear that Pope's chances of carrying what was then South Florida were not good.

The Disston sale continued to be under fire. Samuel Swann of Fernandina answered charges which he claimed came from Pope that he had accepted \$20,000 in hush money from the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund arising out of claims incurred by the Disston purchase. In a letter to Comptroller W. D. Barnes Swann maintained that the money was paid him for services rendered.<sup>75</sup> Swann seems to have been rather prolific in letter-writing in explaining his part in the purchase, since Governor Bloxham, drawn into the controversy, answered the bribery charge in a speech at Fernandina by reading a letter from Swann. In the

71. *Ibid.*, Sept. 16, 1884.

72. *Ibid.*, Sept. 23, 1884.

73. Tavares *Herald* as quoted in the *Floridian*, Sept. 23, 1884.

74. Gainesville *Advocate* as quoted in the *Floridian*, Oct. 28, 1884.

75. *Floridian*, Sept. 23, 1884; a suit brought in 1881, Swann v. Trustees of Internal Improvement Fund, was dismissed by a compromise between Parties. *Minutes of the Internal Improvement Fund*, II, 506-507.



same speech the governor appealed to the colored vote saying, "I would scorn any man who would trample upon the rights of another on account of his color."<sup>76</sup>

Under the State Constitution of 1868 the governor appointed all important county officials.<sup>77</sup> A preference vote was held in order that the voters might express a choice. In Nassau county where Fernandina is situated it was announced that only those who voted for E. A. Perry and the Democratic county ticket would be allowed to vote for the county offices; voting for the Democratic electoral ticket was not a requisite.<sup>78</sup> This showed conclusively that to the Nassau Democrats the important offices were the governorship and the membership in the legislature.

On the eve of the election the *Times-Union* reported a letter making the rounds signed E. A. P. (Gen. Perry's initials) supposed to be addressed to Sam Pasco, urging the Democratic state chairman to do all in his power to prevent negroes and "poor whites" from voting; the Jacksonville newspaper said that the letter was a lie.<sup>79</sup> Pope in turn was accused by the Democrats of theft as a youth; the Madison *New Era* refuted this by printing a denial by Charley Butts, the man from whom Pope allegedly had stolen.<sup>80</sup>

The election came off quietly except for Madison county where ballot boxes were taken by armed men at Madison, Cherry Lake and Hamburg, each side blaming the other.<sup>81</sup> The state-wide election resulted in a complete victory for the Democrats in the major offices: Perry won over Pope, 31,957 to 27,680, Mabry defeated Greeley, and both Congressional districts went Democratic. The Republican Independent ticket won twelve of thirty-two seats in the Senate and twenty-three of eighty-

76. Fernandina *Mirror*, Sept. 20, 1884.

77. Article 5, Section 19; Article 6, Section 19, Constitution of 1868.

78. Fernandina *Mirror*, Oct. 25, 1884.

79. *Times-Union*, Oct. 25, 1884.

80. Madison *New Era* as quoted in the *Times-Union*, Nov. 1, 1884.

81. Madison *Recorder* as quoted in the *Land of Flowers*, Nov. 15, 1884; *Times-Union*, Nov. 9, 1884; *Floridian*, Nov. 11, 1884.

eight seats in the Assembly.<sup>82</sup> Frank Pope refused to concede defeat and claimed a majority of 1,732. The defeated Independent gubernatorial candidate accused the Democrats of ballot box stuffing in Jackson, Gadsden, Leon and Jefferson counties. Voicing his determination, he said:

I am determined in my fight against Bourbonism in Florida. The people have declared by their votes against it and I shall see that their rights in the premises shall be protected. Again, I repeat, the votes shall be counted as cast.<sup>83</sup>

Pope lost out in his attempt to prove irregularities in the election, and Perry became the next governor. An analysis of the election shows that Pope surpassed the vote of 1880 for Simon Conover, Republican, in the Democratic counties, but fell behind Conover's vote in the Republican counties; nor did he carry the South Florida counties where the main influx of Northerners had settled.<sup>84</sup> Many of these new Floridians had come to Florida to settle on Disston lands, and the firm opposition to the Disston sale by the Independents obviously did not meet with their approval; thus, one outcome of the election was a claim of vindication of Governor Bloxham for having made the Disston sale. Yet while the Democrats won, the heavy Independent vote indicated that a large number of the people of Florida wanted reform in the state government. If it had not been that many Democrats had a strong aversion to lining up with Republicans and also that some of the Republicans led by Dennis Eagan preferred to vote for Perry over Pope, the election might have swung the other way. It is hard to estimate what damage Pope, the man, did to the Independent movement or what would have happened had

82. W. T. Cash, p. 79; *Pensacola Commercial*, Nov. 5, 1884; *Fernandina Mirror*, Dec. 20, 1884; *Times-Union*, Nov. 11, 1884.

83. *Times-Union*, Nov. 9, 1884; *Floridian*, Nov. 11, 1884.

84. *Fernandina Mirror*, Dec. 20, 1884.

the Independents been able to run a better known man of another type such as former Governor Frank Drew.

The election of 1884 was the end of the Independent movement as a third party in Florida. It failed to hold together because it was a coalition of heterogeneous factions which had little in common other than being out in the political cold. It lacked a cohesive force; opposition to the Disston sale did not give it that force. The Independents stood for certain progressive measures which later the Populists took over, such as a state railroad commission. In that sense the Independents were forerunners of the Populist movement, and some former Independents, such as D. L. McKinnon, became Populist; however, many others, including Frank Pope, himself, and J. E. Alexander, returned to the Democratic fold, forming an independent wing under United States Senator Wilkinson Call.<sup>85</sup> This political faction prevented the Farmers' Alliance from electing one of their members United States Senator in 1891, although a majority of the legislature were members of the Alliance.<sup>86</sup> Thus Independentism, although a defeated cause, continued to exert a strong force in Florida politics.

85. Bradford County Telegraph, July 29, 1892; Jacksonville *Daily Standard* as quoted in the *Ocala Banner*, Oct. 31, 1890; *House Journal*, "A Journal of the Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the State of Florida, 1897," p. 240.

86. Albert Hubbard Roberts, "Wilkinson Call, Soldier and Senator," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XII (1933-34), pp. 187-189; *Floridian*, April 9, 1891; *Telegram*, April 16, 1891; *House Journal*, 1891, pp. 816-818.