

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

November 2020

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Note: This article first appeared in November 2018. It is reprinted, with some changes, because of its timeliness.

Dates to Remember

Wednesday, Nov. 11, 2020
Veterans Day

California and the Election of 1860

The deep divisions in our country today are reminiscent of strong divisions in 1860. Back then it was due to the issue of slavery. Prior to the presidential election in that year, there had been fistfights in Congress, bloody battles in Kansas, uproar over the publication of Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, John Brown's assault on the armory at Harper's Ferry, and talks of secession. Southerners were determined not only to keep slavery but to expand it into the West. The Democratic nominee for president was Stephen A. Douglas, who had introduced the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in Congress; that bill effectively allowed citizens of new states to introduce slavery in their constitution if they chose to do so. This caused outrage among Northerners, who saw this as an expansion of slavery into free-soil territory. It led directly to the formation of the Republican Party which was against any expansion of slavery. Among the Democrats running for president, there was a split between the moderate Douglas Democrats, the southern Democrats under former Vice-president John C. Breckinridge who favored a militant pro-slavery agenda, and the Unionist Party under John Bell, who were pro-slavery but also pro-Union. These divisions caused the Democratic votes to split three ways, and allowed Lincoln to win the electoral vote.

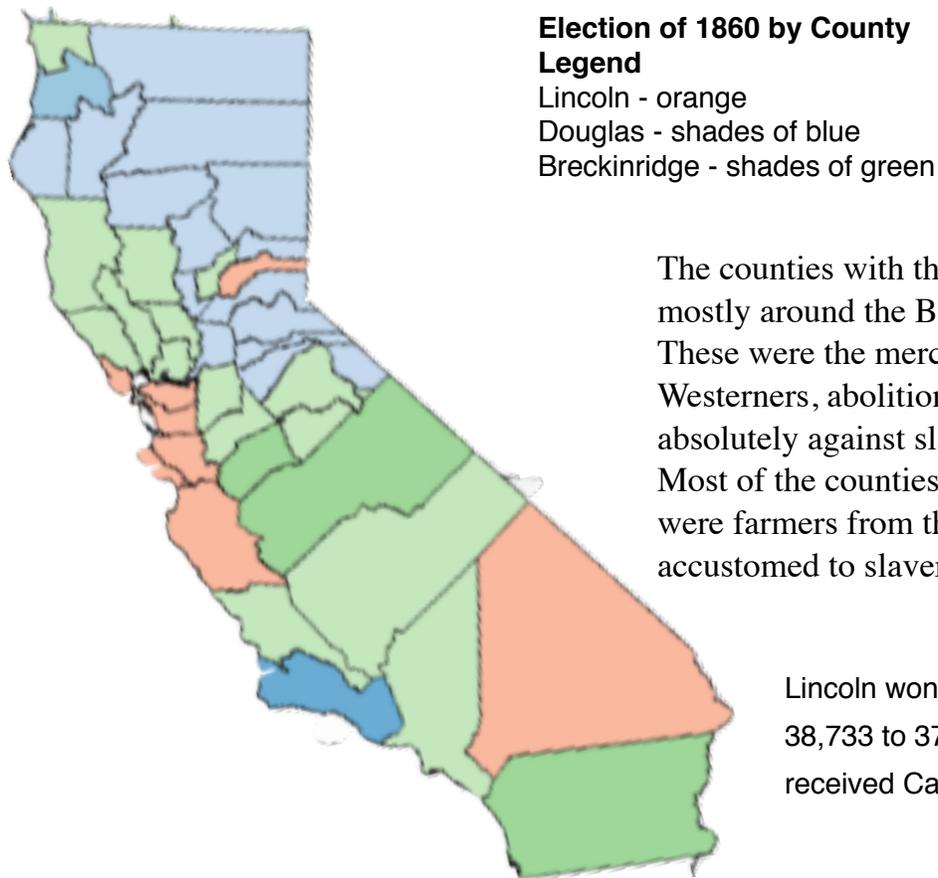
Electoral Votes

Popular Votes

		Electoral Votes	Popular Votes
Abraham Lincoln	Republican	180	1,866,452
John C. Breckinridge	Southern Democratic	72	847,953
Stephen A. Douglas	Democratic	12	1,380,202
John Bell	Constitutional Union	39	590,901

In California, the "Pico Bill" was passed in the state legislature which would have split the state in two, around San Luis Obispo, with the southern state named "Colorado" and allowing slavery. This

shows the preponderance of Democratic legislators in both the state assembly and state at the time, most of whom were born and raised in the South. The bill was introduced into Congress but went nowhere, due to the chaotic environment in Washington. While the bill never passed, it illustrates the division in the state over slavery and was reflected in the 1860 election in California. The election results by county shows that most counties voted for either Douglas or Breckinridge. But these counties had small populations.



The counties with the greatest populations - mostly around the Bay Area - voted for Lincoln. These were the merchants, immigrants, mid-Westerners, abolitionists, and others who were absolutely against slavery one way or the other. Most of the counties in Southern California were farmers from the South who had grown up accustomed to slavery.

Lincoln won by a slim margin over Douglas: 38,733 to 37,999. As a result, Lincoln received California's 4 electoral votes.

The map above may have some discrepancies. According to the *Sacramento Daily Union*, (November 15, 1860), these counties voted for Lincoln: Alameda, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Marin, Nevada, San Bernardino, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano, Sonoma, Tuolumne, Yolo.

It will be interesting to compare the results of this year's presidential election in California's counties to the 1860 presidential election. Will we see any patterns?

Resources:

Wikipedia - The Election of 1860

UCR Center for Bibliographic Research/California Digital Newspaper Collection

The Candidates



Stephen A. Douglas

Douglas favored extending slavery into new territories but did not favor secession. He broke with tradition and actively campaigned in both the North and the South, arguing against secession. He won the second highest number of the popular vote, but only received 12 electoral votes from the states of Missouri and New Jersey.



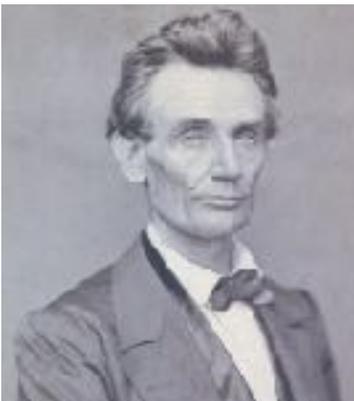
John C. Breckinridge

When the northern Douglas Democrats bolted from the Democratic convention, the remaining southern Democrats delegates who favored secession elected this senator from Kentucky. He favored extending slavery into new territories and into Cuba. He received 18% of the popular vote but received 72 electoral votes, all from the South and including Delaware and Maryland.



John Bell

A senator from Tennessee, Bell was nominated by moderates who were opposed to the extremes of the other parties, but was derided in Southern papers as being a friend of abolitionists. Nevertheless he received 40% of the popular votes in the South, and 39 electoral votes, which split the national vote and helped give the election to Lincoln.



Abraham Lincoln

A self-taught country lawyer who became better known after his debates with Douglas. He drew the line over the expansion of slavery and famously said “a house divided cannot stand”. He won the electoral votes from every Northern state except New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. The latter two were slave-owning states.