

## ANSON BURLINGAME: REFORMER AND DIPLOMAT

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IT IS NO COINCIDENCE that one of the most innovative American diplomats ever to serve in China was also one of the most active participants in the New England antislavery struggle of the 1840's and 1850's. Former Massachusetts Congressman Anson Burlingame went to Peking in 1861 as the first United States minister plenipotentiary to reside in the Chinese capital. He traveled to his new post with no diplomatic experience, after having spent more than a decade laboring in the ranks of the Free Soil movement and the new Republican party. Burlingame was young—only 41 years old—when he went to China. He was a reformer and a politician, not a diplomat, and his fresh approach to Sino-Western relations reflected his background. He disagreed with the belief, prevalent among Westerners in China, that the Chinese were an inferior race and not due respect as a people or a nation. Using his political skills, Burlingame endeavored to change the assumptions and methods of Western diplomacy in Peking. In recognition of his efforts, the Chinese government in 1867 named him China's first official envoy to the West. The same reform propensity that propelled Burlingame into the political drama that led to the Civil War also carried him to the fore in the Western encounter with China's centuries-old isolation.

Burlingame's humble frontier beginnings gave little hint of his future political and diplomatic success. He was born on November 14, 1820, in New Berlin, a farm community in central New York. Joel Burlingame, Anson's father, was a farmer, school teacher, and Methodist lay preacher. When Anson was three, the family moved to Seneca County, Ohio, and in 1833 moved again to the frontier city of Detroit. After only two years in Detroit, the Burlingames made their final move one hundred miles southwest to a farm in Branch County, Michigan. Young Anson remained behind, however, to continue his education.<sup>1</sup>

At age seventeen Burlingame entered the Detroit branch of the fledgling University of Michigan. Since his family was very poor, his

<sup>1</sup> Burlingame to his parents, June 30, 1839, Burlingame Family Papers, Library of Congress; Frederick Wells Williams, *Anson Burlingame and the First Chinese Mission to Foreign Powers* (New York, 1912), 3-5.

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only assets were "a frank, noble disposition, habits of industry, a charming and persuasive manner, and promising talents as an orator."<sup>2</sup> He attended class irregularly because he had to work to support himself. He copied deeds and documents in a law office, worked on survey crews, and was employed by the Indian Commission in negotiating treaties with tribes in the Great Lakes region. At the university his academic record was not distinguished. He excelled, however, in one area: oratory. His platform talents brought him notice and a wide circle of friends. He became prominent in a literary society and in college politics. At his final examination in rhetoric Burlingame's speech received a loud ovation, which was not only extremely rare for such occasions but also against the rules.<sup>3</sup>

Burlingame's accomplishments as an outdoorsman, even more than his effective stump-speaking style, revealed his rural, Western background. A man of great strength and endurance, he frequently took walks of fifteen and twenty miles into the country just for recreation. He enjoyed hunting and was an excellent marksman. Everyone around Detroit knew and talked about his ability to hit an owl in the steeple of the Presbyterian Church at a distance unmatched by anyone else. His reputation with a rifle played almost as important a role as his oratory in his later public career.<sup>4</sup>

After leaving the university Burlingame entered a law office in Detroit. He acquired a circle of influential friends and patrons, including Zepheniah Platt, former attorney general of Michigan. He was in frequent demand as a speaker at Washington's Birthday celebrations, lodge meetings, and other occasions. In 1843, however, Burlingame made a momentous decision. He left Detroit and his rapid but modest successes there to try his fortunes at Harvard Law School.<sup>5</sup>

Burlingame soon became a permanent and prominent resident of Cambridge. He graduated from Harvard in 1846 and became junior partner in the Boston firm of George P. Briggs, son of former Whig Governor George Nixon Briggs. The Young Men's Whig Republican Association elected him its president. On June 3, 1847, he married Jane Cornelia Livermore, daughter of the Honorable Isaac Livermore, a leader in Cambridge business and political circles who served at various times as treasurer of Michigan Central Railroad, president of Hancock Free Bridge Corporation, and director of both Boston City Bank and National Insurance Company. Livermore was also a state senator for two years and president of the Cambridge Common Council.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Anson Burlingame obituary, unidentified Detroit newspaper, no date, Burlingame Family Papers

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*; Burlingame to his parents, Aug. 13, 1840, *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Anson Burlingame obituary, unidentified Detroit newspaper, no date, *ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Burlingame to his mother, Nov. 7, 1840, *ibid*; Burlingame to his parents, Feb. 28, 1843, *ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Isaac Livermore obituary, unidentified newspaper, no date, *ibid*

Burlingame certainly benefited from his association with Briggs and Livermore, but he did not join them as a regular member of the Whig party in Massachusetts. Most of Burlingame's visitors to his law office in the old Statehouse building were the young and enthusiastic opponents of slavery known as Free Soilers. While his father-in-law was serving as a Whig presidential elector in 1848, Burlingame joined Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, and others in Massachusetts to campaign for the Free Soil ticket of Martin Van Buren and Charles Francis Adams.<sup>7</sup>

Following the election, Burlingame took time out from politics to make a tour of Europe in 1849-1850. This trip to the Old World both heightened and demonstrated the young activist's ardent belief in American democracy. While in London he visited the House of Commons. After sitting in the gallery for a few minutes, he was asked to move to another seat because he had sat down in a section reserved for peers. An old peer sitting nearby overheard and interposed: "Let him stay, let him stay. He is a Peer in his own country." Continuing on his way out, the spirited Burlingame replied: "I am a Sovereign in my own country, Sir, and shall lose caste if I associate with Peers."<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the United States, Burlingame found himself immediately in the thick of the controversy generated by the fugitive slave provision of the Compromise of 1850. He took to the stump on numerous occasions in Massachusetts to denounce the new federal law which "commanded" all citizens to assist in the recovery of runaways. He shared the platform with Horace Mann, Henry Wilson, and other Free Soilers at a public meeting protesting the trial of fugitive Thomas Sims. He accompanied Richard Henry Dana on the night that "rowdies" attacked Dana for defending Anthony Burns against prosecution as a fugitive slave.<sup>9</sup>

At the time of Burlingame's return from Europe, the Free Soil party in Massachusetts faced a strategy dilemma—whether to continue on its own or to form a coalition with the Democrats against the Whigs, who controlled the state. At the outset the zealous Burlingame aligned himself with the doctrinaire Free Soilers headed by Charles Francis Adams. They feared that a coalition would mean surrender of Free Soil principles to political expediency. Despite their efforts, a coalition had been created by 1851. As a result, Adams retired temporarily from public life, but Burlingame remained his "personal listening post" in state politics. By the time of the Free Soil party's state convention in

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *Burlingame*, 6-8; William Stevens Robinson, *Warrington Pen Portraits*, ed. by Mrs. W. S. Robinson (Boston, 1887), 427; Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington, Ky., 1970), 81, 248

<sup>8</sup> George Frisbie Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years* (New York, 1903), I, 153; Burlingame to his wife, Apr. 9, 1850, Burlingame Family Papers

<sup>9</sup> Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America* (Boston, 1874), II, 308-309; Robert F. Lucid (ed.), *The Journal of Richard Henry Dana, Jr.* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), II, 636-637; Edward I. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner* (Boston, 1887-1893), III, 224

1851, Burlingame was wavering between principle and compromise. Before the convention began, Adams refused to allow his name to be entered for governor, but Burlingame suggested that an arrangement might still be made with the Whigs to secure Adams a senator's seat. Adams remained true to his position against political combinations and dismissed the idea. When the convention nominated for the governorship John G. Palfrey, an Adams man, Burlingame rejoiced in a victory for Free Soil principles. Adams continued to be skeptical, however, and in November he watched as coalition members in the state legislature chose the Democratic candidate over Palfrey and the Whig nominee. Although Burlingame remained a political intimate of Adams, he seemed to have learned a useful political lesson. The next year Burlingame ran successfully for the state senate as a coalition candidate.<sup>10</sup>

Senator Burlingame immediately offended almost all of his Free Soil, Middlesex constituents by opposing an anti-liquor law. He was probably as much against drinking hard liquor as any other social reformer of his day. When he was eighteen he had even made a compact with a friend "to forever declare hostility against virtue's direct foe *ardent* spirits, to cut all acquaintance with its votaries—and be perpetually on our guard against its artful wiles."<sup>11</sup> More than likely Burlingame's opposition to the prohibitory liquor bill reflected his extremely democratic convictions, which caused him to view the law as a violation of individual liberty.

Louis Kossuth, the legendary leader of Hungary's 1848-1849 revolt against the Austrian monarchy, visited Massachusetts in April, 1852. Not surprisingly, Burlingame was a member of both the legislative committee of reception and the subcommittee which escorted Kossuth from New York to Massachusetts and throughout the state. The Hungarian came seeking aid for his revolution, and Burlingame, with his messianic belief in American democracy, argued that Kossuth be given full support. In a speech during Kossuth's visit to Worcester, the young state senator proclaimed:

A nation can have no such thing as a fixed policy. It must have fixed principles. [N]ow, when the republic has expanded from sea to sea, when its flag is advancing to the north and the south, when the beautiful white wings of its commerce are fluttering in every quarter of the globe, and bringing home wealth and victory with all the winds of heaven [applause], shall we so wrong the memory of the brave men who cleared the way for these glories . . . ? No, no! they gave their breasts to the battle, they struggled through nameless woes, for a place on earth, and that their sons might have "power on earth" to be wielded for liberty on whatever doubtful field it might strive!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Martin B. Duberman, *Charles Francis Adams, 1807-1886* (Boston, 1961), 171, 176-177; Kevin Sweeney, "Rum, Romanism, Representation, and Reform: Coalition Politics in Massachusetts, 1847-1853," *Civil War History*, XXII (June, 1976), 116-137.

<sup>11</sup> Agreement between John Walker and Anson Burlingame, July 23, 1839, Burlingame Family Papers; Robinson, "Warrington", 428; Sweeney, "Rum, Romanism, Representation, and Reform," 128-132.

<sup>12</sup> *Kossuth in New England. A Full Account of the Hungarian Governor's Visit to Massachusetts* (Boston, 1852), 63-64.

Specifically, Burlingame endorsed the view of Henry Wilson and others, mostly Free Soilers, who advocated that the United States employ "armed resistance" against the intervention of Russia's czarist armies in Hungary. Since he could not personally strive for liberty on a foreign field in 1852, nor directly influence American foreign policy, Burlingame contented himself with leading a fund raising drive for Kossuth in Massachusetts.<sup>13</sup>

The next year Burlingame attended the state constitutional convention. The Free Soilers and Democrats took the lead in arranging this meeting because they claimed that the existing constitution favored the wealthy men of Boston. Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, Nathaniel Banks, and most of the coalition leaders were present. Burlingame made two speeches during the sessions, which were highly complimented for their oratorical style but which were virtually devoid of substance. George Boutwell, a fellow delegate, recalled Burlingame at the convention as "an enthusiastic young man. He had had some experience in public affairs, but it could not have been predicted that he would attain the distinction which he achieved subsequently in the field of diplomacy."<sup>14</sup> Burlingame's friend Dana, who also attended the convention, noted that "he is a warm hearted, full blooded fellow, and everybody likes him and regrets that he will not think nor study."<sup>15</sup>

Although the senator from Cambridge made little, if any, substantive contribution to the convention debates, he consistently recorded his votes with the faction seeking to liberalize the constitution. One of their primary objectives was the popular election of judges to seven-year terms. Burlingame and his allies finally managed to substitute a ten-year term for lifetime tenure, although the judges continued to be appointed by the governor. Their efforts were for naught, however, because in November, 1853, the voters of Massachusetts rejected the new constitution.<sup>16</sup>

With this defeat at the polls the always tenuous Democrat-Free Soil coalition fell apart. Burlingame, as Boutwell and Dana had observed, had made little real progress in state politics and could easily have gone down with the coalition. Politics was his profession, however, and at this point he made a bold and opportune decision. He joined the Know Nothing party. Henry Wilson and Nathaniel Banks accompanied him in this desperate move for political survival. Wilson through his energy and activity gained a United States Senate seat. Banks on his record and Burlingame largely on his luck went to Congress. Burlingame's victory over two-term incumbent Whig William Appleton was one of the

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 63-64, 283; Pierce, *Sumner*, III, 269.

<sup>14</sup> George Sewell Boutwell, *Reminiscences of Sixty Years in Public Life* (New York, 1902), I, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Lucid, *Dana*, II, 567.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 557-560; Fred Harvey Harrington, *Fighting Politician: Major General N. P. Banks* (Philadelphia, 1948), 16-17; Sweeney, "Rum, Romanism, Representation, and Reform," 132-137.

biggest upsets of the 1854 Massachusetts elections and was attributable to an almost total Know Nothing sweep in the state.<sup>17</sup>

Although the outcome of the elections confounded contemporary observers, even more perplexing was the question of how the former Free Soilers who had welcomed Kossuth could join with the anti-foreign Know Nothings. The explanation of this seeming incongruity was the fact that by the fall of 1854 the Know Nothing party in Massachusetts was dominated by antislavery reformers, not its original anti-foreign and anti-Catholic founders. Following the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill in the United States Senate in January, 1854, the Free Soilers of Massachusetts, including Burlingame, had begun efforts to combine all antislavery and anti-Nebraska politicians in the state regardless of party. When Whig resistance killed this fusion effort in July, Burlingame and others made their sudden switch to the only other political organization in the state. The Know Nothing party was an essentially grass-roots movement which was gaining popular support but which was controlled by political amateurs. The party "provided an irresistible opportunity to 'outs' from the older parties" to turn its organization to their own purposes.<sup>18</sup> Since Know Nothings were very secretive about their activities, no one knew for certain the number of Free Soilers who entered the party. The numbers in Massachusetts were obviously large enough, however, to nominate Free Soilers as Know Nothing candidates for most offices. Once in office these same Free Soiler-Know Nothings vigorously pursued school, prison, debt, judicial, and other reforms and stood firmly against slavery. Reform was "the essential feature of Know-Nothingism in Massachusetts," Oscar Handlin has observed, and in contrast "the party's anti-foreign accomplishments were quite insignificant."<sup>19</sup> During the next three years, 1855-1857, the new Republican party absorbed almost all of the Free Soiler-Know Nothings of Massachusetts, including Burlingame.<sup>20</sup>

Burlingame took his seat in the Thirty-fourth Congress on December 3, 1855. The attention of Washington and the nation was focused on Kansas and Nebraska. Foreign affairs were not crucial at the moment, although William Walker's expedition in Nicaragua and the publication of the Ostend Manifesto had recently provided plenty of partisan fireworks. Many congressmen still advocated support of various European revolutionaries, but Asia generated little interest despite

<sup>17</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 14, 16, 1854; Robinson, *Warrington*, 428. For an analysis of the 1854 Massachusetts election see George H. Haynes, "The Causes of Know Nothing Success in Massachusetts," *American Historical Review*, III (1897), 67-82.

<sup>18</sup> Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *Journal of American History*, LX (Sept., 1973), 319-320.

<sup>19</sup> Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants* (New York, 1970), 202-203.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 204; Pierce, *Sumner*, III, 400-401; Harrington, *Fighting Politician*, 22, 43; Dale Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts: The Political Realignment of the 1850s," *Journal of American History*, LXIV (Mar., 1978), 959-986.

Commodore Matthew Perry's dramatic opening of treaty relations with Japan. For most members, including the gentleman from Cambridge, remote China occasioned no notice at all.

The freshman congressman began his career in the House busily working for Nathaniel Banks' election to the speakership. Burlingame and the other Banks strategists made the contest a sectional issue, and their ultimate success after 133 ballots has been called "the first Northern victory."<sup>21</sup> The selection of a speaker took weeks, and Burlingame, an affectionate husband and father, longed to return home to see his family.<sup>22</sup> He remained at his post in the capital, however, and there in the spring of 1856 he became involved in an event which would make him a Northern regional hero.

On May 19-20, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts delivered his famous speech, "The Crime Against Kansas." Portions of the speech were an insulting and personal attack on South Carolina Senator Andrew Pickens Butler, who was absent from the Senate. Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina, compelled by a sense of duty to defend the honor of his kinsman Butler, entered the Senate chamber two days later and severely beat the seated Sumner with a cane.<sup>23</sup> Northerners, both in and out of Congress, were horrified and angered by the South Carolinian's barbarity. The assault deeply disturbed the sensitive Burlingame, who had known and been associated with Sumner for a number of years in the Massachusetts Free Soil movement. On May 31, Burlingame wrote to his wife:

I do wish so much to get a chance to speak. I have tried for four weeks to get the floor but have not been able to do so. I think there will be a chance early in week after next. It is necessary for some of us to stay and as usual the duty has fallen on me. Sumner is better. I am quite lonely and not very well. Don't be alarmed about me.<sup>24</sup>

On June 21, Burlingame finally got the floor. His speech, "A Defense of Massachusetts," showed careful preparation and was presumably delivered from memory as was his usual practice. Early in the oration Burlingame set the tone: "With modesty, but with firmness, I cast down [Massachusetts'] glove to the whole band of her assailants."<sup>25</sup> He itemized and rebutted specific charges made against Massachusetts for its organization of an Emigrant Aid Society and for passing a personal liberty law. He quoted and ridiculed statements by various Southern congressmen. Then he warmed to the subject most on his mind—the attack on Sumner. He praised the senator and compared Brooks to Cain.

<sup>21</sup> Harrington, *Fighting Politician*, 30-31.

<sup>22</sup> Burlingame to his wife, Dec. 12, 19, 1855, Jan. 2, 10, 1856, Burlingame Family Papers.

<sup>23</sup> David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 1960), 289-297.

<sup>24</sup> Burlingame to his wife, May 31, 1856, Burlingame Family Papers.

<sup>25</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 34 Cong., 1 sess. (1855-1856), appendix, 653.



He carefully concentrated his remarks on the act itself, however, and not its perpetrator. Finally he raised the issue to another level:

The higher question involves the very existence of the Government itself. If, sir, freedom of speech is not to remain to us, what is all this Government worth? [?] We shall speak whatever we choose to speak, when we will, where we will and how we will, regardless of all the consequences. If we are pushed too long and too far, there are men from the old commonwealth of Massachusetts who will not shrink from a defense of freedom of speech, and the honored State they represent, on any field, where they may be assailed.<sup>26</sup>

In the speech Burlingame had carefully avoided attacking Brooks personally with the single exception of the remark about Cain. Yet while praise for the speech poured in from the North, the South Carolinian promptly challenged Burlingame to a duel. Burlingame did not want to fight, but under pressure from the Northern press he reaffirmed his speech without qualification and on July 21 responded to Brooks. Burlingame chose Clifton House on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls as the place. For weapons the former Detroit sharpshooter selected rifles at six paces. Brooks refused to travel so far through hostile Northern territory to face an almost certainly fatal confrontation. Burlingame had hoped for this result, but still he had gone to Clifton House prepared to face his antagonist. From that time on he had the public reputation of "a northern man who would fight," but privately the affair did not end at Niagara Falls. Brooks tried to get Burlingame to name another site nearer to the District of Columbia. The Massachusetts champion, however, had left Washington for places unknown. Had Burlingame fled the field of honor? Yes, he had and in doing so showed more common sense than cowardice. He and most other Americans in the 1850's considered the "code duello" an uncivilized vestige of a romanticized past. Burlingame and his constituents believed that his conduct had been "manly and honorable" throughout the affair. His reputation was secure, and he regarded any further exchanges with Brooks to be foolish.<sup>27</sup>

Even before he replied to Brooks on July 21, Burlingame had made plans to leave Washington prior to adjournment. He spent August and September campaigning throughout Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York for John C. Frémont, the Republican presidential nominee. Because of the Brooks affair, large and enthusiastic crowds greeted him everywhere he went. This public

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 653-656

<sup>27</sup> There are several accounts of the abortive duel. See Wilson, *History*, II, 492-493; James E. Campbell, "Sumner-Brooks-Burlingame or the Last of the Great Challenges," *Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly*, XXIV (1925), 435-473; John Bigelow, *Retrospections on an Active Life* (New York, 1909), I, 165-170. Campbell implies that Burlingame ran from the duel, and Wilson and Bigelow say that he was ready to fight. See also Burlingame to his wife, no date (filed with 1856 correspondence), Burlingame Family Papers; William Winter to Burlingame, July 28, 1856, *ibid*; Rollin H. Neale to Burlingame, July 29, 1856, *ibid*; *Washington National Intelligencer*, June 23, July 21, 24, 1856; *Washington Evening Star*, July 19, 21, 23, 1856; Pierce, *Sumner*, III, 492-494; Donald, *Sumner*, 300-311; Harrington, *Fighting Politician*, 33

response erased the depression that he had experienced ever since the attack on Sumner. His subtle sense of humor and confidence returned. Regretting his long absence from home and thinking of his own bid for reelection, he wrote his wife: "The truth is Jennie I don't think I make a very good husband. This political life makes a slave of a man. . . . I almost fear you and Dr. Stone will not be able to defeat my reelection—the people like such 'bad' men."<sup>28</sup> Within his own district, however, William Appleton still had strong support for retaking the seat which he had lost to Burlingame two years before. Only the dramatic election-eve return to Boston of the weak and haggard Sumner in a show of support for his champion tipped the scales in the race. The voters of Cambridge returned Burlingame to the Thirty-fifth Congress and—two years later—to the Thirty-sixth Congress.<sup>29</sup>

Burlingame continued to serve his constituents well, albeit a little less dramatically. Although not a particular friend of Boston's rich men, he tried to do something for Boston harbor, the navigation laws, and the fishing boundaries. He played a prominent role in the House debates on Kansas and slavery, making a major speech on the eve of the vote on the admission of Kansas under the Lecompton Constitution. Political observers grouped him with Abraham Lincoln, William H. Seward, and Charles Sumner as Republican orators who were consistently against compromise on the slavery issue. Looking forward to the 1860 election, he said that the Republicans would elect a President who would be "the tribune of the people, and after we have exterminated a few doughfaces from the North, then, if the slave Senate will not give way, we will grind it between the upper and nether millstones of our power."<sup>30</sup>

By the time of the 1860 election, Burlingame was clearly within the moderate element of the Republican party. He was as uncompromisingly opposed as ever to slavery but advocated non-extension of the institution rather than the radical solution of abolition. He joined many others in his party in considering William H. Seward, the leading contender for the Republican nomination, too radical on the slavery issue and Edward Bates of Missouri too conservative. "The man to win," he predicted, "must be found between them both."<sup>31</sup> The man Burlingame originally had in mind was his friend and former congressional colleague from Massachusetts, Nathaniel P. Banks. Burlingame and other Banks supporters hoped for a deadlocked convention to which they could present their man as a compromise candidate. Burlingame went to the convention in Chicago full of

<sup>28</sup> Burlingame to his wife, Sept. 1, 1856, Burlingame Family Papers

<sup>29</sup> Burlingame to his wife, Aug. 1, 3, 6, 10, 1856; *ibid*; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 5, 1856, Nov. 3, 1858; Pierce, *Sumner*, III, 509-513; Donald, *Sumner*, 318-320.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *History*, III, 97-98. Boutwell, *Reminiscences*, I, 218-219; *Congressional Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 sess. (1857-1858), appendix, 289-291; Burlingame to his wife, Apr. 17, 1857, Feb. 11, 1858, Burlingame Family Papers

<sup>31</sup> Burlingame to Banks, Feb. 16, 1860, Nathaniel P. Banks Papers, Illinois Historical Society

optimism and determination. He promised Banks: "I will do all *mortal man* can do for my *friend*. I have more hope than ever. You *must* be on the *ticket*."<sup>32</sup> Banks did not even have the majority of the Massachusetts delegation behind him, however, and was never a leading contender in Chicago. Instead of Banks, the convention turned to another moderate for its nominee and to a man whom Burlingame could and did support enthusiastically.<sup>33</sup>

During the 1860 presidential campaign, Burlingame, as one of the Republicans' most popular and effective speakers, stumped extensively for Abraham Lincoln. Undoubtedly Burlingame's efforts proved invaluable to Republican success in the critical states bordering the Great Lakes. Back home in Cambridge, however, William Appleton took advantage of the incumbent's absence to defeat him for reelection. Immediately after entering the White House, Lincoln repaid Burlingame by appointing him minister to Austria.<sup>34</sup>

After his confirmation Burlingame quickly departed for Europe. He had reached Paris in June, 1861, when Secretary of State William H. Seward informed him of his transfer to China. The Austrian monarchy had declared Burlingame *persona non grata* because of his close association with the rebel Kossuth and his introduction in Congress of a resolution terming Sardinia a "first class Power" after its 1859 victory over Austria.<sup>35</sup> The new diplomat readily accepted the change and made arrangements to proceed directly to Asia. Before leaving Europe, Burlingame met Benjamin Moran, the assistant secretary of the United States legation in London. After their meeting Moran noted critically: "I have heard much of this person, and was led to believe him to be a man of dignity and refinement, but I find him only ordinary and totally unfit for any Diplomatic Post."<sup>36</sup> Such things had been said about him before, but as in the past he plunged ahead full of enthusiasm. "I proceed to my new post with diffidence," Burlingame wrote Seward, "but still with pleasure for there is a fine field and I am yet a young man."<sup>37</sup>

The new minister arrived at Macao in October, 1861, a month before

<sup>32</sup> Burlingame to Banks, May 3, 1860, Nathaniel P. Banks Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>33</sup> Harrington, *Fighting Politician*, 41-49; Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), 110, 139-143; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (London, 1970), 205, 216.

<sup>34</sup> Lincoln to Seward, Mar. 18, 1861, in Roy P. Basler (ed.), *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1953), IV, 292-293; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 6, 1860; Pierce *Sumner*, IV, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Seward to Burlingame, June 17, 1861, Diplomatic Instructions of the Department of State, 1801-1906, China, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives. Hereafter cited as Diplomatic Instructions, China, RG 59, NA. *Congressional Globe*, 36 Cong., 1 sess. (1860), 1824; Williams, *Burlingame*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Sarah Agnes Wallace and Frances Elma Gillespie (eds.), *The Journal of Benjamin Moran 1857-1865* (Chicago, 1948), II, 867-868.

<sup>37</sup> Burlingame to Seward, Sept. 10, 1861, Despatches from United States Ministers to China, 1843-1906, General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, National Archives. Hereafter cited as China Despatches, RG 59, NA.

his forty-first birthday. Largely because the winter made Peking inaccessible, he did not proceed to the capital until the following July. Since the United States had no legation building, he bought a small house with half of his first year's salary. The other half had been used to pay his transportation to China. He had no staff other than Samuel Wells Williams, the missionary turned diplomat who served as secretary of the legation. In the hills twelve miles west of Peking, Burlingame established a summer legation at Sanshanan (Temple of the Three Hills). He named it "Tremont Temple" after the favorite Free Soil meeting place in Boston.<sup>38</sup>

With the Civil War raging at home, Burlingame sometimes felt an impulse to return to do his military duty. He had taken a prominent role in several key episodes leading to the war and maintained an acute interest in events transpiring in the United States. Jennie Burlingame, who had joined her husband in Peking, wrote to her father:

Whenever the mail comes, and we read the papers, Anson declares that he cannot bear to be away from the country any longer, but must start off at once, in the hope of being able to do his country more service there than here, but in his more sober reflections he feels that he is doing more good by remaining here.<sup>39</sup>

As minister, Burlingame did make a small contribution to the war effort by persuading China to close its harbors to Confederate cruisers such as the *Alabama*.<sup>40</sup>

Anson Burlingame had traveled a long way from his humble, rural origins. He could not credit his successes to great intelligence or even to great energy, but he had one genuine talent: a natural and forceful oratory. His affable personality complemented his speaking ability to gain him friends and political support. He also seemed to have an instinct for making bold moves. He was not especially courageous, but his optimism and acute sensitivity to principles propelled him into controversial situations. Although not an original thinker, he possessed a strong faith in ideas. Politics had taught him to be flexible in his public associations, but he adhered dogmatically to a personal creed. His opposition to slavery, for example, never wavered. He consistently championed individual rights and freedoms and the belief in popular government. He was an evangelical fundamentalist on the subject of democracy.

The new minister's lack of diplomatic experience did not handicap him as much in Peking as it might have elsewhere. Diplomacy in the Chinese capital in the early 1860's was conducted on a personal and informal basis. In addition to Burlingame, the only other diplomatic

<sup>38</sup> W. A. P. Martin, *A Cycle of Cathay or China* (New York, 1900), 222; Burlingame to Seward, Sept. 16, 1862, China Despatches, RG 59, NA.

<sup>39</sup> Mrs. Burlingame to her father (Isaac Livermore), Nov. 11, 1862, Burlingame Family Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Mrs. Burlingame to her sister, Oct. 9, 1862, *ibid.*; Burlingame to Seward, Mar. 17, 1864, China Despatches, RG 59, NA.

representatives permanently stationed in Peking were the British, French, and Russian ministers. The total of legation personnel, missionaries, and other Westerners in the capital city numbered less than fifty among a Chinese population of several hundred thousand. In these circumstances this small group became a close personal as well as professional community. In a private letter to Seward, Burlingame wrote that "my colleagues are all my warm friends."<sup>41</sup> Diplomatic questions were often discussed over dinner, during a game of cards, or on a horseback ride. In this situation Burlingame, the congenial and engaging politician with the natural talent of persuasion and eloquence, easily assumed a predominant role among the Westerners in the Chinese capital.<sup>42</sup>

Burlingame also overcame quickly his lack of knowledge of China. Before receiving his appointment to the post in Peking, he had never taken any interest in Asia. He had made only one recorded reference to China on the floor of the House of Representatives. Employing an orator's stereotype, he had remarked that when he was ready to depart from practicality, he would "join the immovable civilization of China, and take the false doctrines of Confucius for my guide, with their backward-looking thoughts."<sup>43</sup> After arriving in China, he began to understand that such comments were symptomatic of the gulf of misunderstanding that separated the Eastern and Western civilizations. Both Chinese and Westerners were basically ignorant and disrespectful of each other's culture. Consequently, Westerners had often resorted to coercion of the Chinese in an effort to overcome stubborn and haughty Chinese resistance to Western intrusions into China. In the face of Western threats and force, the Chinese became even more recalcitrant. Burlingame later recalled:

When I came to China, in 1861, the force policy was the rule. It was said "the Chinese are conceited barbarians, and must be forced into our civilization;" or, in the energetic language of the time, it was said, "you must take them by the throat."<sup>44</sup>

In this clash of cultures Burlingame recognized some of the same racial and social prejudices which had surrounded the slavery issue in the United States. At home he had always opposed the coercion of one race by another, and in China he continued to adhere to that same principle.<sup>45</sup>

Before Burlingame's arrival in 1861, Western nations, primarily Britain and France, had on several occasions employed naval and military forces to coerce China into signing "unequal treaties." Beginning with

<sup>41</sup> Burlingame to Seward, private, Dec. 23, 1863, *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> Mrs. Burlingame to her father, Jan. 12, 1863, Burlingame Family Papers; Raphael Pumpelly, *My Reminiscences* (New York, 1918), I, 432; Martin, *Cycle of Cathay*, 378-379; Williams, *Burlingame*, 20, 26-30.

<sup>43</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 35 Cong., 1 sess. (1857-1858), appendix, 291.

<sup>44</sup> Burlingame to Seward, Apr. 10, 1867, China Despatches, RG 59, NA.

<sup>45</sup> Burlingame to Seward, Nov. 9, 1864, *ibid*; Pumpelly, *Reminiscences*, I, 390.

the Treaty of Nanking in 1843 and continuing through the Treaties of Tientsin of 1858 and the Peking Convention of 1860, the Westerners had erected a "treaty system." The United States had never formally joined in any of the military actions against China but participated in the treaty system through separate treaties, which guaranteed most-favored-nation status to the United States. These unequal treaties forced upon the Chinese a foreign commerce which they did not want. The treaties required tariffs to be negotiated and did not allow the Chinese to determine their own duties. Another provision was extraterritoriality, i.e., legal immunity, which protected Westerners in China from arrest and prosecution by the Chinese. The treaties also specified that all treaty nations would enjoy the privileges gained by any treaty nation in China. After committing many years to the struggle for human dignity and social justice, Burlingame could not accept the forceful methods and bigoted attitudes which had created the treaty system.<sup>46</sup>

In order to defend its interests under the treaties, the Chinese government initiated efforts to reform its own diplomatic methods. Only a few months before Burlingame's arrival in Peking, the emperor's government created the Tsungli Yamen, China's first Western-style foreign office. Initially the Tsungli Yamen consisted of only three prominent Chinese officials and had only a weak and informal role in the government. The mandarin in charge of this new office, however, was Prince Kung, the *de facto* head of the Chinese government. Under his leadership the Tsungli Yamen quickly became the chief contact between the Western representatives and the imperial government. Traditionally, the Chinese had assumed that all other nations were morally and culturally inferior to the Middle Kingdom and had treated other countries as tributary states. Most Chinese officials in the 1860's still adhered to this hierarchical and Sinocentric world view. The Tsungli Yamen met stiff domestic opposition because it represented a new, more direct, and egalitarian mode of international relations. Burlingame recognized that Prince Kung had effected a dramatic innovation in Chinese foreign policy and became a sympathetic supporter of his reform efforts.<sup>47</sup>

The Chinese and Western concepts of international relations and of each other seemed to provide little ground for compromise, but with

<sup>46</sup> *Treaties, Conventions, etc., Between China and Foreign States* (Shanghai, 1908), I, 29-46, 159-164, 212-229, 238-242, 509-523, 602-623, 673-678; Te-kong Tong, *United States Diplomacy in China, 1844-60* (Seattle, 1964), 223-234, 280-285.

<sup>47</sup> Burlingame to Seward, Oct. 25, Dec. 12, 1862, China Despatches, RG 59, NA; Mary C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The Tung-Chih Restoration, 1862-1874* (New York, 1967), 224-226; Samuel S. Kim, "America's First Minister to China: Anson Burlingame and the Tsungli Yamen," *Maryland Historian*, III (Fall, 1972), 87-91. It should be noted that Burlingame was America's first resident minister in Peking and not America's first minister to China. Three of Burlingame's predecessors in China—Caleb Cushing, William B. Reed, and John E. Ward—held the rank of envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary.

characteristic optimism Burlingame assumed that some accommodation was possible. He assisted the Tsungli Yamen in learning about Western diplomatic practices, and he sought to convince Western officials, in his words, to "substitute fair diplomatic action in China for force."<sup>48</sup> With his Western colleagues he began to formulate a significant new approach to Sino-Western relations called the "cooperative policy," an attempt to replace the existing cultural confrontation with discussions and conciliation. To Burlingame cooperation represented an enlightened and deliberate alternative to coercion. To Secretary of State Seward, who encouraged Burlingame to pursue this effort, the cooperative policy appeared to be of practical benefit for the United States. As long as the Civil War raged at home, the application of American military or naval force in China would have been impossible.<sup>49</sup>

In the spring of 1863, Burlingame initiated a series of detailed discussions with each of the other Western representatives in an effort to formalize Sino-Western cooperation in Peking. The odds were against him, as they had been when he first ran successfully for Congress as a Know Nothing. On June 20, 1863, however, he was able to inform Seward that he had gained the assent of Sir Frederick Bruce of Great Britain, Jules Berthemy of France, and L. D. Balluzek of Russia to a formal statement of cooperation with the Chinese government. "The four B's," as the ministers were called, agreed to respect China's sovereignty and territory and not to interfere in internal Chinese affairs. They also offered to give advice and moral support to the emperor's government and endorsed some specific programs to assist China in reforming its army, navy, and customs service. Burlingame's enthusiasm for a reform effort and his talents for politics and persuasion had played an important role in this agreement, which represented a significant departure from the past.<sup>50</sup>

The cooperative policy did not work any instant miracles. The unequal treaties still remained in effect. Most Chinese officials remained suspicious and resentful of the West. But at least the Tsungli Yamen and the four foreign representatives were making an attempt at working with, rather than against, each other. Within a few years, however, changes within the diplomatic community and the continuing inequities of the treaty system began to undermine this hopeful initiative for friendly and peaceful relations between China and the Western nations. By 1865 Burlingame was the only one of "the four B's" still in Peking, but

<sup>48</sup> Burlingame to George F. Seward, June 15, 1864, enclosed in Burlingame to William H. Seward, June 18, 1864, China Despatches, RG 59, NA; Burlingame to W. H. Seward, Oct. 30, 1863, *ibid.*; Martin, *Cycle of Cathay*, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Seward to Burlingame, Mar. 6, 1862, Diplomatic Instructions, China, RG 59, NA.

<sup>50</sup> Burlingame to Seward, June 20, 1863, China Despatches, RG 59, NA. For a detailed account of Burlingame's contribution to the cooperative policy see David L. Anderson, "Anson Burlingame: American Architect of the Cooperative Policy in China, 1861-1871," *Diplomatic History*, I (Summer, 1977), 239-255.

the American minister continued to adhere to the cooperative approach. When Americans or other foreigners in China raised questions of commerce, residence, or other treaty issues with the Chinese government, Burlingame consistently extended to the imperial government every courtesy due to a sovereign nation. He steadfastly rejected the counsel of those foreigners who advocated menacing China with the threat of Western naval or military power.<sup>51</sup>

The greatest proof of Burlingame's consistently cooperative and conciliatory attitude toward the Chinese came in November, 1867, when the imperial government appointed him its first diplomatic envoy to the Western nations. Prince Kung and his colleagues in the government expressed the same confidence in Burlingame as he had in them. They were registering their understandable approval of his cooperative approach over the coercive methods of other Westerners. The Tsungli Yamen did not give Burlingame detailed instructions but expected him "to personally state their case at foreign courts, explain their difficulties, and urge the reasons for their own policy."<sup>52</sup> Burlingame accepted the Chinese post as a new opportunity to pursue his efforts toward reform of Sino-Western relations.<sup>53</sup>

Throughout 1868 and 1869, Burlingame and his entourage of Chinese co-envoys and Western secretaries traveled through the United States and Europe. In numerous public speeches and in private meetings with high government officials, Burlingame advocated Western forbearance in China and cooperation with the Chinese government. Criticism, however, dogged the heels of the Burlingame mission. His detractors argued that Chinese hostility and resistance to foreigners made force the only means for advancing Western interests in the Middle Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> Despite his adversaries, Burlingame remained the perpetual optimist. The obstacles in his path to peacefully reconciling China and the West were large, but he refused to believe that the task was impossible. He took hope from his early antislavery struggles and the ultimate success of that movement. He believed that the advocates of force in China were like Southerners whom he had heard say "that the only way to treat a 'nigger' was to enslave him and then, when slavery made him deceitful and lazy, would whip him to cure the sins resulting from their own false principles."<sup>55</sup> Emancipation, however, had demanded the price of a bloody civil war. He believed that change in China would be much less costly. "The imagination kindles at the future which may be," he told a

<sup>51</sup> Burlingame to Seward, private, June 21, 1863, China Despatches, RG 59, NA; Burlingame to Seward, Feb. 28, 1866, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Williams to Seward, Dec. 23, 1867, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Williams to Seward, Nov. 28, 1867, *ibid.*; Burlingame to Seward, Dec. 14, 1867, *ibid.*; *North China Herald*, Dec. 24, 1867; Kim, "America's First Minister to China," 101.

<sup>54</sup> Williams, *Burlingame*, 141, 166, 202-203.

<sup>55</sup> Burlingame to Samuel Wells Williams, Jan. 23, 1870, Williams Family Papers, Yale University Library.



New York audience, "and which will be if you will be fair and just to China."<sup>56</sup> Anson Burlingame the diplomat was still Anson Burlingame the reformer. His opposition to unfairness and injustice had carried him from a frontier orator, to a New England reformer, to a popular congressman, to an innovative diplomat, and finally to a self-proclaimed harmonizer of Eastern and Western civilizations

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Williams, *Burlingame*, 139.



## URGENT GRADUALISM: The Case of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race

James R. Stirn

HISTORIANS OF ANTE-BELLUM America have managed to study, dissect, and label the various segments of the antislavery movement. An exception is a small group that gathered at Boston in January, 1835, to plan and publicize a theme of urgent gradualism. They called themselves the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race. Their goals were to: (1) convince Southern planters that slavery must end; (2) initiate the religious and secular education of Negroes; and (3) promote dispassionate inquiry into the difficulties of abolition in America, the West Indies, and elsewhere with an aim at overcoming those difficulties.

Because the American Union failed to gain much popular support, historians have either ignored it or else dismissed it as merely a diversionary maneuver designed to draw attention away from the ever more outspoken Garrison.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, fear of Garrison infused the enterprise from the start and caused the organizers to launch the society prematurely and to become embroiled in an open confrontation with the notorious Boston agitator.<sup>2</sup> Many potential converts, already disgusted with the noisy theoretical contentions between colonizationists and abolitionists, foresaw more of the same and were quickly disillusioned.

<sup>1</sup> John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison, A Biography* (Boston, 1963), 195; William H. Pease & Jane H. Pease (eds.), *The Antislavery Argument* (Indianapolis, 1965), xlix; Phyllis M. Bannan, *Arthur and Lewis Tappan* (Ann Arbor, 1972), 94-95. The most authoritative treatment of the Union is to be found in Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Cleveland, 1969), 134-141. Wyatt-Brown's account is sympathetic and full of insights, but emphasizes the role of the Tappan brothers, John and Charles, in Boston, who saw the new organization as a means of luring their abolitionist brother, Arthur, away from Garrison's influence.

<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Senior, *New England Congregationalism and the Antislavery Movements, 1830-1860* (Ann Arbor, 1967), 88; *Journal of Freedom* (New Haven), Jan. 29, 1835; a running account of the Union's opening proceedings also appears in *Liberator*, (Boston), Jan. 24, 31, 1835.