

Editor's Introduction

Sterling Price, in the eyes of Confederate Missourians, was an authentic heroic figure. A governor, a U.S. representative, and a Mexican-American War hero, he was handsome, well spoken, and popular. At the beginning of the secession crisis, he was a conditional Unionist, someone who was for the Union but not to the extent of suppressing the rights of individual states. Most Missourians agreed with this stand. In the November 1860 presidential election, more than 70 percent of the votes of Missouri went to Stephen A. Douglas and John Bell, the candidates advocating compromise. But Price's stand as a conditional Unionist rankled the secessionists in Missouri and elsewhere in the Southern states. Only after the Camp Jackson affair, in which Nathaniel Lyon and his mainly German American recruits surrounded and forced the surrender of the Missouri State Militia's "Camp of Instruction" on May 10, 1861, did Price's attitude change from conditional Unionism to secessionism. Similarly, many Missourians' attitude changed to secessionism.

Price was named major general and commander of the Missouri State Guard. But because of his previous conditional Unionism, he was not completely trusted by either Governor Claiborne Fox Jackson or Lieutenant Governor Thomas Cate Reynolds, both secessionists. Similarly, Jefferson Davis, president of the new Confederate States of America, trusted neither Price nor Jackson, the latter because of his temporizing actions during the secession crisis.

Once Price took command of the Missouri State Guard, he came into his own. He led by example, was fearless, inspired his men, and shared

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their hardships. They loved him and called him “Old Pap.” They fought for him at Wilson’s Creek and Lexington, Missouri, and at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. When, after Pea Ridge, Price and his men were transferred east of the Mississippi River, they again fought well but sought to return west of the river and fight for the liberation of their home state, Missouri.

Price’s last hurrah was the expedition into Missouri in autumn of 1864. He had hoped that, upon his arrival in the state, Confederate sympathizers would flock to his banner. They didn’t. Most of the sympathizers in Missouri realized that the Confederacy was failing, and they stayed away from his forces. The raid was a failure, and Reynolds, who traveled with the raid, was furious.

After the surrenders, many Missourians, including Reynolds, Price, and Brigadier General Joseph O. Shelby, fled to Mexico. (Jackson died in December 1862, and Reynolds became acting governor.) In Mexico, Price tried to establish a farming community but was unsuccessful and returned to St. Louis, racked with illnesses. Reynolds engaged in business in Mexico City. In 1867 in Mexico City, he began writing his version of events in a manuscript he titled “Gen. Sterling Price & the Confederacy.” It was never completed, possibly because he had heard of Price’s death. Reynolds also later returned to St. Louis.

After the Civil War, books and magazine articles about it began to appear. At first, many of these were Union memoirs. Only somewhat later did Confederate material begin to come out. Thomas L. Sned, who had served as Price’s adjutant during the war, wrote his complimentary account of Price’s campaigns, which appeared in volume 1 of the four-volume *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1884) and as a separate book in 1886.

In 1898, the Reynolds manuscript was discovered among his papers and was donated to the Missouri Historical Society. For historians, the Reynolds manuscript has proved to be a proverbial gold mine of information. This is especially true since Price’s personal papers were lost in a fire in the 1880s. Later historians, using a wide range of sources, including

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The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (abbreviated as Official Records, or OR;) and the Reynolds manuscript, have not been as kind to Sterling Price as Snead. No one has questioned his personal bravery, but his grasp of strategy and tactics has been questioned. Many accounts mention his personal vanity and his aggressive self-promotion as factors that limited his personal success. This being said, one must remember that Reynolds had a poor opinion of Price, and this opinion certainly pervades the manuscript.

Now for the first time, the entire manuscript is available in print. That this additional appraisal of Sterling Price is presented is important, but probably of equal importance are Reynolds's views of the inner workings of the Confederate government and in particular the challenges that faced the Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy.

The original manuscript is still at the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis. It was donated to the society by George Savage, the nephew of Thomas Reynolds. Savage found it among the papers left to him by Reynolds. This manuscript is handwritten on thin paper and is quite



→ Thomas C. Reynolds. ←

Photograph of a painting, no date. Missouri History Museum.

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fragile. It was transcribed into typescript, apparently in 1904 by Cyrus A. Peterson, president of the society. There is a notation on the first page of the typescript volume: "This volume was presented to the Missouri Historical Society by Dr. C. A. Peterson, April 1904." Peterson was particularly interested in the battle at Pilot Knob, Missouri, during Price's expedition, and he published *Pilot Knob, the Thermopylae of the West* (Cyrus A. Peterson and Joseph Mills Hanson, New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1914), which draws on this manuscript. Throughout the typescript volume are a number of notes referring to specific *Official Records* pages along with some corrections of the typescript, all apparently in Peterson's hand. They appear in appendix 1.

This editor faced an initial question. Apparently, Reynolds loved long sentences and semicolons. There was a temptation to break up these sentences into more manageable chunks. However, this temptation was resisted and the manuscript was essentially left unchanged from the Peterson transcription, with the exception of the correction of a few spelling and typographic errors. The manuscript exists as one long document without any separations. The decision was made to add a few separation headings based on dates and specific events. Bracketed dashes ([—]) in the manuscript represent information that was not available to Reynolds in Mexico City; either his memory had failed or his notes were incomplete. This manuscript ends just before the Price expedition into Missouri in the fall of 1864. Peterson added some extracts from the Missouri Historical Society Archives and from the *Official Records* volumes as a way to indicate what the manuscript might have held if it had been finished. These additions appear at the end of the Reynolds manuscript. This editor has found some additional contemporary material relating to the Price expedition to augment that added by Peterson. It appears in appendix 1. In addition, other pertinent material relating to the manuscript, material dated before the conclusion of Reynolds's narrative, has been added as appendix 2. Finally, appendix 3 contains a table that lists the various members of the Confederate Congresses who were from Missouri.

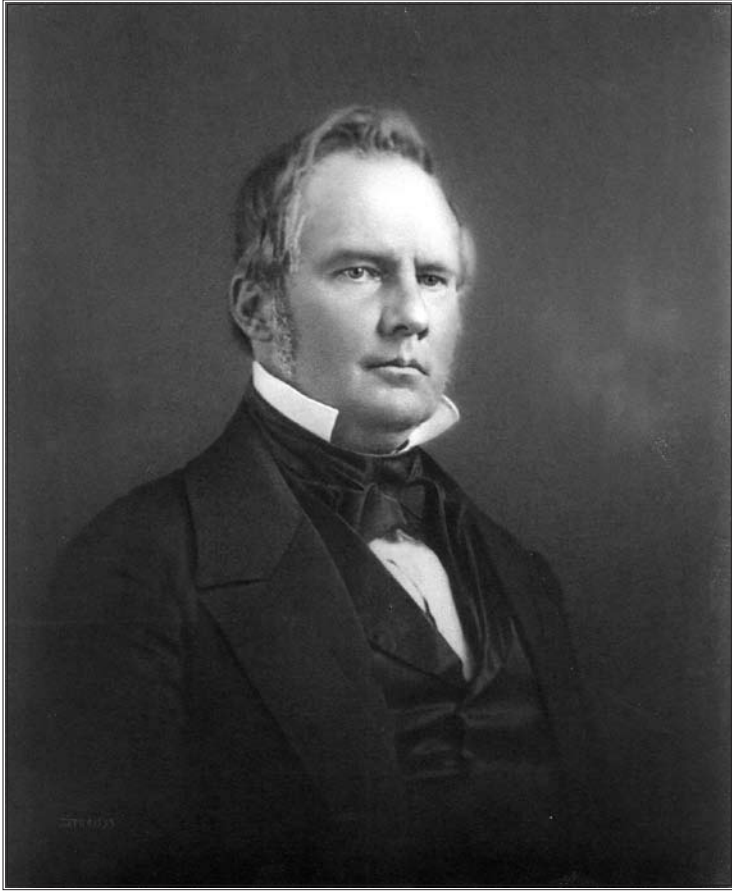
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City of Mexico, 10th March, 1867

I propose in this memoir to state, partly from memory, and partly from letters and memoranda, and with entire impartiality, the connection of Gen. Sterling Price¹ with military and civil affairs of the Confederate States and the State of Missouri, during the late civil war, in explanation of the course pursued towards him by their respective authorities, the true reasons for which had, to a great extent, to be kept as “secrets of state,” during the continuance of the war itself.

Gen. Price first became known in national politics by his election, from Missouri, as a member of the first U.S. Congress in the presidency of Mr. Polk. Failing to acquire any position in it, he was not re-nominated by the Democratic Party (to which he had always belonged) and in disgust at that treatment (as I have understood from himself,) he resigned his place in Congress, in the spring of 1846, and being elected colonel of a Missouri volunteer regiment, took part in the Mexican war in New Mexico, etc. The American accounts of the war gave him credit for energy, activity and military ability; the Mexican accuse him of disobedience of orders, bad faith and useless bloodshed, in fighting a battle after he knew that a peace was concluded and hostilities had ceased. On Col. Jefferson Davis’s declension of a brigadiership, it was given to Col. S. Price, who throughout the war was a special favorite and protégé of Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri, who kept up with him a frequent correspondence during his campaign in Mexico.²

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— Sterling Price. —

Photograph, 1852–1856. Missouri History Museum.

Two incidents occurred in those campaigns to exercise an important influence on Gen. Price's character and future career. One was his quarrel with Mr. Francis P. Blair, Jr.³ I have heard the statement of both in regard to it: from Mr. Blair at Jefferson City in January 1857, and from Gen. Price at Camden, Ark., in the summer of 1864. Mr. Blair considered his arrest as a piece of tyranny and an outrage on him by Gen. Price, then U.S. Military Governor of New Mexico, and attributed it to personal malice; even after the lapse of nearly ten years (in 1857),

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he spoke of it with great bitterness, and as fully justifying his violent philippic in the Missouri legislature, against Gen. Price, when Governor of the State. He justified his personal abuse of Gov. Price at the time when their respective official positions prevented the Governor from demanding "satisfaction," on the ground that he was retaliating for an outrage committed on him at the time when their respective positions in New Mexico prevented, and indeed precluded for all time, his seeking redress for it from Gen. Price; that as he had to pocket his outrage, he insulted Gov. Price in a speech at a time when the latter would have to pocket the insult in like manner. Mr. Blair added: "I consider him, however, a man of such courage that I believe he would have given his right hand to have been able, without violating his duty, to resign the governorship and challenge me." This feud with Mr. F. P. Blair Jr. and with his family, who shared his resentment, was considered to have influenced Gen. Price in his desertion of Col. [Thomas Hart] Benton in 1852, the period at which the latter, more publicly than he had previously done, entrusted the management of his political fortunes in Missouri to Mr. F. P. Blair Jr., Hon. Montgomery Blair, his brother, and Mr. B. Gratz Brown,⁴ his cousin, all of St. Louis, MO., and allied himself more closely than ever with Mr. Francis P. Blair, Senior, at Washington City [Washington, DC]. But in General Price's own account of the matter to me in 1864, he treated the New Mexico incident as a petty quarrel between Mr. Blair and sum [*sic*] subaltern officer, with which he, as Governor of New Mexico, had really had very little to do, and in regard to which Mr. Blair's resentment had greatly surprised him; in general, his account treated the matter very lightly, and as of little importance in determining his subsequent political relations with the Blairs, against whom neither his manner nor his language evinced any personal ill-feeling.

The other incident was related to me by Gen. Price at Jefferson City, Mo., in January 1861, at my house, Gov. C. F. Jackson, Mr. Russell, Commissioner from Mississippi,⁵ and Mr. McAfee, Speaker of the Mis-

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souri House of Representatives, being with us. While on a march with his command to attack some Mexican position, he received from his superior officer, an order (by letter) to return. He deliberately, but silently, determined to disregard the order, continued his march and gained an advantage over the Mexicans. By the first opportunity he stated the matter to Senator Benton at Washington City, and received soon in answer an approval of his course, and a promise to protect him against any censure. Accordingly, nothing came of the matter. I was struck at the time when Gen. Price related the above, by the light the incident shed on the state of discipline in the U.S. Army in the Mexican war, and also by his tone and manner in relating it, as above set forth. He evidently felt proud of it, and seemed utterly unconscious of any military impropriety in his disobeying orders and then seeking to shield himself by political influence at Washington City. The success on that occasion will aid in explaining his tendency, during the late civil war, to action independently of his official superiors, almost to the extent of insubordination; and also his singular unconsciousness of the unfavorable impression produced on those superior, by his frequent assertions to them that the troops he commanded were so devoted to him that they would mutiny or desert if separated from him.

After the Mexican war, Gen. Price's prominent reappearance in politics was on his nomination for the governorship of the state by the Democratic convention at Jefferson City in the spring of 1852. The history of his nomination was given me by Hon. John M. Krum at St. Louis in February 1861, in a conversation arising out of the general astonishment at his being a strong Union man in the Missouri convention, while but a short time before, on his visit to Jefferson City, his language had indicated that he was a secessionist.

The Benton and Anti-Benton Democrats had agreed upon a fusion in that convention of 1852, on the basis that the former being a majority of the party, the candidate for Governor should be a Benton man, that for Lieutenant Governor, an Anti-Benton, and so on alternately to the

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end of the ticket; but the fused convention as a whole was to select the candidates, and not each wing of the party select its share of the ticket. The Anti-Benton minority at once took measures to secure the fruits of this advantage. Gen. Thomas L. Price⁶ was the choice of the great body of the Benton men, but especially distasteful to the Anti-Benton men. Accordingly in a caucus of some leaders of the latter, Judge Krum was selected to have an interview with Gen. Sterling Price, a Benton delegate to the convention, and conspicuous for the ardent support he had given Col. Benton not only before but since the division in 1849 in the Missouri Democracy on the subject of that senator. Judge K's report of the interview, concerning the policy which Gen. Sterling Price, if elected Governor, would pursue in regard to both the men and the measures of the Anti-Benton Democracy, being entirely satisfactory to the caucus, it was resolved to support him, in the convention, for the candidacy for the governorship. The solid vote of the Anti-Benton minority, added to a small portion of the Benton majority, secured him the nomination over General Thomas L. Price; and Dr. Brown, a zealous Anti-Benton man, was nominated for Lieutenant governor.

Col. Benton promptly denounced the ticket as a fraud, a bargain and sale, and "spit upon the platform"—all publicly in his speeches. Privately, he was reported to be especially severe on Gen. Sterling Price, whom he considered mainly indebted to him for both military and political position, and from whom he had expected unswerving fidelity. But the fusion was maintained; Gen. Price acted with consummate discretion, keeping very quiet and making no general canvass; and the entire fusion ticket was elected. Thenceforward, and as governor in 1853–57, Gen. Price vigorously opposed Col. Benton and sustained the Anti-Benton democracy. The election of 1856 completely demolished the Benton party in Missouri; of its remnants, some returned to the re-united or "National" democracy, the others joined the newly established "Republican Party."

In January 1857, the Missouri Legislature met, with an overwhelming democratic majority in each branch. Two senators were to be elected: one

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for the "short term" ending March 3rd 1861, and the other for six years commencing 4th March, 1857. For the short term, Gen. Price, whose gubernatorial term had just expired, Hon. James S. Green,⁷ elected member of congress, and Hon. Willard P. Hall⁸ were candidates for the nomination by the democratic caucus; the two latter had always been Anti-Benton democrats since the division in the party in 1849. Mr. Hall, however, being considered the least decided of the two in his states rights principles.

The selection of Gen. Price was urged by his friends mainly as a debt of gratitude to him on the part of the re-united democracy, on account of the admitted fact that by his opportune abandonment of Col. Benton, and his policy during his four years governorship, he had contributed more than any other one man in Missouri to that very triumph which placed two senatorships in the gift of the democracy; that he modestly asked the short term and had announced (as he did in a conversation with me), his determination, if elected senator, to ask no re-election; and that while his inferiority, in parliamentary talent, to either Mr. Green or Mr. Hall, was admitted it was urged that he had made a capable governor, that his messages showed ability and sound sense, and that his vetoes showed moral firmness and decision of character. The main objection to Mr. Green was that his election to the U.S. Senate would create a vacancy in his congressional district, and subject the democracy to the risk of losing it in a special election. It was known to but few at that time, though now no longer a secret, that Gen. Price's intellect was so limited that his messages were written for him by political friends; political (capital?) was therefore made for him by referring to those state papers. He himself carried on a quiet and dignified but active canvass for support with his usual skill, both at the gubernatorial mansion, and the lobby of the legislature.

In the vote in the democratic caucus, Mr. Hall received the largest vote, but not a majority. Mr. Green came next, and Gov. Price last, with a vote so small as to render his chance hopeless. He promptly with-

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drew, and his late supporters joined those of Mr. Green, who received the nomination over Mr. Hall, and was thereon elected U.S. Senator by the Legislature. For the long term, Gov. Trusten Polk⁹ was elected senator over Mr. Phelps,¹⁰ the latter being urged as was Gov. Price, on the ground of gratitude for the admittedly immense service in abandoning Col. Benton some few months after Gov. Price. But Gov. Polk, always an Anti-Benton man since 1849, prevailed in the face of the risk the democracy ran of losing the state in the special gubernatorial election made necessary by his election to the U.S. Senate.

It was very evident to me and many other observers of those two elections, that the same causes determined each. The friends of Col. Benton who were now re-united to the democracy after having stood by him until all hope of sustaining him was gone, could not be induced to reward the two great defections which were claimed and admitted to have sealed his political fate. The men who from the start in 1849 and at first in the meager minority, had opposed Col. Benton on principle, could see no difference between his position which Gov. Price and Mr. Phelps shared in 1849, and his position in 1853, when those two politicians abandoned him and joined his opponents when rendered nearly certain of ascendancy in Missouri through the support of the [Franklin] Pierce administration. These feelings were general, though not exclusively prevalent, in the respective classes mentioned; and both felt that it was safer to have the state represented in the U.S. Senate, in the troublous times then obviously coming, by men whose fidelity, in adversity, to their party and principles in the past, was a guarantee of fidelity to them in the future, rather than by men whose changes of party had indicated quite as much sagacity in joining the winning side, as repentance in abandoning the losing.

Events have shown the democracy of Missouri to have been correct in its appreciation of men on that occasion. Mr. Green and Mr. Polk remained true to the state and to their principles; the former in (poor?) health, remained in Missouri, and the latter, abandoning a senatorial seat

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and risking his large fortune, joined the Confederate Army. Mr. Hall and Mr. Phelps, after considerable trimming,¹¹ sided with the Federals, the former becoming the intrusive Lieutenant governor of Missouri under the rump convention, and the latter Federal military governor of Arkansas. After like trimming, Gen. Price was driven by the blundering arrogance of Lyon¹² into resistance to the U.S. government; to what extent his trimming continued afterwards, remained throughout the late civil war a matter of both doubt and anxiety to the Confederate government itself.

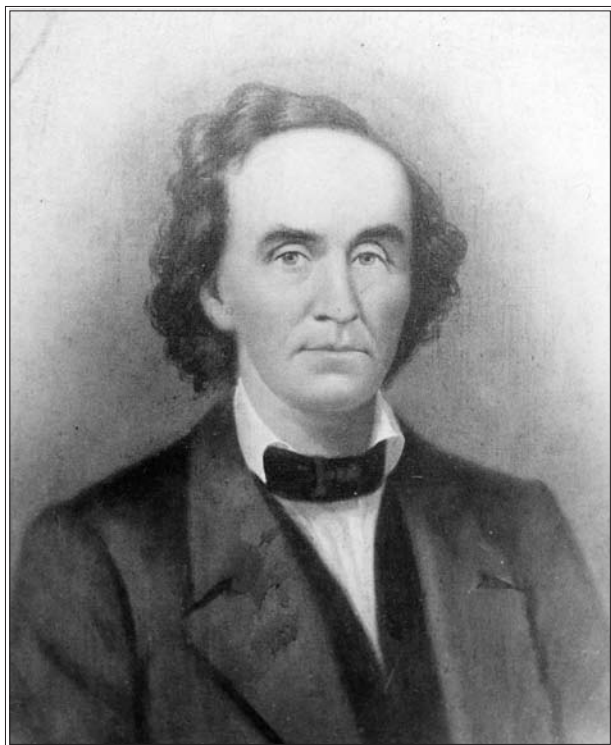
Gov. Price was visibly mortified and chagrined by his utter defeat in the canvass for the U.S. senatorship, and disdaining the suggestion of some of his friends that the democracy of his district would cheerfully send him to the U.S. house of representatives to fill the vacancy occasioned by Mr. Green's election to the senate, he returned to his home in Chariton county. He was generally regarded as completely shelved and dead, as a politician; though I remember to have heard a prediction by some who knew him well, that on Mr. Green's appearing for re-election to the U.S. Senate in 1861, Gov. Price would certainly be "on hand in full force," to pay him off for the defeat in 1857, for which Gov. Price had not forgiven him, though only the innocent cause. Mr. Green himself expressed to me in July 1860 the same opinion, and his belief that Gov. Price's retirement, in the well known secrecy of his habits, was merely to recover political strength to take some new position to that end.

His reappearance in politics took place at the democratic convention in the spring of 1860, at Jefferson City. He was a delegate from Chariton County, and considered to favor Mr. Stephen A. Douglas for the presidency of the United States. The friends of Mr. Douglas designed to make him president of the convention, but were out-manuevered. When the contest for the nomination for the governorship became vexed, some thought of proposing Gov. Price as a compromise. I asked his view on the point, and he answered, I believe with entire sincerity, that he had no desire for the position, as he had once filled it, but would not decline

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it, should the convention voluntarily give him the nomination. My own nomination for the Lieutenant governorship had, as I knew, been so effectually prepared, even before the convention met, that I received it, by a motion for a unanimous nomination, before the first roll-call was over. I had, for various reasons, supposed that Gov. Price would feel bound to support some candidate from his own section of North Missouri, as the governorship was conceded to the "south of the river" (Missouri). About the time of the meeting of the convention, Mr. Geo. L. Pollard of St. Louis, informed me, however, that shortly before Gov. Price had declared himself in favor of myself, and expressed the intention to use his influence for me. I accordingly acted in concert with him on the subject, and asked him to place me in nomination in the convention, which he accordingly did. Not choosing to inquire, or even guess, whether his support, announced at so late a period and when the contest was virtually decided, was not merely an evidence of sagacity in choosing the winning side, and securing in advance a claim on the remembrance of the future president of the state senate, who in all probability would preside over (and might have a casting vote in), two elections for U.S. Senator: I determined on rendering him at once a fully equivalent service; besides, I had a strong personal liking for him. The nomination of Mr. C. F. Jackson for the governorship rendered almost certain his resignation of the best office in the state, the bank commissionership: Mr. J. M. Hughes and other gentlemen of eminence were known to desire it. Learning that Gov. Price was somewhat embarrassed in money matters, I inquired of his nephew, Mr. Thos. Price, who roomed with me, whether Gov. Price would not like to have that office; he at once answered that it would be the most acceptable favor imaginable to Gov. Price. As soon as I was nominated by the convention for the lieutenant governorship, I asked Gov. Stewart, as a favor to myself, that he should tender that office to Gov. Price. He did so, and it was well known at the time that to me, and to me alone, did Gov. Price owe an office which came just in time to save him from serious business and pecuniary embarrassment. When

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— Claiborne F. Jackson. —

Photograph of a painting, mid-nineteenth century. Missouri History Museum.

I handed him Gov. Stewart's note offering him the position, he pressed my hand and thanked me most cordially. I mention these facts here mainly because on my controversy with him in 1865, the Alexandria (La.) newspaper, then edited by Mr. W. A. Seay, of St. Louis, charged that I was elected Lt. Gov. of Missouri through Price's patronage. The above is all the interchange of service between us up to that time of which I have any recollection; if there were any other, they were insignificant or mere courtesies.

After the convention Gov. Price remained very quiet. On the nomination of Douglas and Breckenridge as opposing Democratic candidates for the U.S. presidency, he quietly took sides for Douglas and advised

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Gov. C. F. Jackson and myself to do so. During our canvass he remained perfectly quiet; I never heard of his doing anything to help our election, and his passiveness attracted my attention. I attributed it at the time to the ill-feeling believed to exist between Jackson and him, the (totally erroneous) current belief that Senator Green's support of Jackson and me was the result of some understanding at Chillicothe, that I would support Green for re-election in 1861, and to Gov. Price's inveterate habit of trimming, which led him to await the result of the State election before deciding on taking an active part in the contest between the Douglas and Breckinridge wings of the Democracy. Subsequently in 1861, Gov. C. F. Jackson in conversation with me, attributed Gov. Price's course to the remnant of old ill-feeling between them. I forgot its origin, but it was of sufficient strength to make Gov. Price express to me, on the offer to him by Gov. Stewart¹³ of the bank commissionership, that Gov. Jackson would interpose difficulties, by delaying his resignation, or otherwise. An interview between them, however, removed those difficulties; but both Gov. Jackson and I were somewhat disappointed that Gov. Price, owing his appointment to me, and the facilitating his prompt reception of it to Gov. J., seemed to take no interest in securing our election in August 1860.

That election was decisive, Gov. Jackson receiving a plurality of about 7,500, and I one of about 15,000 votes. Soon after, Gov. Price became chairman of the State central committee of the Douglas democracy, and its success in the State in the presidential election of Nov. 1860 seemed again to place Gov. Price in a prominent political position.