

1860 voters sought pro-slavery candidate

By Tom Ward
Missourian staff writer

Columbia voters in 1860 were concerned about slavery's future. They wanted a congressman who would reflect their pro-slavery sentiments.

The citizens of Boone County also had an interest in the election because James Rollins of Columbia was a candidate.

The Democrats and the

Constitutional Union Party had held their district conventions in May in Mexico to select the second district nominees.

The second district covered much of eastern Missouri, including Boone, Callaway, Warren and St. Charles counties.

The Democrats decided on John B. Henderson of Pike County, a supporter of Stephen Douglas. This caused the delegates from Boone and Callaway

counties to walk out of the convention.

The Constitutional Union party chose Rollins by acclamation.

Rollins and Henderson each charged the other with having Freesoil or abolitionist tendencies. (Freesoilers did not oppose slavery but opposed its extension into new territories.)

It was because of one meeting with a German leader, according to historian William Switzler, that Rollins was able to woo the Freesoilers and thus carry

the district by a small margin.

Both candidates were to speak in Marthasville, in Warren County, but Henderson was too sick to come. Rollins gave his speech and afterward met with Frederick Muench, the leader of the German Freesoilers.

Muench pledged the support of the Freesoilers. Later Muench, without Rollins' knowledge, wrote a letter advocating support for Rollins to a freesoil newspaper in Hannibal.

The St. Louis Republican, which backed Henderson, got hold of the letter and printed it.

The newspaper reached Henderson an hour before both men were to debate at Sturgeon. Henderson opened the debate and blistered Rollins, who was unaware of the letter, for conciliating with the Freesoilers.

Rollins jumped up and denied it.

According to Switzler, Henderson responded: "I will prove it on him. I charge that one Mr. Minch, a German, has written a letter urging the Germans to vote for him, and after he had an interview with Minch."

According to Switzler, "Rollins rose with equanimity and said defiantly — 'Read the name of the author.' Henderson did it, 'Frederick Minch.' 'Spell it,' Rollins said, and Henderson spelled it — 'M-e-u-n-c-h.' Rollins — 'the name is Muench not Minch. You can't cheat the people. You can't play tricks on me with impunity; you have changed his name.'"

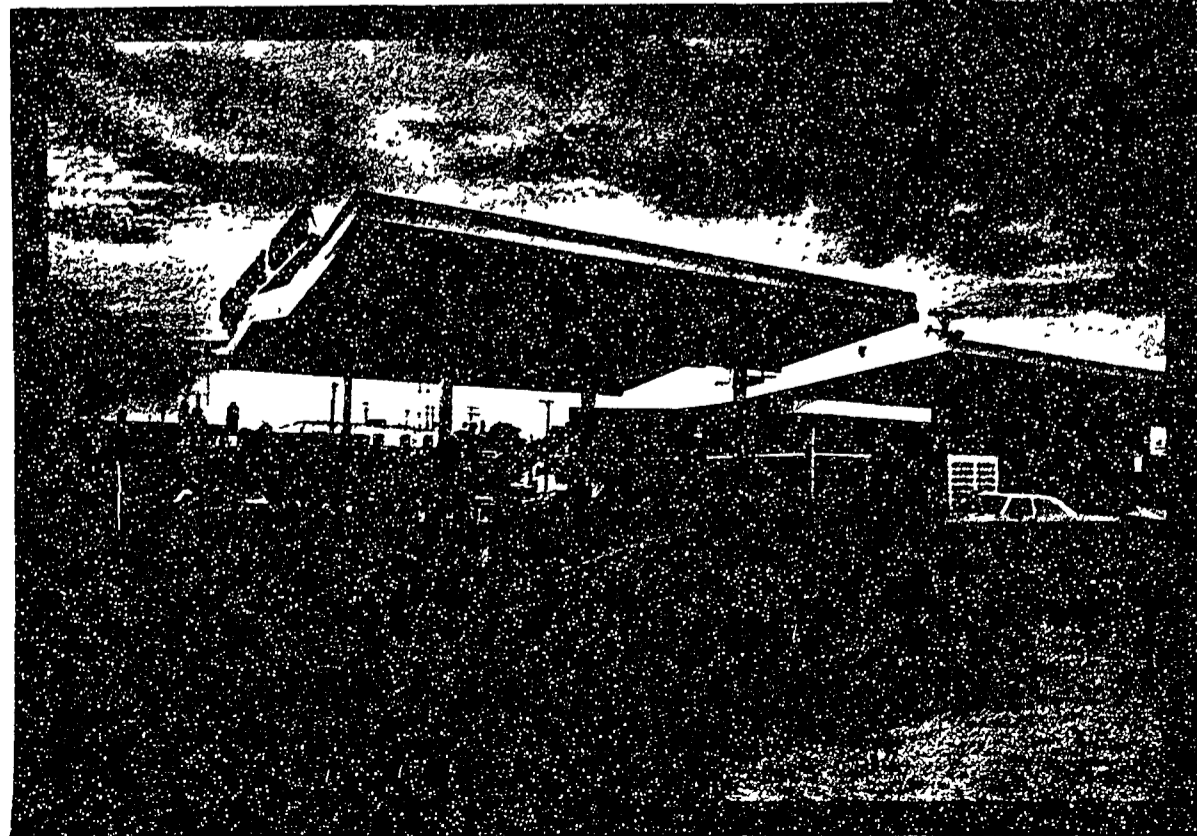
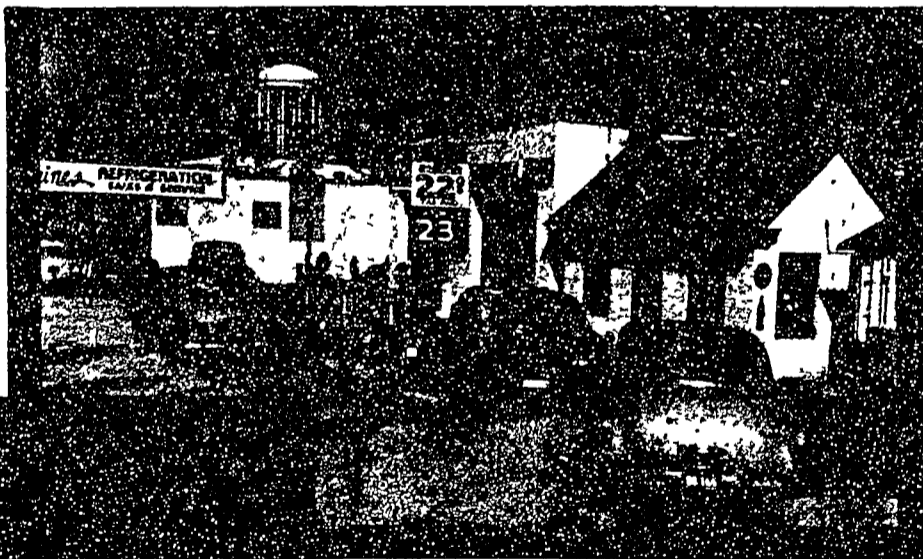
In Boone County, Rollins outpolled Henderson 1,514 to 1,062. But the rest of the district, except for the German Freesoilers went for Henderson. It was the Freesoil vote that enabled Rollins to beat Henderson by 254 votes in the district.



Stump speaking was a popular activity at any election. George Caleb Bingham's painting,

aptly titled "Stump Speaking," added much to his status as an artist. (Missourian photo)

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