

To Martin Van Buren, May 29, 1837

I have watched with much anxiety the progress of the panic, and the efforts made by the opposition, here as well as elsewhere, to turn the existing pressure in the money-market, and the deranged state of trade, to political account. The agitators have at length reached a point beyond which they cannot go. They have raised the storm, but cannot lay it, and now find that they themselves are likely to be overwhelmed in the general ruin, which they have contributed so largely to produce.

To Andrew Jackson, June 14, 1837

The laws of Congress are imperative. The President is bound by his duty and official oath to see that they be faithfully executed. He possesses no discretion; he cannot alter or change a law of Congress, but is bound to see it faithfully executed as he finds it.

From Anne Royall, March 19, 1838

Please present my best respects to Mrs. Polk & say to her, her party the other evening has gained for her much praise. All parties, both Ladys & gentlemen pronounce it the genteelst party that has been given this winter by far.

From Cave Johnson, March 25, 1838

[William] Overton is not worth a damn. He is worth 40 or 50,000 and lies upon his back twelve miles from town, day after day and week after week, reading novels or phrenology or some such stuff. We dont see him once a month. We intend telling him flatly that we give him up unless he sets to work.

To Henry Horn et al., July 14, 1838

In the political contest in which we are engaged, the country is thrown back more distinctly upon the ground occupied by the Federal and Republican parties, forty years ago, than it has been at any time, since that period. Party names may have changed but the principles which guide us are essentially the same. Our political opponents have drawn to their aid, in the pending contest, the power of associated wealth, in the form of privileged banking corporations, and have made them the instrumnts, as they are the natural allies of that party in the country, who have at all times distrusted the power and capacity of the people for self-Government.

From Hopkins L. Turney, July 30, 1838

I arrived at home on the 22nd after a long tiresome & accidental trip, sinking a steamboat, upsetting a stage &c.

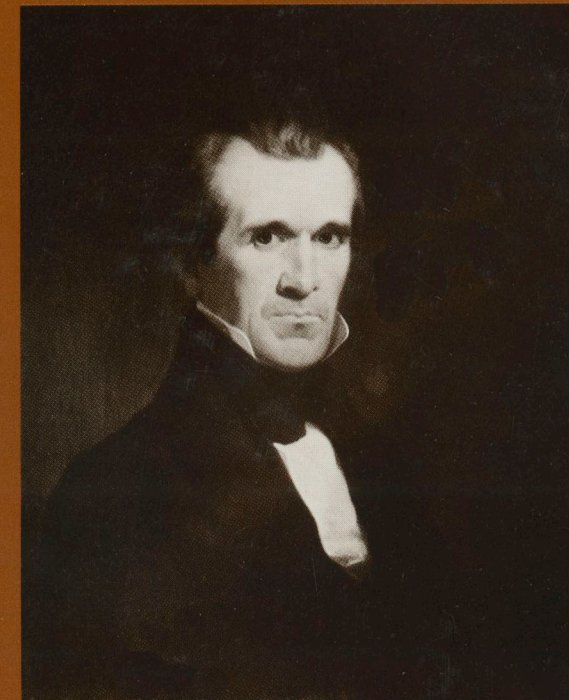
WEAVER

CUTLER

Correspondence
of
JAMES K.
POLK

Volume IV
1837-1838

Correspondence of JAMES K. POLK



Volume IV, 1837-1838

HERBERT WEAVER

Editor

WAYNE CUTLER

Associate Editor



Vanderbilt

Correspondence of
JAMES K. POLK

Volume IV, 1837–1838

HERBERT WEAVER, *Editor*
WAYNE CUTLER, *Associate Editor*

Volume Four of Polk's correspondence chronicles a two-year period of severe political turbulence in state as well as national affairs. Coming on with great suddenness and force, the financial panic of 1837 and the attending collapse of agricultural markets almost paralyzed the Democratic party's leadership in Tennessee. Robert Armstrong ran an ineffectual campaign for governor against Newton Cannon; all but three of Tennessee's thirteen congressional districts elected anti-Van Buren candidates; and the Democracy sustained a similarly harsh rebuke in state legislative races. Congressman John Bell and his splinter faction openly embraced the national Whig party and in so doing ended more than three decades of Democratic rule in Tennessee.

Returned to Congress for his seventh consecutive term, James K. Polk also won reelection as Speaker of the House. In the three sessions of the Twenty-Fifth Congress the House debates were as rancorous and volatile as any that ever tested a Speaker's parliamentary skill or self-possession. Polk labored hard to pass the administration's leading measure, a bill which would have divorced the Treasury Department from the banking industry. In that legislative conflict the Speaker welcomed the renewal of party regularity by nullification Democrats, but he could not retain the support of the conservatives, who resolutely opposed the administration's hard money policies. Partisan harassment and Democratic division rendered Polk's second term as Speaker quite as difficult as his first.

Returning to Tennessee between each session of Congress, Polk toured the state rallying spirits of party workers and courting support among nullification Democrats. At summer's end, 1838, he announced plans to retire from Congress and stand for governor in the 1839 elections. Democrats in Tennessee and across the nation greeted Polk's decision with enthusiasm and great hope that party fortunes might soon be revived.

The Polk Project is sponsored jointly by Vanderbilt University, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, the Tennessee Historical Commission, and the Polk Memorial Association.

ISBN-0-8265-1206-2



HERBERT WEAVER is Professor of History Emeritus at Vanderbilt University, where he began his teaching career in 1949. He earned both the bachelor's and master's degrees at Birmingham-Southern College; his doctorate is from Vanderbilt.

A past president of the Tennessee Historical Society, Professor Weaver is the author of *Mississippi Farmers, 1850–1860* (Vanderbilt University Press, 1945), and is one of the authors of the seven-volume *Army Air Forces in World War II* (University of Chicago Press, 1948–1958). He is editor of *Correspondence of James K. Polk*, Volumes I, II, and III (Vanderbilt University Press, 1969, 1972, and 1975).

WAYNE CUTLER is Associate Professor of American History at Vanderbilt University, where he has taught since 1975. He earned the bachelor's degree at Lamar University; his master's and doctor's degrees are from the University of Texas at Austin.

Professor Cutler became director of the Polk Project in 1975 and is editor designate of the fifth volume of the *Correspondence*. He previously served as assistant editor of *The Papers of Henry Clay*, Volumes IV and V (University Press of Kentucky, 1972 and 1973).

"The letters in this volume are plump with political talk, both state and national, and a great deal of that talk attests to Polk's growing stature as a party leader and confidant of President Jackson."—*The Journal of American History*
"The editors have again provided a thoroughly professional and usable collection of Polk's correspondence and readers will look forward to the latter volumes of the series."—*The American Historical Review*

Volume III, 1835–36
ISBN 0-8265-1201-1

\$25.00