

of 1846 Congress engaged in an extended and bitter debate over Polk’s proposed reduction in tariff duties; Vice-President George M. Dallas broke the tie vote on the bill’s third reading in the Senate.

In the 1846 fall elections Northern Democrats suffered defeat at the polls. Although the outcome of fighting in Mexico was as yet indeterminate, the mere prospect of extending slavery into territory acquired in the war heightened sectional tensions. Other political concerns included changes in cabinet personnel, patronage difficulties within the party, presidential ambitions for 1848, growing Catholic influence and increasing nativism, and Mormon settlement in the Great Salt Lake Basin. More private matters related to acquiring additional slaves for his cotton plantation in Mississippi and purchasing a residence in Nashville for his retirement years.

In addition to the texts, briefs, and annotations, the editors have calendared all of the documents for 1846. Entries for unpublished letters include the documents’ dates, addresses, classifications, repositories, and précis.

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To Louis McLane, January 28, 1846

The Oregon question is manifestly approaching a crisis, and should the notice be authorized by Congress, as I do not doubt it will be in some form, it must be adjusted within the year, or war may follow.

To Gideon J. Pillow, May 16, 1846

The truth is we had borne and forborne so long with that distracted power & suffered so many wrongs and insults from her, that no alternative was left, when she shed American blood East of the Del Norte, but to recognize the war which she made.

From Brigham Young et al., August 9, 1846

Sufficient to say that a combination of fortuitous, illegal and unconstitutional circumstances have placed us in our present situation on a journey which we design shall end in a location west of the Rocky Mountains.

From John H. Bills, August 25, 1846

Congress having adjourned, allow me to congratulate you & the country upon the success of the great measures, of the reduction of *Taxes* in the new Tariff, the warehousing bill, the Constitutional Treasury, and above all the settlement of the Oregon difficulty.

From Laura Wilson Polk Tate, September 14, 1846

We all know my dear brother that all roman Catholic priests are governed by false principles. The highest authority we have is the Bible. If they do not make roman catholics of our children they will disgust them with religion and make infidels of them which is worse.

To Laura Wilson Polk Tate, September 24, 1846

The College of Georgetown (not two miles from the President’s house) is an institution conducted by very learned and able professors, and is under excellent discipline. . . . I do not apprehend the dangers, which you point out, and think that in *Marshall’s* case, no such danger exists.

From Robert Armstrong, November 4, 1846

Mr. Bancroft remained a few days & went up to London; he is a Strange Compound and it is impossible to say what Kind of Impression he will make in this country, but I can tell you he will make *Many*.

From Robert Campbell, Jr., November 14, 1846

In regard what is due to my Negroes, I wish you to pay them liberally and in specie. They do not appreciate any other kind of money but specie.

From Francis W. Pickens, November 30, 1846

I deeply regret to see that the great states North have gone agst us. I suppose it is upon the anti Slavery feeling which is opposed to acquiring new territory for slavery, combined with the high tariff party. If so, it is dangerous to the future ascendancy of the Democratic party, as well as the Union itself.

Jacket illustration: Thomas Sully portrait of James K. Polk. Courtesy of the Dialectic and Philanthropic Society, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



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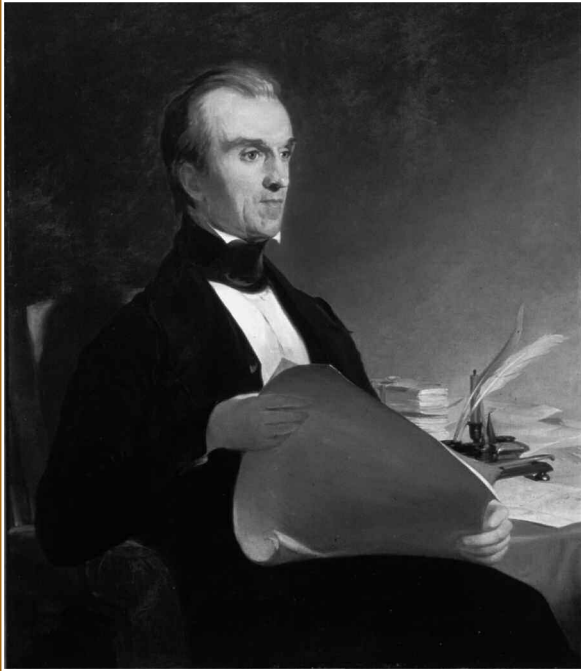
CUTLER

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ROGERS
SEVERANCE

Correspondence
of
JAMES K.
POLK
Volume XI
1846

Tennessee

Correspondence of JAMES K. POLK



Volume XI, 1846

WAYNE CUTLER

Editor

JAMES L. ROGERS II

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Associate Editors

Correspondence of JAMES K. POLK Volume XI, 1846

WAYNE CUTLER, *Editor*
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After taking the presidential oath of office in 1845, Polk advised George Bancroft that he had set four goals for the new administration: resolution of the Oregon boundary dispute with Great Britain, creation of an Independent Treasury system, reduction of tariff duties on non-luxury imports, and acquisition of California. Polk’s correspondence in 1846 mirrored his efforts to achieve those goals; and by year’s end Young Hickory had accomplished three of his four objectives. The purchase of California would await the outcome of his defense of Texas.

With notions of manifest destiny sweeping across the Union, Polk’s firm defense of the United States’ claims to the whole of the Oregon country found support among expansionists in both parties and sectional lines. Polk’s determination to end the convention of joint-occupancy, his low-tariff trade advocacy, his refusal to equivocate in the face of British war preparations, and his decision to defend the annexation of Texas brought the British ministry to a reconsideration of earlier proposals to divide the Oregon country at the 49th parallel.

Polk’s efforts to resume diplomatic relations with Mexico proved futile, for he would not agree to pay her indemnity for the annexation of Texas. In lieu of denying Texas’s right of self-determination, Polk would agree to purchase Upper California and New Mexico; but the military overthrow of the central government ended further indirect negotiations to resolve the Texas question peacefully. On April 24 a Mexican Cavalry force crossed the Rio Grande River and attacked a U.S. army unit patrolling the north shore of the river, the boundary line claimed by the Republic of Texas. When Polk learned that eleven American soldiers had died in the attack, he advised the Congress that “Mexico has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon the American soil.” On May 13 Congress declared war against Mexico.

Through political skill and sheer determination Polk secured his two domestic goals in the summer of 1846. The creation of an Independent Treasury system represented the final act in the protracted battle over banking in America that had commenced in 1832 with Andrew Jackson’s veto of the bill to recharter the Second Bank of the United States. Also in the summer

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