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THE CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS OF JAMES K. POLK, 1824-1837

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Joseph M. Pukl, Jr.

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1324133

For my wife Gail,

and for Mom and Dad.

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The author takes this opportunity to extend his gratitude to those whose contributions have made this thesis better than it would have been. Professor Paul H. Bergeron has invested much of his valuable time and energy into this study and has offered valuable advice and suggestions throughout its course. Dr. LeRoy P. Graf and Dr. Ralph W. Haskins read the thesis and made pertinent remarks and recommendations which improved the quality of my writing style and scholarship. My appreciation must also be extended to the many library workers who strived to locate sources for the study and who suggested other possible avenues of exploration.

Interest in the general topic itself dates back to my undergraduate years at California State College (of Pennsylvania). Dr. John K. Folmar introduced me to the Polk literature; and my love of history is due to Dr. Folmar and Dr. Thomas H. Coode, who made history not only meaningful and interesting but also enjoyable. My deepest debt, however, is to my parents, who saw me through the entire educational process and who never lost faith in my ability to achieve. My wife Gail contributed greatly to the project by allowing James K. Polk to make deep intrusions into our private lives over the past two years. Her moral support and aid in typing the manuscript were invaluable.

J.M.P.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to expose the actions of James K. Polk in his efforts to obtain a seat in the national House of Representatives. The narrative answers this general question: just what did Polk do to gain his initial victory (1825), and in his subsequent successful bids for office. What tactics did he and his opponents use? Was Polk the best candidate, or was he just a better politician? Did issues or personalities influence the election results? If issues, were they local, state, or national in nature, or a combination? And did these issues change over the years, either in their nature or substance?

This study covers Polk's seven Congressional campaigns and since both issues and candidates changed from year to year, a comprehensive set of specific conclusions cannot be drawn. Polk, as illustrated throughout the thesis, adjusted his strategy to suit his various opponents and to the changing issues. Characteristic of all his campaigns, however, were speeches and printed circular letters, extensive travels, frequent use of the newspapers, and even various underhanded schemes. Polk undoubtedly used his incumbent status to win votes. He granted political favors, performed services, and franked mail into his district. All extant election results are included in tabular form and the results of a census study of Polk's district are revealed.

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INTRODUCTION

While in Congress James K. Polk occupied a prominent role in national affairs. Elected as a Democrat during the presidency of John Quincy Adams, the Tennessean became a staunch opponent of administration policies; and before Andrew Jackson's inauguration, Polk began his steady climb toward a leadership position among Congressional Democrats. In December 1832 he was appointed to the influential House Ways and Means Committee and a year later he became its chairman. From this post Polk directed the Jacksonians' battle against the United States Bank, strongly advocating the removal of the government's funds from that institution.

In mid-1834 Polk's stature in Congress was confirmed when he gained support for his nomination as Speaker of the House. Although he lost this election to fellow Tennessean John Bell, Polk, the avowed Jacksonian candidate, easily defeated Bell, the defector from Jacksonian ranks, in the speakership contests of 1835 and 1837. Along with prestige, however, this leadership position also brought heavy responsibilities. Prior to the presidential election of 1836 an anti-Jackson movement developed in Tennessee. Polk was obliged to support the unpopular Martin Van Buren, Jackson's hand-picked successor, against Hugh L. White, a favorite son candidate. As a result Polk drew upon himself much of the antagonism directed against Van Buren.

Unlike Polk's well-known actions in Congress and in national affairs, his Congressional election campaigns have been neglected by scholars, as a survey of the vast amount of historical literature shows. Charles G.

Sellers, Polk's definitive biographer, does treat these campaigns, but merely as a prelude to the Congressman's more important activities in Washington. Other historians have concentrated mainly on the more exciting presidential years. This thesis is intended not only to fill a gap in the historical writings but also to make a contribution to the increasing amount of literature about Polk.

While serving in Congress from 1825 to 1839 Polk engaged in seven election campaigns, four of which were noncompetitive. Although he did not always have an opponent, he often acted to thwart any rumored adversary. Polk, unopposed in 1835, was forced to campaign actively for reelection because of both his unpopular stand on the approaching 1836 presidential canvass and the constant threat of a competitor. Because Polk became a Congressional leader during the Jackson years, the President's opponents made a special effort to defeat Polk in every election after 1828.

The term "political campaign" is used in its broadest sense in this study to encompass such activities as formal circular letters and the smallest services Polk performed for his constituents. Many of these personal favors would not normally be considered campaign activities, but Polk certainly regarded them as effective appeals for votes. This study has required an intensive search through the relevant primary sources of the 1820s and 1830s, not to mention secondary accounts found in articles and monographs. Much detail is presented in regard to both Polk and his various opponents. As a supplement to the main concern of the thesis, some attention is directed to the Congressman's personality, facets of which may account for some of his political success. A second

area of somewhat divergent interest is an examination of the counties included in the Congressman's district. Census data, in addition to information gathered from contemporary and secondary sources, form the basis for this analysis.

In summary, this thesis covers Polk's political activities during a fifteen year period from about 1824 to 1839. Moreover the actions of his opponents are chronicled and some attempt is made to reveal general campaign strategy. Preliminary to this, however, is a brief discussion of Polk himself and of his Congressional district.

CHAPTER I

JAMES K. POLK AND HIS CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Near the close of his Congressional career James K. Polk visited with Orson S. Fowler, a Phrenologist, to obtain a reading. The pseudoscientist, undoubtedly aware of Polk's national reputation, discovered, through the bumps on the Congressman's head, that his life was not only "singular" but quite eventful. Fowler described Polk as being perceptive, emotional, very active, industrious to the point of obsession, and as one who thrives upon strenuous intellectual pursuits, a character which the phrenologist judged to be completely positive in nature. He also told the Congressman that both loyalty and a determination which grew in the face of staunch opposition were his most forceful personality traits. Through the observations of others, one learns that Polk was a rather formal person with only a few personal friends. He lacked charisma and a brilliant mind but made up for these deficiencies through sheer perseverance, perceptiveness, an extraordinary ability to remember facts, sincerity, and cordial manners.[1]

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[1]"Phrenological Opinion upon the Character of Jas. K. Polk. By O. S. Fowler. May 30, 1838," in James Knox Polk Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [Microfilm reproduction, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee]); Lucien B. Chase, History of the Polk Administration (New York, 1850), 10-11; Walter Chandler, "Centenary of James K. Polk and His Administration," West Tennessee Historical Society Papers, III (1949), 28; Goodspeed Publishing Company, History of Tennessee: With an Historical and Biographical Sketch of Maury, Williamson, Rutherford, Wilson, Bedford, and Marshall Counties (Nashville, 1886), 739-40; Eugene I. McCormac, James K. Polk: A Political Biography (Berkeley, 1922), 8; Henry S. Foote, The Bench and Bar of the South and Southwest (St. Louis, 1876), 177.

At times Polk was even judged to be rigid, humorless, and stubborn. Earl I. West attributes these characteristics, as well as his devotion to the work ethic, to Polk's early training in the Presbyterian religion. Related qualities were Polk's promptness and dependability. He was so reliable in fact, that in 14 years of Congressional service, he missed only one daily session, and that because of sickness. Remarkably, he abstained from both drinking and dueling in an age when both were nearly universal Southern traits. These qualities alone could have been responsible for the seeming wall that existed between Polk and most of his colleagues.[2]

Although Polk was physically below average in both height and weight, he appeared rather muscular and carried himself in an erect manner. His impeccable mode of dress was capped by a handsome head which only added to his distinguished bearing. He had a high broad forehead and long coal black hair, which he wore straight back. His gray eyes, some have recorded, lit up and sparkled brightly when he was excited, and his slightly swarthy complexion merely complemented his other features.[3]

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[2]Earl I. West, "Religion in the Life of James K. Polk," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XXVI (Winter, 1967), 357; John S. Jenkins, The Life of James Knox Polk, Late President of the United States (Auburn, N. Y., 1850), 61; John S. Jenkins, James Knox Polk, and a History of His Administration (Auburn, N.Y., 1850), 61; Marquis James, The Raven: A Biography of Sam Houston (Indianapolis, 1929), 167; Samuel G. Heiskell, Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History, 2nd ed. 2 vols. (Nashville, 1920), II, 194; Milo M. Quaife, ed., The Diary of James K. Polk During His Presidency, 1845 to 1849, 4 vols. (Chicago, 1910), II, 297.

[3]"Glances at Congress.-No.II.," United States Magazine and Democratic Review, V (Mar., 1839), 262-63; McCormac, Polk, 9; B. Perley Poore, Perley's Reminiscences of Sixty Years in the National Metropolis, 2 vols. in 1 (Philadelphia, 1886), I, 328; Bessie R. James, Anne Royall's U.S.A.

Contemporaries considered Polk one of the finest politicians of his era. James Phelan testified that "He appreciated public sentiment and knew how to guide it, when it could be guided, to evade it or to follow it when it could not be guided." In the House Polk disclosed that he meant to be a true representative of his constituents and felt bound by principle to carry out their wishes. His own beliefs just naturally coincided with the desires of his western and Democratic constituency. Consequently, he urged the sale of public land at an unprecedented low price so that nearly all men could acquire a stake in their government. He sought to eliminate the national debt, and to reduce taxation, thus putting an end to various troublesome surplus revenue allocation plans. Polk, whom his most recent biographer, Charles G. Sellers, refers to as a practitioner of the "neo-Jeffersonian faith," hoped to achieve a simple and economical government. Of course, Polk held these beliefs only because he was dedicated to the strict construction of the Constitution, with its restrictions upon the powers of the federal government. He expressed these basic political ideas as early as August 1829.[4]

(New Brunswick, N.J., 1972), 249; Nathaniel Baxter, "Reminiscences [of James K. Polk]," American Historical Magazine, VIII (July, 1903), 264-65, Baxter testifies that Polk was 5 feet 10 inches tall and weighed 155-60 pounds; Nashville Union, Nov. 7, 1837, July 17, 1839; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston, 1945), 62.

[4]James Phelan, History of Tennessee: The Making of a State (Boston, 1888), 377; McCormac, Polk, 17; Charles G. Sellers, Jr., James K. Polk: Jacksonian, 1795-1843 (Princeton, N.J., 1957), 152-53; [J. L. Martin], "Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil, Number VI, James K. Polk," United States Magazine and Democratic Review, II (May, 1838), 202.

Polk's ideology was totally consistent with that of the Democratic party in general, and particularly with Andrew Jackson's. From his earliest action in Congress, Polk followed Jackson's lead, even though at times the great Tennessean seemed to ignore his contributions. The Congressman's loyalty to his constituents was exceeded only by his allegiance to Jackson; and when Tennesseans chose to rebel against Old Hickory's domineering personality, Polk would be forced to choose between the wishes of his party and those of his constituents. By the mid-1830s, however, Polk no longer felt any scruples about misrepresenting those who elected him, and he selected the politically expedient path to reelection.[5]

Jackson and Polk held nearly identical positions on the various political issues of that era, and this has led some to charge that Polk was simply acting as Jackson's puppet. One modern student, Edward Pessen, even argues that Polk shifted his stand on numerous issues simply to please Jackson and thereby to serve his own political ambitions. Pessen's charge, however, is pure conjecture. For instance, Polk expounded his beliefs even before Jackson formulated the political basis for his administration. One explanation for their similar beliefs might be that they emerged from a compatible socio-economic class and from constituencies no more than 50 miles apart in Middle Tennessee. Because the two Tennesseans' ideas coincided so well, and because of Polk's party loyalty and the infinite care he gave to even the smallest of party matters, he was considered the most outstanding Democratic member of the Tennessee

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[5]McCormac, Polk, 20; Baxter, "Reminiscences," 267.

Congressional delegation. According to Powell Moore, before Polk served three terms in the House he was recognized as the party's leader in Congress.[6]

According to Henry S. Foote, "Mr. Polk, as a popular speaker, has, perhaps, never had his equal in Tennessee. . . ." Although this is the most extreme of contemporary judgements, it is not far from the truth. Often referred to as the Napoleon of the Stump by latter-day admirers, he was at his best arguing a factual or political point, since he lacked the rhetorical flourish so common in that period. Polk, however, was not an orator but a debater. He won the audience to his point of view by using clear statements and illustrations attuned to their educational level. As was common practice in the Jacksonian period, Polk peppered his arguments with military rhetoric. As Perry M. Goldman has ably pointed out, the norms, experiences, and ideals of the 1820s and 1830s were slanted toward a military orientation, which not only substituted for a long heritage but also represented a common endeavor. His most formidable weapons though were the absurd anecdotes and ridicules which he directed at his stump opponent. Despite the fact that one of Polk's political opponents thought him an unimaginative and unoriginal speaker, a general consensus holds that he dealt well with facts but usually tried to appeal to the emotion rather than to the intellect of the crowd. This

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[6]Edward Pessen, Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics (Homewood, Ill., 1969), 199; Powell Moore, "James K. Polk: Tennessee Politician," Journal of Southern History, XVII (Nov., 1951), 493-94; Joseph H. Parks, ed., "Letters from James K. Polk to Samuel H. Laughlin, 1835-44," East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, No. 18 (1946), 147.

same opponent recalled that Polk's favorite ploy was to connect an issue he opposed to a man or party the crowd found odious while linking his own pet measures to Andrew Jackson and the Democracy. In this manner he tried to guide public opinion but still obey the wishes of his constituents.[7]

Polk represented the Sixth Congressional district, which consisted of Maury, Bedford, Lincoln, and Giles counties in Middle Tennessee. The district formed roughly a square with Lincoln and Giles on the Alabama border and Maury and Bedford located directly north of them. (See map on page 24.) Polk's constituents, who were engaged in agriculture almost exclusively, farmed large-scale landholdings and concentrated mainly on cotton production. An East Tennessean vouched for the productivity of Middle Tennessee's soil when he said, "Our soil is poor in comparison with what is now called Middle Tennessee . . . and we have it not within our reach, as a people, to become rich as they can . . . ." Polk's district was not immune to the agricultural depression that plagued the entire South in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and as time passed, the district became less desirable as new agricultural lands were opened up both in West Tennessee and in the western territories. And just as East

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[7]Foote, Bench and Bar, 178; Jacob H. Hager, "James Knox Polk," Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography, 6 vols. (New York, 1888-89), V, 51; Phelan, History of Tennessee, 377; Jenkins, Polk, and a History of His Administration, 50-51; Jenkins, Life of Polk, 50-51; Perry M. Goldman, "Political Rhetoric in the Age of Jackson," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XXIX (Winter, 1970-71), 360, 370-71; Joshua W. Caldwell, Sketches of the Bench and Bar of Tennessee (Knoxville, 1898), 181; Oliver P. Temple, Notable Men of Tennessee from 1833 to 1875: Their Times and Their Contemporaries (New York, 1912), 263; Baxter, "Reminiscences," 266-67.

Tennessee lost population and political supremacy to Middle Tennessee over a period of years, West Tennessee would siphon off people and political power from the middle section of the state.[8]

Polk's own Maury County was the most populous in the state in 1820. One contemporary recalled years later that "The majority of the people lived on their own farms, and owned much land and many negroes." From this we may deduce that many of Polk's constituents, if not wealthy, were rather well off. Columbia, the county seat and Polk's hometown, had a population of about 1,500 in the mid-1830s. Bedford County surpassed Maury in population by 1830 so that the counties then ranked one and two in the state. Shelbyville was its county seat. Bedford's land, like that of its western neighbor, was very fertile, with cotton and grains being the staple crops. The Duck River flowed from east to west through both counties.[9]

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[8]Eastin Morris, comp., The Tennessee Gazetteer or Topographical Dictionary (Nashville, [1834] 1971), 8; Robert Cassell, "Newton Cannon and the Constitutional Convention of 1834," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XV (Sept., 1956), 227-28; Samuel C. Williams, ed., "Journal of Events (1825-1873) of David Anderson Deaderick," East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, No. 8 (1936), 130; John C. Wormeley to Polk, Jan. 23, 1833, in Herbert Weaver, Paul H. Bergeron, and Kermit L. Hall, eds., Correspondence of James K. Polk, 3 vols. to date (Nashville, 1969-), II, 42.

[9]Jill K. Garrett and Marise P. Lightfoot, comps., Maury County, Tennessee: Wills and Settlements, 1807-1824 and 1820 Census (Columbia, Tenn., 1964), i; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 11, 109, 200; Nathaniel W. Jones, A History of Mt. Pleasant, Especially, and the Western Part of Maury County Generally, as He Remembers It (Columbia, Tenn., [1903] 1965), 36; Goodspeed, History of Tennessee . . . Maury, 768, 873; Baxter, "Reminiscences," 262; Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 67n.

To the south were the less populous counties of Lincoln and Giles. Cotton was the universal staple grown in the unusually rich soil of Lincoln, through which the Elk River flowed. The southeastern section of the county was only sparsely settled during this period, partly because of poor soil. Fayetteville, centrally located, was the county seat. Just west of Lincoln was Giles County and although its land was rough and irregular, Giles did contain rich agricultural lands where cotton, corn, and tobacco thrived. Two rivers, the Elk and the Richland, flowed through Giles and as a result of very favorable conditions, Giles citizens, in general, were larger landowners. Furthermore, it is likely that throughout Polk's district approximately half of the families held slaves and about 3/4 of the families owned their own land. Giles' county seat was located in Pulaski, which in 1830 counted 47 families within its limits and by 1833 had attained a population of 1,200. Traveling posed a problem in the first half of the nineteenth century; and according to the mail route schedule, it took about two days to get from Columbia to Shelbyville and three days to reach Pulaski from Columbia. But because of the population concentration in Maury and Bedford and the shape of the district, Polk had it easier than many of his Congressional colleagues.[10]

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[10]Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 162, 192; Goodspeed Publishing Company, The Goodspeed Histories of Giles, Lincoln, Franklin and Moore Counties of Tennessee (Columbia, Tenn., [1886] 1972), 749, 753, 761, 767, 769, 772, 778; Chase C. Mooney, "Some Institutional and Statistical Aspects of Slavery in Tennessee," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, I (Sept., 1942), 210-12; John K. Yerger to Polk and William M. Inge, Dec. 20, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 189; Columbia Western Mercury, Jan. 13, 1830.

For more information about Polk's constituency the federal censuses of 1820, 1830, and 1840 should be examined.[11] In 1820 Maury County contained 5 percent of Tennessee's population, or 22,141 people of which 29 percent were slaves. The county's electorate in that year numbered 2,763.[12] When the state made a count of its voting population in 1826, Maury's total was 3,418. The county's manufacturing was done in 19 small establishments. In 1820 they had $14,928 in capital investments, employed 132 people (mostly men), paid out $3,740 in wages, and produced $61,249 worth of goods.[13]

The results for the other counties in Polk's district fit into a similar pattern. Bedford County contained 4 percent of Tennessee's people,

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[11]For this study the state's counties which existed in 1840 were divided into grand divisions to obtain consistent data throughout the 20 years encompassed by the 3 censuses. The following counties were classified as being in Middle Tennessee: Giles, Bedford, Sumner, Cannon, White, Coffee, Lawrence, Williamson, Humphreys, Dickson, Marshall, Hickman, Lincoln, Rutherford, DeKalb, Jackson, Smith, Maury, Robertson, Wilson, Overton, Wayne, Fentress, Warren, Davidson, Franklin, Montgomery, Stewart, and Hardin.

[12]For an abstract of this information and additional details concerning the population of Polk's district in 1820 see Table I. The eligible voters for 1820 were obtained by adding half of the 16-25 white male age census group to the upper white male age groups. Since free blacks were permitted to vote, their numbers were acquired by dividing the 14-25 male age group by 12 and then multiplying that figure by 5 to obtain a proportion of the free blacks over 20 years old. After adding this to the upper free black male age groups and then to the white total, an approximate number of voters was arrived at. To account for the property or residency qualifications for the 1820 figure, an arbitrary 5 percent was subtracted from the total number of possible voters, reasoning that no more than this percentage would be affected. The voting qualifications are from William H. Combs and William E. Cole, Tennessee: A Political Study (Knoxville, 1940), 16.

[13]Census for 1820 (reprint ed., New York, n.d.), 32*-33; William B. Turner, History of Maury County Tennessee (Nashville, 1955), 371;

TABLE I

1820 POPULATION DATA

Political Division	Total Population	Percent of State Population	Percent White	Percent Slave	Percent Free Black	1820 Voters	1826 Voters
Maury County	22,141	5	71	29	0	2,763	3,418
Bedford County	16,012	4	77	22	1	1,995	3,195
Lincoln County	14,761	3	85	15	0	2,109	2,825
Giles County	12,558	3	74	26	0	1,633	2,013
Sixth District	65,472	15	76	24	0	8,500	11,451
Middle Tennessee	284,763	67	76	24	1	-----	-----
State of Tennessee	423,418	100	80	19	1	-----	-----

Source: Census for 1820, 32-32*; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 66.

16,012 in number, with 22 percent of its population being slaves. The County's voters equaled 1,995 in 1820 and 3,195 by 1826. The county manufactured $36,086 worth of products in 12 establishments with $34,238 in capital investments for the year 1820. The concerns employed 122 people (mainly men) and paid $2,885 in wages. Lincoln County, in 1820, contained 14,761 people or 3 percent of Tennessee's total. Slaves made up only 15 percent of its population. At the time of the fourth census, Lincoln's voters totaled 2,109 and by 1826 they neared 2,825. The county employed only 91 people (exclusively men and a few children) in its 7 manufacturing establishments, which were capitalized at $35,492. Those workers produced approximately $1,000 worth of goods in 1820 but were paid $7,221. This discrepancy exists because the product market values for many manufacturers were not recorded. Giles County, the least populous in Polk's district, contained 12,558 people, with slaves making up 26 percent of that number. The county held 1,633 voters in 1820 and by 1826 this figure had increased to 2,013.[14]

A composite view, as shown also on Table I, p. 13, reveals that in 1820 the 4 counties contained 65,472 people, which represented slightly more than 15 percent of Tennessee's total. All of these counties, even Giles, were well above the state's county population average. Just over 3/4 of the district's people were white, with slaves making up the

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Nashville Republican, Sept. 23, 1826; Digest of Accounts of Manufacturing Establishments in the United States, and of Their Manufactures [1820] (reprint ed., New York, n.d.), 25*.

[14]Census for 1820, 32*-33; Nashville Republican, Sept. 23, 1826; Digest of Accounts of Manufacturing [1820], 25*; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 66.

remainder. The district voters numbered close to 11,451 by 1826, and while there were 8,947 males over 21 in 1820, 16,044 people earned a living through agriculture. Polk's district reflected the section's results in microcosm, with the only exception being, as shown on Table I, p. 13, that Middle Tennessee contained a slightly larger proportion of free blacks. The section's people were overwhelmingly agriculturists. The counties in Polk's district exceeded the section's number of people per county engaged in agricultural pursuits, but lagged far behind in the manufacturing and commerce categories, except in Maury which was above average in all economic areas. Proportionally, Polk's district and Middle Tennessee matched in the number of whites, while the state's percentage was greater. Slave densities, however, were higher in both Middle Tennessee and in Polk's district than in the state. And free blacks were in nearly equal proportions in the state and section but existed in lesser numbers in the district. Employment statistics were approximately uniform throughout the three areas.[15]

In 10 years Maury's population increased by 25 percent to reach 27,665, as illustrated in Table II; but it decreased from 5 to 4 percent of the state's total. The proportion of slaves in the county increased from 29 to 34 percent. The county's electors numbered 3,291 in 1830 and 4,093 in 1833.[16] Bedford County experienced a tremendous 90 percent

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[15]Census for 1820, 32-32*.

[16]The eligible white voters for 1830 were obtained by simply adding together the 20-29 white male age group and the upper white male age groups. Even though this includes the 20 year olds who could not vote, any simple statistical method used to delete them would be plagued with

TABLE II

1830 POPULATION DATA

Political Division	Total Population	Percent of State Population	Percent White	Percent Slave	Percent Free Black	1830 Voters	1833 Voters
Maury County	27,665	4	66	34	0	3,291	4,093
Bedford County	30,396	4	81	19	0	4,160	4,277
Lincoln County	22,075	3	81	19	0	3,263	3,379
Giles County	18,703	3	68	32	0	2,388	2,485
Sixth District	98,839	14	74	25	0	13,102	14,234
Middle Tennessee	379,617	56	74	26	1	-----	-----
State of Tennessee	681,904	100	79	21	1	-----	-----

Source: Fifth Census, section 2, 108-11; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 66.

growth rate in the 1820s to total 30,396 people by 1830. It contained nearly 4 1/2 percent of Tennessee's total population and was now the most populous county in Polk's district. The proportion of slaves in Bedford dropped from 22 to 19 percent and free blacks decreased from 1 percent to less than that. Bedford, in 1830, had approximately 4,160 voters (869 more than Maury) and in 1833 it reported 4,277 electors.[17]

The two least populous counties in Polk's district also registered tremendous population increases since 1820. Lincoln County's 1830 population was 22,075, a 50 percent increase in 10 years. The proportion of slaves increased also, from 15 to 19 percent. The approximate number of voters was 3,263, a 55 percent increase over the 1820 total; by 1833 there were 3,379 voters. Giles County registered a 49 percent increase in the number of inhabitants since 1820 for a total of 18,703. Slaves increased from 26 to 32 percent of the population in those 10 years. In 1830 Giles voters totaled 2,388, and by 1833 their numbers were up to 2,485. These two counties each held 3 percent of the state's population.[18]

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approximately the same degree of error. The free black voters were obtained by dividing the 10-23 age group by 14 and then multiplying that by 3. The resulting proportion was added to the older male age groups. From the sum of the black and white possible voters, 5 percent was subtracted to allow for the disqualification of some due to the property or residency requirement.

[17]Fifth Census, or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States, 1830 (reprint ed., New York, n.d.), section 2, 110-11; Turner, Maury County Tennessee, 371; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 66.

[18]Fifth Census, section 2, 110-111; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 66. The 1830 population statistics are further illustrated in Table II, p. 16.

In 1830 the 4 counties held 14 percent of the state's population, or 98,839 people. In spite of large population increases, their proportion of the state's people had declined by 1 percent over 1820. All four counties remained above the average county population for the state and for Middle Tennessee. Whites composed slightly under 3/4 of the district's and section's population, while the state registered 79 percent. Both the 4 counties and the section recorded approximately 1/4 of their population as being slaves while the state was slightly over 1/5. The number of free blacks registered 1 percent in the state and in Middle Tennessee but existed in less numbers in Polk's district. Total 1830 voters in the district numbered 13,102.[19]

The census of 1830 revealed that Tennessee deserved an increase in House representation and therefore, in the following federal reapportionment, its number of congressmen was raised from 9 to 13. This reapportionment determined that the state must both rearrange and decrease the geographical size of its Congressional districts. In the General Assembly's reapportionment, Lincoln and Giles were removed from the Sixth district, so that only Maury and Bedford remained, and the district's number was changed from six to nine. Polk ran in 1833 and 1835 in these two counties but just after the latter campaign, the counties of Marshall and Coffee were created. The former was taken from portions of Lincoln, Bedford, and Maury, while Coffee was formed from Bedford, Warren, and Franklin counties. State law required that Congressional districts encompass the same constituents until the next reapportionment regardless

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[19]Fifth Census, section 2, 108-11.

of any county boundary changes; because of this, Polk's 1837 campaign was hardly affected by the creation of these new counties. (See map on next page, Figure 1.)[20]

While yielding about 1/5 of its land area to Marshall County in 1836, Maury's population growth during the 1830s slowed to only 2 percent, and equaled 28,186 in 1840. Maury again achieved its station as the most populous in Polk's district, as illustrated, along with other 1840 population data, in Table III. The proportion of slaves continued to rise and gained 5 percentage points over its 1830 total. By 1840 Maury voters totaled 3,503 in number.[21] The people continued to work almost solely in agriculture, but for the first time, mining activity, in granite, was recorded. In 1840 the county produced 51,376 pounds of tobacco, 4,003 bales of cotton, at 500 pounds each, to rank third in

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[20]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 202-203; John T. Moore and Austin P. Foster, Tennessee: The Volunteer State, 1769-1923, 5 vols. (Chicago, 1923), I, 404; Charles A. Miller, comp., The Official and Political Manual of the State of Tennessee (Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Co., [1890], 1974), 31, 175; Morris, Tennessee Gazetteer, 64-65; Goodspeed, History of Tennessee . . . Maury, 352-53, 888; Jonathan Webster to Polk, Feb. 21, 1836, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 508, 508n; James C. Record to Polk, Feb. 22, 1836, in ibid., 510; William J. Whitthorne to Polk, Mar. 12, 1836, in ibid., 538-39; Pulaski Whig Courier, Jan. 26, 1839; William T. Hale and Dixon L. Merritt, A History of Tennessee and Tennesseans: The Leaders and Representative Men in Commerce, Industry and Modern Activities, 8 vols. (Chicago, 1913), III, 806; James Osburne et al. to Polk, July 24, 1838, in Polk Papers, LC.

[21]Since the constitution of 1835 disfranchised free blacks and eliminated the property qualification, the number of voters for 1840 is the number of white males 20 years old and above. Even though the 20 year olds could not vote, it was thought that attempting to remove them through a simple statistical procedure would involve as much error as would leaving them in the voting population. The information concerning Tennessee's constitution of 1835 is from Combs, Tennessee: Political Study, 20, 23.

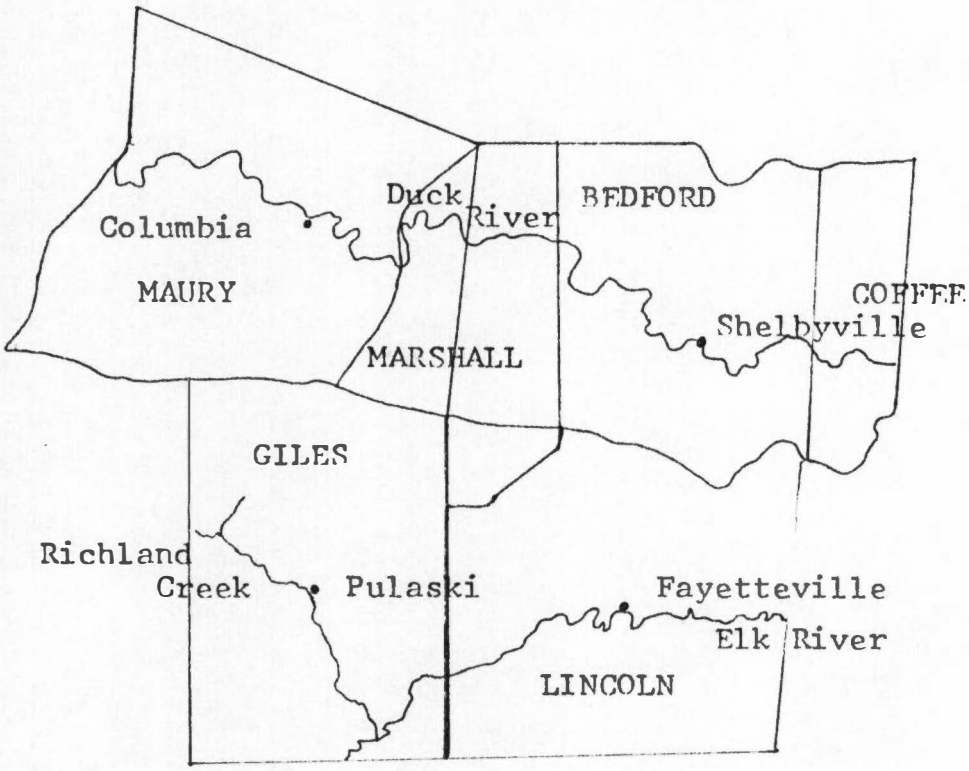

FIGURE I. Polk's Congressional district. Polk ran in Maury, Bedford, Lincoln, and Giles counties from 1825 to 1831. In the reapportionment following the census of 1830 the General Assembly removed Lincoln and Giles from Polk's district. He ran in Maury and Bedford in 1833 and 1835 until in 1836 Marshall and Coffee counties were created. Because of a state law, Polk continued to represent the same constituency until he retired in 1839.

Source: Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, facing page 44.

TABLE III

1840 POPULATION DATA

Political Division	Total Population	Percent of State Population	Percent White	Percent Slave	Percent Free Black	1840 Voters
Maury County	28,186	3	61	39	0	3,503
Bedford County	20,546	2	79	21	0	3,074
Marshall County	14,555	2	79	21	0	2,308
Ninth District	63,287	8	71	29	0	8,855
Middle Tennessee	419,955	51	73	26	1	-----
State of Tennessee	829,210	100	77	22	1	-----

Sources: Sixth Census, 264-73; Sixth Census of the United States [Microfilm reproduction], Maury, Bedford, & Marshall counties manuscript censuses.

Middle Tennessee, and invested $59,555 in manufacturing. The county's 1839 property assessment came to $6,840,867. Because Bedford relinquished nearly half of its land area to Marshall and Coffee counties, it lost 32 percent of its population in the 1830s, and registered only 20,546 inhabitants in 1840. The proportion of slaves, however, increased from 19 to 21 percent. In 1840 Bedford contained 3,074 voters, a 26 percent decrease from 1830. Its economy produced 171,339 pounds of tobacco and 350 bales of cotton, and invested $87,865 in manufacturing. The county's property value was estimated to be $3,776,393, only half that of Maury.

The newly created Marshall County contained 14,555 people, at least half of whom were former Bedford County residents. Slaves made up 21 percent of its population, and in 1840 Marshall possessed about 2,308 voters. The county's nearly exclusive agricultural work force harvested 119,165 pounds of tobacco and 980 bales of cotton, while the manufacturing sector had $24,237 invested in capital. Since Polk continued to represent that portion of Coffee County which had formerly been a part of Bedford, its statistics should be included here; but because there is no feasible way to divide the county's census data, any attempt to supply such information would be plagued with serious error.[22]

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[22] Sixth Census or Enumeration of the Inhabitants of the United States [1840] (Washington, D.C., 1841), 268-69; Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States [1840] (Washington, D.C., 1841), 250-61; Pulaski Whig Courier, Mar. 8, 1839; Sixth Census of the United States: 1840; Population; Tennessee, Number of Inhabitants by County (National Archives, Washington, D.C. [Microfilm reproduction, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee]), Maury, Bedford, Marshall, & Coffee counties manuscript censuses.

By 1840 the three counties in Polk's Ninth Congressional district had 63,287 residents, 8 percent of Tennessee's total population. Both Maury and Bedford continued to be well above both the state's and the section's average population per county, and while Marshall just slightly surpassed the section's average, it was far above that of the state. The state, section, and district approximately held the same proportion of whites, with the range being from 77 to 71 percent, respectively. In Polk's district slaves composed roughly 1/3 of the population to 1/4 for the section and 1/5 for the state. While the number of free blacks in Middle Tennessee and in the state totaled 1 percent, the remained negligible in Polk's district. The 3 counties' voters in 1840 totaled 8,855.[23]

The counties of Polk's Congressional district were roughly composed of a 3/4 white and 1/4 slave population throughout this 20 year period. The majority of the people were farmers, ranging from small to large planters. This, along with additional data presented in the tables, reveal that Polk represented a rather homogenous population. The counties experienced their greatest period of expansion in the 1820s while their growth rate lagged seriously in the 1830s. Thus Polk represented a district which quickly passed its boom period and was heading steadily toward a static condition. Throughout this 20 year span, none of the counties in Polk's district was able to keep pace with the state's 96 percent rate of growth.

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[23]Sixth Census, 264-73; Sixth Census of the U.S., Maury, Bedford, & Marshall Counties manuscript censuses.

The theme of Polk's first three campaigns was the evolution of Sixth district politics from very competitive to noncompetitive. In 1825 five men canvassed the district; two years later Polk campaigned against one very able opponent; in 1829 he was reelected without opposition. But national politics, rather than Polk's actions, was responsible for the lack of competition in 1829.

CHAPTER II

FROM DYNAMIC TO STATIC POLITICS: THE SIXTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, 1825-29

The political leaders of the Jacksonian period, Edward Pessen argues, were wealthy men from traditionally well-to-do families. James K. Polk seems to fit into this general mold. His father was a prosperous planter, merchant, army contractor, land speculator, and bank director, who was able to educate his son in the section's best schools and then to send him to the prestigious University of North Carolina, in the Polks' native state. This training enabled the son to become "a successful lawyer and politician who moved in the most elegant circles of his state." Furthermore Charles Sellers has referred to him as being "a member of one of the state's most prominent families." One contemporary, recalling Maury's most exclusive families, placed the Polks at the top of his list.[1]

After graduation from college in 1818, Polk studied law with Nashville's premier lawyer, Felix Grundy; two years later he was admitted to the bar. With his mentor's recommendation, Polk was elected chief clerk of the Tennessee senate in 1819; and after two terms at that post, he sought a seat in the state's house, winning easily over William Yancey, Maury's incumbent, in 1823. Soon after his election, Polk was appointed

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[1]Pessen, Jacksonian America, 181-82; Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "James K. Polk's Political Apprenticeship," East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, No. 25 (1953), 38-39; Jones, History of Mt. Pleasant, 36.

an aide to Governor William Carroll, an indication of his status in the political community. Throughout his term in the fifteenth General Assembly, he took an active part in legislative concerns and consequently attracted much newspaper publicity.[2]

Politics in Tennessee, prior to Polk's political debut in 1819, consisted of only one party with internal factional battles. Even though the state constitution was relatively democratic, a small group of men actually ran the government. The dominant political group, with its power base in Middle Tennessee, was founded by William Blount, and included his halfbrother Willie, Joseph McMinn, James Robertson, John Eaton, Andrew Jackson, and Hugh L. White. By 1819 the leader of this group was John Overton. Opposing this faction was one established by John Sevier, which included John Cocke, John Williams, Newton Cannon, and Andrew Erwin. Their base of power was located in East Tennessee. Upon Sevier's death in 1815 this faction disintegrated and Erwin established his own clique in Middle Tennessee. As this section attracted more people than East Tennessee, it became the politically dominant section of the state. Above all else, personalities formed the basis of these cliques. Before Polk's entrance into politics, the Overton group ruled the state, but the severe panic of 1819 turned the people against them and their banking interests. Andrew Erwin's group opportunistically

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[2]Robert M. McBride and Dan M. Robison, eds., Biographical Directory of the Tennessee General Assembly, 1 vol. to date (Nashville, 1975-), I, 588-89; Sellers, "Polk's Political Apprenticeship," 39; Polk to William Polk, Sept. 24, 1822, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 16; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Nov. 26, 1823, Sept. 24-Nov. 26, 1823.

championed the people's cause, and along with Felix Grundy and a splinter from the Overton faction, successfully established a state bank.[3]

The panic and bank fight prefaced the gubernatorial race of 1821, which was Tennessee's first statewide campaign based on political issues. William Carroll, an independent candidate who drew the support of the Erwin group, won easily and his hard-money policies naturally hurt the Overton banking interests. Andrew Jackson had long since realized the the destructive potential of banks, and he was seriously suspicious of their activities. He chose, however, to keep his ties with the conservative and bank-oriented Overton group. With this transition, issues rather than personalities began to develop as the basis for political alignments. At the same time the people chose to repudiate their prior deferential behavior in favor of an active democracy.[4]

In an attempt to regain its lost power, the Overton group pushed Jackson for the presidency in 1824, and as a preliminary test, ran him successfully against John Williams, Erwin's man, for the United States Senate. The national political situation for the 1824 presidential election was really nothing more than a Tennessee in macrocosm. The nationwide Democratic-Republican party, being without official opposition, splintered into factions, with the result that four men became candidates.

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[3]Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "Banking and Politics in Jackson's Tennessee, 1817-1827," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLI (June, 1954), 62-71; Stanley J. Folmsbee, Robert E. Corlew, and Enoch L. Mitchell, History of Tennessee, 4 vols. (New York, 1960), I, 293-94; Thomas P. Abernethy, From Frontier to Plantation in Tennessee: A Study in Frontier Democracy (Chapel Hill, 1932), 164-65, 181.

[4]Sellers, "Banking and Politics," 71, 73-76; Abernethy, Frontier to Plantation, 231-34, 243; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 69-73, 90.

The lack of a majority of electoral votes for one candidate caused the election to be decided by the House of Representatives, which chose John Quincy Adams. When Henry Clay, another of the contenders, was appointed Secretary of State, the Jacksonians charged that Adams became President only through a corrupt bargain with the Kentuckian. Jackson vowed that the popular voice would be heard and obeyed in 1828.[5]

Tennessee politics throughout the early 1820s remained in transition and flux. Tennessee politicians could no longer be easily categorized into factions. The politicos, according to James E. Murphy, "were always changing hats, which often were so dusty that you couldn't tell their true color." During William Carroll's domination of the governor's chair from 1821 to 1835, Tennessee gubernatorial contests were generally noncompetitive, but during this period both legislative and Congressional races were very competitive. As evidence of the state's unstable political nature, only two of the nine congressmen elected in 1821 were returned in 1823. These candidates announced themselves and depended both on their popular appeal and personal connections to aid them in their election. But popular appeal and personal connections were not enough since deferential politics had been rejected. An extensive campaign was also required in which "the candidates made up for the lack of any formal party campaign machinery by expending enormous energy in direct personal appeals to the electorate." And because of such extensive efforts,

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[5]Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 294-97.

it was common for more than 70 percent of the voters to come out on election day.[6]

In August 1824 James K. Polk, almost 29 years of age, announced himself as a candidate for the nineteenth Congress, which was to convene in December 1825. Seriously considering such a move even before his marriage to Sarah Childress on the first day of that year, Polk was persuaded to run for Congress by members of the Overton faction. Even though their man, James T. Sandford, had soundly beaten Andrew Erwin a year earlier, they expected the opposition leader to win in 1825. The district, they revealed, had been gerrymandered for Erwin and it would take a stronger man than Sandford to defeat him in the coming contest. Polk, who had originally opposed the Overton group, allied himself with it near the end of his term in the General Assembly. In addition, past political successes must have only whetted his ambitions. It has been said by one of Sam Houston's biographers that Polk filled Houston's Congressional seat when the latter moved to Tennessee's executive chair. Nothing could be further from the truth, for both Polk and Houston served together in the nineteenth Congress, representing separate districts. Houston's successful bid for the governorship came two years later in 1827.[7]

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[6]James E. Murphy, "Jackson and the Tennessee Opposition," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XXX (Spring, 1971), 52; Niles' Weekly Register (Baltimore, Md.), Sept. 13, 1823; Richard P. McCormick, The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jacksonian Era (Chapel Hill, 1966), 225.

[7]Nashville Republican, Aug. 21, 1824; Nashville Whig, Aug. 23, 1824; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Jan. 21, Sept. 8, 1824, Aug. 13, 1823;

Another candidate announced in September 1824, only a month later than Polk. He was Lunsford M. Bramlett, longtime Giles County lawyer, county and circuit court judge, and Presbyterian church elder. Although it has been stated that Bramlett did not arrive in Tennessee from his native Georgia before 1812 or 1813, it is known that he was one of the resident attorneys practicing at the 1810 Giles County court. Besides serving clients in his own county, he also practiced before the Lincoln County court. Bramlett was reportedly an excellent lawyer and a hard worker who had a lucrative practice. Based upon the length of his bar experience, Bramlett was probably close to 50 years of age at the time of his announcement for Congress. He resided in Pulaski, where he was considered one of the town's first citizens. His one serious flaw was that he was neither an "eloquent nor graceful" speaker; but he was "forcible, earnest and sincere."[8]

In October Jonathan Webster, Bedford's state senator and one of its most respected citizens, declared his intention of running for Congress. He was one of the county's earliest settlers and wealthiest

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Lucius Polk to ?, [late 1824], cited in Jessie C. Connors, "The Years Are Kind," Nashville Tennessean Magazine, July 10, 1949, p. 8; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 95; McCormac, Polk, 6; James, Raven, 67, 351; Miller, Political Manual, 168, 175.

[8]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Sept. 29, 1824; Goodspeed, Histories of Giles . . ., 756, 760, 773; James, McCallum, A Brief Sketch of the Settlement and Early History of Giles County, Tennessee; Centennial Address Read July 4, 1876 (Pulaski, Tenn., 1928), 16, 25, 114-15; James McCallum, "Brief Sketch of the Settlement and Early History of Giles County," American Historical Magazine, II (Oct.,1897), 309-10; William S. Fleming, A Historical Sketch of Maury County, Read at the Centennial Celebration in Columbia, Tennessee, July 4, 1876 (Columbia, Tenn., [1876] 1967), 76; Moore, Volunteer State, II, 45.

men. Being a large-scale farmer, he introduced the use of mules for farm work to replace oxen. Webster, born in 1779 in Virginia, had moved to Tennessee in 1808 and built, along with his brother, the region's first grist mill in Noah's Fork.[9]

Also in October the incumbent, James T. Sandford, announced that he would seek reelection. Born in Virginia and schooled in that state's politics, he moved to Columbia before December 1807. Once in Tennessee, he became a large-scale planter and a Jackson supporter. He was probably much older than Polk, and likely closer to Bramlett's age. In the following month, one of Maury's Revolutionary veterans, Francis Willis, announced that he would also seek the seat.[10]

Finally, after seven months of speculation and rumor, Andrew Erwin, the man Polk had originally been persuaded to run against, officially became a candidate in April 1825. Two years before, Erwin had been defeated by Sandford even though the Sixth district had been specifically

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[9]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Oct. 20, 1824. This paper mistakenly printed Webster's first name as Thomas. Jones, History of Mt. Pleasant, 17-18; Turner, Maury County Tennessee, 65; Columbia Observer, Sept. 19, 1834; McBride, Tennessee General Assembly, I, 770-71. Webster represented Bedford County for six terms in the Tennessee General Assembly and was its elected representative to the 1834 state constitutional convention. Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 68n; Moore, Volunteer State, I, 405.

[10]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Oct. 27, 1824, May 20, 1823; McCallum, Sketch of Giles County, Tennessee, 123; Lawrence F. Kennedy, chief comp., et al.,) Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971 (Washington, D.C., 1971), 1653-54; Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 207n; Goodspeed, History of Tennessee . . . Maury, 760; Columbia Herald, Mar. 17, 1871, cited in Jill K. Garrett, comp., Maury County, Tennessee: Historical Sketches (Columbia, Tenn., 1967), 198. Sandford died in December 1830. Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 388n; Nashville Whig, Dec. 6, 1824.

gerrymandered for him in the 1822 reapportionment. Coming from North Carolina between 1800 and 1806, Erwin was one of Bedford County's first settlers. Serving in the Tennessee house since 1821, he had filibustered against and defeated a proposed constitutional convention. All of the Erwins were politically active; son John had served as editor of the Nashville Whig since August 1823, supporting his father's campaign from there. In December 1825 Erwin's other son, James purchased that paper.[11]

Andrew Jackson and Andrew Erwin were political and personal enemies. Erwin was the "principal strategist" of the faction which opposed Overton's group. On a personal level, years earlier, Jackson had killed Erwin's son-in-law, Charles Dickinson, in a duel following a gambling quarrel. In numerous letters to close personal friends, Jackson referred to Erwin in terms which reflected his hatred; quite naturally, Jackson would back almost any man opposing Erwin. Since Polk had already revealed his friendship toward Jackson's cause in the General Assembly, and because Old Hickory must have considered Polk the strongest man to run against Erwin, he gave Polk his unqualified support.[12]

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[11]Nashville Whig, Oct. 18, 1824, Apr. 23, Aug. 13, 1825; Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "Jackson Men with Feet of Clay," American Historical Review, LXII (Apr., 1957), 546; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Aug. 27, 1823; McBride, Tennessee General Assembly, I, 233; Robert H. White, ed., Messages of the Governors of Tennessee, 8 vols. (Nashville, 1952-72), II, 26; Goodspeed, History of Tennessee . . . Maury, 862; John P. Erwin to Henry Clay, Dec. 12, 1825, in James F. Hopkins and Mary W. M. Hargreaves, eds., The Papers of Henry Clay, 5 vols. to date (Lexington, 1959-), IV, 901; Sellers, "Banking and Politics," 64, 64n.

[12]Sellers, "Jackson Men," 538; Murphy, "Tennessee Opposition," 54; Abernethy, Frontier to Plantation, 293; Andrew Jackson to James Monroe, Sept. 28 [or 29], 1819, in John S. Bassett, ed., Correspondence of

After Polk became a candidate, a special legislative session was called for September 20, 1824, to correct defects in the state's presidential election law. Although this put a crimp in Polk's campaign, he played a prominent role in the session and consequently received press mention. While Polk was busy in the Assembly, Sandford was reaping the benefits of incumbency by offering to take care of his constituents' business affairs in the nation's capital. But incumbency had its disadvantages too; for example, Sandford soon had to leave the state to resume his responsibilities in Washington. To offset his absence, however, the congressman wrote letters to district newspaper editors concerning the deadlocked national election, then in the House. He clearly sought to connect his cause with that of Jackson and unleashed his anger upon Adams, the newly-elected President, and his Secretary of State for usurping "'the rights of the people.'" The Congressional session ended on March 3, 1825; Sandford rushed back to Tennessee and was certainly there before April 1.[13]

Toward the end of April, the Columbia Blues, a militia company, organized a march to Nashville to greet Lafayette, who was visiting there as a part of a general tour of the United States. They addressed a letter to Congressional candidate Francis Willis, a Revolutionary veteran, requesting that he accompany them to welcome the French Revolutionary

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Andrew Jackson, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1926-35), II, 436-37; Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, July 10, 1828, in ibid., III, 412-13; Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 311.

[13]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Oct. 6, 1824, Sept. 17, 1823, Jan. 12, Mar. 2, 1825; Kennedy, American Congress, 101.

hero. In a reply indicative of a learned man, Willis gracefully accepted the invitation.[14]

Early in May Polk initiated his campaign in earnest by issuing a circular letter to the inhabitants of the district. In this pamphlet he explained his stand on the various political issues then facing the people. Upon the crucial question of internal improvements, which were generally called for by the Tennessee electorate, Polk argued that they were expedient and desirable, for they

> promote the agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing interests of the country; they add to the wealth, prosperity, and convenience of the great body of people, by diminishing the expenses, and improving the facilities for the transportation of our surplus products to market, and furnishing an easy and cheap return of those necessaries required for our consumption.

He raised the question of constitutionality and judged that the power was delegated to the federal government through the document's revenue clauses (presumably Article I, section 8). Polk totally endorsed internal improvements, but he qualified himself by asserting that a state must grant its permission before any federal improvements could be made within its borders.[15]

Basing his campaign on the same issue, Andrew Erwin exploited his close association with Henry Clay, the champion of internal improvements. He promised to get improvements for Tennessee and that, if elected, the

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[14]Columbia Columbian, Apr. 21, 1825.

[15]Excerpts from Polk's 1825 circular letter are quoted from Jenkins, Polk and a History of His Administration, 58, 60; and from Jenkins, Life of Polk, 58, 60; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Mar. 28, 1827.

proposed Buffalo to New Orleans (via Washington) national road would be approved. Furthermore, he pointed out that Polk had voted against a proposed toll road between Columbia and Nashville during his term in the General Assembly. Erwin's master strategy, however, had been to delay announcing his candidacy until late spring, thereby convincing the Jacksonians that they were unopposed in the district, hopefully causing them to split into factions. After each faction put up a candidate, Erwin planned to enter the fray suddenly with an excellent possibility of achieving a popular plurality. This shrewd tactic apparently surprised most of the candidates, and seemed to be working until it received a setback with the withdrawal of one of the major Jacksonians.[16]

Bedford County's other candidate, Jonathan Webster, dropped out soon after Erwin's announcement, possibly realizing that against Erwin he could not even win his home county. This left Polk, Sandford, and Bramlett to vie for the majority of the Jacksonian votes. Willis, being from Maury, would undoubtedly draw a few votes from Polk; but because his age made an extensive campaign impossible, he never had more than a slim chance of success. By mid-June Governor Carroll, who expressed favorable prospects for Erwin's success, feared that the Jacksonians would realize their predicament, and rally behind a single candidate to defeat Erwin.[17]

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[16]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 95-97.

[17]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 95-97; William Carroll to Henry Clay, June 11, 1825, in Hopkins, Clay Papers, IV, 434.

In his moves to counter Erwin, Polk also exploited his opponent's connection with Henry Clay but stressed that the Kentuckian and John Quincy Adams, disregarding the people's wishes, had contrived to place themselves in power. Polk, hoping to place this yoke around his adversary's neck, pointed out the family alliance, which was consummated through the marriage of Clay's daughter to Erwin's son. Polk advocated internal improvements in order to offset the popularity Erwin received from that issue. According to Sellers, "This was the most serious departure from Old Republican orthodoxy of Polk's entire career. . . ." This occurred, however, only after Jackson came out for moderate improvements and his constituents expressed a desire for them; in addition, he believed that it was his responsibility to reflect the views of the people rather than to press his own upon them. By this time also, Polk was enough of a politician to realize that if he did not endorse improvements, he probably could not expect to be elected. To aid his candidate, Jackson even had an incriminating State Department document released to Polk for use in his campaign against Erwin.[18]

To convince the voters that he was the strongest of the three major Jacksonian candidates, Polk conducted an extensive campaign throughout the district. Even though he was decidedly the underdog at the outset,

> he traversed and canvassed [the district] . . . again and again. Before the canvass was half over he had displayed so

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[18]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 96-98; Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Apr. 28, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 171. These are the only facts known about the document Jackson supplied to Polk; its exact contents remain a mystery.

> much activity and energy in his movements, and had instilled into his supporters so much of his own ardent zeal that he was regarded by each of his competitors as the most formidable opponent.[19]

At the close of a "vigorous campaign" which was decided "mainly upon personal popularity," Polk received the reward he had struggled so hard to obtain. On August 4 and 5, 1825, the voters of the Sixth Congressional district elected him. As Table IV makes clear, Polk ran third in Bedford County, behind Erwin and Bramlett respectively; but he made up for this deficit by outdistancing all others in both Maury and Lincoln. While Polk only received a 43 percent plurality in Lincoln, he captured 54 percent of Maury's vote. Bramlett received a tremendous 65 percent in his home county of Giles. As it turned out, Erwin's strategy failed, because he could not attract enough support in any county except his own; and he won Bedford by a mere 43 percent plurality. His strategy actually hurt his cause by allowing some of the anti-Polk vote to be funneled to other candidates. It did, however, keep the election from being a landslide against Erwin. Sandford and Willis had very little effect on the outcome; their total did, however, hold the margin of victory for both Erwin and Bramlett. Had Webster continued in the contest he undoubtedly would have siphoned off more votes from Erwin than from Polk and Bramlett, since Webster and Erwin were from the same

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[19]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 98; Alfred O. P. Nicholson, Eulogy on the Life and Character of James K. Polk, Delivered at the M'Kendree Church at Nashville, on the 1st November, 1849 [Pamphlet in the McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee], 429; reprint from Tennessee General Assembly, Journal of the House of Representatives, 28th General Assembly, 1849-50 (Nashville, 1849), appendix.

TABLE IV

RESULTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION OF 1825 IN TENNESSEE'S SIXTH DISTRICT

Candidate	Vote By Counties				Sixth District Totals
	Maury	Bedford	Lincoln	Giles	
Polk	1,675	729	1,015	250	3,669
Erwin	544	1,353	751	100	2,748
Bramlett	60	752	423	1,112	2,347
Sandford	745	339	176	252	1,512
Willis	99	0	6	0	105
Vote Totals	3,123	3,173	2,371	1,714	10,381
Total 1826 Voters	3,418	3,195	2,825	2,013	11,451
Percent Turnout	91	99	84	85	91

Source: Nashville Whig, Aug. 13, 1825.

county. Polk began his Congressional career as a decidedly minority choice; in this election, with a 91 percent turnout, only 35 percent of the voters cast their ballots for him.[20]

Polk was elected in a year which saw only 1/3 of the Tennessee Congressional delegation replaced rather than the 7/9 supplanted two years earlier. He was aided in his efforts by Lincoln County's Judge Alfred Harris, whom Sandford had defeated in 1823; in Bedford by former candidate Jonathan Webster and Archibald Yell; and in Giles, his weakest county, by Aaron V. Brown. His electoral victory hinged upon dominance in two of the district's four counties, an achievement no other candidate matched. Because of their more substantial voting populations, one of those counties had to be either Maury or Bedford. Polk's success had its basis in "his general popularity, sound judgement, and ability to address the public with ease, facility, and persuasive eloquence." Bramlett attributed his loss to the "anxiety," "embarassment," and "excitement" felt in the wake of the 1824 presidential election, but this served only as a convenient excuse. His support of Jackson and his favorable stand toward a constitutional amendment prohibiting the presidential election from devolving to the House should have only aided his cause. Erwin blamed his failure on "sinister causes." Following

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[20]Goodspeed, History of Tennessee . . . Maury, 739; Anson Nelson and Fanny Nelson, eds., Memorials of Sarah Childress Polk, Wife of the Eleventh President of the United States (New York, 1892), 26; Nashville Republican, Sept. 23, Oct. 21, 1826, Aug. 6, 1825; Nashville Whig, July 30, Aug. 13, 1825. Slightly different election results are found in Fayetteville Village Messinger, Aug. 3 & 4, 1827, and in Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 98.

the election, Governor William Carroll made a prophetic prediction in a letter to Henry Clay in which he referred to Polk as a talented young man who "will probably remain several years in congress; and may hereafter have a share of influence in the political concerns of the State."[21]

As congressman, Polk kept in close and frequent touch with his constituents, acting as a servant to the "sovereigns" in regard to most of their requests. Although letters poured in, Polk never once exhibited either a defensive or frustrated attitude toward the suggestions, complaints, or requests of his constituents. Sellers considers a voluminous correspondence an essential part of a reelection bid, and Polk certainly believed this. But in the heat of the campaign, Polk's correspondence fell to record low levels.[22]

Polk employed every advantage of incumbency to keep his name before the public. He addressed pamphlets to his district as early as March 1826 to prepare the way for the following year's campaign. His speeches in the House usually received considerable attention in the district's newspapers and were nearly always followed by favorable editorial comments. His resolutions against President Adams' proposed mission to the Panama Conference got especially widespread coverage; and his first major speech supporting George McDuffie's resolutions prohibiting the

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[21]Niles' Weekly Register, Sept. 3, 1825; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 98; Fayetteville Village Messenger, May 4, 1827; Henry Clay to James Erwin, Aug. 30, 1825, in Hopkins, Clay Papers, IV, 601; William Carroll to Henry Clay, Oct. 4, 1825, in ibid., 716; White, Messages, III, 265.

[22]Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, xi, passim; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 100.

House from deciding presidential elections was acclaimed by Jacksonians all over the United States. Andrew Jackson told him that this speech was "well received" in the Sixth district and only strengthened Polk's claim to his constituents' "future confidence."[23]

The Polk-Jackson relationship went back many years. Jackson was a close friend of both Polk's father and his wealthy North Carolina kinsman, William Polk. Polk himself had attracted Jackson's attention while in the Tennessee legislature when he abandoned his former ties with the Carroll faction to come out in support of Old Hickory in his bid for a United States Senate seat. Since Jackson's margin of victory turned out to be rather slim, Polk's contribution seemed greater than it actually was. Edward Pessen, a modern student of the period, has said not only that Polk exploited this friendship to its greatest extent but also that

> During the course of a political career dedicated almost fanatically to his personal advance, Polk managed to remain silent when either friends or an earlier position of his came under attack by Jackson.

Pessen furthermore charged that Polk "displayed 'disingenuousness and preference for devious manipulation.'" It must be admitted that one had to be careful in any dealings with Jackson, whose prejudices were so strong. He was devoted to his friends, hated his enemies and was suspicious of those who stood in the middle. Polk's star undoubtedly rose

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[23]Francis Porterfield to Polk, Mar. 2, 1826, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 34-35; Andrew Jackson to Polk, May 3, 1826, in ibid., 41; Fayetteville Village Messenger, May 17, May 24, 1826.

with Jackson's, but only because the two men shared a general political outlook.[24]

Just as soon as the first session of the nineteenth Congress adjourned on May 22, 1826, Polk rushed back to Tennessee to mend "his fences" and to detect any "signs of opposition." While there, he attended all of the court sessions and militia musters he possibly could, and naturally addressed the crowds. Public dinners were scheduled in both Fayetteville and Shelbyville to celebrate the Fourth of July; but they were actually held on July 6 and 8 respectively, so that Andrew Jackson could attend. Although there is no evidence that Polk was at either dinner, Jackson's presence in his district obviously helped his cause since he was identified with the great Tennessean. According to the nature of the toasts presented at the Fayetteville dinner, the people were totally opposed to the Adams administration. Despite the progress made toward the following summer's campaign, Polk regretted that he had not had more time to spend at home.[25]

In the fall of 1826 the position of marshal for West Tennessee was up for reappointment. Bedford County's second-term state senator, Theodorick F. Bradford, solicited the State Department post from Secretary of State Henry Clay and requested letters of recommendation from some prominent Jackson foes. At this time, however, Bradford, for

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[24]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 87, 91; Pessen, Jacksonian America, 195; Phelan, History of Tennessee, 358.

[25]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 110; Fayetteville Village Messenger, July 12, July 19, 1826; National Banner & Nashville Whig, July 12, 1826; Polk to Robert Caruthers, Sept. 25, 1826, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 47.

politically expedient reasons, had not yet broken with the Jacksonians, although he was actually pro-Adams in sentiment. Governor Carroll, Boyd McNairy, and others, in confidential letters to Clay, confirmed that Bradford was only posing as a Jacksonian. Furthermore, it was made clear that the Tennessee friends of Adams and Clay would appreciate Bradford's appointment. Despite the latter's continued efforts, the incumbent marshal, Robert Purdy, was reappointed very early in 1828.[26]

Bradford continued to seek the marshal's post and because the fate of his application remained unknown, Polk inquired into his activities, considering him a potential 1827 opponent. In December 1826 a Bedford County resident wrote Polk that Bradford was seeking reelection to the state senate and that Jonathan Webster would probably be his opponent. Although this informant revealed a distrust of Webster, he urged that good relations be maintained with Webster because "his influence will be with us in the next race, we must once make the most we can of him." In February 1827 this same correspondent told Polk that Bradford undoubtedly was an Adams supporter, something the Congressman must have already known. Polk, however, had long since ceased concerning himself with Bradford, since the latter was actively campaigning for reelection to the state senate, making it unlikely that he would announce for Congress.[27]

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[26]McBride, Tennessee General Assembly, I, 69; Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 68n, 144n; William Carroll to Henry Clay, Nov. 19, 1826, in Hopkins, Clay Papers, V, 939; Boyd McNairy to Henry Clay, Nov. 13, 1826, in ibid., 922.

[27]James R. White to Polk, Dec. 30, 1826, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 67; James R. White to Polk, Feb. 8, 1827, in ibid., 86.

Polk, however, was certain of one competitor. When Polk publicly announced, in mid-December, that he would seek reelection, Lunsford M. Bramlett, one of his 1825 opponents, revealed that he would oppose Polk. Immediately after Polk learned of Bramlett's intentions, he also heard the ominous news that there was to be a coalition of the Erwin and Bramlett forces behind Bramlett. The object of this Bedford-Giles alliance was to defeat Polk by obtaining large majorities in both counties. If both Erwin and Bramlett could deliver their support of two years earlier, the federation would defeat Polk. The latter's brother-in-law, James Walker of Columbia, promised to do all he discreetly could to expose the coalition and open the people's eyes to Erwin's and Bramlett's deceitful plan. According to one Bedford countian, however, the coalition scheme was well known and already had had an adverse effect upon Bramlett's prospects. In any case, by the end of December 1826, Bramlett opened his "campaign in high Stile."[28]

At the beginning of 1827, among other issues important to Tennesseans, was the West's apparently inferior status within the United States. Although no law or custom determined the apportionment of Supreme Court justices among the various sections of the country, the West was underrepresented on that Court and felt slighted because no justice sat in their circuit courts, as was the rule in the East. Apparently at this time there was a lag between the country's growth and

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[28]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Dec. 13, 1826; James Walker to Polk, Dec. 15, 1826, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 61; James R. White to Polk, Dec. 30, 1826, in ibid., 66; John C. Wormeley to Polk, Dec. 27, 1826, in ibid., 65.

the reapportionment of circuit districts. In addition, delays in their judicial proceedings were all too frequent. To remedy this the Tennessee General Assembly addressed a preamble and resolutions to Congress requesting redress, and circulated copies to the other western states suggesting that they do the same. Polk also knew that his constituents wanted all of the remaining federal lands in Tennessee ceded to the state to be used specifically for educational purposes. One of his Bedford County confidants, James R. White, pressed upon him that "To get this matter through is a consumation devoutly to be wished, for it will in a great measure disarm the opposition." Polk had constantly been striving toward this end and this bit of encouragement certainly made him push harder. The same correspondent told him that his constituents opposed Senator Robert Y. Hayne's nationwide bankruptcy bill and urged Polk to oppose it when it reached the House. Polk had no chance to do this since the bill never received the necessary Senate vote. Most importantly, however, White revealed that Bedford's newspapers were insufficiently reporting Polk's activities in Congress. This lack of information allowed his enemies to charge the Congressman with inefficiency and inactivity, and White urged Polk to mail personal communications into the area to help remedy the situation. Bedford's citizens, White revealed, also requested changes in the mail route to speed up the delivery of eastern newspapers into their county.[29]

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[29]Niles' Weekly Register, Dec. 16, 1826; James R. White to Polk, Dec. 30, 1826, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 66, 67n; James R. White to Polk, Jan. 9, 1827, in ibid., 72. Through this bill Hayne hoped to transform the various state bankruptcy laws into an invariable nationwide procedure. Ibid., 68n.

Bramlett's campaign gained momentum as the new year progressed. He not only visited Maury County but also stayed through the entire four-week circuit court session, and made many speeches there. He harped on the charge that a "misrepresentation" of Polk's strength was the key factor in his 1825 victory. Polk had convinced the voters that he was by far the easy winner, when that was not the case. James Walker reported that while Bramlett had won some converts and had assumed that Erwin's supporters would line up behind him, evidence showed that the majority of the county's people remained loyal to Polk. Walker further predicted that ". . . Bramletts great industry at this time will operate against him, as it will be considered that he is taking an advantage of you whilst engaged in your public duty." But Charles W. Webber, another of Polk's close associates, claimed that the canvass would be closely contested and that Bramlett would take Bedford. While Walker said that Bramlett's strength was no greater than expected, Webber warned that Bramlett was rapidly gaining strength and that Polk would "have to use much industry upon your return, otherwise you may be beat." Walker nevertheless advised the Congressman to devote himself to his constituents' wishes and to supply them with as much information as possible. Furthermore, he urged Polk to concentrate on obtaining converts in Bramlett's Giles County stronghold.[30]

To cultivate the Lincoln County voters Bramlett attended the March session of their circuit court and offered the county's citizens two

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[30]James Walker to Polk, Jan. 15, 1827, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 74; James R. White to Polk, Feb. 8, 1827, in ibid., 87; Charles W. Webber to Polk, Jan. 23, 1827, in ibid., 76.

horses to enter in a Fayetteville horse race to be held in May. Some in that county believed that Bramlett would defeat Polk, and even Polk's supporters realized that Bramlett was sapping his strength in Lincoln with every passing day. Polk's friends were not idle, however, and they attacked Bramlett in Giles, his home county.[31]

Polk contributed to his own popularity by delivering a speech in the House which attacked the Secretary of State's practice of reassigning the government's contracts for the publication of the laws of Congress to newspapers which supported President Adams. The law, Polk pointed out, stipulated that those contracts were to go to the three newspapers in each state with the largest circulations, regardless of their politics. While indirectly defending Jackson on this count, Polk came straight to Old Hickory's aid when the Adams forces brought up the controversy over the six militiamen Jackson had executed during the War of 1812. Through this ploy the Adams men hoped to obstruct an investigation into Clay's activities concerning the newspapers.[32]

The second and final session of the nineteenth Congress ended on March 3, 1827. Polk departed for Tennessee the following day, but not before having a circular letter to his constituents published under the date of March 4. He had the letter sent to friends throughout the district who agreed to distribute them. The documents reached the

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[31]Henry Robertson to Polk, Feb. 4, 1827, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 83-84; Collin S. Tarpley to Polk, Feb. 11, 1827, in ibid., 89; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 112; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Mar. 28, 1827.

[32]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Mar. 14, 1827.

district soon after Polk arrived there on March 19; and to ensure as wide a circulation as possible, he had the district's newspapers copy it.[33]

To disarm Bramlett's charge of inactivity, the circular letter summarized Polk's Congressional actions. Polk reported that a bill to improve the West's judicial system and to readjust representation on the Supreme Court failed in the Senate during the first session, and a revised bill during the second session could not get out of the House. In regard to Adams' proposed mission to the "extraordinary Assembly" in Panama, Polk asserted "that the United States had nothing to gain, but much to lose by" participating in this meeting of the South American republics, France, and England; he opposed the appropriation of money for such an endeavor. Instead of venturing into "untried and hazardous experiments," Polk felt the country should continue to follow the prudent policy set down by George Washington. The pet project of Andrew Jackson, a constitutional amendment to keep presidential elections out of the House, failed to make progress due to the extensive efforts of the Adams "Administration who were elevated to office, not by the voice of a majority of the people. . . ."[34]

In regard to internal improvements, Polk reiterated his 1825 position, saying that the state's consent was essential before the federal government could institute any such projects within its borders. He reported that the obstruction removal project at Muscle Shoals on the

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[33]Kennedy, American Congress, 104; Polk to Alfred Flournoy, Mar. 20, 1827, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 92; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Mar, 28, 1827.

[34]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Mar. 28, 1827.

Tennessee River was progressing but that the proposed national road from the District of Columbia to New Orleans remained in a planning stage. Polk, however, warned his constituents that the national debt was excessive and that expenditures should be severely limited so it could be quickly paid off. Although he would not categorically oppose improvements, he presented gentle and general arguments against them. In other areas Polk reported that he had voted against an increase in the wool tariff and unsuccessfully worked for the relinquishment of the federal government's land in Tennessee. This land, found south and southwest of the Congressional Reservation Line, which roughly followed the westernmost course of the Tennessee River through the state, was sought to supplement the state's school fund. He promised his constituents, however, that he would keep striving to obtain these lands for the state. Due to the corruption of the Adams administration in the area of executive patronage, Polk proposed that limitations be placed on that executive power. At this point, he launched into a partisan attack of the Adams administration and referred to the approaching presidential election as a contest "between power and right." In concluding, Polk invited the public to examine his record and expressed the hope that the voters would confirm their confidence in his abilities and actions on election day.[35]

Before embarking on his extensive campaign, Polk optimistically revealed his plans to Alfred Flournoy, his Giles County ally. He also disclosed that he would visit Fayetteville when the Lincoln County circuit court met and would attend either the Lincoln or Bedford militia

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[35]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Mar. 28, 1827.

muster. He hoped to move into Bramlett's own Giles County just as quickly as possible and asked Flournoy for information concerning any upcoming public gatherings. Polk's strategy was to parallel the Clay-Adams coalition with that formed by Erwin and Bramlett, and to increase his attack by expressing stern opposition to Adams' Panama Mission in particular and to the entire administration in general. In the wake of Polk's initial visit to Lincoln County, a poll of grand jury members revealed their preference for Polk by a nearly two-to-one margin.[36]

In reaction to Polk's circular, Bramlett addressed one to the people of Lincoln, Bedford, Maury, and Giles through the press. In it he announced his states' rights strict constructionist views and publicly denounced all internal improvement projects until the huge national debt was eliminated through the government's current revenue sources. Furthermore, Bramlett expressed his belief that internal improvements were not authorized by the Constitution. Asserting that Polk agreed that improvements were unconstitutional, Bramlett, in regard to Polk's state consent declaration, sarcastically inquired:

> if Congress does not possess the right by the Constitution, to make internal improvements, it is difficult to conceive, how the assent of a state . . . can confer a constitutional right to appropriate the funds of the General Government, to the execution of a purpose, not authorised by the constitution itself.

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[36]Polk to Alfred Flournoy, Mar. 20, 1827, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 92; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 113; McCormac, Polk, 20; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Apr. 25, 1827.

Bramlett proposed an amendment to the federal Constitution as a method of testing popular opinion on the perplexing issue.[37]

While the Adams administration sought to expand the public sector, Bramlett urged austerity in an attempt to pay off the national debt and prevent "national bankruptcy." He opposed a large standing army and hoped to make the militia the backbone of America's defenses. He opposed protective tariffs which benefited the manufacturing areas at the expense of the agricultural ones. He supported Jackson for the presidency and a constitutional amendment to keep presidential elections out of the House. And to comply with a consensus of the district's voters, he came out against a national bankruptcy law, beneficial only to merchants. In concluding he promised to uphold the interests of the district and the state and to adhere to republican principles.[38]

Two months before the election, James Campbell of Winchester, Tennessee informed his brother David of Virginia that

> There is a very sharp contest going on in Bedford. The hobbies which the candidates mount—are the bank—the currency, political economy in all its branches, which they know but very little about.

Although admitting that both candidates were nearly "equal in talents," he predicted that Polk would emerge the victor because he "is more the man of the people. . . ." This assessment may have been prompted by Bramlett's poor speaking ability, which possibly allowed a distance to develop between the people and himself. Besides the Congressional

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[37]Fayetteville Village Messenger, May 4, 1827.

[38]Fayetteville Village Messenger, May 4, 1827.

campaign of 1827, the debate over the proposed Tennessee constitutional convention and the approaching presidential election attracted the people's attention. The state was already lined up solidly behind Jackson and nearly all 1827 Congressional candidates came out in support of him. As a result, the August election was "between men professing nearly the same principles, and the question is which one is best qualified to carry into effect the known wishes of the people."[39]

At the close of "a severe contest with a formidable competitor" the "rigid and uncompromising Presbyterian . . . of incorruptible honesty" emerged victorious. As illustrated in Table V, Polk received 57 percent of the total vote, capturing a majority in every county except Giles. In his home county of Giles, Bramlett defeated Polk by large margins in every voting precinct to take 71 percent of its votes; but in Lincoln just the opposite occurred with Polk winning every precinct except one and receiving 59 percent of that county's votes. Bedford, the most closely contested county, possibly due to Erwin's influence, went to Polk by a 10 percent margin. In 1827, 835 more people voted than two years earlier, and a tremendous 98 percent turnout resulted.[40]

Polk's victory over Bramlett was achieved by carrying both Maury and Lincoln, his 1825 bastions, and by capturing a slight majority in

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[39]James Campbell to David Campbell, June 6, 1827, in David Campbell Papers, Duke University Library, Durham, N.C. [Microfilm reproduction, McClung Collection, Lawson McGhee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee]; Fayetteville Village Messenger, July 13, 1827.

[40]Nelson, Memorials, 32; Poore, Perley's Reminiscences, I, 83; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Aug. 3 & 4, 1827; Nashville Republican, Sept. 23, Oct. 21, 1826.

TABLE V

RESULTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION OF 1827 IN TENNESSEE'S SIXTH DISTRICT

Candidate	Vote By Counties				Sixth District Totals
	Maury	Bedford	Lincoln	Giles	
Polk	2,348	1,902	1,513	587	6,350
Bramlett	876	1,542	1,040	1,408	4,866
Vote Totals	3,224	3,444	2,553	1,995	11,216
Total 1826 Voters	3,418	3,195	2,825	2,013	11,451
Percent Turnout	94	108*	90	99	98

*This apparent discrepancy is due to Bedford's tremendous 90 percent rate of growth, and it is quite likely that the voting population could have increased to this extent in one year.

Source: Fayetteville Village Messenger, Aug. 3 & 4, 1827.

Bedford. This latter accomplishment indicates that since 1825 he had found favor with Bedford's voters who had placed him a poor third in the earlier contest. While it is apparent that Bramlett did not attract all of Andrew Erwin's 1825 support, Erwin's strength probably did aid Bramlett. Bramlett easily carried his own Giles County, in fact by an even greater margin in 1827 than in 1825. The victor in the later year, as in the earlier, was the candidate who could achieve a heavy majority in one county and at least a plurality in another, provided one of those counties was either Maury or Bedford. The 1827 election also included a gubernatorial contest between Sam Houston, the Jacksonian, and Newton Cannon. Although Houston won, Cannon took all of the counties in the Sixth district. Considering this fact, Polk's personal strength among his constituents in 1827 is even more apparent. Admittedly, he did hold the advantage of incumbency. But in this election just over 1/2 of the previous congressmen were returned, a decrease in stability from 1825 when 2/3 were reelected. In spite of the opinion expressed in Polk's district some Tennesseans felt a desire for change.[41]

In regard to this election, and possibly thinking of the approaching presidential campaign, one district newspaper printed the following editorial with the aim of consolidating party ranks:

> By those unacquainted with the state of public sentiments in this District, the termination of our Congressional election may be imputed to wrong motives. Justice to the candidates, and more particularly to the unsucessful [sic] one, requires that we should state, that in point of talents,

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[41]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Aug. 3 & 4, 1827. Slightly different election returns appear in Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 113; Niles' Weekly Register, Sept. 8, 1827.

> character, principles and integrity, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, for the District to have furnished two more unexceptionable gentlemen, or two who possessed in a greater degree, the entire confidence of the people. The decided majority which Col. Polk obtained over his opponent, is not attributable to any want of confidence in the later [sic], but to a desire on the part of the people, to manifest in the strongest manner (by a re-election,) their approbation of the course pursued by the former in the late Congress; and the settled conviction that a change of men, even if their princiciples [sic] and course of policy were precisely similar, would be hailed by the enemies of Gen. Jackson and friends of the administration, as a victory, which if productive of no other consequences, would indicate a less degree of stability in the people of this state, than we claim for ourselves or they have a right to anticipate.[42]

Soon after the election, Polk, preparing for the contest yet two years away, requested a list of Giles County residents and their post offices from his friends Alfred Flournoy and Sheriff Lewis H. Brown. Aware that he had lost Giles by large margins in past contests, Polk hoped to build up strength there by sending some accounts of "public proceedings" to "certain persons." He had been unable to do so in the 1827 campaign, he said, because he lacked their names and addresses. To keep himself before the general public, Polk sent communications to the district newspapers, informing them of Congressional events. With his ear attuned to the sounds of politics, he received reports concerning possible 1829 opposition from, among others, Archibald Yell, a Bedford County lawyer and ardent Polk supporter. Yell, warning the Congressman that Theodorick F. Bradford would be arriving in Washington to intensify

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[42]Fayetteville Village Messenger, Aug. 10, 1827. Lunsford M. Bramlett later went on to become judge of the Fourth Circuit Court District of Tennessee, and served from October 21, 1833, to October 31, 1835. Under the new constitution of 1835 he becames Giles County's first chancellor, serving until 1844. Fleming, Sketch of Maury, 71, 75, 77.

his efforts to obtain the post of marshal for West Tennessee, hoped that Bradford would get the appointment and thus "be out of the way. . . ." But in any case he predicted that Bradford would probably not oppose Polk in 1829. Yell revealed that in the recent militia elections, many of Polk's allies had been elected as officers over Bramlett men. As to the Congressman's popularity, Yell emphasized that "if your friends rise in other Counti[e]s as they have been in this for the last four or five weeks you can beat old Jackson."[43]

From Lincoln County, Polk learned that his popularity remained very high. Yell, attending the Fayetteville court, reassured his friend that he had "no hesitation in saying that you would get a majority over any man that could be started either in or out of the County." But he warned of a rumored movement in the General Assembly to gerrymander the district "to suit the purposis of a certain Dinasty in this County [Bedford]." This undoubtedly refers to the Erwin faction, of which Bradford was now a self-confessed member.[44]

At the beginning of 1828, Polk used all the means of his incumbency to campaign for reelection. He performed all sorts of favors for his constituents, such as attending to various business matters, subscribing to newspapers, and writing letters of recommendation. He was especially attentive to the plight of the needy Revolutionary veterans, who sought

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[43]Polk to Alfred Flournoy, Oct. 11, 1827, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 96-97, 97n; Archibald Yell to Polk, Jan. 20, 1828, in ibid., 127-28; Fayetteville Village Messenger, Jan. 4, 1828; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 250; Goodspeed, Histories of Giles . . ., 774.

[44]Archibald Yell to Polk, Feb. 10, 1828, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 144.

government pensions. Moreover, Polk franked government documents and printed speeches to his constituents. It cannot be denied that these services were effective appeals for votes.[45]

Following a report from Lincoln County that he had no opposition and probably would have none in 1829, Polk contributed as much as he could to Jackson's presidential campaign. In a March letter, Yell speculated that if Adams won, Andrew Erwin would probably try to ride Adams' coattails into Congress the following year. "You will have no opposition except John Quincy, should he be elected. In that event I think Old Andrew Erwin will be a candidate tho. without much prospect of success." And he reported that Erwin, Theodorick F. Bradford, James L. Armstrong, and William S. Watterson were "all at work poisning the minds of the people as much as possible against old Jackson and all his frinds and particularly those that have been in their way." This unmistakable reference to Polk indicates that in the Sixth Congressional district the opposition was attacking all Jacksonians, with Polk as a special target. Yell reminded the Congressman that "upon the result of the Prest election depends our fate"; as a shrewd politician Polk must have known that this was true. He realized, however, that he had a loyal ally in Yell and

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[45]Although no definitive list of the political favors Polk performed could be recorded here, representative ones for this period are Polk to [Department of War], Dec. 10, 1827, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 105; James N. Smith to Polk, Feb. 13, 1828, in ibid., 148; William P. Smith to Polk, Feb. 15, 1828, in ibid., 151.

that the Bedford countian would do all he possibly could to thwart the Erwinites' moves.[46]

The presidential campaign of 1828 was fiercely fought and slanderous remarks were frequent. The Jacksonians charged that the Federalist Adams misused government funds and had years earlier employed corrupt practices to influence Czar Alexander of Russia. Erwin and his Tennessee clique published materials implicating Jackson in the Burr conspiracy and in slave trading, and numerous references were made concerning the irregularities of his marriage to Rachel. Genuine issues were hardly mentioned in the Tennessee campaign; the canvass was fought by factions still based on "common friendships and common enmities." Early in the spring of 1828, Polk outlined the proper strategy the Jacksonians should use to wage the contest. He declared that

> we should "carry the War into Africa." Not by asserting falsehoods as their habit is, but facts, many of which exist to their prejudice. We should defend only when necessary, and assail when proper, and when supported by truth.

As early as 1826 Polk, hearing of a plot to embarrass Old Hickory by asking him some tricky questions in public, had admonished Jackson to choose his words carefully when answering any queries.

> Without great care in the phraseology employed to convey our ideas, you know the plainest sentiment in the English language may be perverted, and by the uncandid made to mean any thing but what it was intended to mean.[47]

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[46]Joseph H. Wallace and William P. Martin to Polk, Mar. 28, 1828, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 173; Archibald Yell to Polk, Mar. 2, 1828, in ibid., 160-61, 161n; Polk to Andrew Jackson, Apr. 22, 1829, in ibid., 258.

[47]Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 297-98, 310-12; Andrew Jackson to ?, Nov. 10 [?], 1806, in Bassett, Jackson Correspondence, I, 152, 152n;

In a congratulatory letter to his constituents following the climax of the campaign, Polk played down his role in Jackson's victory, but the opposition thought it significant enough to mount a special effort to defeat him in the coming year's contest. Toward the end of 1828 Lunsford M. Bramlett apparently realized that the company of Andrew Erwin was not for him. Based on a Bramlett letter, it appears that the Polk-Bramlett rivalry ended and both men aligned themselves behind Jackson's banner. In addition, evidence exists which suggests that Bramlett and Polk worked together on a court case in late August 1828. Polk's conciliatory manner and the effort of all Democrats to solidify the party behind their candidate during the late stages of the presidential campaign returned Bramlett to the fold. Besides reuniting the party, Polk undoubtedly hoped to eliminate a potential competitor.[48]

Even though he received a report in mid-January that he had no competition, the Congressman sought to reinforce his Maury stronghold. Concentrating on the northeastern part of the county, he directed increased numbers of communications to that area. From Bedford County Jonathan Webster informed him in late February that "So far as I can learn your enemies are silent, and your friends satisfide." And when it

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Andrew Jackson to arbitrators, Feb. 29, 1812, in ibid., 217-20, 217n; Polk to Andrew Jackson, Apr. 13, 1828, in ibid., VI, 498. This letter also appears in the Papers of Andrew Jackson, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [Microfilm reproduction, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee], and in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 176; Polk to Andrew Jackson, Dec. 4, 1826, in ibid., 52, and in Bassett, Jackson Correspondence, III, 321.

[48]McCormac, Polk, 24-25; Lunsford M. Bramlett to Polk, Dec. 23, 1828, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 216-17; John H. Camp to Polk, Aug. 31, 1828, in ibid., 194.

came time to leave the capital for home, Polk knew that no opposition had yet materialized. Confident that he would run unopposed, the Congressman delayed his departure for three days, arriving in Columbia sometime toward the end of March 1829.[49]

Tennessee, to which Polk returned, was "politically the most important state in the Union" since the election of its favorite son to the presidency. Therefore, its political events would "exert a much greater influence on the affairs of the nation. . . ." Factors in Tennessee, however, made it inevitable that serious jealousies and animosities would develop. The state's unusually large number of very talented men, its unnatural one-party political arena, together with Jackson's elevation to the presidency and his lack of "tact and diplomacy" all contributed to the potential instability of state politics. And when the situation became so serious that a splinter of Jackson's Democrats formed an opposition party, Tennessee would enter the final stage of its evolutionary progress toward becoming a competitive two-party state.[50]

The election of 1829 was a relatively quiet one in Tennessee, possibly because the people were exhausted following Jackson's long campaign for the presidency. Writing to Old Hickory in May, William

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[49]George W. Barnett to Polk, Jan. 15, 1829, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 227; Burd S. Hurt to Polk, Feb. 16, 1829, in ibid., 239; Jonathan Webster to Polk, Feb. 20, 1829 in ibid., 243; James L. Edwards to Polk, Mar. 6, 1829, in ibid., 248; Kennedy, American Congress, 108.

[50]James, Raven, 71; Powell Moore, "The Political Background of the Revolt against Jackson in Tennessee," East Tennessee Historical Society's Publications, No. 4 (1932), 50-51.

Carroll commented on the various Congressional campaigns. "Our local elections in some parts of the state begin to make a noise but generally the contests will be carried on without much bitterness of feeling." Carroll noted the sharp battle between Cave Johnson, in his political debut, and incumbent John H. Marable, but thought the results of the other races so certain that he failed to comment on them. Only a few days prior to the election Carroll revealed the same state of affairs to Martin Van Buren. "With the exception of two or three congressional districts, and in some counties for the State Legislature we have little or no excitement."[51]

On August 6 and 7 Tennesseans went to the polls and as a formality reelected five congressmen, Polk among them, who ran unopposed. They also chose James Standifer to replace retiring James C. Mitchell. Of the three remaining incumbents who were forced to engage in an active canvass, only one was defeated. John H. Marable lost to Cave Johnson, the Jacksonian candidate. Tennesseans had voted to return seven out of eight Congressional incumbents who sought reelection. Thus the Jacksonians were able to add one to their ranks within the delegation. Carroll was once again elected governor in a noncompetitive race.[52]

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[51]William Carroll to Andrew Jackson, May 25, 1829, in Jackson Papers, LC; William Carroll to Martin Van Buren, Aug. 4, 1829, in Martin Van Buren Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. [Microfilm reproduction, University of Tennessee Library, Knoxville, Tennessee].

[52]Clement L. Grant, "The Public Career of Cave Johnson," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, X (Sept., 1951), 197-98; National Banner & Nashville Whig, May 26, Aug. 4, 1829; Niles' Weekly Register, Sept. 26, 1829; Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 299-300.

Although Sellers attributes Polk's lack of opposition to the demoralizing effect produced by his "convincing victory" over Bramlett two years before, it must be remembered that the latter had returned to the Jacksonian fold, severing his ties with Erwin, just at the time when party loyalty was becoming important in the state. It was highly unlikely that Bramlett would have opposed Polk. The Erwin forces marked Polk for defeat following Jackson's overwhelming victory, and the result of the presidential campaign had to have a demoralizing effect upon them. The simple reason why Polk was not opposed in 1829 was that the Erwinites could not produce a viable candidate, and this situation can most likely be attributed to their disastrous defeat in 1828. If they had won the presidential contest, Erwin would probably have opposed Polk; when Adams lost these plans were thrown into chaos. Sellers is correct in his conclusion that Polk "did not have to campaign to insure his reelection"; but following his 1827 victory and until he was positive that he would run unopposed, he prepared for a competitive race.[53]

It is evident that the election of 1828 affected Polk's 1829 campaign, and national affairs continued to have an increasingly strong influence on politics in the Congressman's district. Polk's own role in the national controversies of the 1830s and his elevation to the Speakership in 1835 influenced the electorate to a certain degree. Of the Congressman's four campaigns from 1831 to 1837, he ran unopposed in three. The 1833 campaign was the most bitterly contested canvass of his Congressional career. Two years later he waged his campaign on the

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[53]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 143.

controversial presidential issue, and party loyalty forced him to support the unpopular candidate. Although unopposed in 1835, Polk feared that a competitor would announce at any moment. In the 1837 campaign Polk accepted the reins of Tennessee's Democracy and became indirectly involved in campaigns all over the state.

CHAPTER III

THE IMPACT OF NATIONAL CONTROVERSY ON POLK'S CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS, 1831-1837

Less than a month after Polk's reelection in August 1829, his Bedford County friend, Archibald Yell, warned him that Andrew Erwin and Theodorick F. Bradford were already mounting a special effort to defeat him in 1831. Because Polk had supported Jonathan Webster, Bradford's successful opponent for the state senate, Erwin and Bradford blamed him for their defeat. Furthermore Erwin and Bradford boasted that they would defeat Polk with "the verry man you have elected," meaning that they would try to draw Webster into their camp and run him for Congress. Although Yell dismissed this possibility, it was widely known that Webster's true ambition was a seat in Congress. Yell speculated that Erwin and Bradford would finally settle on running circuit court Judge William E. Kennedy.[1]

By the year 1830 Polk had established himself as a "leading figure" in the House and President Jackson came to realize that he could always "count on the unfaltering support" of this ally from Middle Tennessee. As a result of his increased stature in Congress, Polk's constituents realized that he was well equipped to deal with their legislative needs and wants. In April 1830 one of his Lincoln County correspondents urged

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[1]Archibald Yell to Polk, Sept. 9, 1829, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 273-74, 275n, 76n.

him "to put down the Yankee petitions against Sunday mails. . . ." In general this Southerner asked his Congressman to ". . . Avert the Yankee strides to a Consolidated Government" and to "Keep the State Sovereignty untainted by interferance of the Judiciary. . . ." The people of Lincoln sought a reduction in the tariff on bailing materials, and pressed for the removal of the river obstructions which impeded commerce at Muscle Shoals and in their own Elk River.[2]

At the close of the first session of the twenty-first Congress Polk traveled home by "way of New York, up the great canal, visit[ed] the Falls of Niagara, and thence across the Lake and through Ohio & Ky." It was a vacation of sorts, his first since 1824, and one which he never would have taken in an election year. When he finally returned home, he embarked on a number of short trips throughout the district, and discovered that his popularity among his constituents was substantial. And as a symbol of good feeling, Polk's former opponent, Lunsford M. Bramlett, presided at a Pulaski dinner in the Congressman's honor. Polk, the politician, never missed an opportunity to address the people; he delivered, according to Sellers, a fine speech with a definite Jeffersonian bent.[3]

Upon his return to Washington in the fall of 1830, Polk learned of an effort to gerrymander the state's Congressional districts in the

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[2]Schlesinger, Age of Jackson, 61-62; William F. Smith to Polk, Apr. 20, 1830, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 315.

[3]Polk to [William Polk], May 1, 1830, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 318; Kennedy, American Congress, 112; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 149.

approaching reapportionment. Since this rearrangement was to be made by the General Assembly elected in August 1831, Governor Carroll and his faction were engaged in serious efforts to dominate that legislature so they could regroup the state's counties to suit themselves. One of Polk's Maury County associates, Terry H. Cahal, informed him of irregularities in the federal census taken in 1830. He revealed that sections of Maury County went unenumerated; and as a result, Bedford was shown to be more populous than Maury. Although the census did show Bedford to be the state's most populous county, Cahal argued that Maury actually contained more people. Because of this controversy, he promised a "warm contest" for the legislature.[4]

Polk did, however, receive some better news. A politico from a nearby district, on a visit to Maury, told the Congressman that "you are not to have opposition at the next election." Nevertheless, Polk franked into his district many printed copies of his committee report attacking the distribution of surplus revenue to the states. He charged that these funds were being used for internal improvements, which were not authorized by the Constitution. Finally, after a six-year evolution toward this stand, Polk uncategorically expressed opposition, on constitutional grounds, to internal improvements. Since this was an election year,

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[4]Samuel G. Smith to Polk, Nov. 10, 1830, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 340-41; Archibald Yell to Polk, Jan. 10, 1831, in ibid., 380; Terry H. Cahal to Polk, Jan. 31, 1831, in ibid., 387-88.

he must have either been almost sure of a favorable reaction by his constituents or positive that the would run unopposed.[5]

As Congress neared adjournment in the spring of 1831, Polk was very anxious to get home. He even considered leaving before adjournment so that he could get to Baltimore in time to catch the March 4 westward stage. Congress, however, accommodated Polk, adjourning on March 3, in plenty of time for him to catch his stage. He arrived in Columbia prior to March 28, 1831.[6]

When Polk reached Tennessee he found that the relationship among Jackson, Calhoun, and Van Buren constituted the major topic of discussion. Most of his constituents expressed regret over the recent Jackson-Calhoun alienation and revealed a suspicion of Van Buren. Cahal referred to the New Yorker as an opportunist; and Yell feared a party split, should Van Buren be pushed on the voters as Jackson's successor. Polk, realizing the explosive nature of this situation, refused to express an opinion on the subject even to such a close and devoted follower as Yell. Another important issue revolved around Congressman David Crockett and the federal government's land in Tennessee. Polk and Crockett had both worked in the recent Congress to have these lands ceded to the state, but at the last moment, Crockett opposed the measure, causing its defeat. In addition, the West Tennessee Congressman came out in open opposition

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[5]Jared S. Allen to Polk, Dec. 7, 1830, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 354; Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Mar. 1, 1831.

[6]Polk to Sarah Polk, Mar. 2 & 3, 1831, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 398-99; Polk to Andrew Jackson, Mar. 28, 1831, in ibid., 405; Kennedy, American Congress, 112.

to President Jackson. In an attempt to sabotage Crockett's reelection campaign and to help get a loyal Jacksonian elected in his place, Polk wrote five articles, intended for publication, entitled "Col. Crockett & his course in Congress." In these Polk exposed the West Tennessean's treachery.[7]

As in 1829, Polk ran unopposed and was reelected when the voters went to the polls on August 4 and 5, 1831. In this year of apparent political stability, the Tennessee electorate returned six of the nine congressmen it had elected in 1829. By this time Polk was becoming a popular figure throughout both the state and nation because he had been in Congress for so long, but more importantly, because he actively participated in party affairs as well as in Congressional legislative matters. The people of Knoxville recognized his stature and tendered him, along with favorite son Hugh Lawson White, a dinner just prior to their departure for Washington. Both politicians took this opportunity to address the crowd.[8]

By the time of Polk's election to the twenty-second Congress, he had built up a reputation as being a "frnd to the old Soldiers." His

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[7]Terry H. Cahal to Polk, Jan. 31, 1831, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 387; Archibald Yell to Polk, Mar. 31, 1831, in ibid., 403-404. These anti-Crockett articles Polk wrote have been erroneously classified with the 1836 papers by the Library of Congress. Actually they were written for use against Crockett in his Congressional campaign of 1831 or 1833. Their use here in the 1831 campaign does not distort the facts. The articles, in Polk's hand-writing, are found in Series 3 of the Polk Papers, LC.

[8]National Banner & Nashville Whig, Aug. 8, Nov. 14, 1831; Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Aug. 6, Aug. 9, Nov. 22, 1831; Miller, Political Manual, 175.

diligent attention to military pension applications was by this time known throughout the state. As a result, many Revolutionary veterans addressed him asking for aid. Archibald Yell, who considered this reputation very important politically, urged Polk to act promptly on all applications and especially on those with political significance. Irrespective of the popularity he attracted from this service, Polk ran into trouble on a more crucial issue, the United States Bank.[9]

The Bank was made an issue in the 1832 presidential campaign and a group of Polk's constituents held a well publicized pro-Bank meeting in Columbia on April 16. It attracted people from both sides of the issue but the resolution adopted instructed Polk to vote for a recharter of the Bank. His friends, however, were not idle. Taking an anti-monopoly stand, they presented a resolution which advocated the chartering of a second national bank should the present one be rechartered. This, they argued, would check the monopoly's inherent tendency toward corruption. Since the pro-Bank people controlled the meeting, this resolution failed to pass.[10]

Thomas Harney, in a letter to the Congressman, apologetically admitted that he had initiated the meeting. He said, however, that because Polk's feelings on the subject were not generally known, he thought it would be helpful to poll public opinion. After the first

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[9]Andrew Derryberry to Polk, Sept. 22, 1831, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 420; ibid., passim; Archibald Yell to Polk, Sept. 4, 1831, in ibid., 419, 420n.

[10]Columbia Western Mercury, Apr. 17, 1832; Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Apr. 21, 1832.

notices for the gathering had been circulated, Harney learned of Polk's opposition to the Bank and immediately acted to put a halt to the assembly; however, Polk's enemies, who also had learned of these events, pressed for a meeting and planned to use it to embarrass the Congressman.[11]

One of Polk's brothers-in-law, Andrew C. Hays, informed the Congressman that although the gathering of about 100 people did pass a pro-Bank resolution, a majority of the district's voters felt otherwise. Hays thought the meeting was an opposition scheme to stir up disaffection in preparation for an attempt to defeat Polk in the next election. Another Columbia resident told Polk not to concern himself with the meeting since "the whole proceeding was intended more to embarrass you than from any great solicitude on the subject." The assembly did, however, have its effect. Cahal, one of Polk's close Columbia associates, was converted to a pro-Bank stand by the debate; and although he remained in Polk's camp for a time, a split was in the making. And later in the month, the Maury County grand jury voted to instruct Polk to vote for the recharter bill then before Congress.[12]

Bedford County was also divided over the issue. Theodorick F. Bradford circulated a pro-Bank petition there and organized a pro-Bank

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[11]Thomas Harney to Polk, Apr. 16, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 457.

[12]Andrew C. Hays to Polk, Apr. 17, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 459-60; Charles C. Mayson to Polk, Apr. 18, 1832, in ibid., 461-62; Terry H. Cahal to Polk, May 4, 1832, in ibid., 470-73; Grand Jury of Maury County to Polk, Apr. 26, 1832, in ibid., 466-67; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 181.

meeting in Shelbyville. Bradford's actions indicated that he would oppose Polk in the next election and wished to place this issue before the public and declare his stand. Cahal considered Bradford's actions those of a candidate and reported that the Bedford countian would surely oppose Polk if Maury and Bedford remained in the same district after the reapportionment. Polk received detailed accounts of Bradford's activities from Jonathan Webster and was encouraged a bit by the news that the Bank issue had caused a split in his opponent's camp.[13]

In early 1832 Congress reapportioned its members among the states according to the results of the 1830 census, and, as Polk informed the district, Tennessee was awarded increased representation in the House. The state was entitled to 4 additional House members, thus increasing its delegation to 13. Because political considerations played a large role in the redistricting process, the General Assembly battled for months over the new arrangement. Early in August Polk realized that it would be nearly impossible for both Lincoln and Maury counties, his bastions of strength, to be placed in the same district. This was not his only matter of concern, however. Bradford was making serious attempts to gerrymander a district which would give him a significant advantage over Polk. The latter's cousin, state legislator Lucius Polk, suggested that Bradford's threat could be eliminated by placing Maury and Bedford in separate districts. Polk however, warned against such an arrangement.

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[13]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 181; Jonathan Webster to Polk, Apr. 25, May 3, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 464-65, 469; Terry H. Cahal to Polk, May 4, 1832, in ibid., 473.

> My opinion is that it would be a hazardous experiment, and might result very badly. If it were supposed that I favoured or even connived at the change, Or if my friends took an active part to effect it, the first impression would be that I had become alarmed. . . .

In regard to Bradford, Polk asserted that "I am ready to meet him '*at every point*' and do not fear the result. . . ." The Congressman attempted to extricate himself from the whole affair. While he conceded that Bradford had been "actively engaged to fix a District to suit himself," Polk retorted that "I must take them as he and others have chosen to make them."[14]

In the arrangement set by the General Assembly in October 1832, Bedford and Maury alone composed the new Ninth Congressional district. A great deal of gerrymandering occurred in the reapportionment and much resentment resulted. One modern student argues that an anti-Jacksonian legislator, who called the rearrangement a product of the Assembly's "ambition, favoritism, management, and juggling," was nearly expelled. Enough evidence exists, however, to indict both the Jacksonians and their opponents on charges of gerrymandering.[15]

Throughout November 1832 Polk, who was again in Washington, continuously received political reports from home. All of his friends

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[14]Shelbyville *Western Freeman*, Mar. 6, 1832; Polk to Andrew A. Kincannon, Aug. 15, 1832, in Weaver, *Polk Correspondence*, I,496; Polk to Lucius J. Polk, Oct. 19, 1832, in *ibid*., 513.

[15]Weaver, *Polk Correspondence*, I, 515n; James W. Wyly to Polk and James Standifer, Jan. 11, 1833, in *ibid*., II, 16-17; Miller, *Political Manual*, 29; Eric R. Lacy, "Crossroads in the Highlands: First District Congressmen and the Age of Jackson," East Tennessee Historical Society's *Publications*, No. 37 (1965), 24; *Niles' Weekly Register*, Oct. 20, 1832; William B. Campbell to David Campbell, Oct. 22, 1832, in Campbell Papers, DU.

expected a competitor to announce at any moment. Bradford still exhibited "a mysterious silence," but one of Polk's Bedford County informants revealed that since Bradford's Congressional bid would definitely cause a split in the opposition ranks, he would not run. Yell detected an even deeper rift in the opposition over Bradford's suspected candidacy. Finally, toward the end of the month, one confidant predicted that if Bradford did run he would make a poor showing, even in Bedford; therefore he would have no chance of success.[16]

Even before he suspected that Bradford would be his opponent, Polk franked many public documents and printed speeches into the district. Just as soon as he had learned that only Bedford and Maury would be in his district, Polk requested an up-to-date Bedford County mailing list from William Gilchrist and county deputy Kenneth L. Anderson. This list, containing 167 or so names also instructed Polk to send items to Jonathan Webster, who would distribute them to his neighbors. Next Polk obtained a list of Bedford County justices and their addresses from court clerk James McKisick. And soon after Jackson delivered his December message to Congress, Polk sent copies of it to the district.[17]

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[16]Erwin J. Frierson to Polk, Nov. 21, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 526-27; William M. Inge to Polk, Nov. 21, 1832, in ibid., 527; Archibald Yell to Polk, Nov. 25, 1832, in ibid., 533; Andrew A. Kincannon to Polk, Nov. 26, 1832, in ibid., 536.

[17]William Gilchrist to Polk, Nov. 18, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 520-22; James McKisick to Polk, Nov. 20, 1832, in ibid., 525. Among the letters proving that Polk sent an unusually large amount of mail into the district in this period are Isaac J. Thomas to Polk, Dec. 18, 1832, in ibid., 581; Thomas Collin to Polk, Jan. 16, 1833, in ibid., II, 25; Isaac J. Thomas to Polk, Dec. 24, 1832, in ibid., I, 588.

Late in 1832 the issue of mail routes predominated in Bedford County. The residents sought to change the route from Murfreesboro to Huntsville, Alabama, so that it would go through both Shelbyville and Fayetteville. While Bedford countians petitioned Congress, Kenneth L. Anderson personally advised Polk to work diligently for this change. Anderson recognized the political capital that could be gained from it. "My Own impresion is that if you Can procure its operation it will not only be a public benefit, but add much to your popularity." One of Polk's close Shelbyville associates, Erwin J. Frierson, even said that by obtaining this change for the citizens, Polk would "completely stop the mouths of your enemies in the County upon the only subject left them to harp upon." Polk, recognizing the importance Bedford countians placed on this issue, immediately set out to perform this service for his constituents.[18]

On November 27, 1832, Postmaster General William T. Barry informed Polk that beginning on April 1, 1833, the Murfreesboro-Huntsville mail route would go through Shelbyville and Fayetteville. Furthermore, the mail would be delivered three times weekly in a four-horse stage coach. On the following day Polk sent Barry's letter, enclosed in one of his own, to the editors of the Shelbyville Western Freeman. The Congressman told the editors that he had been constantly working to achieve this goal. The paper published both letters. In addition, the editors appended favorable editorial comments. Yell reported from Fayetteville

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[18]Kenneth L. Anderson to Polk, Nov. 19, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 523; Erwin J. Frierson to Polk, Nov. 21, 1832, in ibid., 526.

that Polk's aid had "given genrl sattisfaction and gained grate applause," and he predicted that "It will have the same effect in Bedford."[19]

During the presidential election of 1832 the anti-Masonic movement became popular, especially in the northeastern United States. It spread quickly as others opportunistically employed it to achieve their own ends. In late November 1832 the Shelbyville Western Freeman opined that although the anti-Masons represented only the fringe of society in Columbia, the people of Shelbyville and Bedford County were almost unanimously opposed to the principles of Masonry. Early in December this same paper asserted that throughout the past year it had "brought charges enough against Masonry . . . to damn it in the estimation of every honorable man . . ." and dared the fraternal members to come into the open and refute the allegations. McKay W. Campbell warned Polk that the anti-Masons and Bradford had formed an alliance to defeat the Congressman. He reported that "the 'Anti Mason' question will be much pressed . . ." and that the coalition planned to misrepresent Polk's stand on the various Revolutionary pension bills. Another of their stratagems was to bring out an opponent to Polk from Maury, since they felt assured of winning Bedford.[20]

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[19]Shelbyville Western Freeman, Jan. 8, 1833, Dec. 18, 1832; William T. Barry to Polk, Nov. 27, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 537; Polk to Harvey M. Watterson and John H. Laird, Nov. 28, 1832, in ibid., 541-42; Archibald Yell to Polk, Dec. 16, 1832, in ibid., 577.

[20]Shelbyville Western Freeman, Nov. 27, Dec. 4, 1832; McKay W. Campbell to Polk, Nov. 29, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 543-44.

Early in December, Jonathan Webster predicted that Bradford would oppose Polk and that he would stress the anti-Masonry issue. Realizing that the stand was gaining in popularity, Bradford had taken up the banner and had recently delivered a speech in the state senate attacking a prominent Tennessee Mason. Speculation concerning Bradford's future course, however, was rampant among all interested parties. Yell disclosed some ominous news late in the month when he noted that the Bedford opposition had announced Robert Cannon as a candidate for the state senate. Bradford, who had held this seat in the previous Assembly, had an excellent chance of reelection, but apparently he had other plans. The probability that he would be Polk's 1833 opponent continued to increase.[21]

Although Sellers does admit that anti-Masonry was Bradford's main campaign issue, he asserts that ". . . Polk does not seem to have been a Mason. . . ." He attributes Bradford's crusade to its proven popularity and effectiveness against the Jacksonians in the presidential race. Such an issue, having nothing whatsoever to do with his opponent, would seem to be an absurd weapon to choose, especially since Polk through sarcasm and wit could have easily demolished Bradford's irrelevant stand. Jackson, however, was a Mason; but attacks on Old Hickory at this time in Tennessee easily led to political suicide. The truth of the matter is that Polk himself was a Mason. He joined the Columbia

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[21]Jonathan Webster to Polk, [Dec. 6, 1832], in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 555; William J. Whitthorne to Polk, Dec. 15, 1832, in ibid., 573; Archibald Yell to Polk, Dec. 16, Dec. 27, 1832, in ibid., 576-78, 591.

lodge in 1820 and soon thereafter, transferred his membership to Nashville.[22]

In December 1832 Bradford put his strategy into effect. A published letter from MANY VOTERS which appeared in the Columbia Western Mercury, urged James Craighead to announce against Polk. James Walker learned from A.O.P. Nicholson, the paper's editor, that Thomas J., Parry W., and Jefferson Porter were behind this scheme to foster opposition to Polk from Maury. Walker, however, detected a political motive behind Nicholson's allegation; both the Porters and Polk supported Nicholson's opponent for the General Assembly. By implicating the Porters in this plot against Polk the editor may have hoped to cause a split. Nicholson then would have a good chance of enlisting Polk's support. In any case, Craighead ignored the newspaper appeal and Bradford had to hunt elsewhere for a Maury countian to run against Polk. Bradford hoped to dominate the Bedford vote while splitting Maury's vote. The Bedford countian delayed announcing as a candidate until he coaxed Thomas J. Porter to run for Congress against Polk.[23]

In 1832 Porter was Maury's county court clerk. He had succeeded his father, Joseph B. Porter, in that post, the latter having died in 1828. Just over a year after he became county court clerk, Thomas J.

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[22]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 203; Charles A. Snodgrass, The History of Freemasonry in Tennessee, 1789-1943 (Nashville, 1944), 395, 235-36; Columbia Herald, June 30, 1871, as cited in Garrett, Historical Sketches, 186.

[23]James Walker to Polk, Dec. 3, Dec. 11, 1832, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 549-50, 550n, 564; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 203.

Porter became a Columbia alderman. From information recorded in Maury's 1820 census, Porter was in his early to mid-30s when he ran for Congress. The Porter family was not only the earliest settlers in the south central portion of what was to become Maury County, but they were the first to reside south of the Duck River. Joseph B. Porter had worked with Polk's father in surveying North Carolina land claims located in Tennessee's western district, and eventually Thomas J. Porter took part in this endeavor. Polk's opponent undoubtedly was well known throughout Maury County and especially in Columbia. It is not exactly known when Porter announced for Congress, but based on the sarcastic tone of a letter he addressed to Polk late in December 1832 requesting a personal favor, he probably was then seriously considering the move. Porter declared himself sometime between the first week in February 1833 and early May when Bradford announced.[24]

After the first of the new year, Samuel H. Laughlin, editor of the Nashville Republican, requested that Polk subscribe to the National Intelligencer for him. Although stating that he disagreed with editor Joseph Gales' politics, Laughlin admitted that the Intelligencer

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[24]Weaver, Polk Correspondence, I, 15n, 329n, 324n, 203n; Thomas J. Porter to Polk, Dec. 23, 1832, in ibid., 586; Jonathan Webster and Moses Hart to Polk, Feb. 6, 1833, in ibid., II, 63; Columbia Western Mercury, Dec. 20, 1828, Jan. 10, 1829, the 1828 issue is also cited in Jill K. Garrett, ed. and comp., Maury County Tennessee Newspapers (Abstracts), 2 vols. (Columbia, Tenn., 1965), I, 23; Fleming, Sketch of Maury, 81; Goodspeed, History of Tennessee . . . Maury, 759; Patricia P. Clark, "A.O.P. Nicholson of Tennessee: Editor, Statesman, and Jurist" (M.A. thesis, University of Tennessee, 1965), 8; Jones, History of Mt. Pleasant, 29, 34; Columbia Herald, Sept. 15, 1871, as cited in Garrett, Historical Sketches, 193; Garrett, Maury . . . 1820 Census, 133; Nashville Republican & State Gazette, May 6, 1833.

faithfully reported the news. Laughlin specifically wanted Gales' accurate accounts of Polk's speeches to copy in the Republican. Editor Nicholson of the Columbia Western Mercury, also seeking newspaper copy, asked the Congressman to keep the paper informed of his activities. Although Nicholson reported on February 7 that Polk had no opposition, he conceded that Bradford continued to act like a candidate, circulating actively throughout Bedford County. As late as February 1833, some rumors had it that Bradford would run, while others denied this.[25]

The hectic second session of the twenty-second Congress had to deal with both the Nullification crisis and the Force Bill. Although these crucial issues kept Polk from officially declaring his candidacy for reelection as early as he usually did, they provided a basis for some very exciting debate. Polk's major contribution came on January 21, 1833, when he presented the Ways and Means Committee's report advocating a tariff reduction. This speech, reproduced in the press certainly kept the Congressman's name before the people, and Polk's stand was certainly in line with Tennesseans' anti-Nullification and low tariff views. In addition, Polk's role in the mail route change was still earning him political capital. Archibald Yell reported that it "has been a quietus upon Theo. It has done you more service in Bedford than all your Big speeches in Congress. . . ." Yell predicted that Bradford would not run and that Polk would be reelected unopposed. Shelbyville's John H.

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[25]Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, Jan. 8, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 11, 12n; A.O.P. Nicholson to Polk, Feb. 7, [1833], in ibid., 65-66, I, 460n; Jonathan Webster to Polk, Jan. 15, 1833, in ibid., II, 22; Thomas Collin to Polk, Jan. 16, 1833, in ibid., 25.

Anderson confirmed that the mail route change had denied Bradford his most formidable weapon. Apparently he had previously advocated a mail route change or had attacked Polk for not being able to bring about the desired change. Bradford continued to act like a candidate, although Jonathan Webster informed Polk that as of February 6 no opponent had stepped forward.[26]

Just as soon as Congress adjourned Polk rushed back to Columbia, arriving on March 21. Less than a month after his return he kicked off his campaign by delivering a speech to the people on the first day of Maury's circuit court session. Polk, realizing that he was wide open to anti-Masonic charges, determined to overshadow that controversy by making the Bank of the United States the key issue of the campaign. He could point to his March 1 Ways and Means minority report, which attacked the Bank and the decision to create it. Joshua Caldwell judged that "A consequence of this report was that the friends of the Bank everywhere declared war on him," and thereby played into Polk's hands. Polk had complete confidence that upon this issue he could successfully fight Bradford.[27]

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[26]Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Feb. 20, 1833; Archibald Yell to Polk, Jan. 16, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 28; John H. Anderson to Polk, Jan. 25, 1833, in ibid., 47-48; Jonathan Webster and Moses Hart to Polk, Feb. 6, 1833, in ibid., 63; Paul H. Bergeron, "Tennessee's Response to the Nullification Crisis," Journal of Southern History, XXXIX (Feb., 1973), 31-44.

[27]Polk to Clement C. Clay, Mar. 25, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 78; Stephen Adams to Polk, Mar. 24, 1834, in ibid., 374; Caldwell, Bench and Bar of Tennessee, 177; Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Apr. 29, 1833.

In his April 15, 1833, speech, Polk asserted that his enemies, both within the district and those of the Nashville junto, who had charged him with attacking the credit and commerce of Tennessee, misrepresented his stand on the Bank. He criticized the National Banner for distorting his Ways and Means minority report, which had advocated an investigation of the Bank. Furthermore, this misrepresentation occurred while Polk was out of the area and unable to defend himself. He implicated James Erwin and the Bank itself in a conspiracy to flood his district with pamphlets attacking his committee report. He charged that those pamphlets were written even before the report itself was made public and therefore had no basis in fact. In addition, Polk pointed out that this interference in his district was done for the express purpose of having him defeated.[28]

Shifting to the offensive, the Congressman explained that the committee report had nothing to do with credit. It simply advocated an investigation to determine if the Bank was being managed properly. He referred to the Bank's attempt to delay the payment of the national debt so it could engage in a foreign transaction as evidence that mismanagement existed. Appealing to the people's love for Jackson, he reminded them that the President had requested an investigation of the Bank. Turning the tables on his enemies, Polk asserted that the institution's profits were a drain on the section's already deficient currency supply. The speech was considered so successful and convincing that it was copied in the district papers as well as in the Washington Globe. Upon Polk's

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[28]Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Apr. 29, 1833.

request, copies of the latter newspaper were distributed throughout the district. In spite of Polk's speech, the Bank issue remained a thorn in his side. William B. Lewis wrote the President that "The bank people are doing all they can against Polk. . . ."[29]

After five months of sub rosa campaigning Bradford in early May announced his candidacy. He had Polk exactly where he wanted him. The three-man race was between two candidates from Maury and one from Bedford. Bradford, who had succeeded Andrew Erwin as the leader of the Bedford County opposition, had established himself as the pro-Bank advocate in the Tennessee legislature. Bradford felt at home with the United States Bank question.[30]

When Polk charged the Bank and its Nashville supporters with interference in his district he was totally correct. Two years later MANY VOTERS testified to this in a letter to the press, and just after the 1833 election Polk wrote Francis P. Blair that

> . . . the whole power of the Bank, through its organ here, (The "Banner") was brought to bear on my Congressional District. Throughout the whole contest too, I had to contend with the secret influence of the bank. . . .

In a letter to William B. Lewis, Polk expressed the same sentiments. Specifically, these Bank men, just prior to the election, secretly printed an extra edition of the National Intelligencer in the Nashville Banner's office and flooded Polk's district with copies. This sheet,

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[29]Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Apr. 29, 1833; William B. Lewis to Andrew Jackson, Apr. 21, 1833, in Jackson Papers, LC.

[30]Nashville Republican & State Gazette, May 6, 1833; Sellers, "Banking and Politics," 82-83.

capitalizing on the reputation of the Washington paper, was filled with anti-Polk and pro-Bank material. To counter these fake Intelligencers the Congressman published one of Bradford's earlier pro-Bank speeches to the Tennessee legislature. These circulars were then distributed widely.[31]

Polk also had a trump card up his sleeve. Early in May, he addressed a letter to Andrew J. Donelson, the President's nephew and private secretary, asking him to obtain either extracts or full copies of the letters written in 1827 recommending Bradford for the post of marshal of West Tennessee. These would prove that he had been an Adams supporter and therefore hostile to the people's hero, Andrew Jackson. On May 30, 1833, Donelson sent extracts from 5 of the 13 letters but warned Polk not to use the information publicly or ever to reveal its source. Donelson had copied parts of the letters without the consent of the Secretary of State. In hopes of reinforcing this incriminating evidence, Polk, soon after he received the extracts, asked the Secretary to send him official copies of the letters. His request was refused; a Department rule prohibited such practices. The Congressman ignored Donelson's warning and effectively used information from the extracts.[32]

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[31]Shelbyville Western Freeman, May 29, 1835; Polk to Francis P. Blair, Aug. 8, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 97-98; Polk to William B. Lewis, Aug. 13, 1833, in ibid., 99; William H. Stephens to Polk, Jan. 18, 1834, in ibid., 258. Although Stephens does say he delivered circulars for Polk, he does not give a date. Placing the event in 1833 does not distort the facts. McCormac, Polk, 35.

[32]Paul H. Bergeron, "Politics and Patronage in Tennessee During the Adams and Jackson Years," Prologue, II (Spring, 1970), 20; Andrew J. Donelson to Polk, May 30, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 80-81, 81n, 82n. Although this citation indicates that no envelope has been

In the meantime the opposition found another issue to use against Polk. Pamphlets written by MUHLENBURG stated that he had voted against a pension bill in the last Congress that would have benefitted Revolutionary veterans. The writer also addressed communications to the district press labeling Polk a hypocrite for advancing an expedient position in the district and then advocating another in Congress. MUHLENBURG argued that such an unreliable representative should be replaced. The editor of the Shelbyville Western Freeman invited Polk to respond to these accusations.[33]

The Congressman answered in a circular letter to his constituents on June 12, 1833. He admitted that he had voted against pension bills but for good reasons. Polk hoped that military pensions would be extended to all soldiers of the Revolution and to their widows, and not be restricted just to the continental line troops. He had voted against bills not conforming to these guidelines. Polk also opposed various bills which would have granted pensions to the wealthy veterans who had no need of them and therefore had never applied for them. Polk emphatically stated that he sought a pension plan that would embrace all

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found, one has been discovered in Series 9 of the Polk Papers, LC. This envelope, addressed from Donelson to Polk, bears a June 1 postmark but has been erroneously classified by the Library of Congress with the 1831 papers. Polk's notation confirms the belief that this envelope brought the extracts to him. Polk to Louis McLane, June 24, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 87, 87n; Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Apr. 28, 1835, in ibid., III, 170-71.

[33]McCormac, Polk, 35, erroneously states that the author of these pamphlets was "Muhlenging"; Shelbyville Western Freeman, June 4, 1833.

soldiers of the Revolution who had need of such aid; and in this circular he showed that he had consistently voted with this principle. To bolster his defense against these anti-Revolutionary pension attacks, Polk solicited letters from fellow congressmen Cave Johnson, John Blair, Clement C. Clay, and William T. Fitzgerald which confirmed the views expressed in his circular letter.[34]

By the time Polk sought these letters, however, he was confident of reelection. Near the end of June, he expressed this opinion in a letter to one of his closest friends, Cave Johnson. He revealed that other attacks against him had been based on his vote against an appropriation for the military academy, his support of a move to repeal the twenty-fifth section of the Judiciary Act of 1789, and his vote in favor of John Randolph's diplomatic mission to Russia. Polk, however, triumphantly reported that "All these . . . have been met and in succession put down."[35]

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[34]Columbia Western Mercury, June 17, 1833. Only two copies of this newspaper are known to exist and both are found in the Polk Papers, LC, Series 2 and 11. Cave Johnson to Polk, June 25, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 88-89; John Blair to Polk, June 26, 1833, in ibid., 91-92; Clement C. Clay to Polk, July 2, 1833, in ibid., 93; William T. Fitzgerald to Polk, July 3, 1833, in ibid., 94-95.

[35]Polk to Cave Johnson, June 20, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 85. This letter is also found in St. George L. Sioussat, ed., "Letters of James K. Polk to Cave Johnson, 1833-1848," Tennessee Historical Magazine, I (Sept. 1915), 211-12. The twenty-fifth section of the Judiciary Act of 1789 authorized the Supreme Court to review the rulings of state courts and the Jacksonians' opposition to this action stemmed from the Jackson-Supreme Court duel over the Indian situation in Georgia. Bradford also had been charging Polk with voting for a large appropriation for Randolph's mission to Russia which lasted only 10 days because the diplomat could not stand the cold. Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 161, 204.

At the climax of the most turbulent campaign of his career up to this point, Polk was returned to Congress. As illustrated in Table VI, he received a tremendous 69 percent of the vote to Porter's 22 percent, and Bradford's 10 percent. Oddly enough, his most vocal opponent received the smallest vote total. Bradford's strategy apparently hurt his cause; Porter did not draw many Polk votes but probably offered some voters an anti-Polk option. Maury remained Polk's stronghold, where he obtained 73 percent of the vote. Maury's other candidate, Porter, received 25 percent of its votes to Bradford's barely measurable 2 percent. Bradford did not even carry his home county of Bedford; Polk captured it with a 63 percent tally, while Bradford received 19 percent and Porter 18 percent. Polk was reelected in a year when Tennesseans returned five of the nine congressmen chosen in 1831 and sent eight new representatives to Congress.[36]

Although the campaign was vocal and hard-fought, the election results showed a runaway landslide for Polk. Powell Moore has pointed out that Polk's political success in the 1830s was, in part, due to his prominence in Congress, which both increased his standing among Tennessee politicos and brought some degree of pride to the Ninth district voters. This historian reminds us that "Although the Columbia district was in one of the rich plantation and slaveowning regions of the state, generally Whig in later years, Polk was never beaten in a congressional election."[37]

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[36]Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Aug. 3, Aug. 6, 1833; Niles' Weekly Register, Aug. 24, 1833.

[37]Moore, "Polk: Tennessee Politician," 494.

TABLE VI

RESULTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION OF 1833 IN TENNESSEE'S NINTH DISTRICT

Candidate	Vote By Counties		Ninth District Totals
	Maury	Bedford	
Polk	2,782	1,969	4,751
Porter	961	551	1,512*
Bradford	79	592	671
Vote Total	3,822	3,112	6,934
Total 1833 Voters	4,093	4,277	8,370
Percent Turnout	93	73	83

*The Republican gives Porter's total as 1,413 but the sum of his Maury and Bedford totals equal 1,512.

Source: Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Aug. 6, 1833.

Curiously, the turnout of eligible voters in 1833 was considerably lower than in previous elections. Voter participation was 83 percent, very high compared with twentieth century figures, but substantially lower than that of 1825 (91 percent) or 1827 (98 percent). One possible explanation for this decreased turnout was the severe cholera epidemic that swept through the district during that summer. Because of the disease people avoided the population centers, preferring health and life to participation in the democratic process and possible death. Moreover, the deaths caused by the disease necessarily decreased the voting population to some degree.[38]

In the course of the 1833 canvass Polk heard that Speaker of the House Andrew Stevenson was to be appointed to a diplomatic mission. Hence, Polk decided to seek the speakership and immediately after the election asked Cave Johnson to test party opinion and enlist support for his bid. As it turned out Stevenson did not receive the appointment, and Polk was elevated to the chairmanship of the House Ways and Means Committee instead. From this position he led the Jacksonian majority in the lower chamber and enlarged the scope of his committee to encompass the President's pet issues and insure their passage. Jackson, well pleased with Polk's work, heaped praise upon the Congressman in a Nashville speech. His elevation to this prestigious post and the

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[38]Nashville Republican & State Gazette, June 12, June 14, June 24, July 3, July 5, July 22, 1833; Archibald Yell to Polk, July 10, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 95; James Campbell to David Campbell, July 22, 1833, in Campbell Papers, DU.

substantial contribution he was thus able to make toward furthering the Jacksonian program brought him nationwide acclaim.[39]

In early December 1833, Columbia Western Mercury editor A.O.P. Nicholson again asked Polk to send him information suitable for publication; and at the very end of the year Polk supplied material to Nicholson, as well as to many of the nation's other newspaper editors. On December 30 and January 2 he replied to George McDuffie's speech defending the Bank of the United States. Polk asserted that the Bank's "'irresponsibility'" made the withdrawal of the government deposits "'necessary.'" This speech, possibly the most effective of Polk's career, was printed and 500 copies distributed to his constituents. Moreover it received considerable attention in both the district and national press. This effort catapulted Polk higher into the political ranks of the Jacksonians themselves and thus transformed him into a national political figure. Although he certainly enjoyed the national recognition, the reaction of his constituents was more important to him. He knew they would react favorably, since he had merely followed the mandate the voters had given him in August 1833. Andrew C. Hays reported that "this speech, has done more for you than any other

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[39]McCormac, Polk, 47, 37-43; William Carroll to Andrew Jackson, Aug. 9, 1833, in Jackson Papers, LC; Polk to William B. Lewis, Aug. 13, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 99-100, and also in "Calendar of the Jackson-Lewis Letters, 1806-1864," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, IV (Sept.,1900); reprint ed., 1971, p. 314; Polk to Cave Johnson, Sept. 26, 1833, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 110, and in Sioussat, "Polk-Johnson Letters," 213.

act of your public life. . . ." Thomas Lacy testified that it had even won Polk some converts from the opposition camp.[40]

In June 1834 when Stevenson did resign in favor of a diplomatic post, Polk and fellow Tennessean, John Bell, vied for the speakership. Although the President seemed to stand aloof, it was understood in Congress that he preferred Polk. Bell received the support of a few Jacksonians and when the opposition saw that none of its candidates could win, it coalesced behind Bell to defeat Polk, the reputed administration candidate. Polk's reaction to this defeat was not simply disappointment; he felt cheated and in modern terms he would be called a "poor loser."[41]

Although Bell was still within the Jacksonian ranks, Polk believed that the new Speaker was leaning toward the opposition. As an act of revenge and to justify his loss, he set out to prove that Bell was

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[40]A.O.P. Nicholson to Polk, Dec. 5, [1833], in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 158; ibid., x; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 215-18; Nashville Republican & State Gazette, Jan. 16, Jan. 18, Jan. 23, May 29, 1834. For proof that Polk sent many copies of this speech into the district and that it experienced a very favorable reception, see Samuel P. Walker to Polk, Jan. 21, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 270; Andrew C. Hays to Polk, Feb. 9, 1834, in ibid., 302-303; Thomas J. Lacy to Polk, Feb. 5, 1834, in ibid., 294-95; Isaac J. Thomas to Polk, Jan. 20, 1834, in ibid., 260-61; Boling Gordon to Polk, Apr. 28, 1834, in ibid., 394-95.

[41]For various views of the 1834 speakership election, see Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 315; Joseph H. Parks, John Bell of Tennessee (Baton Rouge, 1950), 70-72; Moore, "Polk: Tennessee Politician," 494; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 234-42; and for contemporary accounts, see [Martin], "Political Portraits," 207; John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1918, 3 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1920), II, 226n; and for the President's viewpoint, see Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Hutchings, June 30, 1838 (?), in Bassett, Jackson Correspondence, V, 554-55.

actually an enemy of the Democracy. As Lucien Chase wrote in 1850 regarding Polk, this "Disaster only had the effect of arousing his powers, and stimulated him to win victory. . . ." Polk realized that if Bell could be railroaded out of the party, his own path to the Speaker's chair would be unimpeded.[42]

When the Congressional session ended on June 30, 1834, Polk "returned to Tennessee in haste to spread the rumor that Bell had gone over to the opposition. . . ." James Walker, at Polk's request, attempted to get anti-Bell articles published in the Nashville newspapers. These newspapers, besides having the largest circulation of any in the state, were located in Bell's district. Walker's efforts were largely unsuccessful, although he did get a few mild articles into the National Banner. He did, however, convince the Columbia Observer and several other local sheets to take up Polk's standard. Walker then reported back to Polk that Bell must not only be publicly connected with the United States Bank, but he also had to be classified among Jackson's opposition and identified as the anti-Jacksonian candidate for Speaker. Walker predicted that "if we can get the Ball in motion and the discussion commenced, Mr. B. will be placed in a very awkward predicament."[43]

Cave Johnson and brother-in-law James Walker urged Polk, however, to abandon his crusade against Bell and run for the governorship. Obviously they feared that another defeat at Bell's hands would irreparably harm

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[42]Parks, Bell, 72; Chase, Polk Administration, 11.

[43]Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 315; Parks, Bell, 73; James Walker to Polk, June 24, June 30, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 433-34, 435-36.

Polk's political career; they believed that Polk would be almost guaranteed to win a statewide campaign, even though the Congressman's strength had never been tested outside of his district. On the other hand, Andrew C. Hays, another brother-in-law, advised against such a move, arguing that "Your friends I do not believe would consent to your leaving the District to offer for Governor." In addition, Hays reported that Polk's most serious 1833 opponent, Thomas J. Porter, had retired from politics and was considering a move to Mississippi. In any case, Polk was intent on carrying out his attack on Bell as a prelude to an all-out drive for the speakership in December 1835. Before this, however, Polk had to seek reelection.[44]

Many congressmen supported him in his fight with Bell. In the summer of 1834 Polk had solicited their letters expressing views upon the recent speakership contest. In addition, the people of Tennessee generally seemed to favor Polk over Bell. At Fourth of July celebrations, both in and outside of his district, he was honored in toasts while Bell was vilified. In the Ninth district Polk's political friends and former enemies joined to offer him a testimonial dinner in Columbia on August 12. After "a splendid dinner" the following toast, among many other non-scheduled ones in the same vein, was offered:

> Hon. James K. Polk. — Our esteemed fellow citizen and faithful representative in Congress — though not the Speaker of the House, we hail him the able Speaker for the people.

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[44]James Walker to Polk, June 30, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 436; Cave Johnson to Polk, July 15, 1834, in ibid., 438-39; Andrew C. Hays to Polk, Dec. 24, 1834, in ibid., 593-94.

Following his introduction and the crowd's "repeated burst of applause," Polk addressed the people in a relatively non-partisan and patriotic effort.[45]

According to James Phelan, the period "From December, 1834, to the loss of Tennessee by Polk in 1844, may be called the decade of partisan fury. . . ." A more recent scholar, Richard P. McCormick, comes to the same conclusion when he argues that following a decade of intense factional rivalry, partisan divisions found a basis in "a combination of personal rivalries and antagonism to Van Buren. . . ." This opposition to Jackson began to form in 1823 upon Old Hickory's move from the state to the national political arena. From then until 1834 Jackson's personal popularity stifled his enemies; but in that year an opposition leadership was able to develop. Between 1834 and 1839 they evolved toward an alliance with the national Whig party.[46]

Personalities had always been significant in Tennessee politics but in 1834 an explosive issue was cast into the political arena which was responsible for the development of a viable two-party system. This issue surrounded Jackson's successor to the presidency. It had been well known since 1832 that he favored Van Buren; but most Tennesseans considered the New Yorker an opportunist who had once opposed Jackson and

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[45]For these numerous letters concerning the 1834 speakership election, see Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 466, 481-82, 445, 482-83, 483-84, 497, 497-99, 510-11, 511-12, 513-14, 515-17; Fayetteville Independent Yeoman, July 31, 1834; Columbia Observer, July 11, Aug. 8, 1834; Pulaski Tennessee Beacon & Farmers' Advocate, Oct. 17, 1834.

[46]Phelan, History of Tennessee, 357; McCormick, Second American Party System, 222-23; Moore, "Background of Revolt against Jackson," 45.

who now was using Old Hickory to further his own ambitions. As an alternative to Van Buren, most Tennesseans hoped that another favorite son, Hugh Lawson White, would succeed Jackson. The President's supporters, however, lined up behind his choice. During the summer and fall of 1834 the cry for White became much stronger. The people meant no disrespect toward Jackson, but they just naturally wished that another Tennessean could be elected President. Moreover, White's popularity in the state was second only to that of Jackson. The President, however, continued to insist on Van Buren and this fragmented the Tennessee Democracy. This schism was based strictly on personalities since both presidential hopefuls' stand on the issues was nearly identical.[47]

Late in August 1834 Polk, presumably, first learned of the movement to nominate White for the presidency. Robert M. Burton informed the Congressman that a caucus of Bank men had made such an attempt but that the Jackson forces had broken it up. Jackson, hearing about the movement at the same time, promised to ruin White politically should he become a candidate. In a letter to Polk, White related Jackson's threat; but Polk, replying in disbelief, confirmed the President's friendship toward White, and attributed the threat to "an interested source." White later claimed that Polk in 1834 knew nothing of Jackson's preference for Van Buren, which is highly unlikely. Furthermore, White charged that as soon as the word came down from Jackson, Polk adjusted

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[47]Sioussat, "Polk-Johnson Letters," 214-17; Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 314-15, 324; Powell Moore, "The Revolt against Jackson in Tennessee, 1835-1836," Journal of Southern History, II (Aug., 1936), 339.

his stand to coincide with the President's. In mid-September Polk's hometown newspaper came out for White, an ominous sign for the Congressman. This, however, was only the beginning of his newspaper problems. Both of the Nashville papers and many local sheets that had shown partiality toward Bell immediately took up the White banner. Bell threw his support to White out of sheer expediency; in the past Jackson had exhibited hostility toward him and now Bell's battle with Polk had alienated him from his fellow Democrats. Bell had to choose between supporting White and abandoning his political career.[48]

Before Polk returned to Washington in the fall of 1834 he made provisions for the establishment of a Jackson organ in Nashville. His plans to purchase one of the two major Nashville papers had failed and therefore he was forced to found another one. Progress toward this end was deliberate but slow throughout the fall and winter of 1834-35. In the meantime, feeling the need for outlets he tried to gain the support of local sheets, both in and outside of his district, to enlist in his war against Bell and White. Specifically he made inquiries in regard to the Pulaski Tennessee Beacon. Polk clearly realized that newspapers played an important role in the electoral process. As J. C. Guild recalled years later, "newspapers were partizan organs, and their influence in shaping public sentiment and controlling elections . . ."

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[48]Robert M. Burton to Polk, Aug. 27, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 462; Polk to Hugh L. White, Sept. 2, 1834, in Nancy N. Scott, ed., A Memoir of Hugh Lawson White (Philadelphia, 1856), 254-55, and also in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 470-71; Columbia Observer, Sept. 19, 1834; Frank B. Williams, Jr., "Samuel Hervey Laughlin, Polk's Political Handyman," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XXIV (Winter, 1965), 359; Moore, "Revolt against Jackson," 338-39.

was crucial. And between 1835 and 1839, according to Powell Moore, the Democrats' greatest weakness was the "Lack of adequate newspaper support. . . ."[49]

Before Congress convened in December 1834 hundreds of pro-Bank and anti-Polk pamphlets were sent into the Ninth district; and to counter their effect, Polk franked Jackson's December 1834 message into the area. It was certain that Bell was behind these pamphlets and the Polk-Bell feud continued to escalate. The two Tennesseans carried their battle into the halls of Congress. Late in December their antagonism and the Jackson-Van Buren-White controversy entered a new phase. On December 23 the entire Tennessee Congressional delegation, except for Polk, John Blair, and Senator Felix Grundy, met and recommended White for the presidency. The men solicited White's consent and publicized their actions in February 1835. A controversy arose over Cave Johnson's role in the meeting. Although Johnson definitely attended the gathering and seemed to have opposed White's candidacy, the pro-White men tried to implicate Johnson, Polk, and Grundy in their effort to bring out White. They asserted that Johnson spoke for Polk and Grundy and that he wholeheartedly supported the move to nominate White.[50]

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[49]Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, Oct. 20, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 534-37; Alfred Flournoy to Polk, Sept. 30, 1834, in ibid., 512-13; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 249; Josephus C. Guild, Old Times in Tennessee with Historical, Personal, and Political Scraps and Sketches (Nashville, 1878), 142; Moore, "Polk: Tennessee Politician," 499.

[50]Charles Cassedy to Polk, Sept. 26, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 508; James Y. Green to Polk, Dec. 25, 1834, in ibid., 601; Spivey McKissick to Polk, Dec. 28, 1834, in ibid., 612; Polk to James Walker, Dec. 24, 1834, in ibid., 599-601; ibid., xi; James Graham to William A. Graham, Dec. 8, 1834, in J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, ed.,

Realizing that the controversy over Cave Johnson's role in the December caucus would come out in the press, the Jacksonians prepared for it. Polk, Johnson, and Grundy wrote letters to each other which vouched for their respective roles in the caucus and their feelings regarding White's candidacy. The White supporters were accusing Johnson of taking one stand in the caucus and another after it adjourned. Late in February 1835, through an exchange of insulting and trivial letters, White on the one hand and Polk and Johnson, on the other, broke friendly relations. It seems as if Polk, Johnson, and White all wanted the break, yet they concluded their correspondence in a conciliatory manner.[51]

Near the end of December 1834, Polk expressed his opinion of White's candidacy to James Walker. Polk revealed that although he liked White and would support him if he were the party's candidate, he feared that a split in Democratic ranks would cause both candidates (White and Van Buren) to be defeated. A day later Polk told Walker that Jackson had learned of Bell's intrigues to bring out White. Realizing now that he

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The Papers of William Alexander Graham, 4 vols. to date (Raleigh, 1957-), 336; Scott, White Memoir, 259-62. This December 23 caucus decided to address a letter to White requesting permission to enter his name as a candidate for president. The entire Tennessee Congressional delegation signed this document except Johnson, Polk, and Grundy. This possibly sheds some light on the position Johnson actually took at the gathering.

[51]Polk to Cave Johnson, Jan. 7, 1835, Sioussat, "Polk-Johnson Letters," 219, and in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 20-21. For Polk's account of Felix Grundy's and Cave Johnson's role in the December caucus and their views of White's candidacy, see the letters in ibid., 65-66, 20-21, 147-48. For the exchange of correspondence between Polk, Johnson, and White which led to their split, see ibid., 110-18. Some of these letters also appear in Scott, White Memoir, 256-59.

and Jackson were on one side of the political fence while Bell was on the other, Polk wanted to do nothing to jeopardize his advantageous position.

> Whatever our personal preferences for men may be, as patriots we should go for the good of the country, and to that end should avoid divisions, and preserve if possible the integrity of the party.

In other words, Polk had decided to support the candidate chosen at the Democratic convention to be held in Baltimore in May 1835; this candidate undoubtedly would be Jackson's own preference, Martin Van Buren.[52]

As soon as Tennesseans learned that White would allow himself to be a presidential candidate they rallied behind his banner. In the Ninth district two scheduled pro-White meetings were cancelled because of bitter cold weather. Finally on February 12 a meeting was held in Columbia and on March 28, one was held in Shelbyville. Resolutions supporting White for the presidency resulted from these 1835 gatherings. Polk discovered that friends as well as enemies had come out for White and that his enemies were trying to connect his name with Van Buren's. When Polk learned of these events he instructed James Walker to inform the people that the opposition hoped to divide the Democracy through White's candidacy and thus throw the election into the House. There

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[52]Polk to James Walker, Dec. 24, Dec. 25, 1834, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, II, 598-99, 604-605.

they hoped to elect one of their own candidates to the presidency. In other words, White was simply being used by the Whigs.[53]

Walker, recognizing the explosive nature of this issue, advised Polk to keep his opinions to himself. "It will be well for you to be cautious at present on this question. Your course yet cannot affect you." He offered to act as Polk's sounding board and would let the Congressman know what he could say without angering the voters. Van Buren's supporters were not idle. Jonathan Webster held a barbecue for Van Buren's supporters and in Columbia a Van Buren militia company was formed to check the influence of its White counterpart.[54]

Polk continued to receive reports of White's increasing strength and at the end of February, James Walker still urged him to avoid discussing White's candidacy. Walker informed the Congressman that the state probably would not send delegates to the Baltimore convention and that Tennessee's electoral votes would almost surely go to White. At this same time the Tennessee Congressional delegation published its correspondence with White, making him an official candidate. The Jacksonians' strategy was to urge the people to support the choice of the upcoming Baltimore convention. They kept the unpopular Van Buren's name in the background and did not outwardly attack the popular White. The White men argued that they were upholding the original Jacksonian

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[53]James Walker to Polk, Feb. 8, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 90; James H. Thomas to Polk, Feb. 12, 1835, in ibid., 97; Polk to James Walker, Feb. 7, 1835, in ibid., 88; Nashville Republican, Jan. 31, Feb. 17, Apr. 9, 1835; Shelbyville Western Freeman, Feb. 20, 1835.

[54]James Walker to Polk, Feb. 12, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 98; Jones, History of Mt. Pleasant, 41.

principles but refrained from attacking Old Hickory. From Washington, Polk tried to initiate a movement to elect delegates to the party's convention. James Walker endeavored to accomplish this feat but also tried to keep his and Polk's involvement secret.[55]

As soon as the twenty-third Congress adjourned on March 3, 1835, Polk journeyed to Baltimore, and three days later, caught a stage for home. He had been planning his trip since mid-February and when he discovered that this was the earliest stage available, he considered chartering a special stage. Even though he realized that events in Tennessee were critical, he decided to wait for the March 6 stage. In any case, he arrived home during the third week of that month.[56]

Soon after Polk reached Columbia the first number of the newly founded Jacksonian organ in Nashville appeared. The Nashville Union, edited by Samuel H. Laughlin, "was a subsidized party organ." "The truth, as Laughlin presented it, was one-sided, and only his friends promoted the public welfare." Laughlin's caustic pen not only helped to remedy the Jacksonians' deficiency in newspaper support, but also blunted the Bell-White group's desperate fight to win as many Congressional seats in 1835 as possible. The opposition hoped to build up its ranks in Congress, because it expected the presidential election to be

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[55]Samuel G. Smith to Polk, Feb. 13, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 99-100; James Walker to Polk, Feb. 28, Feb. 24, 1835, in ibid., 119, 110; Pulaski Tennessee Beacon & Farmers' Advocate, Feb. 27, 1835; Moore, "Revolt against Jackson," 340-42. In spite of Walker's and Polk's efforts, Tennessee was unrepresented at the Baltimore convention of 1835.

[56]Kennedy, American Congress, 119; Stockton and Stokes to Polk, Feb. 19, Feb. 23, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 107, 109.

decided there. Although Bell hoped to defeat all Democrats, Polk and Cave Johnson were special targets; and Bell's associates even promised United States Bank cashier Samuel Jaudon that Polk would not be reelected. The specific issue that the White supporters used against the Van Buren congressmen was the question of for whom they would vote, if the election went into the House.[57]

When Polk announced, in early April, that he would seek reelection to Congress, he was unopposed, although it was rumored that Bradford would run again. Polk wasted no time in hitting the campaign trail, and traversed the district addressing his constituents through both the written and spoken word. After his first short campaign jaunt, he wrote Cave Johnson that ". . . I found my friends in Bedford and the people generally, apparently satisfied with my course, and every body saying to me, I will have no opposition." But he also told Johnson that Allen A. Hall, Nashville editor and White supporter, was in the Ninth district. Although Hall was outwardly collecting payments for his newspaper, Polk suspected that he was gathering political information for the Nashville junto. This group would then decide from Hall's findings if Polk could be beaten and if so, make efforts to bring out a candidate.[58]

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[57]John W. Childress to Polk, Jan. 23, 1835, in Weaver Polk Correspondence, III, 60; Daniel Graham to Polk, Jan. 29, 1835, in ibid., 73; Williams, "Laughlin," 360-61; Norman L. Parks, "The Career of John Bell as Congressman from Tennessee, 1827-1841," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, I (Sept., 1942), 242; Jenkins, Life of Polk, 90; Jenkins, Polk and a History of His Administration, 90; Parks, Bell, 88; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 275.

[58]Polk to Cave Johnson, Apr. 13, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 154, and in Sioussat, "Polk-Johnson Letters," 220-21; Nashville Union, Apr. 13, 1835; James Walker to Andrew Jackson, Apr. 5, 1835, in Jackson Papers, LC.

On April 20, 1835, the first day of Maury's county court session, Polk, along with other candidates, addressed the crowd. Because he had received several calls through the local press to state his role in the December caucus which brought out White and to reveal his position on the presidential question, Polk talked mainly about these matters. He said that he took no part in the caucus because he "was not commissioned to Washington by my constituents, to express their opinion or pledge their votes. . . ." If reelected he promised to vote for the candidate who received the most votes in the district, should the House choose the president. From this stand he argued that the Democracy should continue to run the government and to insure this end "it is important that the party should not be weakened by divisions as to men. . . ."[59]

Professing his friendship for White, Polk expressed the hope to see him elected president if the majority of Democrats throughout the country would unite behind him.

> But until such indication shall be given, I will wait and see upon whom the great body of our friends of the same political faith in other states do concentrate; and upon him, whomsoever he may be, in my opinion, all should unite.

He continued to stress party unity and loyalty and that the rewards of high office must be shared with fellow Democrats from other states. Moreover he argued that should the election be cast into the House by

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[59]In Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, Apr. 21, 1835, in Polk Papers, LC, the editor sent Polk a clipping from the April 17, 1835, Shelbyville Western Freeman which called for the Congressman to reveal his ideas on White's candidacy and to expose his role in the December caucus. Nashville Union, Apr. 22, May 4, 1835. These excerpts from Polk's Apr. 20, 1835, speech are from the Nashville Union, May 4, 1835.

Democratic disunity, the opposition would surely win the presidency. To make his picture clearer, Polk used the election of 1824 as an example, and concluded by saying that

> If Judge White shall be the man whom the public opinion of our political friends shall select as our candidate, he ought to be supported by the whole party; if he be not, the preservation of our principles will in my opinion require that we should not separate from the body of our political friends. . . .

He urged that the people line up behind the candidate supported by a nationwide Democratic majority and thereby, Polk gently advocated support of the Baltimore convention. He also indirectly argued that adherence to the convention's choice would prevent a party split. However, he neither mentioned Van Buren nor the convention by name. In order to give this speech the widest possible circulation, Polk had editor Laughlin publish it in the Union.[60]

White's candidacy placed Polk in a quandary. White was second only to Jackson in popularity in the state; therefore all but the staunchest Jacksonians would support him over Van Buren. Yet to keep himself in Jackson's favor, Polk felt obligated to support the New Yorker. Besides this, his enemy Bell was backing White. According to Powell Moore, Polk "therefore associated the movement for White with that against himself in Tennessee." But because of White's popularity, Polk was afraid to attack the Judge. For these reasons he was determined to play a passive role in the squabble over presidential candidates until after his own reelection. He was sensitive to the flow of public opinion and "enough

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[60]Nashville Union, May 4, 1835.

of a practical politician to recognize when yielding was unavoidable. . . ." He instructed Laughlin to "say nothing of my position in the Presidential Election." But while Polk did try to sidestep the whole issue and only implied his support of Van Buren and the Baltimore convention, he never misled the voters, as Robert Cassell suggests, into believing that he was a White supporter.[61]

But Polk had to view the entire matter from another perspective. If his reelection was dependent in part to neutrality on the White issue, would not this strategy jeopardize his leadership position in the party and his hopes for the speakership. The focus of Van Buren's Tennessee campaign would be on him, since the New Yorker's only other major supporters in the state were the President, Cave Johnson, and Felix Grundy. Johnson lacked both widespread exposure and general popularity, while Grundy was fearful of his own reelection to the Senate. Although Grundy was not yet two years into his six-year term, he did not wish to anger the constantly increasing opposition majority in the legislature. And the President's high station prevented him from stumping the state for Van Buren. One student, L. Paul Gresham, argues, possibly erroneously, that Jackson understood Polk's plight and favored

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[61]Moore, "Polk: Tennessee Politician," 495-96; Moore, "Revolt against Jackson," 343; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 92; Parks, "Bell as Congressman," 243; Polk to Samuel H. Laughlin, July 7, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 244; Robert Cassell, "Newton Cannon and State Politics, 1835-1839," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XV (Dec., 1956), 309-10.

the Congressman's neutral strategy. Once Polk was reelected, Jackson planned an all-out war on White.[62]

Even though Polk did not categorically oppose White prior to August 1835, he did attack those men who tried to split the party. He connected these men with the Whigs, and this seemed to be his special topic. He traced the Whigs back to their "Old Blue Light Federalist" beginnings and noted their role in the treasonous Hartford convention. He attacked Alexander Hamilton and John Adams as the advocates of an aristocratically controlled government, then moved on to stress the corrupt bargain which placed John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay in power. In contrast, Polk eulogized Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Jackson as being "all that was great and good."[63]

In late April, Polk heard some ominous news from editor Laughlin. Theodorick F. Bradford was in Nashville to see John Bell on business matters. Laughlin thought that Bradford was there for political ends and Polk undoubtedly agreed with him. Polk immediately became interested again in Bradford's letters of recommendation written by anti-Jacksonians in 1827. He wrote Donelson, informing him that the Nashville junto was making a special effort to defeat him and that he expected Bradford to be its candidate. Polk explained that the extracts Donelson had supplied

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[62]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 279; Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, x, xi; L. Paul Gresham, The Public Career of Hugh Lawson White: A Summary of a Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Vanderbilt University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Private edition. (Nashville, 1945), 23-24.

[63]Baxter, "Reminiscences," 268.

in 1833 were very helpful and that he had kept the source a secret. He told Donelson that informed sources warned him that in this year's campaign Bradford intended to challenge the information Polk divulged in 1833, and therefore Polk requested permission to name Donelson as his source. Furthermore he asked Donelson either to confirm the contents of those letters or to supply him with exact copies of them. Polk feared that Bell, being familiar with State Department officials who possibly knew of the letters, may have informed Bradford of Polk's clandestine source. The Congressman said he could not wait for Bradford's challenge before daring him to request copies of the letters from the State Department, for then the damage would have been done.[64]

Even before receiving Donelson's reply, Polk made the same request to the President, remembering that 10 years earlier Jackson had supplied him with a State Department document. Being more prompt than his nephew, Jackson reminded Polk that although official copies could not be obtained, as a congressman he had the authority to examine these letters. He advised Polk to dare Bradford to deny their contents. "It will answer all the purpose you desire to shew, that he belonged to the opposition at that time and again has come out in his true Whigg

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[64]Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, Apr. 21, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 164; Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Apr. 28, 1835, in ibid., 169-71. After Polk addressed this letter to Washington, he discovered that Donelson was in Nashville and sent a similar letter to him there. See Polk to Andrew J. Donelson, Apr. 29, 1835, in ibid., 174-75; Bergeron, "Politics and Patronage," 20-21.

character. . . ." Donelson's belated reply brought Polk nearly the same information.[65]

Soon after his April speech, Polk again schooled Laughlin on the presidential question. Consistent with his speech, he reminded the editor to urge party unity and to "say nothing of any particular candidate for the Presidency." In addition, he warned Laughlin "to say nothing of the convention (for that is an abstract question . . .)." Throughout his campaign the Congressman made extensive use of the Union; for example, he frequently gave political advice to Laughlin and offered suggestions about the use of his speeches in the paper. In the meantime Polk had discovered some of the letters Bell had sent into the Ninth district to stir up opposition. In addition to telling Laughlin not to connect himself with Van Buren, Polk warned him not to connect Bell with White since that would only transfer some of White's strength to Bell.[66]

Throughout the spring of 1835 the battle continued between the Tennessee Jacksonians and the White supporters over their roles in the December caucus. Each side prepared to publish the correspondence in a manner to enhance its position. In mid-April Polk advised Cave Johnson, who held the correspondence for the Jacksonians, not to publish it

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[65] [Andrew Jackson] to Polk, May 12, 1835, in Bassett, Jackson Correspondence, V, 345, and in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 190; Andrew J. Donelson to Polk, July 4, 1835, in ibid., 234; Bergeron, "Politics and Patronage," 20-21.

[66] Polk to Samuel H. Laughlin, Apr. 28, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 172, and in Parks, "Polk-Laughlin Letters," 148; Polk to Samuel H. Laughlin, July 7, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 243-44; Williams, "Laughlin," 361.

because "the public mind is too much excited now to do us justice." Polk's cautious nature favored a defensive posture strong enough to meet any opposition attack. He made suggestions to Johnson concerning fine points in the war of words and even edited his replies to the White supporters' charges. On May 23, 1835, a single piece of the correspondence appeared in the McMinnville Central Gazette which cast Polk, Johnson, and Grundy in a bad light. Polk advised Johnson to publish their side of the correspondence slowly and allow the opposition to escalate the conflict. Polk granted permission to publish all the letters he had supplied and reminded Johnson to publish all of the materials regarding the 1834 speakership contest. Late in May, Polk was summoned to Nashville for a strategy session on this matter, but for some unknown reason he did not attend. In any case, Johnson gave all of the correspondence to Laughlin, who directed the conflict from that point on. The Globe even got into the fray, naturally backing the Jacksonians.[67]

A movement developed in Polk's district in May which could not have pleased the Congressman. A citizens group organized a dinner to honor White, but the candiate replied that he could not possibly attend; this must have overjoyed Polk. Early in the same month Jackson instructed

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[67]Polk to Cave Johnson, Mar. 31, Apr. 13, Apr. 16, May 7, May 25, May 27, June 6, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 147-48, 154-55, 155-57, 188, 198-200, 202-203, 213. All of these letters also appear in Sioussat, "Polk-Johnson Letters," 219-27; Felix Grundy to Polk, May 28, June 5, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 203-204, 212-13; Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, May 29, 1835, in ibid., 204-205; Felix Grundy to Andrew Jackson, June 17, 1835, in Jackson Papers, LC; Nashville Union, June 22, 1835.

Polk to "take a firm and open stand in favour of . . . a national convention . . . and . . . against nullification & disunion and against little caucuses. . . ." As an incentive he wrote "Do your duty . . . at home, and you will stand high with the republicans every where." It is apparent that Polk did not follow Jackson's orders because nine days later Old Hickory stormed "How is it that there is no man in the Republican ranks to take the stump, and relieve Tennessee from her degraded attitude. . . ." Jackson's angry letter drew an immediate response from Polk, in which the Congressman revealed his opposition to White, on grounds that he was dividing the party, and confirmed his support of the Baltimore convention's candidate. Jackson could not have been very pleased with Polk's efforts to relate these feelings to the people.[68]

At the climax of his Congressional campaign Polk recalled that although the opposition wished to make White's candidacy the central issue of the campaign, the Jacksonians wanted to avoid the topic as much as possible. White supporters Newton Cannon and William C. Dunlap spoke in Polk's district and tried to bring out an opposition candidate. But if White had his backers, so did Polk. MANY VOTERS and TRUTH addressed newspapers defending the Congressman against the attacks of ONE OF COL. POLK'S CONSTITUENTS. Polk, at the beginning of summer, still expected opposition at any moment and campaigned vigorously. On June 8, 1835,

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[68]Nashville Republican, June 4, 1835; Andrew Jackson to Polk, May 3, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 184-85; [Andrew Jackson] to Polk, May 12, 1835, in ibid., 190-92, and in Bassett, Jackson Correspondence, V, 345-46; Polk to Andrew Jackson, May 15, 1835, in ibid., 346; also in the Jackson Papers, LC, and in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 193.

during another county court session, Polk spoke in his own defense. For the first time he defended Van Buren against the charges that he was a Federalist. The speech, however, was anti-Baltimore convention in tone. Referring to the gathering as merely "recommendutory" in nature, Polk recognized that the people's choice was supreme. Despite all of Polk's efforts, White's cause continued to gain strength. Since the Columbia Observer had hoisted the White masthead, James Walker founded the Columbia Tennessee Democrat in June 1835 to provide Polk and the Jacksonians an outlet for their views. Polk also made attempts to win the Shelbyville press from the clutches of the opposition.[69]

Polk and others took the campaign into Bell's district. Through the Union and personal letters they urged Robert M. Burton, Andrew Hays, and Dr. Felix Robertson to oppose Bell. As already noted, Bell had sent letters into Polk's district, but one in particular attracted considerable attention. Early in May, Bedford County's Charles Cassedy wrote Bell to obtain White's views on the rechartering of the United States Bank. One of Polk's friends, Andrew A. Kincannon, learned of Bell's reply and vowed to get a copy of it. At this time, however, the letter was thought only to instruct Cassedy to ask Polk publicly if he were a candidate for Speaker and whether or not he would vote for Bell for that position. Polk, answering Kincannon's letter so hurriedly that he

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[69]Polk to Aaron Vanderpoel, Sept. 12, 1835, in Weaver Polk Correspondence, III, 294; Polk to Samuel H. Laughlin, May 18, 1835, in ibid., 196-97, and in Parks, "Polk-Laughlin Letters," 149; Shelbyville Western Freeman, May 29, June 19, 1835; Columbia Observer, June 5, 1835; Nashville Union, June 8, Sept. 4, 1835; Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 320n; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 281.

incorrectly recorded the date, was puzzled by the alleged information that Bell sought and wondered what use it would be to him. He urged Kincannon to contact Cassedy and either get a copy of the letter or obtain permission to use the information contained in it.[70]

Toward the end of July, Polk successfully solicited Kincannon's permission to publish his June 1 letter. In the meantime Laughlin learned of Bell's letter to Cassedy and, realizing the political value of it, told Polk to get him either the original or a copy. He warned Polk to do this secretly so the Congressman could not be implicated in a plot against Bell. At this opportune moment, Cassedy chose to take a trip and left his correspondence with Henry Wineow for safekeeping. James Osburn got a copy of the letter and gave it to Polk and his friends.[71]

In this Bell to Cassedy letter it was revealed that White would not categorically veto a Bank bill. In reference to Polk, Bell stated that should Polk run for Speaker, it would be improper to ask Polk to vote against himself; but if he could be persuaded to abandon his bid for the speakership, Bell would appoint him chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Laughlin published this letter in the Union on June 26

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[70]Parks, Bell, 103-106; Robert M. Burton to Andrew Jackson, May 13, 1835, in Jackson Papers, LC; Nashville Union, June 17, 1835; Andrew A. Kincannon to Polk, June 1, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 210; Polk to Andrew A. Kincannon, June 1 [2], 1835, in ibid., 212, 212n. This Andrew Hays, whom Jackson urged to oppose Bell, must be distinguished from Andrew C. Hays, Polk's brother-in-law.

[71]Andrew A. Kincannon to Polk, July 21, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 248-49; Samuel H. Laughlin to Polk, June 17, 1835, in ibid., 222.

and 100 copies of that issue were sent into Polk's district. The Bell organs in Nashville, the Banner and the Republican, waited until Bell's return from an out of town trip before printing a rejoinder.[72]

On the day the Cassedy letter appeared in the Union, James Osburn wrote Polk that he did not have Cassedy's permission to publish the letter verbatim. Although this was unfortunate, the politicos were certainly not saddened by the turn of events. The Jacksonians recognized the important implications of the letter. One significant aspect was its suggestion that White might support a Bank bill. This placed both the Judge and Bell in the Whig camp. It also provided indisputable evidence of Bell's interference in Polk's district. He acted to defeat Polk; and if this could not be done, Bell hoped to compel Polk to support Bell, the anti-administration candidate, for Speaker with the chairmanship of the committee of Ways and Means as his reward. The newspaper feud over this letter continued throughout the remainder of the campaign.[73]

In the mid-1830s the Fourth of July was celebrated at public dinners capped with speeches and toasts. Columbia's 1835 event tended to be pro-White and Bell in tone as was the one held in Shelbyville. Even though Polk still had no opponent, Bradford continued to act like a candidate, delivering a speech at the celebration held at Henry Davis'

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[72]Parks, Bell, 103-104; Nashville Union, June 26, 1835; Felix Grundy to Polk, June 26, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 226-27; Williams, "Laughlin," 361-62; Nashville Republican, July 2, 1835.

[73]James Osburn to Polk, June 26, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 227, 227n; Parks, Bell, 105-106; Nashville Union, July 3-Aug. 3, 1835.

mill in Bedford County. This too was a pro-White gathering. Toward the end of July, Polk's health began to falter under the strain of the campaign and he was forced to retire to a Hickman County health resort to recuperate for a few days after the August election.[74]

In the elections held on August 6 both Polk and his rival Bell ran unopposed. Thus many people either saw no need to cast a ballot for Polk or opposed his reelection by simply not voting. While cholera was prevalent throughout the district, the outbreak did not seem unusually severe and a greater percentage of voters did participate in that year's gubernatorial election, as noted in Table VII. It must be admitted, however, that the turnout in the competitive 1835 gubernatorial contest was much lower than the turnouts for the 1825, 1827, and 1833 Congressional elections in Polk's district. Even though Polk ran unopposed, his campaign had been a severe one because White's candidacy overshadowed other issues. It cannot be denied that Polk side-stepped the presidential question and was less than candid with his constituents in regard to it. He, however, feared the possibility of a pro-White candidate defeating him if he declared his preference for the unpopular Van Buren.[75]

In the election of 1835 the Jacksonians came out poorly. The state had 13 Congressional districts and the Jacksonians were able to field

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[74]Nashville Republican, July 18, 1835; Shelbyville Western Freeman, July 10, 1835; Kenneth L. Anderson to Polk, July 24, 1835, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 249; Polk to Andrew Jackson, Aug. 14, 1835, in ibid., 262.

[75]Nashville Republican, Aug. 11, 1835; Nashville Union, Aug 10, Aug. 19, 1835; Columbia Observer, June 5, 1835.

TABLE VII

RESULTS OF THE CONGRESSIONAL ELECTION OF 1835 IN TENNESSEE'S NINTH DISTRICT

Candidate	Vote By Counties		Ninth District Totals
	Maury	Bedford	
Polk	2,675	2,348	5,023
Total 1833 Voters	4,093	4,277	8,370
Percent Turnout Congressional Election	65	55	60
Percent Turnout Gubernatorial Election	80	68	74

Source: Nashville Republican, Aug. 11, 1835; Nashville Union, Aug. 10, Aug. 19, 1835.

candidates in only 4 of them. As a result of the political revolution, Tennessee's delegation was composed of 10 White allies and 2 Jacksonians (Polk and Johnson), with Adam Huntsman, who defeated Davy Crockett, somewhere in the middle. The gubernatorial contest was also waged between the Jacksonians and the White supporters. Although the Jacksonian candidate, William Carroll, lost to Newton Cannon, he made his best showing in Polk's and Cave Johnson's districts, the administration strongholds.[76]

Immediately after the elections the reelected Jacksonians, disregarding White's popularity, came out against the Judge. Public dinners were tendered by both sides and speeches were numerous, as both the Van Buren and White supporters fought for control of the state. In early November the congressmen departed for Washington and the state experienced a period of relative political calm until their return. The Tennessee legislature did, however, reelect White to the Senate and passed a resolution nominating him for president. When the twenty-fourth Congress organized in December, Polk was elected Speaker over Bell. Because of this victory, attributable to his party loyalty, a small number of opposition members employed delaying tactics throughout Polk's speakership and constantly tried to embarrass him. Probably the most crucial issue the new Speaker had to deal with concerned the anti-slavery petitions then flowing into Congress. The remedy, which

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[76]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 274-75; Niles' Weekly Register, Sept. 5, 1835; Cassell, "Cannon and State Politics," 310.

unclogged the calendar so the House could get on with its work, was the gag rule.[77]

Although Polk's responsibilities as Speaker were great, he continued to keep a close eye on political events in his home state in order to direct Van Buren's presidential campaign there. As soon as Congress adjourned on July 4, 1836, he rushed back to Tennessee to help wage the war himself. Polk, Grundy, and Johnson stumped the state attacking Bell as well as White, but the Van Buren cause was hopeless. A month before the election Polk even admitted as much.[78]

His pessimistic prediction came true as White won the state in the November 8 election. As illustrated in Table VIII, the presidential contest, in contrast to the statewide pattern, drew a larger turnout in the Ninth District than the 1835 election. Possibly due to Polk's actions in his behalf, Van Buren carried the Ninth District. Polk, however, supported the New Yorker only out of a sense of duty to Jackson and the party. To Polk the campaign was between Old Hickory, on the one hand, and Bell and White on the other. In this year Tennessee reached the partisan maturity which had characterized Polk since 1825; and the presidential succession question was the catalyst which transformed

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[77]Joseph H. Parks, Felix Grundy: Champion of Democracy (University, LA., 1940), 305-306. For evidence that Tennessee quieted after the congressmen's departure, see the letters cited in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 367, 372, 379. For an account of the turbulence experienced in the twenty-fourth Congress, see ibid., x; Parks, Bell, 118-20; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 292-97, 307-10.

[78]Parks, Bell, 128-31; Silas Wright Jr. to Polk, Oct. 3, 1836, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 751.

TABLE VIII

RESULTS OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1836 IN TENNESSEE'S NINTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Candidate	Vote By Counties		Ninth District Totals	Percentage By Counties		Ninth District Percentage
	Maury	Bedford		Maury	Bedford	
Van Buren	1,997	1,614	3,611	62	52	57
White	1,210	1,500	2,710	38	48	43
Total 1833 Voters	4,093	4,277	8,370			
Percent Turnout	78	73	76			
Percent Turnout 1835 (Congressional)	65	55	60			
Percent Turnout 1835 (Gubernatorial)	80	68	74			

Source: Nashville Republican, Nov. 24, 1836.

Tennessee into a two-party state. The opposition party, however, was not yet officially under the Whig banner but would be in a very short time.[79]

A few months after the presidential contest, Polk began working on his own campaign for reelection. In January 1837 he received reports that he had no opposition but nevertheless "your friends will still expect you to take the field in order to explain matters and place them in their proper light." Other than doing a little explaining in regard to his stand for Van Buren, he would have to defend the new President against the continuing vigorous attacks of the White forces. Besides aiming for his own reelection, Polk sought to refurbish the state's Democracy by building up a party press and stemming the opposition's momentum. This rebuilding process would require "those qualities of personal magnetism that excite the popular imagination and inspire confidence and loyalty in other politicians." This task was the most ambitious challenge of Polk's career up to this point, but he realized that it would also yield the greatest rewards if it could be accomplished.[80]

Late in January, Bell introduced into Congress a Freedoms of Elections bill which, in general, prohibited the direct use of incumbent

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[79]Moore, "Polk: Tennessee Politician," 497. The statewide voter turnout for the 1835 election was 73 percent with a raw vote total of 89,156 and the 1836 statewide turnout was 55 percent with a vote total of 62,178. These figures are from McCormick, Second American Party System, 230, and Richard P. McCormick, "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," American Historical Review, LXV (Jan., 1960), 292; Nashville Republican, Nov. 8, Nov. 24, 1836.

[80]Richard Warner to Polk, Jan. 24, 1837, in Polk Papers, LC; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 276.

advantages to gain reelection. Polk and Laughlin immediately saw this as a useful tool in their attacks on Bell and Terry H. Cahal, Bell's number one supporter in Maury and rumored to be Polk's 1837 opponent. Laughlin, through the Union, resurrected the Cassedy letter and published other evidence of Bell's interference in Polk's district. He then charged Bell with hypocrisy, arguing that Bell's interference in Polk's district contradicted the principles expressed in his bill.

> This shameless intrusion into another member's district, for the purpose of influencing votes, was a gross infraction of the rights of suffrage, and an attempt to corrupt instead of purifying elections.

To offset such allegations, Bell and Cahal spread rumors that the Speaker was to receive an executive appointment. This, Bell and Cahal asserted, made his reelection not only pointless but would only serve to satisfy Polk's ego at the expense of responsible representation.[81]

In his attempt to rebuild the Tennessee Democracy, Polk made serious efforts to bring out candidates in every district and for every office. He urged William G. Childress to run for Congress in the district including Williamson County and tried to persuade Alfred Flournoy to announce in the Giles district. Certainly Polk had some hand in John Hall's decision to oppose Bell and in William Trousdale's choice to run

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[81]Parks, Bell, 133-36; Nashville Union, Feb. 4, 1837; Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 297; A.O.P. Nicholson to Polk, Jan. 22, 1837, in Polk Papers, LC; Andrew C. Hays to Polk, Feb. 8, 1837, in ibid.; Thomas R. Sett to Polk, Feb. 9, 1837, in ibid. Bell's Freedoms of Elections bill prohibited office holders from contributing money to political campaigns, prevented the franking privilege from being used to distribute campaign material, and prohibited incumbents from tampering with the electoral process or intimidating voters through promises of jobs. Strict penalties were provided for infractions of these rules.

for Congress. Polk even concerned himself with candidates for the General Assembly and made a special effort to supply an opponent for his former adversary, Theodorick F. Bradford of Bedford County. Of course not all of Polk's strenuous efforts ended in success, but the Congressman did not give up.[82]

When the twenty-fourth Congress adjourned in the spring of 1837, President Jackson's term in office also came to a close, and the two Tennesseans traveled home together, arriving in Nashville on March 24. On the following day the Union published Polk's closing remarks to the House and praised the Speaker's course. Moreover, Laughlin editorialized,

> The sure test of the approbation of his district, is afforded by the fact, that he will be re-elected, without opposition, by an almost unanimous vote of the most populous District in the State.[83]

In the middle of March, Polk learned that Bradford had obtained a letter Polk had addressed to James McKisick, reporting that Greenville Cook had the resources to purchase the Shelbyville Western Freeman and would make it into a Van Buren-Polk organ. Polk also asked McKisick to supply Cook with money should he fall short. Bradford had gotten the letter when McKisick inadvertently left it in his newspaper office when he sold the establishment to one of Bradford's associates. The opposition wasted no time and published the letter in the Shelbyville Peoples' Advocate. They charged Polk with attempting to dominate the district's

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[82]Polk to William R. Rucker, Dec. 26, 1836, in Weaver, Polk Correspondence, III, 804; Alfred Flournoy to Polk, Apr. 24, 1837, in Polk Papers, LC; Samuel Mitchell to Polk, Jan. [25], 1837, in ibid.; Nashville Union, Mar. 9, Mar. 25, 1837.

[83]Nashville Union, Mar. 25, 1837.

press by providing financial backing to Cook. McKisick protested the publication of the letter without his permission. In retaliation, Laughlin again published Bell's Cassedy letter. Polk, arriving home toward the end of March, wasted no time in publicly announcing himself a candidate for reelection.[84]

By the end of May, he was confident that he would run unopposed and that the Democracy would carry the state. In a letter to President Van Buren, Polk optimistically predicted that a majority of the state's Congressional delegation and legislature, and Tennessee's next governor would be Van Buren's "political friends." The Democrats' 1837 strategy was formulated by Felix Grundy. He reasoned that since the presidential election was in the past and White removed as an issue, a conciliatory effort should be made to draw back into the party as many of the opposition as possible. Polk, however, opposed this; "He was in no mood to forgive his enemies," and urged an all out campaign against White and his supporters.[85]

In his own campaign Polk embarked on an extensive speaking tour, even though he remained unopposed. On June 23, 1837, a Bedford political gathering was held and, although it cannot be proven, Polk very likely attended and spoke to the crowd. With the panic of 1837

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[84]R. S. Anderson to Polk, Mar. 20, 1837, in Polk Papers, LC; R. S. Anderson to Polk, Mar. 25, 1837, in ibid.; James McKisick to the editor of the Peoples' Advocate, Apr. 26, 1837, in ibid.; James McKisick to Polk, Apr. 28, 1837, in ibid.; Nashville Union, Mar. 28, Mar. 30, Apr. 25, 1837.

[85]Polk to Martin Van Buren, May 29, 1837, in Van Buren Papers, LC; Moore, "Polk: Tennessee Politician," 497-98.

plaguing the nation, Polk stressed his anti-Bank and hard-money stands. Near the end of June, he learned why his rumored opponent, Cahal, never announced. John H. Dew informed the Congressman that Cahal refused to run because he had no chance of success. Besides waging his own half-hearted campaign throughout June and July, Polk inquired into the prospects of various Democratic candidates; and as soon as the election results were known, he received political reports from all over the state. This unprecedented attention only confirms Polk's vital leadership position in state politics.[86]

As illustrated in Table IX, Polk was unanimously reelected in the August 3 election, but 29 percent of those who cast ballots in the gubernatorial election ignored the Congressional contest. Two possible explanations are voter apathy or a boycott of the election by Polk's enemies. His strength in each county cannot be determined since those figures are non-existent. It must be noted that although Democratic gubernatorial candidate Robert Armstrong carried Maury, Newton Cannon, who won the statewide contest, captured Bedford by a larger margin. In addition to this Democratic loss, the General Assembly contained a White majority. In 1837 Tennesseans returned six of the nine Congressional incumbents who sought reelection; each of the parties captured two of the four vacant seats, and therefore the same proportion existed between the Whigs and Democrats in the delegation. The delegation was composed of only 3 Democrats out of a total of 13. Polk's attempted reorganization

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[86]Sellers, Polk: Jacksonian, 318; Ephraim Hunter to Polk, June 13, 1837, in Polk Papers, LC; John H. Dew to Polk, June 28, 1837, in ibid.; ibid., June-Aug. 1837 passim.

TABLE IX

RESULTS OF THE ELECTION OF 1837 IN TENNESSEE'S NINTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Candidate	Vote By Counties			Ninth District Totals
	Maury	Bedford	Marshall	
Polk (Congressional)	-----	-----	-----	4,245
Cannon (Gubernatorial)	1,668	1,864	-----	3,532
Armstrong (Gubernatorial)	1,735	1,576	-----	3,311
Total 1840 Voters	3,503	3,074	2,308	8,885
Percent Turnout (Congressional)	-----	-----	-----	48
Percent Turnout (Gubernatorial)	97	112*	-----	77

*State law determined that areas ceded to newly formed counties voted with their parent county until the next reapportionment. By distributing 2/5 of Marshall's voters to Maury and 3/5 to Bedford, a 77 percent turnout for the gubernatorial race in each county resulted. This matches the district turnout. Although population growth from 1837 to 1840 was probably minimal, it must have had some effect on this data.

Source: Nashville Republican, Aug. 8, 1837.

of the Tennessee Democracy had not resulted in any appreciable gains, but his efforts may have slowed the opposition's momentum.[87]

The shattering losses the Tennessee Democrats experienced in 1835, 1836, and 1837 nearly destroyed the party. As Polk pondered both his own future and the fate of the Democracy in Tennessee, he realized that they were one and the same. How could he expect to advance in the party hierarchy if his state was hopelessly lost to the Whigs; and if this occurred, sooner or later his own power base would be eroded and his political career ended.[88]

Nevertheless, the national Democratic party continued to dominate Congress; and for a second time, Polk was elected Speaker. Less than a year later he decided not to seek reelection but to run for the governor's chair, hoping to rejuvenate the Tennessee Democracy in the process. At the end of the 1839 campaign in which he directed the strategy of nearly all Democratic candidates, Polk was elected. A Democratic legislature was also chosen; and the party gained three seats in the Congressional delegation. Polk had worked hard to rebuild the party and in 1839 the Whig momentum was stalled. Fortune, however, soon turned its back on Polk. He discreetly but unsuccessfully sought the vice-presidential spot on Van Buren's 1840 ticket; subsequently he was defeated in both the 1841 and 1843 gubernatorial races. Although these were serious setbacks, Polk's past achievements for the party paid off when, in 1844, he was

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[87]Nashville Republican, Aug. 8, 1837; Kennedy, American Congress, 129-30; Parks, Grundy, 310.

[88]Folmsbee, Tennessee, I, 341.

the unexpected choice of the Democratic party to head its presidential ticket. He carried his party to a surprising victory in November 1844—a triumph marred only by his failure to carry Tennessee.[89]

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[89]Kennedy, American Congress, 133-34; Nashville Union, Sept. 3,1838.

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