To Sarah C. Polk, April 20, 1839

I have had a hard week's service, addressing the people every day except one, and on that day riding 45 miles.

From Archibald Yell, September 15, 1839

Your Tennessee Boys here won lotts of *hats & boots* on your election. We live upon the Whigs here. I believe our Boys would be sorry if these Whigs get too much under par—they could get no bets.

From Joshua L. Martin, November 2, 1839

You are a young man, & need not be in haste, and let me assure you that when the proper time arrives the *White House* is yours.

To Cave Johnson, March 30, 1840

If it was ascertained that a clear *majority* of the Democratic party declared an intention to run me on the ticket, that would be one thing, but if otherwise my present impression is, that I ought not and could not consent to be run by a minority . . . merely for the purpose, of strengthening the ticket in a few states, in the Presidential election.

From Henry Trott, Jr., June 12, 1840

I see that the Directors of the mother Bank are to make the directors of the Branch Banks. Our county is entitled to one, and when the Whigs had the power at Shelbyville they gave us a good Whig director . . . who knows about as much about financial matters as a hog does about the 25th day of December.

To David Burford, November 7, 1840

We are *beaten* in the late contest . . . . I am perfectly satisfied that the state is still Democratic, and that by proper *energy and organization* on our part, she will recover herself in August, next. For myself though the majority against us may appear to be large, I am in the field undismayed and unterrified . . . .

To Robert B. Reynolds, August 19, 1841

In regard to the election, you know the result. It is now perfectly manifest, that we had the power to succeed, if we had known our own strength & the weakness of our opponents. Our friends however in many parts of the State gave up the contest in advance.

From J. George Harris, September 3, 1841

I heard it as the saying of a *whig* yesterday, "The Lord took our president—the demos have taken our Vice President—and the Devil will take our party."

CUTLER
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SMITH
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PARKER

Correspondence of JAMES K. POLK

Volume V
1839–1841

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Volume V, 1839–1841

WAYNE CUTLER
Editor

EARL J. SMITH
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Vanderbilt

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Volume Five of the correspondence covers three years of Polk's career, 1839–1841, during which period he completes his second term as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, conducts a colorful and successful race for the governorship of Tennessee, fights for passage of his legislative program, seeks the 1840 vice-presidential nomination of the Democratic party, directs Van Buren's presidential campaign in Tennessee, and loses his bid for reelection as governor in 1841.

Polk's letters demonstrate that his two gubernatorial races attracted considerable national attention. In 1839 he ran as much against Henry Clay as Newton Cannon, the incumbent Whig governor. Polk's stunning victory signaled that Clay might have difficulty carrying the western states and thus probably hurt the Kentuckian's chances for winning the Whig presidential nomination in 1840. The gubernatorial election of 1841 proved just as colorful and arduous as that of 1839. Whig divisions at the national level almost gave Polk another upset victory; despite his loss he remained the overwhelming favorite and active leader of the Old Democracy in Tennessee. Polk's political letters illustrate much of the enthusiasm and spontaneity of politics at the state and local levels, which frequently involved as many as 85 percent of the eligible voters. Letters relating to the governor's official duties often pallor in comparison to the high drama of mass rallies, stump oratory, and partisan journalism.

Although family concerns surface with less frequency than previously, this volume does include two interesting series of letters in which James and Sarah inform one another of campaign activities. These personal exchanges reveal that Polk's wife played an active part in his political career by serving as his informal campaign coordinator. Letters to and from his large family connection tell of street fights, bank embezzlement, runaway slaves, financial distress, and many other diverse topics that reflect the variety and richness of that larger collection of over 2,400 letters from which the editors have selected 688 items for inclusion in Volume Five.

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"Weaver deserves a great deal of credit for what he has accomplished in the first four volumes of this series. Against many difficulties and obstacles, the most important of which was money, he has provided the scholarly world with a valuable selection of letters, splendidly edited, by a major figure in the territorial expansion of this nation."—*The Journal of American History*

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