To Martin Van Buren, May 29, 1837
I have watched with much anxiety the progress of the panic, and the efforts made by the opposition, here as well as elsewhere, to turn the existing pressure in the money-market, and the deranged state of trade, to political account. The agitators have at length reached a point beyond which they cannot go. They have raised the storm, but cannot lay it, and now find that they themselves are likely to be overwhelmed in the general ruin, which they have contributed so largely to produce.

To Andrew Jackson, June 14, 1837
The laws of Congress are imperative. The President is bound by his duty and official oath to see that they be faithfully executed. He possesses no discretion; he cannot alter or change a law of Congress, but is bound to see it faithfully executed as he finds it.

From Anne Royall, March 19, 1838
Please present my best respects to Mrs. Polk & say to her, her party the other evening has gained for her much praise. All parties, both Ladies & gentlemen pronounce it the gentlest party that has been given this winter by far.

From Cave Johnson, March 25, 1838
[William] Overton is not worth a dam. He is worth 40 or 50,000 and lies upon his back twelve miles from town, day after day and week after week, reading novels or phrenology or some such stuff. We dont see him once a month. We intend telling him flatly that we give him up unless he sets to work.

To Henry Horn et al., July 14, 1838
In the political contest in which we are engaged, the country is thrown back more distinctly upon the ground occupied by the Federal and Republican parties, forty years ago, than it has been at any time, since that period. Party names may have changed but the principles which guide us are essentially the same. Our political opponents have drawn to their aid, in the pending contest, the power of associated wealth, in the form of privileged banking corporations, and have made them the instruments, as they are the natural allies of that party in the country, who have at all times distrusted the power and capacity of the people for self-Government.

From Hopkins L. Turney, July 30, 1838
I arrived at home on the 22nd after a long tiresome & accidental trip, sinking a steamboat, upsetting a stage &c.
Volume Four of Polk's correspondence chronicles a two-year period of severe political turbulence in state as well as national affairs. Coming on with great suddenness and force, the financial panic of 1837 and the attending collapse of agricultural markets almost paralyzed the Democratic party's leadership in Tennessee. Robert Armstrong ran an ineffectual campaign for governor against Newton Cannon; all but three of Tennessee's thirteen congressional districts elected anti-Van Buren candidates; and the Democracy sustained a similarly harsh rebuke in state legislative races. Congressman John Bell and his splinter faction openly embraced the national Whig party and in so doing ended more than three decades of Democratic rule in Tennessee.

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

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

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