From Hopkins L. Turney, February 24, 1842

These leaders of ours, with a view to promote themselves, or which is the same thing, to prostrate Tyler to make way for themselves, will I fear do an essential injury to the country. It is certainly a very small business, to make war upon such a man. I would as soon make war on a woman in labour.

To Franklin H. Elmore, June 13, 1842

Mr Van Buren as you know has recently paid a visit at the Hermitage and spent some time in the state. You have doubtless observed the idle speculations of the Whig press in this quarter, in regard to what they chose to consider the object of his visit, and especially as connected with my name; and yet I solemnly assure you, that not a word either verbally or in writing, has ever up to this hour, passed between us on the subject.

From Daniel Graham, August 11, 1842

The great Nashville Camp meeting has been on hand all last week. Bell attended closely, staid there one night with Harry Hill and was in the altar looking devoutly. Some one said he made fifty votes.

To Martin Van Buren, December 8, 1842

The labour of canvassing a State like this, of more than six hundred miles in extent, and reaching from the mountains of Virginia & Carolina to the Swamps of the Mississippi, and of visiting and addressing the people in more than eighty Counties, is greater than can be estimated by any one who has not performed it. It requires four months of unceasing riding and speaking. I have twice performed it, and standing in the relation which I do to the Democracy of the State, I must undertake it again.

To Sarah C. Polk, April 4, 1843

He made a speech of two hours—at which his friends stamped and applauded as much as they could. I followed, and I suppose it will not be immodest for me to say to my wife, that my speech was perhaps the happiest effort of my life. I drove him to the wall upon the facts and the argument, and as in his speech he had made a great effort to turn the occasion into a frolic, I concluded to close my speech by fighting the old boy with fire, and accordingly I turned the laugh upon him—and almost laughed him out of the court-house.

From Robert Armstrong, June 12, 1843

If you succeed as you must and we carry the state we must then look to the convention for electing Delegates to nominate a candidate for President & Vice President. These men must be of the true stripe. Their may be a clash between the friends of Van Buren & Calhoun that cannot be settled. Then your prospect as a compromis is best. The friends of V.B. &c are Democrats and could with great propriety agree upon you.

From Samuel H. Laughlin, December 21, 1843

If something express—something binding—is not forthwith arranged, Nicholson and his friends, nearly all of them friends because they do not know him, will have the whole control of our party affairs, and the leading press, in their own hands, or under their unconditional control.
Volume Six of the correspondence covers two years of Polk’s career, 1842–1843, during which period he returns to private life following his unsuccessful 1841 bid for reelection to the Tennessee governorship, resumes the practice of law, manages party affairs both within and without the General Assembly, wages a second unsuccessful campaign to reclaim the governorship, loses control of the state party organization, and initiates efforts to win the 1844 vice-presidential nomination of the Democratic party.

As principal executor of Andrew Jackson’s political legacy to Tennessee, Young Hickory inherited the frustrating task of conserving the Old Democracy’s future at both the state and national levels. If he would defeat the Whig opposition at home, he must stress sectional and state issues at the expense of his mentor’s long-standing coalition with the northern Democracy. On the other hand, if Polk focused attention on those questions that transcended sectional and state interests, he would render Tennessee Democrats vulnerable to Whig charges of being too radical, too impractical, and too insensitive in their anti-consolidationist approach to the general government. Many of Polk’s advisers urged him to moderate his opposition to economic relief proposals such as those for a more protective tariff, a federal bankruptcy act, and a new national bank. By avoiding divisive discussions of national issues Polk might have held the middle ground in his 1843 race for governor, but he wanted to defeat Whig principles more than he desired the office itself. Quite deliberately he made his third gubernatorial contest a popular referendum on the 1844 presidential question; unfortunately for Martin Van Buren’s prospects the voters of Tennessee preferred Henry Clay and the Whig party.

In addition to the texts, briefs, and notes for documents, the editors have included in this volume a retrospective calendar of Polk correspondence for the period from 1816 through 1843. Entries for unpublished letters include the documents’ dates, addressees, classifications, repositories, and verbal précis. 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.

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Professor Cutler became director of the Polk Project in 1975, served as associate editor of the fourth volume of the correspondence, and headed the editorial team in the preparation of the series’ fifth and sixth volumes. He began his professional career in 1966 as an editorial associate of the Southwestern Historical Quarterly and moved to the assistantship of the Henry Clay Project in 1970.

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"The best news to accompany the arrival of this latest volume of the James K. Polk correspondence is the elevation (if that is the word) of Wayne Cutler to the position of editor. Each succeeding volume in this series improves over the last. And the best of the Polk material is yet to come. Scholars can rejoice that it will be steered through the publishing process by a very capable young editor."—The Journal of American History

"The present volume is the first to appear under the principal editorialship of Wayne Cutler, formerly the associate editor of the Polk Project. Cutler has maintained the high standards of Herbert Weaver, his predecessor. Deleted letters are deftly summarized, and notes are copious but unobtrusive. Multitudes of obscure personal references have been painstakingly identified. Cutler and his associates deserve the thanks of the scholarly community for their sound workmanship."—The North Carolina Historical Review