Separation of Maine from Massachusetts

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SEPARATION OF MAINE
FROM
MASSACHUSETTS.

A THESIS
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Master of Arts (in History).

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OUTLINE.

I. Introduction
   Early History of Maine.

II. Separation
   Question in 1786.
   Grievances of Maine.
   Question in 1792.
   Question in 1797.
   War of 1812.
   Question in 1816.
   New reasons for separation.
   Question in 1819.
   Maine and Massachusetts separated 1820.

III. Conclusion.
   Causes for Separation.
Introduction.

During the sixteenth century the coast of Maine was explored by Verrazano, Gomez, Gosnold,1 Pring, Sieur de Monts,1 Weymouth,1 and John Smith,1 the latter having mapped the coast and given the name New England to this section. However, the English made no permanent settlement until the period between 1623 and 1629.

Weymouth, returning to England took five Indians with him, some of them lived with Sir Ferdinando Gorges and doubtless helped to arouse his interest in the New World as he became the leader in founding Maine.

In 1607 the Plymouth Company received a grant to this region from King James I and in 1608 sent out a colony under George Popham. The colony settled at the mouth of the Kennebec at Pemaquid, but the severe winter and the loss of their leader caused the project to be abandoned. Raleigh Gilbert then became interested in the colony thru an old charter which had been granted in 1578 to Sir Humphry Gilbert.2 The council of New England obtained a grant of the country between latitude 40 and 48 N. and Gorges and Mason received

1 Williamson, p. 191
2 Williamson, p. 222
from the council the territory between the Merrimac and Kennebec, called the Province of Maine. Later the land was divided and Gorges took the portion between the Piscataqua River and the Kennebec. Grants of land were made by Gorges and several settlements were made.

In 1635 the Council of New England surrendered its charter but Gorges retained the portion that had been granted to him. Gorges drew up an elaborate constitution for his province providing for many unnecessary officials. He soon came into conflict with others who had been granted land in this region and Massachusetts was very hostile because Gorges and his followers were Anglicans. Puritan Massachusetts looked with suspicion upon Anglican neighbors and soon made claim to all of the land granted Gorges. Factional quarrels arose and between 1652 and 1658 Massachusetts little by little annexed the parts of Maine belonging to Gorges. In 1664 a grandson of Gorges brought his claim to Maine before parliament and his claim was allowed, but Massachusetts resisted until 1677, when she bought the Gorges claim for £1250 and, as a proprietor, held Maine until 1691. At this time by a new charter Maine was made a part of Massachusetts. Massachusetts later extended her territory east of the Penobscot so that by 1816 Greenleaf, in his Statistical
View of the District of Maine, gives the boundaries as follows:

"Maine is situated between 43° 05' and 48° 00' north latitude and 66° 49' and 70° 55' west longitude from London. Bounded on the west by New Hampshire from which it is separated by the Piscataqua River from the sea to the source of its main branch, a distance of about 35 miles, in a direct line and from there from a line running north two degrees west about 115 miles farther to the high lands, which in this place separate the United States from Canada. On the south by the Atlantic Ocean from Kittery Point to Quoddy Head in the east. On the east by the bay and river of Passamaquody on the St. Croix, following its middle branch to a monument established at its source and then by a line to be run due north to the high lands, separating the waters which fall into the St. Lawrence from those which fall into the Atlantic, and on the north by the British province from which it is separated by the same high lands."

So much then for the early history and the boundaries of Maine as given by Massachusetts just previous to the separation.
Separation of Maine from Massachusetts.

The first real attempt at separation was made in 1785 when a call was sent out by the Falmouth Gazette for a conference. This call met with a prompt response and a committee was appointed with Peleg Wentworth chairman. The committee wrote to the towns and invited them to send delegates to a convention to consider the question of separation. The convention met in January 1786 at Falmouth and a committee drew up a list of grievances. It will throw light upon the question of separation to see what were the grievances as early as 1786. The committee reported nine grievances (Jan. 4, 1786). Briefly stated they are as follows:

1st. That the interests of Maine and Massachusetts were different and that Massachusetts did not understand and therefore could not promote the interests of Maine.

2nd and 3rd. Distance from the seat of government and the consequent inconveniences.

1 Stanwood, The Separation of Maine from Massachusetts. pp. 4 and 5.

2 An Address to the Inhabitants of the District of Maine upon the subject of their separation from present government in Massachusetts. 1791. pp. 6-7. Boston Public Library. A pamphlet.
4th. The great expense of obtaining justice, since all of the records of the Supreme Court were kept in Boston.

5th. The unjust and unequal operation of the regulations of trade which depressed the price of lumber, the chief industry of Maine.

6th. The denial of representation in the House of Representatives to a great part of the inhabitants in these counties.¹

7th, 8th and 9th. An unjust system of taxation of polls and estates, all an undue burden by reason of the excise and import acts and the unequal incidence of the tax on deeds on account of the smaller value of land conveyed and its more frequent conveyance.

This committee had also been ordered to report on the cost of a separate government but found it impossible to make any estimate. This report of grievances was printed and ordered sent to all the towns and plantations of the District.²

¹ No town having less than 150 ratable polls could send a representative, save that any town incorporated before 1780 might elect a member. A large part of the population in Maine was in unorganized plantations.

² Stanwood, p. 11.
At the next session of the General Court in Massachusetts the Governor in a speech mentioned the attempt at separation but nothing was done.¹ Before the next meeting of the General Court a convention had assembled a second time at Portland and this time sent a petition to the legislature asking for separation.² This petition was offered in 1788 and referred to a committee which recommended that it lie upon the table. This was voted.³ Public interest in the matter now rapidly died out in Maine and we hear little more of separation until 1791. Much, however, had been accomplished. A start had been made and the people of Maine from then on began to think seriously of separation and the cause was destined to gain favor with each additional attempt.

Stanwood in his article upon the Separation of Maine from Massachusetts⁴ raises an interesting question in regard—

¹ Stanwood, p. 9.
² Stanwood, p. 9; Williamson, p. 536.
³ Williamson's History of Maine, p. 527.
⁴ Stanwood, p. 11.
to the status of Maine if she had been granted separation at this time. The Federal Union under the constitution had not been formed and so had Maine separated at any time before 1789 would she have been a little republic? Another interesting question would have been the attitude of the other states toward Maine. In fact in Massachusetts at this time one of the arguments against the separation of Maine was the fact that to add another to the already quarreling members of the Confederation would be but adding to an already almost intolerable condition of affairs.

It seems that at the beginning separation appealed to the imagination and fancy of the people rather than as a movement caused by any oppression on the part of Massachusetts. In fact the first movement seems to have been largely supported and carried on by clergymen, physicians, lawyers and farmers. The people opposed were those in trade who dreaded any change that might injure business, and those who held office under Massachusetts. Both factions were controlled by self interest.

It is well to remember that in 1786 Shay's Rebellion occurred in Massachusetts and that some of the more

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1 Stanwood, p. 9.
radical men in Maine considered this a favorable time to force her hand.

The vote in 1787 from 32 out of 93 towns and plantations was 618 for separation and 353 against it.¹ This agitation for separation resulted in benefits to the people of Maine. It drew the attention of the Massachusetts legislature to the needs of Maine and they passed legislation exempting wild lands from taxation for ten years, changed the fee paid at the time of transfer so as to make it less heavy and ordered the construction of two roads which would give a thoroughfare from Augusta to Passamaquoddy Bay. Granted to every squatter on the public lands prior to 1784 one hundred acres of land upon payment of five dollars. Established a term of the Supreme Court at Wiscasset, and incorporated Bowdoin College.² All this, of course, pleased Maine and remedied some of the grievances so that the agitation for a separation dies down until 1791.

In 1791 a Mr. Gardiner of what is now Wiscasset

¹ Stanwood, p. 11.
² Williamson, p. 532.
moved in the General Court that the towns be instructed to take a vote on separation, but nothing came of it. On February 13, 1792, the Massachusetts legislature passed a resolve that the inhabitants of the Counties of York, Cumberland, Lincoln, Hancock and Washington, may have meetings called by the selectmen and allow the people to vote on the question the first Monday of May. This time even the little towns were to vote. The same arguments were used as before with the additional argument that the money paid by the people of Maine to Massachusetts would be amply sufficient to support a state government. The population of Maine was now well beyond the 100,000 mark, greater than the population of Rhode Island or Delaware or Vermont, and yet they maintained separate governments. The vote stood 2084 in favor and 2438 opposed to separation.

1 Stanwood, p. 13.
2 Stanwood, p. 13
3 U.S. Census 1890 (93,308); 1800 (150,939); 1810 (228,767).
4 Stanwood himself counted these returns in Massachusetts State House, so I give his figures.
It seems that the people of York County defeated separation this time. It is explained mainly on the ground that their nearness to Massachusetts made them feel less keenly the great disadvantages that the other sections labored under because of the distance from the seat of government. The vote in York County ran so strongly against separation that it overcame the lead given for separation in the other counties.\(^1\) Thus the second attempt ended in failure.

Maine was again allowed to vote on the question in 1797 but again the vote was against separation.\(^2\)

The next attempt was in 1807. The legislature passed a resolve allowing Maine to vote the first Monday in April upon the question of separation. The party in favor of separation was very much disappointed by the result of the 1807 vote. The movement seemed to arouse little interest. The people were, in fact, much more interested in the state election of that year.\(^2\) Governor Strong was running against Sullivan,\(^3\) a Republican, and the people of Maine were so

\(^1\) Vote by counties given in pamphlet from Boston Public Library.

\(^2\) Williamson, p. 605.

\(^3\) Sullivan was interested in the settlement of the eastern boundary dispute.
eager to elect the Republican candidate that they regarded
the question of separation as relatively unimportant. The
vote of Maine elected Sullivan\(^1\) while separation was defeated
3370 for to 9404 against.\(^2\) This ends the agitation for
separation until after the War of 1812. As the War of 1812
had considerable influence upon the success of the movement
it is perhaps well at this time to see just how it effected
Maine.

Maine suffered severely in the War of 1812.\(^3\) All
Eastern Maine, including Eastport, Castine, Hampden, Bangor
and Machias fell into the hands of the British. Even Belfast
across the Bay from Castine was held for a short time and
English ships terrorized the inhabitants of Thomaston by
appearing in the river below the town.\(^4\)

The people of Maine instead of blaming the Federal
government or themselves for their misfortunes seem to have

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\(^1\) Williamson, p. 600.

\(^2\) Stanwood, p. 17.

\(^3\) McMaster, pp. 132-133. Also Histories of Castine,
Eastport, Hampden, Bangor and Belfast.

\(^4\) Eaton. History of Rockland, Thomaston and Camden,
pp. 288 and 289-290.
held Massachusetts responsible. The people of Massachusetts were opposed to the war and the people of Maine justly perhaps complained that Massachusetts would not protect them and would not even allow the people of the District to adopt means to protect themselves.\(^1\) Almost no resistance was made to British attack and the lack of organization, supplies, etc., was held by the people of Maine to be the fault of Massachusetts.\(^2\) The old friction between Republicans of Maine and Federalists of Massachusetts was again clearly apparent.

Another event toward the close of the war did not tend to improve the situation. The famous Hartford Convention met in 1814. While it is true it did not represent Massachusetts opinion -- not even Federalist opinion -- the convention aroused the spirit of the people of Maine who were intensely loyal to the Union. "In no other part of the Union, perhaps, did that famous convention call forth more exasperation than it did in Maine."\(^3\)

In Niles Register, March 18, 1815, it was reported: "During the fever of rebellion that recently raged at Boston

\(^1\) Williamson, p. 649.
\(^2\) Stanwood, p. 17.
\(^3\) Niles Register, March 18, 1815.
and reduced itself to the contempt it deserved in the famous meeting at Hartford, the citizens of Maine prepared for the worst and had determined that if Massachusetts proper lifted an arm against the Union or took any measures to effect a separation of the states they also would come forth and by a convention establish a provisional government and support the Union and bring about a separation from Massachusetts."

It cannot, however, be said that Maine had favored the War of 1812. Many of the coast towns, Belfast, Castine, Deer Isle, and Machias, had opposed the war. Calais felt that the misrule of Massachusetts during the war was in part the cause of their misfortunes and after this she favored separation.

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1 Conventions were held in Oxford, Kennebec and Somerset Counties.
2 Eaton. History of Belfast.
5 Centennial Memorial Machias, p. 141.
7 Annals of Calais, p. 54.
The war stopped manufacturing and caused a general disturbance of economic life which with the dismissal of the militia, probably caused the bad moral conditions especially among the young.¹

In 1815 a petition for separation was sent to the Massachusetts General Court but it met with little favor and for the first time since the movement started Massachusetts refused to allow the petition.² Up to this time she had been very fair in her treatment of the question and the people of Maine seem to have felt that they would get justice because you find little complaint of the way the question had been handled each time it had previously come before the legislature. In 1815, however, Massachusetts voted, "Not expedient to pass said resolves." It is said that the reason Massachusetts refused the petition for a vote in 1815³ was that up to this time Maine had been growing faster than Massachusetts and as Maine was Republican, Massachusetts did not care so much about retaining control, but now in 1815 Maine had almost ceased to grow and Massachusetts was

¹ Williamson, p. 660.
² Stanwood, p. 36.
People moved in great numbers in 1816 and 1817 to Ohio. The movement was known as the "Ohio Fever." The chief causes for the movement were the gloom of the latter part of the war. Territory had been seized by the enemy and commercial intercourse had been seriously interfered with. The necessaries of life were scarce and their prices high. Ohio was pictured as rich in land, with mild climate and long summers. Eighteen hundred and sixteen was known as the summerless year. There were frosts in every month. All this helped the Ohio movement.

2 Williamson, p. 665.
3 Williamson, p. 663.
4 Stanwood, p. 22.
because of her location hoped to be the capital of the new state. At the Augusta meeting the following action was taken:

"Resolved, therefore as the sense of this meeting, that the period has arrived when the best interests of Maine will be promoted by a separation from Massachusetts proper and that we will individually use all fair and honorable means to effect these objects."¹

Those opposed to separation also held meetings.² Their chief arguments were advantages and pride in the connection with the Old Commonwealth. The objection that carried most weight, however, was the Federal law³ which made it necessary for the vessels of one state to clear when sailing to a port in another state. The fee was only fifty cents for a vessel over fifty tons and twenty-five cents for those smaller. Still in spite of the small fee the people in the coast towns considered it a very important point. A meeting was held in Warren⁴ and because of this Federal law

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¹ Stanwood, p. 23.
² Stanwood, p. 22.
they voted strongly against separation.\textsuperscript{1} The newspapers in Massachusetts at this time seem to take very little notice of the separation question.\textsuperscript{2} In Maine, however, articles appeared for and against.\textsuperscript{3} The Eastern Argus, American Advocate and Bangor Register, which were Republican, supported separation while the Portland Gazette, Hallowell Gazette and Kennebunk Visitor, which were Federalist, opposed separation.\textsuperscript{4} Maine being Republican it can be seen that the Federalists in the District would naturally in large numbers be opposed to separation, as it would mean loss of power. On the other hand, the Republicans of Massachusetts did not really wish Maine to separate because it would leave them a hopeless minority in Massachusetts and so the movement received little help from the Massachusetts Republicans. On May 20, 1816, 17,075 votes were cast and 10,584 were in favor of separation and 6,491 against it.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{1} Eaton. History of Warren, p. 302.
\textsuperscript{2} Stanwood, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{3} The newspapers are impossible to obtain. The Bangor fire destroyed the only library copies in Maine of the newspapers.
\textsuperscript{4} Williamson, p. 672.
\textsuperscript{5} Williamson, p. 663.
On May 29 the Massachusetts legislature assembled and the subject of separation was taken up. Finally a bill was reported which provided for an election in Maine to choose delegates to a convention to meet at Brunswick on August 26. If a majority of the delegates favored separation the convention was to proceed to form a constitution. This bill was several times amended and one amendment caused the failure of the movement.¹ This amendment provided that the people should vote once more on the first Monday in September on whether they wished to be formed into a new state and that the vote cast must be in the ratio of five to four in favor. The bill as amended passed both houses of the Massachusetts legislature. As soon as the act was passed Maine became very much excited and once more the campaign was on. All the arguments already cited being again brought forth. The vote this time was very close. There were 11,669 for and 10,347 against. Those in favor of separation had lost as the ratio 5 to 4 had not been maintained.²

The convention met the 30th of September in Brunswick in the meeting house. The leaders for separation

¹ Williamson, p. 664.
² Williamson, p. 664.
now tried to put over a trick which when it became known in Massachusetts caused the harshest language that had been used in the whole long struggle. As the separation had lost in the actual vote they decided they could give a different interpretation to the five to four clause. They took the aggregate majority vote of the towns voting yes, which was 6,031, and the aggregate majority vote of the towns voting no, which was 4,409, and said 6,031 to 4,409 exceeds the ratio five to four.¹ After drawing up memorials to the legislature the convention adjourned. Massachusetts was very angry at the action of the convention and there seems to have been a reaction unfavorable to Maine.

One man in the "Advertiser"² of October 23 maintained that "Maine would finally endanger if not overthrow the literary, religious and political institutions of the state." Also "that for ten years past the laws had been regularly and unremittingly resisted in some parts of the semi-civilized District." The Massachusetts legislature rejected the work of the Brunswick convention and this ended the 1816 attempt at separation.

¹ Williamson, p. 664.
The next move took place in 1819. The Maine members of the Massachusetts legislature sent out an address\(^1\) to the Maine people asking them to elect only members who would support separation. Petitions for separation numbered 130 against 5. The legislature was so impressed with the strong sentiment now running for separation that they decided to allow Maine to vote again. The vote was to be taken July 26. The question was whether it was expedient that Maine should become a separate and independent state. This time it was decided that if the number of votes in favor exceeded those against by 1500 the people "shall be deemed to have expressed their consent and agreement to the separation." The result was to be proclaimed and an election was to take place the 21st of September for delegates to a convention which was to meet in Portland the 12th of October and adopt a constitution. Then the constitution was to be submitted to popular vote and if adopted by a majority Maine was to become a state with the consent of Congress. This bill passed both houses of the Massachusetts legislature by large majorities.\(^2\)

\(^1\) Williamson, p. 673.
\(^2\) Williamson, p. 673.
Again we have a campaign in Maine. All the earlier arguments are again brought forth but this time the support of the seacoast towns was gained for separation by the fact that the Federal law in regard to entering and clearing had been changed and the United States divided into two districts. Thus Maine ships would not have to enter and clear in any of the trade ports north of Georgia. This law was passed March 2, 1819. This time the seacoast towns favored separation and every county in the state voted in favor. Kennebec gave a majority of 3,309. The vote was 17,091 for and 7,132 against.

The convention drew up a constitution which was accepted by the people by a vote of 9,050 in favor, 798 against, and separation was complete March 15, 1820.

The conditions upon which Maine separated were as follows:

1 15th Congress. 2nd Sess. Chap. XIVIII. Approved March 2, 1819.
2 Vote by counties. Pamphlet in Boston Public Library.
3 Williamson, p. 673.
Lands and buildings in Massachusetts to belong to Massachusetts.
Lands in Maine to be divided; Massachusetts part not to be taxed.
Arms to be divided in proportion to militia.
All money, checks, etc., obtained from United States because of late war, one-third to Maine, two-thirds to Massachusetts.
Debts, etc., Maine to pay one-third and Massachusetts two-thirds.
Maine to assume obligations to Indians.
Commissioners to divide land, ten from Maine, ten from Massachusetts, they to select ten more.
All grants and contracts to remain in force.
No laws to be passed in Maine making distinction between resident and non-resident proprietors.

The 3rd of March 1820 an act was passed by Congress making Maine a state, and after March 15 Maine was "one of the United States of America admitted in all respects whatever on an equal footing with the original states."

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1 Williamson, p. 675.
Conclusion.

It seems from a study of the question of the separation of Maine from Massachusetts that the various causes might be stated in the following order:

1st. The distance from Massachusetts and the fact that Maine and Massachusetts were non-contiguous. The distance was so great that the people of the two parts came to have little in common except the government. From Hampden, Maine, the trip to Boston by water -- which was the usual method from seacoast towns -- often took a week and some times if winds were unfavorable, two weeks. By land the journey could be made perhaps more quickly but at much greater expense.

3nd. The people of Massachusetts had little knowledge and appreciation of either Maine or its people. In fact the legislature of Massachusetts felt this lack of knowledge so keenly that they had Greenleaf make a report called "Statistical View of the District of Maine (1816)." In this he frankly says that Massachusetts knows very little about Maine and he hopes his book will correct this and induce migration from Massachusetts to Maine. Perhaps separation was inevitable but nevertheless it seems that had Massachusetts known Maine and her people better, Massachusetts might have, by wise legislation, postponed the separation.
The people of Maine had little sympathy with a state church as shown by the readiness with which they got rid of it when they became independent, while Massachusetts retained her state church long after the other New England states had disestablished theirs. The people of Massachusetts were inclined to look upon the people of Maine as crude, ignorant and rough. They seemed to forget that in many respects Maine was in reality a pioneer state and that her people had both the virtues and vices of the pioneer.

3rd. Political differences separated the people. The majority party in Massachusetts was Federalist while in Maine the majority party was Republican. The people of Maine were more in sympathy with the democracy of Jefferson than with the conservatism of the Federalists. They were on the whole pioneers and their economic interests would be better served by the Republicans than by the Federalists. Furthermore, they had greater sympathy with the liberalism of Jefferson and were less frightened by his religious ideas than were the old Federalist Puritans of Massachusetts. The fact that Maine was Republican made Massachusetts less inclined to oppose separation. A writer in the "Advertiser"¹ of October 23

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¹ Daily Advertiser for Oct. 23, 1816, quoted by Stanwood p. 34.
throws a little light upon the attitude of some people in Massachusetts when he refers to the Republicans of Maine in this way:

"While Massachusetts exercised but a feeble ineffectual moral and political authority over Maine, the latter was constantly weakening the respect for the government of Massachusetts and gradually impairing the force and influence of the laws by withdrawing from them their only real support in a free country, public opinion * * * * * that the unprincipled majority in Maine effecting a junction with their natural allies in Massachusetts proper, will finally endanger, if not overthrow the literary, religious and political institutions of the state." This man thought Maine should be allowed to separate for he says further, "It is well known that for ten years past the laws have been regularly and unremittedly resisted in some of the barbarous parts of that semi-civilized District." This shows that at least some Federalists of Massachusetts feared the Republicans of Maine.

4th. There were many men in Maine who were ambitious for political careers and who thought their chances would be much better in a new state. Also there were many to whose pride Maine as a state made a strong appeal.

5th. The War of 1812 had considerable influence. On the
whole Maine was loyal while Massachusetts very unwillingly supported the war. Maine also felt that Massachusetts had neglected her in the matter of protection. It seems that the deep and widespread discontent engendered by the war had much to do with the vigor with which the separation movement was taken up in 1816.

6th. The dissatisfaction over taxes, courts, land fees, etc., all helped to win votes for separation.

7th. There was almost no opposition in Massachusetts to separation.

There can be only admiration for the attitude of Massachusetts all thru the long period of agitation for separation. She stood ready to grant Maine independence at any time the people of Maine could show that they really wished it. There seems to have been very little hard feeling over the question. The committee selected to prepare an address to the people of Maine to accompany the constitution submitted their report Oct. 27, 1819, which ran as follows:

"The constitution of Massachusetts, venerable as the work of the fathers of the Revolution, endeared to the people by many associations, and replete with the soundest principles of liberty and government, has in forty years
experience proved inconvenient and defective in some few of
the provisions. Assuming that instrument as a basis the
convention proceeded to frame a constitution for the State
of Maine deviating in those cases only where experience of
this and other states in the Union seemed to justify and
require it."

The committee concluded by saying:

"Such, fellow citizens, are the principal provisions
in the constitution submitted to you by your delegates, which
embrace the natural variances from the constitution under
which you have so long and happily lived."

John Q. Adams in his diary Oct. 8, 1819, makes the
following comment:

"Much to be lamented as affecting the importance of the
state as a member of the Union but quite unavoidable from the
moment that it became the wish of the majority."

Hon. William King, Maine's first governor, said in
his first message:¹ "It is a source of much pleasure to
reflect that the measures adopted for its (the separation)
accomplishment have effected the object in the most friendly
manner. A great and powerful commonwealth voluntarily

¹ Gov. King's message in Aldrich's Massachusetts, and
Maine.
yielding up her jurisdiction over a large portion of her citizens and territory over which she had undisputed and rightful sovereignty, those citizens peacefully and quietly forming themselves into a new and independent state — these are events which constitute a memorable era in our history. In the division of the public property although a large majority of the legislature which passed that act was constituted of members from Massachusetts proper, who thus had it in their power to dictate the terms, the principles of division are so equitable and just that they have received the general approbation. By this correct and wise policy the executive and legislative departments of the government have laid the foundation of a lasting harmony between the two states."
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