

1-1-1989

Who Were the Whigs and Democrats? The Economic Character of Second-Level Party Leadership in Tidewater Maine, 1843-53

Wayne M. O'Leary

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [Political History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Leary, Wayne M.. "Who Were the Whigs and Democrats? The Economic Character of Second-Level Party Leadership in Tidewater Maine, 1843-53." *Maine History* 28, 3 (1989): 146-169.
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol28/iss3/3>

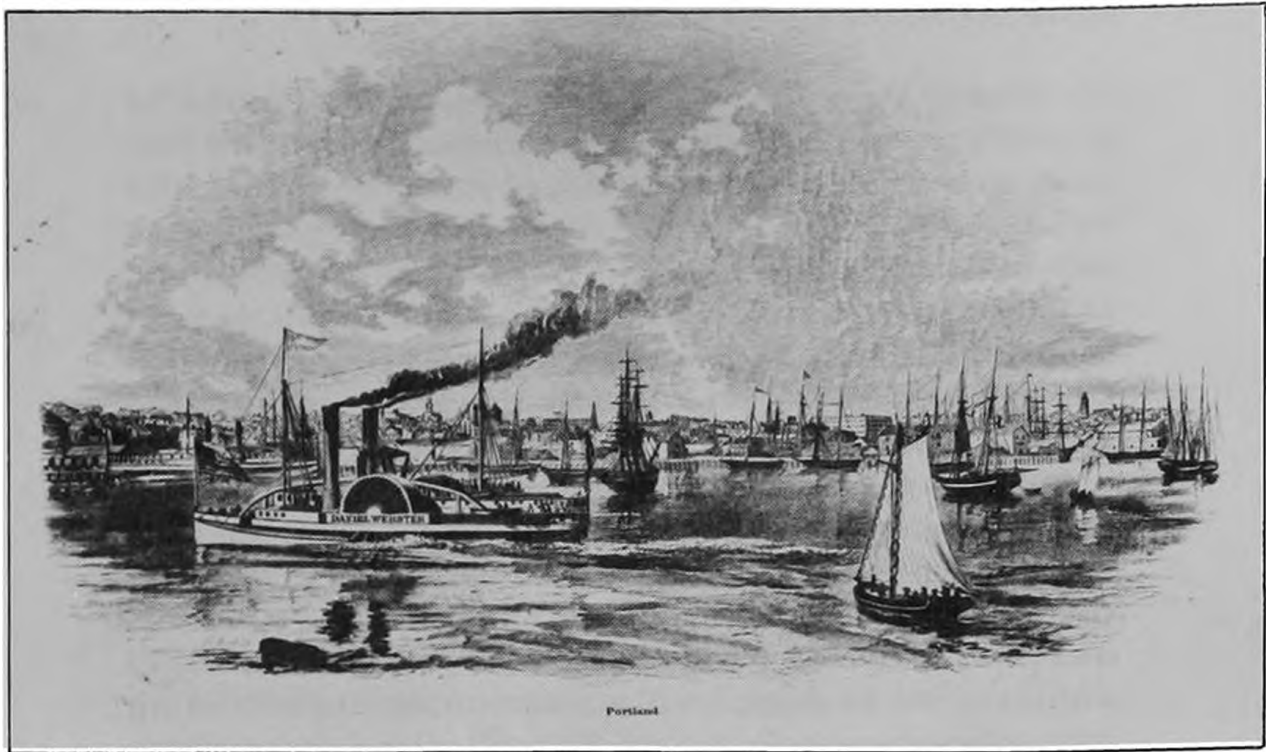
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

WHO WERE THE WHIGS AND DEMOCRATS?
THE ECONOMIC CHARACTER OF SECOND-LEVEL
PARTY LEADERSHIP IN TIDEWATER MAINE, 1843-53

In 1929 historian Charles Beard wrote that "the division of voters into parties according to their political sentiments and views springs from the possession of different kinds and amounts of property," and that the historical basis of conflict in American two-party politics had been "... an emotional antagonism arising from divergent economic situations."¹ The Beard thesis poses an interesting question for students of Maine's political history. Has there, in fact, been a Maine tradition of two-party politics based on economic differences, competition between class interests, and contrasting perceptions of the business system? In short, have the state's major parties ever represented anything more fundamental than cultural rivalries, patronage struggles, or varied rhetorical styles?

Examination of Maine's "second-level" of party leadership in the Jacksonian period provides some clues to the character of political alignments during a critical and formative political era in American politics. Second-level leadership in this context refers to members of the lower house of the State Legislature elected between the years 1843 and 1853.

As a measure of party difference, examination of state legislators is profitable for two reasons. First, because they represented one or more communities and were nominated locally, state representatives were leaders of a sort — not necessarily state or national leaders, but at least dominant within their own grass-roots bailiwicks. At the same time, because they were not upper-echelon political figures, radiating charisma, atypical qualities, or unusual abilities, they provide a clue to the make-up of the party rank-and-file. They were, in other words, average party members, though more active and committed than most. Such individuals provided a bridge between grass-roots constituents and the party elites who may have been less reflective of the people and interests they represented. State legislators thus provide a more accurate picture of the bedrock composition of their parties.



Portland shipping in the great age of coastwise commerce. Maine's coastal communities in the 1840s and 1850s provide an interesting mix of commercial and industrial activity — an inviting milieu in which to analyze relations between politics and economic interest. Illustration from Coolidge and Mansfield, *A History and Description of New England* (1859).

Maine offers a singular advantage for analyzing the economic nature of political parties during the antebellum era. It was overwhelmingly Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. With the exception of small Irish-Catholic minorities in cities like Portland, Bangor, and Augusta, and some immigrant laborers in scattered mill, quarry, and lumber towns, the state exhibited minimal ethnic or sectarian diversity prior to the 1850s.² This homogeneity minimizes cultural variables, allowing more precise examination of the relation between partisanship and economic factors.

The choice of coastal or tidewater Maine in particular as the focus for this study was made for several reasons. First, it provides a manageable and conveniently sized sample, without sacrificing integrity. Tidewater Maine (the region bordering on saltwater) accounts for approximately 45 percent of Maine's legislators during the Age of Jackson. At the same time, it offers a representative cross-section of the state, socially, economically, and institutionally.

Coastal Maine fell into two broad geographic sections: the relatively populous, wealthy, and developed west; and the relatively sparse, poor, and undeveloped east. The coastal zone included such divergent communities as the state's largest city and commercial center, Portland, in western Cumberland County, and the frontier-like fishing and lumbering towns of downeast Hancock and Washington counties. Furthermore, the coastal region included the bulk of the state's major population centers, the greater portion of its wealth, and the focal points of its economy.³

Tidewater Maine also had the virtue of economic diversity. Unlike interior Maine, which was similar to the rest of northern New England in its emphasis on agrarian pursuits, the coastal zone offered a wide range of economic interests. In addition to the farming, small manufacturing, and lumbering common to the rest of the state, the coast offered the maritime activities of shipping, fishing and shipbuilding. And the tidewater textile mill centers of Saco and Biddeford (the most important in the state) added to the mix. Economic diversity, leading to social diversity, added extra dimension to the coastal zone — and, presumably, to its legislative delegations.

Finally, the nature of antebellum politics in Maine was such that the coastal zone emerged as a two-party region in a one-party state. Between 1830 and 1855, Maine elected eight Democratic senators and only three who were Whigs or National Republicans. Out of 25 gubernatorial elections during that time, 20 were won by Democrats. Out of 95 congressional races, Democrats won 70.⁴ Maine, as a whole, was solidly Jacksonian in its orientation before 1856. Within the coastal zone, however, strong two-party competition was the rule. In annual legislative contests between 1843 and 1853, neither party was able to overwhelm the other in the tidewater districts, and the difference between them was usually a margin of only two or three seats. Coastal Maine provides a geographic region characterized by keen political competition; it offers an opportunity to examine a balanced number of House members from each of the two major parties.

A total of 449 members of the Maine House of Representatives held legislative seats in the coastal zone between 1844 and 1854.⁵ Out of the 449 elected members, relatively complete economic information was uncovered for 408, including 211 Democrats and 197 Whigs.⁶ The choice of 1843-1853 as years for study served to combine a sufficiently large two-party legislative sample, undiluted by third-party activity, with obtainable and appropriate economic data. In 1850 — the earliest year for which most of the relevant information used in this study was available — the second American party system was nearing an end, but it still retained its essential structure and allegiances. Philosophical party differences over economic issues like free trade, banking regulation, internal transportation improvements, monetary policy, conditions of labor, and the like remained as strong as they had been earlier, if less emotionally charged. In sum, the decade selected for analysis faithfully reflects the second American party system in its years of mature development; it brackets the census year that provided the key analytical material; and it avoids the pitfalls of basing all conclusions on the make-up of just one legislature.

Real signs of decay in the existing binary system did not appear until the state general election of 1852, when multiple candidacies for governor developed, based on intra-party fissures over slavery and liquor prohibition. By the mid-1850s, the abolitionist and temperance movements had spawned third parties, rendering the major parties ideologically meaningless. But as late as 1853 — the last election year used in the legislative sample — Maine was still basically a two-party Democratic-Whig state, as it had been for a generation.⁷

The first and most obvious measure of economically-based political allegiances is vocation. An examination of the occupations (in 1850) of the 211 Democratic and 197 Whig legislators for whom information was available clarifies several subtle, yet distinct differences between the parties. Both Democrats and Whigs came from all occupational levels. Beyond that, similarities ended.

The Democrats (see Table 1) were much more agrarian in their composition, even in coastal Maine. Nearly half of the Democratic representatives from the tidewater were farmers, compared to fewer than a third of the Whigs. Artisans were also a much more important component of the second-level leadership of the Democrats than of the Whigs. Next to farmers, these skilled workers, whose ranks included carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, and shoemakers (among others), were the most numerous occupational grouping among Democratic legislators. In the Whig grouping, they were fourth. Between 1844 and 1854, no fewer than 21 carpenters from the coastal zone sat on the Democratic side of the Maine legislature compared to only 6 on the Whig side. Similarly, of 11 maritime artisans (ship carvers, boatbuilders, sailmakers, etc.) elected to the legislature, nine were Democrats. Shopkeepers, traders, and seafarers showed no overall predilection for one or the other of the two parties, although seafarers of more humble occupations tended to be Democrats. All three fishermen elected to the Maine House were Democrats, as were three of the four common seamen elected. Three of the five master mariners or ship captains, in contrast, were Whigs.

Significantly, two-thirds of all Democrats were either farmers, artisans, or seafarers, while only a minority of the Whigs came from these occupational backgrounds. This did not necessarily make the Jacksonians the party of the very poor. It did, however, lend credence to their oft-stated claims to be the party of the average workingman — of the man who toiled by hand for his sustenance, rather than the man who balanced books, figured interest, or charged a retainer.

Occupational differences were even more dramatic among higher echelon vocations (see Table 1). Here, the essence of Whiggery asserted itself. Merchants and professional men, combined, outnumbered farmers in the Whig legislative delegations. The legal profession provided the single most glaring occupational distinction between Whigs and Democrats. A total of 37 lawyers were elected to the Maine House from tidewater districts between 1843 and 1853. Of these, 29 (or 78

Table 1

LEADING OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES OF MAINE
TIDEWATER LEGISLATORS ELECTED 1843-1853.

Democrats			Whigs		
Type of Occupation	No.	% of Sample	Type of Occupation	No.	% of Sample
Farmer	95	(45%)	Farmer	62	(31%)
Artisan+	35	(17%)	Professional*	38	(19%)
Merchant	23	(11%)	Merchant	29	(15%)
Professional*	17	(8%)	Artisan+	20	(10%)
Shopkeeper	16	(8%)	Shopkeeper	14	(7%)
Seafarer	12	(6%)	Seafarer	8	(4%)
TOTAL SAMPLE	211	(100%)	TOTAL SAMPLE	197	(100%)

*(Lawyers, clergymen, physicians, editors, engineers, etc.)

+(Carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, shoemakers, printers, etc.)

a Compiled from: U.S., Superintendent of the Census, Seventh Census of the United States, 1850: Manuscript Schedules for Population, State of Maine; and other miscellaneous sources.

percent) were Whigs. Fifteen percent of all Whig coastal legislators during the period were lawyers. Only 4 percent of the Democrats were members of the bar.

The Maine tidewater produced nothing resembling a proletarian upsurge, at least as revealed by the occupations of its elected political leadership. Neither party drew any great degree of its second-level leaders from the lowest end of the occupational scale. Within the context of upper- and middle-class vocations, however, a clear party difference was apparent. Vocationally, the Democratic legislators were solidly middle class as a group, perhaps leaning toward lower-middle class status. Their Whig counterparts were solidly upper-middle class with a distinct aristocratic coloration.

While antebellum Maine Democrats were characteristically “producers” — to use Jacksonian parlance — and Whigs

WHO WERE THE WHIGS AND DEMOCRATS?

were typically “non-producers,” distinctions based on occupation alone were incomplete. The necessary complementary attribute was wealth, or lack of it. On this subject, sociologist E. D. Baltzell once wrote:

Throughout history, landownership has been a staple bond between generations of aristocratic families. Although most family fortunes in commercial societies are originally built on some form of business enterprise, many of the greatest and most stable early American fortunes ... were consolidated through landownership. Nineteenth-century America’s rapid population growth made investment in land ... as good or better than gold.⁸

Real estate holdings should indicate much about the character of Whig and Democratic leadership. Contrasts were not as stark as antebellum labor leader Thomas Skidmore’s vision, which divided society into two classes, “those who own the world, and those who own no part of it.”⁹ Nevertheless, it is clear that coastal Maine society was politically divided between those who owned more of the world and those who owned less of it. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of real estate as an economic measure,¹⁰ trends here remained consistent: Whigs were more land wealthy than Democrats.

The 1850 census schedules for the State of Maine provided realty information on 393 of the legislators in the coastal zone sample, including 209 Democrats and 184 Whigs.¹¹ In 1850, the average real wealth of the Democrats who represented tidewater Maine between 1844 and 1854 was \$2,709. Whig representatives owned \$2,914 in real estate on the average (see Table 2). This small difference was misleading, however, because of one atypical Democrat, Reuel Williams of Augusta, who sat in the Maine House of Representatives in 1848. Williams, one of the few lawyers among the Democrats, was close to being the richest man in the state in 1850. His real estate assets totaled \$160,000, compared to \$20,000 for Representative George W. Stanley, also of Augusta, the second most land-wealthy Democrat in the legislature. On the Whig side, William Patten,

Richmond merchant, was the leader in landed wealth with a mere \$25,000.

Reuel Williams was not the average Jacksonian. Early in his career, he was a Federalist and as late as 1829 was a member of the National Republican party. Only an intra-party feud caused Williams to move to the Democratic side the following year.¹² Upon eventual election to the U. S. Senate in 1837 as a Democrat, the inscrutable Mr. Williams proceeded to vote consistently for the protective tariff against the wishes of his party. Resigning from the Senate in 1842, he pursued a checkered career as a railroad speculator.¹³

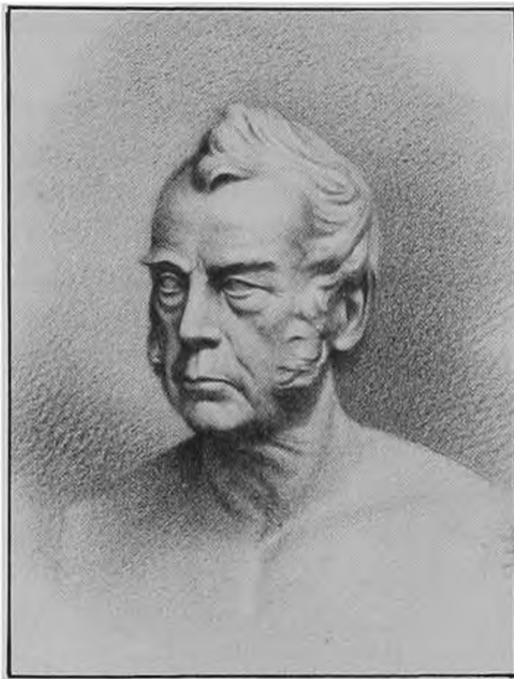
Table 2

**AVERAGE AND MEDIAN VALUE OF REALTY
HOLDINGS (1850) OF MAINE TIDEWATER
LEGISLATORS ELECTED 1843-1853,
BY OCCUPATION.^a**

TOTAL:	Ave.	Med.	Artisan Legislators:	Ave.	Med.
Democrats -	\$ 2,709	\$1,200	Democrats -	\$1,022	\$1,000
Whigs -	\$ 2,914	\$1,500	Whigs -	\$2,477	\$1,350
Merchant Legislators:			Farmer Legislators:		
Democrats -	\$ 2,207	\$1,263	Democrats -	\$2,243	\$1,600
Whigs -	\$ 6,029	\$3,000	Whigs -	\$2,023	\$1,500
Trader Legislators:			Seafarer Legislators:		
Democrats -	\$ 3,022	\$ 950	Democrats -	\$ 758	\$ 750
Whigs -	\$ 2,440	\$1,750	Whigs -	\$1,068	\$ 950
Lawyer Legislators:			All "Business" Occupations		
Democrats -	\$21,663	\$2,000	Democrats -	\$2,882	\$1,300
Whigs -	\$ 4,313	\$1,500	Whigs -	\$4,524	\$2,000

^a Computed from: U. S. manuscript Census Schedules for Population, Maine, 1850.

To put the assets of this one uncharacteristic Democrat in proper perspective, it is necessary to resort to median, rather than average, wealth as a yardstick of party membership (see Table 2). By this measurement, property-owning Whigs were substantially better off than comparable Democrats. Their



An uncommon Jacksonian, Reuel Williams was one of Maine's wealthiest citizens. More typically, Maine's Democrats were middling merchants, artisans, and farmers. Williams sided with the Democrats only after a political squabble with local National Republicans in 1830. Although a Democrat, he continued to vote against party principles until he resigned from the U. S. Senate in 1842. Illustration from North, *History of Augusta* (1870).

median landed wealth was \$1,900, compared to \$1,500 for the Jacksonians. A complicating factor was that among the two groups a higher percentage of Whig legislators — for reasons to be explained further on — failed to become real estate owners. Taking non-property holders into account reduced the gap between the parties, but median differences were still considerable. For all Whig legislators, non-realty owners included, the median propertied wealth was \$1,500, while that of all Democratic members was \$1,200.

Party differences in real wealth were more significant viewed within occupational categories (see Table 2). For instance, the merchant legislators in the Democratic sample averaged only \$2,207 in realty, while the merchants adhering to the Whig Party averaged \$6,029 — or three times as much. Whig artisans held considerably more property than Democratic representatives in the same occupational group, no matter how measured. And Whig seafarers of various kinds also tended to be bigger property owners than comparable Democrats. Interestingly, averages for farmers indicated little difference based on party. The property equity between farmers of both parties was perhaps merely a reflection of the greater agricultural orientation of the Democratic Party as a whole.

Lawyers were a special case. Democrats in the legal profession had a much higher average property wealth than their Whig colleagues, due to the exceptional Mr. Williams, but the median difference was considerably less. When only those owning real estate were considered, Whig lawyers were actually wealthier (\$4,100 to \$2,500 in median land holdings). On balance, there was little to choose between Whig lawyers and Democratic lawyers.

One key vocation-realty categorization of Whigs and Democrats suggested a major difference between the two parties (see Table 2). Occupations primarily concerned with business enterprise (e.g. merchants, bankers, manufacturers, traders, shopkeepers) were more prevalent among Whig representatives than among Democrats by 28 percent to 21 percent of the respective party samples. More significantly, the average and median value of real estate held by Whig legislators in this category was considerably higher than for comparable Democrats — approaching a two-to-one margin. Neither party had a monopoly on “businessmen,” but the Whigs were clearly more inclined toward traditional business pursuits and — more importantly — were more successful (or unscrupulous) in those pursuits. Based on their real wealth, Whig businessmen were, relatively speaking, “big” businessmen.

Whigs outnumbered Democrats in all categories of property ownership above the \$3,000 valuation level (see Table 3). Nearly a third of all Whig legislators elected between 1843 and 1853 owned \$3,000 or more in real property in 1850, while fewer than a fifth of the Democrats were in that category. The higher up the real property scale, the more pronounced the Whig predominance. Among holders of \$5,000 or more in realty, for example, Whigs had a numerical and percentage advantage of roughly two to one. On the other hand, owners of less than \$1,000 worth of real estate were twice as common in Democratic as Whig ranks.

The apparent neatness of the pattern was marred by one outstanding exception. While only 23 Democrats were totally without real property, 33 Whigs (18 percent of the party sam-

ple) were unpropertied. This anomaly arose out of the land-orientation of the Democrats and the comparative lack of interest in agricultural pursuits among the Whigs. Many of the Whig legislators were transient individuals who did not own homes or land even though possessing considerable financial assets. At least three of them lived in hotels in 1850, and several more were boarders in private homes. Representative George W. Kendall (W-Bath), for example, lived at the Sagadahoc Hotel in 1850 and owned no real estate. However, corporate returns for 1850 showed him with \$1,700 worth of banking and railroad stock.¹⁴ Lack of real estate did not necessarily mean poverty. A number of landless Whigs were lawyers or educated professionals of some sort. Representative Phineas Barnes of Portland, who served four terms in the legislature during the 1840s, was one of these individuals. Although the 1850 census returns listed him as propertyless, lawyer Barnes held shares worth over \$1,500 in five Maine corporations.¹⁵ He was not alone. In all, over half of the 33 unpropertied Whigs in the legislative sample had prestigious occupations, including 10 lawyers, and many of them held stock in banks, railroads, and insurance companies. Two-thirds of the landless Democrats had lower-level occupations, and few had any recorded investments.¹⁶ Their lack of realty was a reflection of genuine impoverishment. At the opposite end of the realty scale, land-rich Whigs tended in most cases to be merchants or lawyers, while farming was the most common vocation among the smaller number of wealthy Democratic landholders (see Table 4). This suggested that party differences based on wealth were considerably greater among the landholding elite than realty figures alone indicated. Indeed, such was the case. Generally speaking, the real estate owned by land-rich Democrats constituted most or all of their wealth. Land-rich Whigs, on the other hand — heavily involved in mercantile-professional occupations — had only a portion of their wealth in land. Of the 17 leading Democratic landowners (those with \$5,000 or more in realty), barely half held any shares of stock. Of the 29 leading Whig landowners, however, 25 were corporate stockholders, and 16 owned shares in several corporations.¹⁷

WHO WERE THE WHIGS AND DEMOCRATS?

Table 3

REAL ESTATE HOLDINGS (1850) OF MAINE TIDEWATER LEGISLATORS ELECTED BETWEEN 1843-1853, BY VALUATION LEVELS^a

Value of Realty	No. of Legislators		% of Entire Party Realty Sample	% of Party Property Owners Only
\$10,000 or more	Whigs	15	(8.2%)	(9.9%)
	Democrats	6	(2.9%)	(3.2%)
\$5,000-\$9,999:	Whigs	14	(7.6%)	(9.3%)
	Democrats	11	(5.3%)	(5.9%)
\$3,000-\$4,999:	Whigs	- 25	(13.6%)	(16.6%)
	Democrats	- 22	(10.5%)	(11.8%)
\$1,000-\$2,999:	Whigs	- 66	(35.9%)	(43.7%)
	Democrats	- 91	(43.5%)	(48.9%)
\$500-\$999:	Whigs	- 22	(12.0%)	(14.6%)
	Democrats	- 34	(16.3%)	(18.3%)
\$1-\$499:	Whigs	9	(4.9%)	(6.0%)
	Democrats	- 22	(10.5%)	(11.8%)
\$0:	Whigs	- 33	(17.9%)	—
	Democrats	- 23	(11.0%)	—
Entire realty sample:	Whigs	- 184	(100%)	
	Democrats	- 209	(100%)	
Property owners only:	Whigs	151	(100%)	
	Democrats	186	(100%)	

^a Computed from: U. S. Manuscript Census Schedule for Population, Maine, 1850.

While realty alone pointed up obvious and important economic class differences in the respective memberships of Maine's major antebellum political parties, it did not present the entire picture. The final ingredient is personalty or liquid assets. Among measures of personal wealth, one of the best —

Table 4

**OCCUPATIONS OF MAINE TIDEWATER
LEGISLATORS, 1843-1853, OWNING \$5,000 OR MORE
IN REAL PROPERTY (1850)^a**

Democrats		Whigs	
Farmer	7 (41%)	Merchant	11 (37%)
Merchant	3 (18%)	Lawyer	8 (28%)
Lawyer	2 (12%)	Farmer	3 (10%)
Trader	2 (12%)	R.R. Executive	2 (7%)
Bank Director	1	Trader	1
Judge	1	Physician	1
Sheriff	1	Lumberman	1
	<hr/>	Soap Boiler	1
	17 (100%)	Watchmaker	<hr/> - 1
			29 (100%)

^a Compiled from: U. S. Manuscript Census Schedules for Population, Maine, 1850.

and certainly the most politically suggestive — is business investment.

In 1835, Senator Thomas Hart Benton rhetorically asked: “Is not a moneyed corporation the life and soul of one party in the United States, and are not the people the sole constituents of the other party?” The Missouri Democrat left no doubt that the politics of his day, as he saw it, was a struggle “between MEN on one side and MONEY on the other.”¹⁸ Was there, in fact, a correlation between party affiliation and business interests during the Age of Jackson? Based on available personalty data, the answer — for coastal Maine at least — was a qualified yes: Whigs were not only more apt than Democrats to be stockholders (see Table 5), but were also more likely to be multiple stockholders. In all, 33 Whigs (15 percent) held original shares in more than one corporation, while only 11 Democrats (5 percent) were multiple investors. Furthermore, no Democrat held original stock in more than three companies, but nine Whigs held stock in four or more.¹⁹

Table 5

**MAINE TIDEWATER LEGISLATORS
(ELECTED 1843-1853) SERVING AS ORIGINAL
INCORPORATORS OF CORPORATIONS
CHARTERED 1844-1854^a**

Type of Corporation	No. of Legislators		% of Party Sample
Banking	Whigs	- 33	(15%)
	Democrats	13	(6%)
Railroad	Whigs	- 24	(11%)
	Democrats	12	(5%)
Insurance	Whigs	12	(6%)
	Democrats	8	(3%)
Manufacturing	Whigs	11	(5%)
	Democrats	5	(2%)
Utility	Whigs	8	(4%)
	Democrats	2	(1%)
TOTAL (All Types)	Whigs	55	(26%)
	Democrats	36	(15%)

^a Compiled from: State of Maine, *Acts and Resolves*, 1844-1854 (Augusta, Me.: various printers, 1844-1854).

Incorporations for the 1844-1854 period also revealed a marked predilection toward different types of investment by members of the opposing parties. Whigs, for example, were more involved in banking and railroading, thus living up to their party's traditional reputation as the proponent of high finance and internal improvements. Moreover, 4 Whigs held original shares in several railroad companies, and 10 held shares in more than one bank. Just one Democrat was a multiple shareholder in rail or banking corporations. Out of 30 banks incorporated in the coastal zone between 1844 and 1854, 19 began operations with legislative stockholders from just one political organization, the Whig Party. Only five — none of them in commercial centers — had Democratic shareholders

exclusively, and six had investors from both sides of the aisle. All told, Whig incorporators outnumbered Democrats in 22 of the 30 banks.²⁰ Published lists of shareholders for the year 1850 reveal that 20 of the Whig representatives in the sample group owned stock in one or more Maine banks. Of the Democrats, just nine held bank stock (see Table 6). Railroad incorporations during the same period showed much the same thing, with political incorporators of the Whig persuasion outnumbering Democrats in two-thirds of the rail companies chartered between 1844 and 1854. Railroads, in fact, were dominated by Whigs, at least in terms of politically involved investors. Whig legislative shareholders outnumbered Democrats in rail corporations by four to one. The Atlantic & St. Lawrence line, which had only one Democratic stockholder in 1850, had no fewer than 14 investors who had been, or shortly would be, Whig officeholders. One of these was John M. Wood, New York-born railroad contractor, who not only helped build the line but also emerged in 1850 as the 14th largest stockholder (out of more than 2,000) with \$8,500 in shares. Wood went on to the legislature in 1853 and 1854, during which time four additional Maine railroads were chartered, including the Cobboosee Contee R.R. of which he was an original incorporator.²¹

Only a few legislators had manufacturing interests (see Table 5), but that is not surprising, since Maine was not really an industrial state prior to the Civil War and never approached the manufacturing levels experienced by states in southern New England. Even so, such factory investment as was exhibited among legislators was largely a Whig phenomenon. Likewise, utilities (gas-light and telegraph companies) were a Whig province. Four times as many Whigs as Democrats invested in this new field of enterprise, which in Maine generally revolved around lighting contracts between private companies and municipal governments. Insurance investment was the only area where corporate shareholding was nearly evenly divided between the parties. Proliferating community fire and marine insurance companies apparently appealed to the marginal Democratic investor. Even here, however, Whigs outnumbered Democrats by a three to two margin. Overall, 22

Table 6

**MAINE TIDEWATER LEGISLATORS
(ELECTED 1843-1853) HOLDING SHARES OF
CORPORATE STOCK IN 1850^a**

Banking Corporations:		Railroad Corporations:	
Whig shareholders	- 20 (9% of party sample)	Whig shareholders	- 36 (17%)
Dem. shareholders	9 (4%)	Dem. shareholders	9 (4%)
All Non-Banking Corporations:		TOTAL (All Types):	
Whig shareholders	- 47 (22%)	Whig shareholders	- 57 (27%)
Dem. shareholders	13 (6%)	Dem. shareholders	17 (7%)

^a Compiled from: Maine, Legislature, *List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, With the Amount of Stock Held by Each, January 1, 1850* (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1850); and Maine, Legislature, *An Abstract of the Returns of Corporations, January, 1850* (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1850).

percent of the Whigs in the sample group owned stock in Maine non-banking corporations in 1850, compared to six percent of the Democrats. One out of five Whigs had non-banking business interests. Only about one out of every 14 Democrats had any business investments at all in 1850.

A more comprehensive picture of the vested business interests of Whig and Democratic representatives was obtained by combining information on original incorporations between 1844 and 1854 with data on shares held as of 1850 (see Table 8). Taking into consideration all legislators who were either original shareholders in corporations chartered during the decade or shareholders in major corporations that were active in 1850, well over a third of all the Whig representatives in the sample had investments in some sort of business enterprise. About half that proportion of the Democrats had investments. In addition, Whigs were much more active in large corporations and major areas of profit-making: banking, railroading, utilities, insurance, and textiles. Significantly, those facets of enterprise in which Democratic legislators took a personal interest tended to fall into the category of small business: toll bridges, marine

WHO WERE THE WHIGS AND DEMOCRATS?

railways, locks and dams, small community insurance companies, and the like. In manufacturing, Democrats generally left the large cotton, woolen, and paper-making factories to the Whigs, and purchased shares in small tool companies or iron works. In railroading, Democrats were more apt to hold shares in minor spur lines or short-haul lumber railroads, while Whig investment focused on major statewide or regional lines. The banking scene, similarly, was characterized by Whig investment in heavily-capitalized institutions in commercial centers like Portland and Bangor. Democratic investment was mostly in smaller, home-town banks.

Four tidewater representatives, two Whigs and two Democrats, typified these differing investment styles. Representative Phineas Barnes (W-Portland) owned shares in the Canal Bank of Portland (1850 assets \$200,000) and the Androscoggin & Kennebec Railroad (1850 assets \$702,250), and another Portland Whig, Representative William P. Fessenden, held stock in the Casco Bank of Portland (1850 assets \$300,000) and the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroad (1850 assets \$915,740). In contrast, Representative Thomas J. Southard (D-Richmond) owned shares in the small Mariners Bank of Wiscasset (1850

Table 7

MAJOR MAINE RAILROADS (1850) HAVING STOCKHOLDERS WHO REPRESENTED TIDEWATER DISTRICTS IN THE LEGISLATURE, 1844-1854.

Railroad	Whig Stockholders	Democratic Stockholders
Androscoggin & Kennebec R.R.	6	1
Atlantic & St. Lawrence R.R.	14	1
European & No. American R.R.	5	1
Kennebec & Portland R.R.	20	7
York & Cumberland R.R.	3	1

a Compiled from: *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January, 1850.*

Table 8

**MAINE TIDEWATER LEGISLATORS (ELECTED
1843-1853) HOLDING CORPORATE STOCK IN
1850 OR SERVING AS ORIGINAL STOCKHOLDERS
IN CORPORATIONS CHARTERED 1844-1854.**

Type of Corporation	Whig Share- holders	% of Party Sample	Demo- cratic Share- holders	% of Party Sample
Railroad	51	(24%)	20	(8%)
Bank	44	(21%)	17	(7%)
Insurance	17	(8%)	9	(4%)
Utility	11	(5%)	4	(2%)
Textile	11	(5%)	2	(1%)
General Manufacturing*	9	(4%)	6	(3%)
Transportation (non-rail)	6	(3%)	2	(1%)
Hotel & Public House	7	(3%)	0	(0%)
Toll Bridge & Road	3	(1%)	4	(2%)
Dam, Lock & Canal	3	(1%)	2	(1%)
Marine R.R. & Wharf	1	(1%)	2	(1%)
TOTAL (All Types)	80	(38%)	43	(18%)
*(Paper, lumber, iron, footwear, bricks, tools, flour, lime, sugar, etc.)				

a Compiled from: *Acts and Resolves of Maine, 1844-1854*; *List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, January 1, 1850*; and *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January, 1850*.

assets - \$75,000) and the Sagadahock Bank of Bath (1850 assets - \$50,000), while Democrat Robert C. Stickney of Calais was a shareholder in the Baring & Bog Brook and Lewy's Island rail lines, two small lumber railroads connecting adjoining townships.²²

The mercantile-legal axis in the Whig Party cannot be overemphasized. Almost one-fifth of all the Whigs in the legislative sample were merchants or lawyers who *also* owned corporate stock (see Tables 1 and 9). Furthermore, this group included over half of the two-dozen heaviest investors. No such

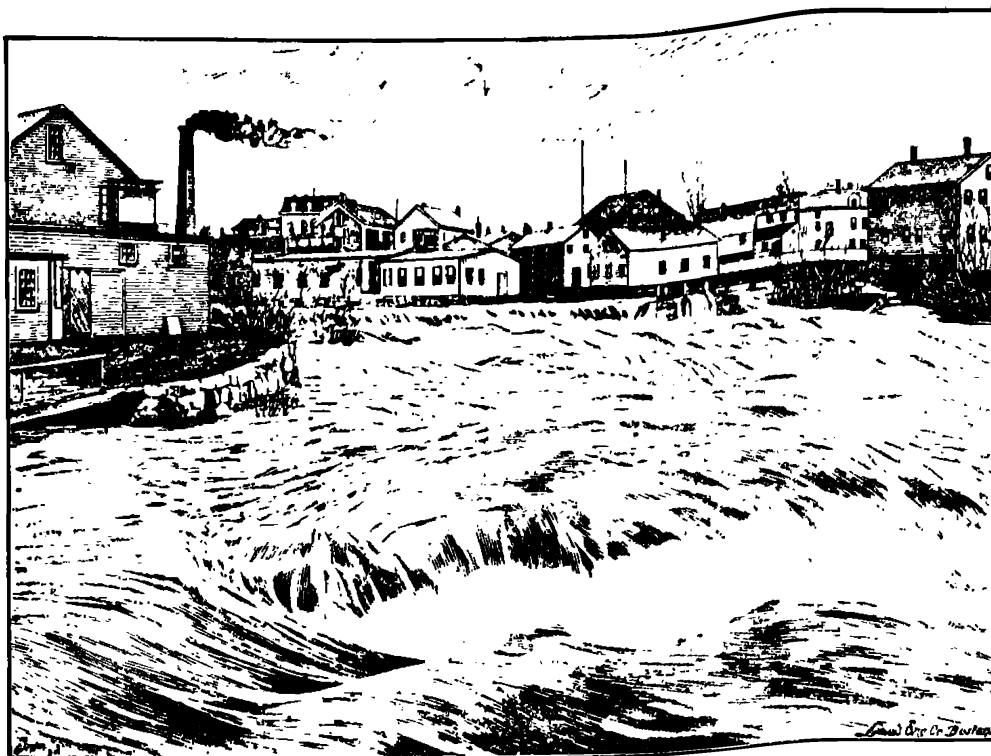
connection between business and the law operated within the party of Jackson. As early as 1837, Democratic editor and publicist John L. O'Sullivan wrote of the influence of the mercantile classes, "... extensively undemocratic, on the young men of the professions, especially that of the law, creating an insensible bias from the dependence of the latter mainly on the patronage of the former ..."²³ The composition and interests of the Whig elite in Maine a few years later suggested that O'Sullivan, partisan though he may have been, was not just indulging in polemics.

Table 9

**LEADING OCCUPATIONS OF MAINE TIDEWATER
LEGISLATORS (ELECTED 1843-1853) WHO HELD
CORPORATE STOCK IN 1850 OR SERVED AS
ORIGINAL STOCKHOLDERS IN CORPORATIONS
CHARTERED 1844-1854.**

Whigs			Democrats		
	% of Party Share- holders	% of Party Occupational Group		% of Party Share- holders	% of Party Occupational Group
Merchant	-19 (24%)	(66%)	Farmer	-11 (26%)	(12%)
Lawyer	19 (24%)	(66%)	Merchant	8 (19%)	(35%)
Farmer	12 (15%)	(19%)	Lawyer	7 (16%)	(88%)
Artisan	8 (10%)	(40%)	Trader	4 (9%)	(27%)
Trader	<u>4 (5%)</u>	(36%)	Artisan	<u>- 4 (9%)</u>	(11%)
TOTAL	80 (100%)		TOTAL	43 (100%)	

a From: U. S. Manuscript Census Schedules for Population, Maine, 1850; *Acts and Resolves of Maine, 1844-54*; *List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, January 1, 1850*; *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January 1850*.



Some of Maine's Democrats held stock in banks and manufacturing concerns, but these corporations were typically smaller than those in which Whigs held interest. The stronger affiliation between Whigs and large manufacturing concerns was evident in voting patterns on an 1848 act requiring a maximum ten-hour day for Maine workers. Illustration from *Leading Businessmen of Lewiston ...* (1889)

Unquestionably, cohesive blocks of special economic interest were present in the Maine legislatures of 1844-1854. It is beyond the scope of this paper to ascertain in detail the degree to which such vested interests influenced actual voting behavior, but one outstanding example serves to suggest the probabilities.

On August 10, 1848, Maine became the third state after New Hampshire and Pennsylvania to enact a ten-hour day law for workingmen. This law, "An Act Regulating the Hours of Labor," attempted to correct in Maine what labor historian Norman Ware called the outstanding abuse of the industrial system of the 1850s: the excessive length of the working day. It specified that ten hours be considered a legal day's work, and that no one outside of agriculture be required to work more. While somewhat primitive and limited, the Maine ten-hour law was the most advanced piece of state labor legislation of its time. Unlike the New Hampshire and Pennsylvania laws,

which allowed exemptions via special contracts for children over twelve, the Maine law expressly forbade all child labor beyond ten hours per day until age sixteen. It was passed by the most heavily Democratic of the Maine legislatures elected between 1843 and 1853. The Democratic edge in tidewater representatives was two to one.²⁴

The act was voted on piecemeal. The key sub-section relating to child labor was the most controversial. This provision provided fines of up to \$100 for corporate officers or manufacturers in violation of the law. A total of 35 of the tidewater legislators in the sample group — 21 Democrats and 14 Whigs — were on record as having voted on the child labor provision. By party, the Democrats voted 18 to 3 in favor of the measure. The Whigs were opposed by a 10 to 4 margin.²⁵ The 22 known tidewater votes in favor of the child labor restrictions included only four men whose occupations could be considered upper-level occupations: four lawyers, a merchant, and a surveyor.

Most importantly, only two of the 22 legislators favoring reduced working hours for children in industry had recorded investments in corporations. By contrast, nine of the 13 opposed to shorter hours did have business investments. Seven of them held shares in railroads, five were in banking, two were in insurance, three were in manufacturing, and at least one owned considerable stock in a textile corporation, a business directly affected by the legislation in question. Clearly, the pattern of voting spoke for itself.

Judging from the economic characteristics of second-level political leadership in tidewater Maine, it appears obvious that there was a distinct class difference between the state's political parties in the Jacksonian era. Coastal zone politics was a contest between the Whigs, whose legislative members tended towards privileged occupational status, real and personal wealth, and a business orientation, and the Democrats, whose representatives were comparatively low in occupational status, relatively poor, and largely disinterested in, or hostile to, business enterprise — especially large-scale enterprise.

Assertions that the parties of the early national period meant nothing in terms of social position and economic interest do not square with the Maine tidewater experience. Observers viewing the tumult of antebellum politics as simply a colorful and harmless game played by the “ins” and the “outs” may well have fallen victim to a malady common to many political historians: a failure to look beyond upper-echelon leadership in analyzing political parties. We learn much about parties by examining the Jacksons, Websters, Clays, and Van Burens, but we learn considerably more by looking behind them to the individuals who deal directly with the rank-and-file — the second-level leaders.

NOTES

¹Charles Beard, *The American Party Battle* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1929), pp. 6, 144.

²For example, out of 449 legislators in the study sample, only 36 had names which could be construed as other than English in origin, and of those most were Scottish or Scots-Irish.

³For example, in 1850, 31 of the 47 Maine municipalities with populations exceeding 2,500 were in the coastal zone, as well as all of those with populations of 5,000 or more. In 1855, 59 of Maine's 70 banks, 22 of the state's 28 insurance companies, nine of its 12 cotton mills, 10 of its 16 paper mills, and 56 of its 66 newspapers, were located in coastal communities. (Compiled from: *The Maine Register, 1855* [Portland, Me.: George Adams, 1855], various pp.).

⁴Compiled from: *Maine Register, State Year-Book, and Legislative Manual, 1973* (Portland, Me.: Tower Publishing Co., 1973), pp. 142-46, 182-84.

⁵Lists of legislators and their parties were compiled from newspaper election returns contained in the *Kennebec Journal* (Augusta), *Eastern Argus* (Portland), *Whig & Courier* (Bangor) and *Republican Journal* (Belfast), 1843-53, and selected state registers for the same period. Most, although not all, of the tidewater's representatives during this decade were identified by party. A handful who could not be labeled were left out of the sample. The 449 legislators examined represented about 90 percent of all those elected.

⁶The data sought fell into three broad categories: (1) occupations, (2) land holdings, and (3) stock investments in business enterprises. The primary source for two of those three was the United States manuscript census

WHO WERE THE WHIGS AND DEMOCRATS?

schedules for the year 1850. The Maine population schedules provided an economic profile, based on occupation and value of real estate holdings, for nine out of ten tidewater legislators serving during the decade 1844-1854 — or better than one-third of all Maine state representatives for that period. To supplement the manuscript schedules, town and county histories, biographical “mug books,” business directories, legal histories, and college alumni catalogues were utilized. For individuals who went into national politics, the *Biographical Directory of the American Congress* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1971) proved helpful. Altogether, census returns provided vocational and realty data for 393 of the 449 members in question, while other sources supplied data on 15 more.

For information on stock holdings among the legislative sample group, state government documents were used. Under “Private and Special Laws,” the annual *Acts and Resolves of Maine* listed all corporations chartered by the state for the years in question (1844-1854) with the names and residences of the original incorporators. Two other selected documents, *List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine* and *An Abstract of the Returns of Corporations*, both issued in January 1850, not only provided names and addresses of the stockholders in all major chartered corporations in the state at that time, but also the value of the shares each held. These sources suggested the investment interests of legislators during the period when they were most intimately involved in politics.

⁷Between 1844 and 1854, only six third-party legislators represented Maine tidewater districts, three of them Free Soilers elected in 1853. The new Maine Republican Party, formed in 1855, did not capture the state until the following year.

⁸E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958), pp. 92-93.

⁹Joseph L. Blau (ed.), *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy: Representative Writings of the Period 1825-1850* (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1947), p. 355.

¹⁰For example, realty, with its unavoidable emphasis on landed wealth, tended to give a distorted view of the assets of Maine legislators. The apparent wealth of farmers — whose livelihoods were tied to the land — was inflated at the expense of lawyers and others, whose holdings were in more liquid assets. In Maine, this presented an exaggerated picture of the average wealth of legislators in the Democratic Party, a party in which farmer-representatives were more numerous.

¹¹Two communities, Brunswick and Harpswell, for which no realty data was submitted by census takers, were omitted from realty totals and averages. This eliminated two Democrats and five Whigs. Both townships were wealthy and Whiggish, thus further prejudicing the sample in favor of apparent Democratic wealth.

¹²William Willis, *A History of the Law, the Courts and the Lawyers of Maine* (Portland, Me.: Bailey & Noyes, 1863), pp. 454-455.

¹³James W. North, *The History of Augusta from the Earliest Settlement to the Present Time* (Augusta, Me.: Clapp & North, 1870), p. 514.

¹⁴State of Maine, Legislature, *List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, With the Amount of Stock Held by Each, January 1, 1850* (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1853), p. 39; and State of Maine, Legislature, *An Abstract of the Returns of Corporations for the Year 1849, Made to the Office of Secretary of State in January, 1850* (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1850), p. 213.

¹⁵*List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, January 1, 1850*, p. 15; and *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January 1850*, pp. 21, 41, 88, 110.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, passim.

¹⁷*List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, January 1, 1850*, passim.; *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January, 1850*, passim.

¹⁸*Niles' Weekly Register* 48 (March-September 1835): 464.

¹⁹They were: Elijah L. Hamlin of Bangor (eight corporations); Waldo T. Pierce of Bangor (seven); David C. Magoun of Bath (six); John B. Hill of Bangor (five); Aaron Hayden of Eastport (five); John Otis of Hallowell (four); Thomas Robinson of Ellsworth (four); John Patten of Bowdoinham (four); and Freeman H. Morse of Bath (four). Five of these men were lawyers, two were merchants, one was a gentleman farmer, and one was a ship carver.

²⁰Compiled from: State of Maine, *Acts and Resolves*, 1844-54 (Augusta, Me.: various printers, 1844-54), passim.

²¹*Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1775-1971* (Washington: G.P.O., 1971), p. 1952; *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January, 1850*, p. 148; State of Maine, *Acts and Resolves, 1854* (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1854), p. 273.

²²*List of Stockholders in the Banks of Maine, January 1, 1850*, pp. 15, 22, 47, 57; *An Abstract of the Returns of Maine Corporations, January, 1850*, pp. 88, 121; State of Maine, *Acts and Resolves*, 1847 (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1847), p. 118; *Acts and Resolves of Maine, 1854*, p. 228.

²³Blau, *Social Theories of Jacksonian Democracy*, p. 35.

²⁴State of Maine, *Acts and Resolves, 1848* (Augusta, Me.: William T. Johnson, 1848), p. 70; see also Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1924), pp. 125, 148.

²⁵State of Maine, Legislature, *Journal of the House of Representatives, 1848*, pp. 777-782.

Wayne M. O'Leary holds a Ph.D. from the University of Maine and has written at length on Maine's maritime history in the nineteenth century. He is the author of a forthcoming book on the state's deep-sea fishing industry and is presently living in Orono, Maine.