Party Development and Political Conflict in Maine 1820-1860 From Statehood to the Civil War

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PARTY DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL CONFLICT IN MAINE

1820-1860

FROM STATEHOOD TO THE CIVIL WAR

By

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A DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is a history of politics in Maine during the state’s formative period, the years from statehood until 1860. The history focuses on party conflict and on the development of organized political parties, particularly the Democratic and Republican parties. It concentrates on the structures and processes that politicians built, including party newspapers, county conventions, state conventions, legislative caucuses, and ultimately state committees and the office of state committee chair – all to compete effectively for power. During this 40-year period, parties also develop powerful new messages, campaign strategies, and developed leaders with the skills to accomplish these tasks.
I also argue that to understand these changes, it is necessary to be familiar with the “deep forces” that channeled Maine’s political and economic development. These are the state’s geography and its constitutional order. These forces produced in Maine a deeply fragmented state within in which both political party leaders and government leaders struggled.

Organized political parties first appeared in Maine in 1832, 12 years after Maine became a state. The force that pushed Democrats and the Whigs to create parties was their competition for patronage. In fact, the battle to control patronage would energize Maine’s political parties throughout this period.

It was the Democrats who first pioneered the development of new political structures and party organizations. In the 1830s and 1840 they dominated Maine's politics. In the late 1840s and early 1850s it was the single – issue movement (prohibition, anti-slavery, and anti-Catholicism) that created political organizations that shook the Whigs and the Democrats to the very core. After absorbing the single-issue movements in 1856, the Republican Party would dominate the state.

Republican men like Hannibal Hamlin, John, L. Stevens, and James G. Blaine created a new Republican Party: centralized, professional, and disciplined. With annual mass state conventions, an army of state and national patronage office-holders, a well-funded party treasury, a compelling single-issue message, a strong state committee, and powerful state chairman, Maine would emerge as a “model” for Republican Parties in the North during the Civil War and the Gilded Age.
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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a case study of the growth of party structures and organization over time in a single state – Maine. It covers the period from Statehood to the Civil War, or from 1820-1860. Maine’s political system moved in those four decades from one controlled by a small, secret Junto of men who had led the campaign for separation through a period when a dominant Democratic Party pioneered many new forms of party organization to one in which a highly centralized, disciplined and well-funded Republican Party dominated the state. This dissertation is unique in the field of historical scholarship because of its subject matter – the development of party structures and organization in the years from the end of the Era of Good Feelings to the Civil War, and because it is a study of that development in one state.

Regrettably, few scholars of 19th century political history have chosen to focus on the growth of party structures and party organization. Michael F. Holt, for example, is one of the most-well-regarded historians of party and political development conflict in the pre-Civil War period. Yet he ignores the growth of party structures over time.\(^1\) An extraordinary scholar with a remarkable grasp of primary materials, he certainly follows the actions of legislative caucuses and county and state conventions. They are not, however, studied on their own, but instead are the settings for events that are part of his wider narratives of Whig, Democratic, and Republican political conflicts. Joel H. Silbey, another well regarded scholar of politics in this period,

focuses on the changes in the political culture over time as America moved from a politics of
deverence to one of mass participation. He writes insightfully about party messages, caucuses,
conventions, and election practices but his examples come from many states and times. Thus, it
is not possible for a reader to see the different paths and different paces that party formation took
in the various states, nor to understand the unique influences on that process that occurred in
individual states.

William E. Gienapp, probably the most influential recent scholar on the origins of the
Republican Party, makes a forceful argument that scholars should recognize the primary role that
the Know-Nothing Party and anti-Catholic prejudice played in creating the Republican Party.
He provides fascinating detail on that process in Maine, and in Massachusetts, Ohio, New York,
Indiana, and Illinois, but does not address the changing structures of the Know Nothing Party or
the nascent Republican Party itself. Analysis of the formation of party structures and
organization is also missing from a book by two well-known scholars of pre-Civil War politics.
Although Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin describe in detail the campaign and election
practices in four small towns in Massachusetts, New York, Georgia, and Ohio, their focus is
primarily on the 1850s and their purpose is not to describe changes over time but to question
whether Silbey and others are accurate in their argument that mass participation was one of the
chief characteristics of pre-Civil War politics. In the process, however, the details that the two

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2 Joel H. Sibley, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford, California: Stanford University

University Press, 1987)

4 Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: America and Their Politics in the
scholars provide on how caucuses and conventions worked in those four towns broke new
ground and gave me some insight into the practices in Maine. Equally valuable but also
somewhat limited is Richard Franklin Bensel’s remarkable book on pre-War election practices.\textsuperscript{5}
Based largely on Congressional investigations of disputed contests in the 1850s, he provides
unparalleled detail on Election Day voting practices in Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania
and other states. However he offers few insights into party structure and organizations and how
they changed over time.

Not only is there a gap in the work of historians who have done broad-brush synthesis of
political history in the pre-Civil War years, there is a similar gap in the work of scholars who
study politics in individual states prior to the Civil War. Representative are studies of Vermont,
Massachusetts, Iowa, and Michigan. Samuel B. Hand’s book\textsuperscript{6} on Vermont’s Republican Party
focuses exclusively on the conflicts amongst the state’s parties beginning in 1853 that resulted in
the creation by the Whigs, Free Soilers, and Know Nothings of the Republican Party in 1854. In
his narrative, he describes the Republican’s substantial success, but ignores the differences
among the parties in their structures, or the changes that took place in the Republican Party
organization over that time period. In another analysis of a single state, Dale Baum documents
well\textsuperscript{7} the shifting conflicts and alliances that led up to the Massachusetts Republican Party’s first
statewide success in 1855 but, like Hand, he is silent on the structures and organization of the

\textsuperscript{5} Richard Franklin Bensel, \textit{The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century} (New York, New
York: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

\textsuperscript{6} Samuel B. Hand, \textit{The Star That Set: The Vermont Republican Party, 1854-1974}. (Lanham, Maryland:
Lexington Books, 2002)

\textsuperscript{7} Dale Baum, \textit{The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts 1848-1876} (Chapel Hill, North
parties. Another well-known study, this one on Iowa, was authored by Morton M. Rosenberg.\(^8\) He offers a captivating narrative of the battles that the Whigs, Democrats, and Republicans fought in the 1850s. He also describes the strong alliances that existed in Iowa between the parties and powerful economic interests, such as the land grant speculators and the railroads. Yet he takes no notice of the forms and structures of the political parties and how they changed over the turbulent decade.

Surprisingly, in a book on the politics of pre-Civil War Michigan, the well-known historian of early 19th century politics Ronald P. Formisano touches only incidentally on Michigan’s party organization over his period.\(^9\) Formisano chooses to concentrate on the changing political cultures, in much the same way as Silbey, and presents convincing evidence of the rapid growth of turnout and voter enthusiasm in the period. Helpful was his analysis of the changing party loyalties among different income and ethnic groups over time, and the fact that Democrats and Whigs differed little on economic issues.

Yet, another book by Formisano, this one on Massachusetts politics from the 1790s to the 1840s\(^10\) offers significant insights into party structures in that period. Although the author’s primary interest continued to be the changes in political culture over time, he pays real attention to the evolution of the Commonwealth’s party structures, particularly the legislative caucuses,

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county caucuses, and state conventions for the years 1811-1812, 1830-31 and 1838-1840. His review of party structures in the earliest period was particularly useful as it offers valuable insights into the political system in the District of Maine prior to Separation in 1820 and the stupor that characterized Maine politics under its Junto.

The one scholar of pre-Civil War politics that was most valuable to me is Richard McCormick.\textsuperscript{11} Regrettably, few historians have followed his lead. McCormick looks at 24 states, and asks of each of them identical questions on when, how, and under what circumstances party formation occurred. Each “chapter” describes in detail the development of party structures. Regrettably they are uneven, as each appears to be based on McCormick’s reading of existing secondary sources. And most regrettably, the chapter on Maine is the shortest – just five pages. In addition, his chapters generally cover less detail on the 1830s than on the earlier decades. McCormick identifies many areas for more and deeper research on the development of party structures.

One scholar who clearly followed up on McCormick’s call for new state-based scholarship on party development was Richard R. Wescott.\textsuperscript{12} Most importantly, Wescott chose the rise of the Republican Party in Maine as his subject matter. Wescott, in his narrative, pays close attention to the evolution over time of Maine’s party structures and presents impressive detail on the structure of the state’s Fusionist Party and a year later of the Republican Party. His research into newspapers of the time demonstrates how county party conventions functioned, and


how they helped the founders of both the Fusion Party and later the Republican Party. He also offers a typology for the structure of political parties in Maine. Still *New Men, New Issues* has its limitations. One is that Wescott covers in detail only a limited time period – beginning in 1848 and ending in 1856. In addition, his typology of a party’s structure was flawed. He assumes that the party structures were fixed, and does not speak to the differences in the structures of the Whig, Democratic, Know Nothing, Fusionists, and the Republicans and the changes that took place over time. Most importantly, however, Wescott ends his book, before John L. Stevens, the Chairman of the Republican State Committee, puts into place the extraordinary changes in his party’s structure and organization which transformed it and set it on the path towards dominating Maine’s politics.

Another element of this dissertation that is a unique is my examination of the role that geography played in forging the path and setting the pace of party development in Maine. The state’s physical and locational geography has profound consequences on party structures, and equally important the state government itself. The state’s geography would offer Democrats, Whigs, and later Republicans remarkable autonomy in pursuing their various party development paths, as they were largely ignored by the state’s powerful economic and sectional interests.

Maine sheer size – it was itself almost as big as the rest of New England – combined with its fragmented and divided political economy – a consequence of scores of river systems and harbors – divided the state into multiple competing centers of political power, with no town or city large enough to dominate. And that same geography produced an economy consisting of six different industries – lumbering, shipping, shipbuilding, fishing, farming, and later
manufacturing, and railroading – all with different interest, and none powerful enough to dominate the others.

One result of this fragmentation of the state’s population and its economy was that Maine’s state government was small and weak. And while the party structures expanded and deepened their penetration into the state’s many towns and villages, and became more powerful, the state did not keep pace. I found it important in this dissertation to understand better what accounted for the weakness and relative lethargy of state government in Maine.

Regrettably, the growth in authority of the 19th century “state” has not captured the attention of American historians until very recently. The one group that has focused on this relatively new area has been scholars of what is called the American Political Development “school” who publish the journal *Studies in American Political Development*. Probably, the most seminal book was published in 1982 by Stephen Skowronek.\(^{13}\) He chose to look at the national government following the Civil War and saw it as an institution, while describing the complex forces pushing its growth and those holding it back. Many scholars have followed in his footsteps, and nearly all of them have focused on the national government, yet some have done work that helps to illuminate the patterns of growth in state governments.

One who offers real insight into a state like Maine is Theodore J. Lowi.\(^{14}\) He argues that American public policy in the first half of the 19th century was “distributive.” In that period,

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government was providing rights and privileges to people to use public resources for their private purposes. Because there were so few people and resources were so abundant, these policies produced few serious political conflicts. Maine’s legislature’s activities before the Civil War certainly followed Lowi’s model. The Legislature willingly provided the lumbering industry with whatever permissions they sought to reconstruct the state’s waterways to help get their logs to market. The lumberman did not have to fight for these laws; the Legislature was pleased to help all comers.

Charles Bright makes a similar and helpful point. He describes the 19th Century state as one of “courts and parties.” He argues that the national government did little but establish a perimeter of legal defense around property and a means of resolving commercial disputes, while at the same time, standing aside while government was being ransacked by the mass parties for as much patronage was possible. Certainly in Maine, his argument resonates as the state was relatively inactive, but generated hundreds of patronage positions that the parties regularly fought for.

Two other APD scholars, Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, provided additional help by suggesting a new way of looking at the relationship between politics and policies. Recognizing that politicians often create policies, they argue that policies also create politics. That is, the existence of policies creates a bevy of politically active interest groups around those policies and

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that government. That line of reasoning suggests, I believe, that if there is a tax on banks that is used to fund schools, both bankers and school superintendents will congregate around that government. And if a state shows a willingness to finance railroad development, railroad promoters will appear eager to fight for their share and eager to win as many allies, such as a political party, to their cause.

Skocpol devotes an entire book to the constellation of interest groups that surrounded national Civil War veterans’ policy issues. The existence of this generous program attracted scores of interest groups into the Congressional fray, both those who fought for more benefits, and those who wanted to determine what the program’s revenue source would be. The obverse of Skocpol’s point would be that interest groups are not going to congregate around a state that is small, poorly funded, and seems unable to act.

That was the situation in Maine. Because the coalition of those who would not benefit from state spending on improvements in river navigation or railroad development was always larger than those who would benefit, the state of Maine was unable to take major actions. In fact, the state’s feebleness was enshrined into the Constitution in 1847 when an amendment was passed that prohibited the state from providing financial aid to railroads or any other private company. State spending barely grew from 1820 and 1850.

This weak state government had profound consequences for the state’s political parties. Since the state had little authority and even fewer resources, aggressive regions and industries had little reason to try to turn a political party into their own instrument. No powerful forces

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wanted to control the party. This lack of interest gave party leaders considerable autonomy. They were able to develop their political structures and organizations quite independent of outside forces. For the parties, their goal was winning elections, and they were never forced into the uncomfortable position of having to champion the cause of single economic interest or region against another. A second factor that contributed to their relative autonomy particularly for the dominant party was that they had their own source of income – assessments on the hundreds of men they were able to place in state and national patronage positions. They did not have to turn to industries or companies for funding.

Their autonomy, of course, was not complete. Democrats, Whigs, and later Republicans often had to do the bidding of a President of their own party, since he controlled so much of the patronage on which the party depended. In addition, their independence from powerful economic interests or sections did not protect them from political earthquakes brought on by national events, such as the Jackson’s War on the Bank, the Kansas Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott decision, and by national economic events such as the Panics of 1837 and 1857.

While they were largely independent from powerful interests, the Whig and Democratic parties were not unified. They too were fragmented, in large measure because of the state’s massive size. From Statehood until late in the 1840s it was virtually impossible to convene a representative state convention or maintain an active state committee. And because of the patronage practices that were common in the early 19th century, men who held powerful patronage positions in the state’s many competing population centers -- the postmasters, the collector of customs, the US marshals – were able to build up their own machines with which they could battle with rivals for more power in their own party. Moreover, powerful men, such
as governors, presidents, US senators and Congressmen, and the collector of customs in Portland often opposed efforts to centralize authority in the party and the distribution of patronage because they preferred to have patronage job-holders loyal to them rather than to some state committee or representative body.

It would not be until the completion of a network of railroads in the state in the early 1850s that it was possible to hold mass state conventions and convene regular meetings of a party state committee – events that were preconditions for stronger parties. And it would be John L. Stevens, the Republican State Committee chair who, taking advantage of the new transportation system, would create a strong, centralized, and disciplined Republican Party, one that was capable of governing. Yet, because of the Republican Party’s origins and the political strategy that the Republicans had to adopt to stay in power after 1856, the well-funded and powerful Maine Republican Party would make no effort to create a state government with similar capacities.

Hopefully, this dissertation will help the reader to follow and understand the complex political evolution that occurred in Maine in the years from Statehood to the Civil War.
CHAPTER I

THE FORCES THAT SHAPED MAINE’S HISTORY AND POLITICS

Introduction

On March 15, 1820, the US Congress accepted Maine as the 23rd state, concluding a long campaign waged by leaders of the District of Maine to separate from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Maine became a state less than one year after a financial panic struck the nation, one that would last for four years.¹ Their efforts began in the 1790s but had failed for two decades because of the conflicts between Republicans and Federalists in Massachusetts and in the District of Maine.²

After numerous conventions, referendums, and negotiations, Massachusetts Federalists shifted their position from opposition to support, and in 1819 the outlines of an agreement were in place. In that year, the Commonwealth approved an agreement, held a referendum in the District that overwhelmingly supported independence, convened a constitutional convention, and

¹The effects of the Panic of 1819 would last until 1823. Its root cause was speculative boom in the buying and selling of newly opened land in Ohio and the South. The specific cause was the decision of the Second Bank of the United States to call in loans to try to end the speculation.

²Massachusetts was strongly Federalist and since 1803 Maine had been strongly Republican. In the first decade of the 1800s Massachusetts’ Federalists became frightened that they might lose control of the Commonwealth because of the growing Republican vote in Maine. By 1818, they were ready to abandon their Federalist cousins in Maine so they could keep control of Massachusetts. See Ronald F. Banks, Maine Becomes a State: The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785 1820 (Somersworth, New Hampshire: New Hampshire Publishing Company and Portland, Maine: Maine Historical Society, 1973), pp. 52, 75-76.
in December held a referendum, where the District’s voters overwhelmingly approved the draft constitution.

A final obstacle appeared in Congress in February of 1820 when Southern leaders objected to admitting Maine – likely to be an anti-slavery state – unless Missouri was admitted at the same time as a slave state. Northern Senators and Congressmen were surprised at the vehemence with which the South asserted the right of slavery to expand. Eventually the compromise was agreed to: Maine could enter the union, but Missouri would as well, thus maintaining in the Senate the parity between “free” and “slave” states. The Missouri Compromise, as it was called, also contained a provision prohibiting slavery in the former Louisiana Territory above 36:30 latitudes. Northerners and Mainers would come to view the Compromise – because of the agreed upon limitations on the expansion of slavery – as a sacred contract.³

Congress's action gave Maine independence and statehood. A month later Maine voters went to the polls and chose a governor and a legislature. Maine was now independent and self-governing, but its new elected leaders, and the ones who would come later, would be only partially in control. Many powerful forces would restrict and shape the choices they could make, most importantly the state's geography, the make-up of its population, its economy, and the constitutional order created by the Maine Constitution. The first chapter will focus on two of those forces.⁴


⁴ My focus on these two does not imply that others were not important. Besides the state’s economy and the make-up is population, another was personal agency -- the ambitions, character, and decisions men made responding to circumstances often not of their own choosing. Another was America’s westward
Of the two, the state’s geography was probably the most powerful. But what is “geography?” There are three important components. The first is its physical assets: Maine’s forests, the fishing grounds, the river systems; the lakes and ponds; the coastline and harbors; minerals (or lack thereof); and its climate and soils. The second is its physical location, where the state is “sited” in relation to other states or provinces, to oceans and mountain ranges, and to major transportation routes. The third is its political geography, an often forgotten component. Most important, of what nation was Maine a part and who are its neighbors? With the exception of the political and military events that determined the state’s political geography, humans played little role in creating the state's geography. Natural forces acting over millions of years provide this background. Geography is also important because it is also the foundation of the state’s economy and the nature of its population.

A second force – the “constitutional order” of the state – is completely man-made; it had the most direct effect on the form and structure of the state's politics. Mark Tushnet, an historian of the “critical legal studies” school, used this concept to describe the profound impact of the US Constitution on the nation’s subsequent politics, but his insights are equally applicable to states. Tushnet defines the constitutional order as consisting of a "reasonably stable set of institutions through which a [state’s] fundamental decisions are made over a sustained period."5 The "order" consists of the key governmental and political institutions, their sources of power, and the formal growth, the largely uncoordinated movement of capital and population west. Another was made-made national events – ones in which Maine was only a minor player, events such as Andrew Jackson’s campaigns for president, the Panics of 1837 and 1857, Texas Annexation, the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the bombardment of Ft. Sumter, and the fortunes of the Union Army on the Civil War battlefields.

and informal rules that guide their actions. The constitutional order the convention delegates created in 1820 would shape in subsequent decades the behavior of politicians, the issues they faced, the structure of political parties, and the distribution of power in Maine.\(^6\)

**The Force of Geography**

Political leaders have recognized the importance of Maine’s geography since statehood. In 1829, just nine years after Maine became a state, Moses Greenleaf published *A Survey of Maine*. Written at the urging of the governor and the legislature, his 468-page book offered the first detailed view of the state's population, agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing. Greenleaf found that geography, politics, and power were closely related, and he made this point in the full title he gave his book: *A Survey of the State of Maine in reference to its Geographical Features, Statistics and Political Economy.*\(^7\)

Greenleaf and later geographers noted Maine’s many distinctive features.\(^8\) It was the largest New England state, almost as large as the other five states in the region combined. It was

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\(^6\) In fact, the Maine Constitution adopted in 1820 survives to this day, albeit with a large number of amendments. Maine is one of the few states in which its original constitution still governs the state.


covered with deep forests containing dense stands of valuable white pine. The massive
geological forces left as legacies a rugged coast, deeply etched rivers, thousands of lakes and
ponds, and thin soils. In addition, it had a long coastline on the Atlantic Ocean, with hundreds of
small harbors. Maine was also distinctive in its location. Significantly, the state sat in the far
northeastern corner of the United States, far from the nation's center. Besides its coast, the
state’s key geographic features were the five major river systems, all flowing north to south, all
self-contained, all draining different regions before they reached the Atlantic.

The Complexity of Geography

A state’s physical geography, location, and political geography shape investment,
economic activity, and population movements. A logger in Maine in 1820 needed good stands
of white pine and a river to carry his logs to a sawmill. A potential settler looked to the soils,
rainfall, growing season, and distance from markets. A miller invested in land near a waterfall
and with settlers growing grain nearby. A shipbuilder opened a yard where ship timbers were in
good supply, and where access to the Atlantic was easy. Laboring men and women moved
where sawmills, logging camps, fishing vessels, and shipyards offered work. Merchants
followed population shifts, seeking eager sellers and willing buyers. Lawyers, doctors,
ministers, and other professionals were close behind.

It might appear counter-intuitive, but the values of a state’s resources are not fixed and
permanent. Such values can change dramatically. For example, a resource can disappear –
forests stripped, fishing grounds exhausted, soils worn out. Or new resources can be discovered,

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9 The argument that geographical values change as a result of new discoveries, and changes in demand,
technology, and national policy is that of the author, as well as concept of locational geography and it
being as important as physical geography.
in older established locations or in new areas recently explored. Changes in transportation have particularly important consequences. If new more fertile lands or richer pine forests became accessible, men could ignore land that had been attractive to their fathers. Consider the changes in the values of certain of Maine’s resources over time. Beginning just after the American Revolution, Maine farmland rose rapidly in value thanks to end of the Indian Wars and the pent up demand in Massachusetts for cheap land. Maine’s land fell in value, however, when the Erie Canal offered an easy way for a settler to reach the more fertile lands in New York and Ohio. Maine’s forestlands were valuable because the state’s rivers provided free nature-made highways for logs, but when loggers out west in Michigan found inexpensive ways to get the logs from its virgin pine forests to market, Maine loggers moved west. Remote lands in far north Aroostook County gained value when roads and railroads finally connected them to ready markets.

New technologies also change geographic values. The invention of the circular saw allowed mills to increase their output exponentially, bringing new investment to Maine’s lumber industry. Steam-powered packets offering regular service to Boston enhanced coastal lands where farms could grow perishable produce that could now quickly reach market. When the new Baltimore & Ohio Railroad reached the coal lands in Pennsylvania, forestland values fell as coal replaced wood as the source of heat. The perfection of the water turbine would make waterfall locations on the Kennebec and Androscoggin rivers far more attractive. The increased use of cement in construction raised the value of Rockland’s limestone quarries but reduce the value of Penobscot Bay’s granite quarries.

The actions of national governments can have equally dramatic effects on geographic values. President Jefferson’s Embargo of 1807 and President Madison's Non-Intercourse Act kept New England’s ships bottled up in harbor, wiping out the value of the city’s vessels and the
goods stuck in its warehouses. The 1817 Congressional law restricting the coastal trade to American-built ships made Maine’s shipyards more valuable by preventing foreign yards from competing for their customers. The passage of the Canadian-American Reciprocity Treaty in 1855 was a boon to merchants and ship owners in Portland and Boston who would handle the expanding and profitable Canadian trade. Lincoln's blockade of the South in 1861 cut Maine’s ship owners off from the profitable business of shipping cotton to Europe and New England. Unable to find sufficient cargoes, ships lost value.

**Physical Geography**

Maine in 1820 had five distinct geographic regions. The most rugged and inaccessible was the *Western Mountains*. Their peaks, some of them reaching elevations above 4,000 feet, are an extension of New Hampshire's White Mountains and the northern end of the Appalachian Range. Occupying the northern areas of what are now Oxford and Franklin counties and the western half of Somerset, these mountains form the spine of the state's border with New Hampshire. When settlement began, pine and spruce forests covered this region as they did the rest of the state. Two of Maine’s great river systems – the Saco and the Androscoggin – originate here. The Androscoggin, the longest of the two (178 miles), has the largest catchment area (3,530 square miles). Each drains south to the Atlantic Ocean. Good rainfall, large

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10 My breakdown of Maine’s geographical regions is based on “Maine’s Physical Regions” which is Plate 50 of Gerald E. Morris, ed. *The Maine Bicentennial Atlas, and Historical Survey* (Portland, Maine” Maine Historical Society, 1976). Plate 50, however, does not show a Fall Line Zone.

11 For details on length and catchment areas for Androscoggin River, see *Androscoggin River* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Androscoggin_River](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Androscoggin_River).
catchment areas, and a rugged topography produced the waterfalls that made these valleys the seat of Maine’s Industrial Revolution.

In 1820, three aspects of this region’s geography deserve special note. Its forests were extensive and rich in valuable trees, but transporting the logs to sawmills and the coast was difficult and expensive because of the plunging waters. Second, the mountains were a formidable barrier to trade with New Hampshire, Vermont, and inland Eastern North America. Most important, however, was the fact that Maine’s mountain region, unlike the rest of the Appalachian Mountains, contained no significant valuable minerals – no lead, copper, salt, silver or gold, and especially, no iron or coal.

*The Upland Plateau*, the largest region, extends throughout the northern half of the state. Unlike the Western Mountains, it is relatively flat. In 1820 forests blanketed this region as well. Spruce, fir, and hardwoods predominated, but stands of white pine were common. Elevations range from 1,250 to 1,000 feet above sea level in the central area, and to 750 feet on its northern and southern slopes. As in the Western Mountains, rain is abundant. But unlike the mountainous western region, the rainfall collects in thousands of lakes and ponds and then flows into streams and rivers. Out of these areas of the Upland Plateau flow the three other great river systems of Maine.

The Kennebec, beginning on the central slopes of the Plateau, flows south 170 miles to the ocean. Along with its tributaries, it drains 5,869 square miles of land and hundreds of ponds and lakes, passing through Augusta, Hallowell, Gardiner, and Bath. Further east is the 264

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mile-long Penobscot, which drains 8,610 square miles of the northwestern part of the Plateau.¹³

The Penobscot passes through Old Town and Bangor, Maine’s two most prominent lumber towns, and it enters the Atlantic at Penobscot Bay. The third and largest system is the St. John, 418 miles in length and draining 21,230 square miles of Maine and parts of Quebec and New Brunswick. It follows a circuitous route to the sea. Beginning in Maine, it first drains north, then east, and then enters the province of New Brunswick where it flows south, reaching the Atlantic at Saint John.¹⁴

With the exception of its forests and rivers, the region had few natural resources. Prospectors struck out here, just as they had in the Western Mountains; there was no copper, lead, gold, silver, coal, nor any commercially valuable deposits of iron.¹⁵ In addition, much of the land was wet and its soils thin. The one exception was the remote Aroostook River valley.¹⁶ It had deep and rich soils but in 1820 was sparsely populated because access was so difficult. Significant settlement would wait until railroads reached the valley late in the 19th century.

¹³ For details on length and catchment area for Penobscot River, see Penobscot River

¹⁴ For details on length, catchment area, and path of Saint John River, see Saint John River

¹⁵ Some iron ore was discovered in what is now an unorganized township northwest of Brownville. In 1843 investors built a blast furnace to process the ore, but the ore was a very low grade and the location remote. Although mining and processing continued for many years, the Katahdin complex was never successful – quality was low, costs high, and it could not compete with Pennsylvania iron shipped to Maine.

The third geographic region is the *Lowland Hills*, extending from the Upland Plateau down to the Atlantic Coast. This region includes most of the coastal counties, as well the southern parts of Kennebec and Penobscot. In York and Cumberland County to the south and Washington County way down east, the region extends inland just 20 to 30 miles. In the central part, it is much broader, extending inland from 40 to 80 miles. In 1820 this was the state's major farming region.

Elevations ranged from 750 feet above sea level in the northern areas to just a few feet on the coast. The topography is irregular but not mountainous, with hundreds of hills and ridges, and between them countless streams and brooks which connect as many ponds, lakes, and marshes. The best farming lands in this region were in the valleys of the Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Penobscot rivers where they widened after leaving the Plateau. On the eve of settlement, a rich layer of organic matter covered the soils thanks to trees that had fallen and decayed over the centuries. In addition, heavy forests – mostly white pine – covered most of the land.

The differences are many but the Lowland Hills are similar to the other regions in two respects. Prospectors had no more luck finding valuable minerals in this region than they had elsewhere in the state. The only significant discoveries were granite in Hallowell, Jay, and Frankfurt and slate near Brownsville in southern Piscataquis County. But rainfall was as good in the Lowland Hills as it was in rest of Maine. The Lowland Hills’ irregular topography collected the rainfall in its marshes, ponds, and lakes. The rainwater ran off in countless brooks and streams, falling over ledges that created hundreds of small waterfalls.

Maine’s fourth geographic region is the *Atlantic Coast*, extending from the New Hampshire border in the south to far down east at the border with the Canadian province of New
Brunswick. As the crow flies, it is slightly less than 200 miles long, but the many inlets, peninsulas, estuaries, and bays produce an extended coastline of 3,000 miles, sheltering scores of small harbors and settlements.¹⁷

Like the rest of Maine, white pine forests once covered most of the coast. It was there that lumbering got its start, but by 1820 the coastal forests had been stripped. Coastal soils were sandy and thin, and in some places, the surface was bare rock. The region contained some minerals – granite on the shores of Penobscot Bay and limestone in Rockland and Thomaston – but no coal or iron.

The coast's many harbors were in 1820 its primary natural asset. Each offered different advantages and disadvantages, but none was as dominant as Boston was in Massachusetts, Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, or New York Harbor in the state of that name. Portland had the largest and deepest harbor, but none of the state's major rivers flowed into it. Bath was at the mouth of two great rivers – the Kennebec and the Androscoggin – but its harbor was the river itself, and access from the ocean was difficult. Eastport had a large and deep harbor, but its interior was rich only in lumber. Belfast and Castine had shallow harbors that lacked a major river offering access to the interior, but they were close to the deep-sea fishing grounds. The Machias and Calais harbors were small, but fed by rivers that offered good transportation from the interior. Hallowell, Gardiner, and Augusta were river ports on the Kennebec, which served a rich farming interior but were hampered by shoals and sharp bends that required difficult and time-consuming upriver sails. Ocean-going ships could reach the river port of Bangor more

easily, and the wider river offered more sites for wharves, but the interior's only product was lumber.

The “Fall Line Belt,” the fifth of the state's regions, is unique because it is not a defined area. Instead, it is a zone of transition between the Upland Plateau and the Lowland Hills. What makes it distinctive is its unique natural resource – powerful waterfalls. Within this "Belt" the major rivers of Maine fall dramatically and most forcefully on their way to the ocean. In 1820 most of these sites were still untapped. The largest falls were on the Androscoggin, Kennebec, and Penobscot rivers, all of whose headwaters begin at 1,250 feet above sea level. Every river, however, has its own geology with its own pattern of falls. On the Saco and the Androscoggin, there were falls near the coast as well as upriver. On the Kennebec and the Penobscot, the largest were upriver and many were on major tributaries. The greatest concentration of sites was on the Androscoggin at Brunswick, Lewiston, Livermore Falls, and Rumford; on the Kennebec at Augusta, Waterville, Skowhegan and Madison; and on the Penobscot at Orono and Old Town.

In addition to powerful falls, sites on the Fall Line Belt had two other valuable characteristics. One was the amount of water flowing downriver. What determined the flow was the region's rainfall and the size of the drainage basin. The Androscoggin, for example, drained 3,530 square miles of land and the Penobscot 8,610. The Kennebec drained 5,869 square miles of land producing a flow of 9,111 cu ft/sec as it emptied into Merrymeeting Bay.\(^{18}\) The other important characteristic of these river sites was the constancy of flow. Volume was quite steady over the seasons because the lakes and ponds acted as natural reservoirs holding back the water.

in rainy months and releasing it steadily throughout the year. The largest reservoir – and a major source for the Kennebec – was Moosehead Lake, which has an area of 120 square miles.¹⁹

**Locational Geography**

A state's location is almost as important as its natural resources. If a state does not have a large population, it benefits from being near populated places. Being close, however, is not just a matter of miles; economically, a state is “close” to another if the cost of shipping goods between the two is low. For example, shipping by an ocean-going sailing vessel was so inexpensive that Bangor was probably closer to Savannah, Georgia than to Houlton just 120 miles away. Portland was probably closer to the West Indies than it was to Skowhegan, 90 miles away. The best location for a state, or for a business for that matter, is at the center of large markets, well served by low-cost transportation.

In 1820, Maine was far from the resources and markets of inland Eastern North America. The rugged Western Mountains made trade with New Hampshire, the Connecticut River Valley, and eastern Vermont difficult and expensive. Further west the additional barrier of the Green Mountains made trade with western Vermont, the Hudson River Valley, upstate New York, and the Great Lakes States almost impossible. Another obstacle was the path Maine’s rivers took.

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All had their origins within the state thus none functioned as a highway carrying the products of the North American interior through Maine on their way to the Atlantic coast.

Major obstacles existed to trade between Maine and the northeastern parts of North America. Despite sharing common borders, Maine’s closest neighbors to the north and the east – Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia – were parts of a foreign country, and relations between the United States and Britain were frosty. United States and British diplomats spent most of their time avoiding serious conflicts elsewhere rather than on expanding trade between Maine and Eastern Canada. There was another problem; the economies of Maine and the eastern Canadian provinces were similar. Maine and nearby Nova Scotia and New Brunswick shared a lumbering and farming economy. New Brunswick exported fish in competition with Maine. Nova Scotia farmers grew the same crops Maine did. Although it had fewer forests, its fishermen, like those of New Brunswick, competed with Maine in the same fishing grounds.

Maine was close by land to only one major market: Eastern Massachusetts. The Lowland Hills did not end at Maine’s southern border but stretched all the way down to Massachusetts Bay. In fact, the hilly terrain disappeared and travel became easier the closer one approached

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20 The St. John River presented an additional problem. Although its origins were in Maine, for much of its length it flowed through New Brunswick and eventually reached the ocean at Saint John, New Brunswick. Saint John merchants reaped most of the benefits from that river’s trade.

21 Compare for a moment Maine’s rivers with the Connecticut and the Hudson. The Connecticut River channeled most of the trade of the state of Connecticut, western Massachusetts, eastern Vermont and western New Hampshire past Hartford and New Haven on its way to Long Island Sound. The Hudson River’s drainage basin included western Connecticut, western Vermont, upstate New York, and after the construction of the Erie Canal, most of the trade of the Great Lake states and Canadian provinces.

Essex County and Boston. Trade did flow down this land route, but the cost of transportation by wagon was greater than by ship; coastal schooners carried most of the trade between Maine and Boston. The full exploitation of this valuable land route would have to wait until the 1840s when a Massachusetts railroad reached Portland.

While Maine suffered from its lack of access to inland Eastern North America, its geography gave its lumber industry unparalleled access to the great ports on the Atlantic: America’s east and southern coasts, the West Indies, South America, and Europe. In 1820, ocean-going vessels sailed regularly with cargoes of lumber from Maine east coast ports and even further to the West Indies and Europe. Maine’s location was also of great value for the fishing industry. The long coastline, the scores of harbors, and its proximity to the rich fishing grounds of the Gulf of Maine, Georges Banks, the Gulf of the St. Lawrence, and the Grand Banks gave its fishermen great advantages. Only Nova Scotia had similar excellent access to these fishing grounds. In the early years of the 19th century, observers would have felt that Maine was blessed, not cursed, by its locational geography.

One of the biggest issues facing Maine in 1820 and in the decades afterwards was the value in its location vis-a-vis British Canada. Maine is at the center of Eastern Canada, equidistant from Quebec to its north, New Brunswick on its northeast, and Nova Scotia on the east. The shortest routes between Halifax, the capital of Nova Scotia, and Saint John, the capital of New Brunswick, on the one hand, and the great cities of Montreal and Quebec passed through Maine. In addition, the shortest line from Montreal and Quebec City to an ice-free harbor on the

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Atlantic Ocean also passed through Maine.\textsuperscript{25} Maine also sat astride the shortest land route between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and Boston. But Maine’s position in respect to Eastern Canada was captive to geo-politics. If the United States and Great Britain each believed more economic integration was in their own national interest, Maine’s geographic position would be of enormous value. If they did not, and if instead both focused on other priorities, such as western expansion, Maine’s locational geography would be a permanent disadvantage.

**The Force of the Constitutional Order**

Just as geography, economy, and population were important in shaping the state’s politics and party conflicts, so too was Maine’s constitutional order.\textsuperscript{26} The delegates who assembled in late 1819 in Portland at the constitutional convention created this “order.”

Constitutions are products of specific men meeting at specific historical times and places, and their work reflects their fears, hopes, and ambitions in that period and place. Sometimes easily and sometimes only after contentious debate, they reach an agreement. The constitutions they write determine who can vote, who can run for office, what the elected and appointive offices will be, and the apportionment of power among the branches of government and the

\textsuperscript{25}That port was Portland. Quebec and Montreal’s foreign trade stopped in the winter when the St. Lawrence froze over.

\textsuperscript{26}The foundation of a state's political institutions is its "constitutional order" but this order is not static. It is modified in subsequent decades by amendments, by legislative laws, by judicial decisions, and sometimes by customs which take on the appearance of law. Collectively, overtime, these varied actions make up the “political order” of a state: the rules that shape its government functions, how its political life is organized, and how its politicians and parties compete for power.
geographic areas of the state. Constitutional conventions, however, are not “neutral” or “above politics.” A constitution, like the one written in Maine in 1819, is a political document, and it creates winners and losers.  

Although written by men at particular times and places, constitutions last for many decades, some for centuries. Constitutions survive long after they are written because the founding delegates make them hard to change. And once a particular political order has been created, those who come to power under it use those procedural obstacles to derail any efforts to rewrite the rules that rewarded them with power. In fact, the constitutional order finalized in 1820 would structure the politics of the entire period from 1820 to the end of the Civil War and that order remains largely in effect today.

The 1819 Convention

Two-hundred and seventy-four men sat down in Portland on October 11, 1819, to draft a constitution for a new state of Maine. This convention was one of the final events in the fifteen-year campaign for statehood waged by activists within the District. In early 1819, they had overcome all the political obstacles in Massachusetts and the District, and in June the Massachusetts legislature passed an Act of Separation. It specified a process for Maine to

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29 There were many contentious issues in these negotiations. One was how Maine or Massachusetts would divide the millions of acres of public land. Another was the whether the new state of Maine might
become independent. The required first step was approval by the citizens of the District at a referendum called for July 26. That vote favored statehood, 17,091 to 7,132.\textsuperscript{30} The margin was also reflective of the relative strength of Maine’s Republicans, the majority, and the Federalists, the minority. Under the Act of Separation, the next step was a constitution drafted by a convention and then approved by the voters.

In July and August, at town meetings across the state, men chose delegates for the constitutional convention. In October the elected delegates assembled in Portland. In one of their first actions, they elected as convention chair William King, a Republican, and one of the five men who led the campaign for separation.\textsuperscript{31} Convention leaders granted credentials to 247 delegates, whom they claimed represented all 236 incorporated towns in the District.\textsuperscript{32} Some towns sent more than one delegate, and others shared a representative. Occupationally, the delegates came from a small segment of the population. The largest single category was commerce which included forty-five delegates: merchants, shipbuilders, sea captains, and change the charter of the strongly Congregational Bowdoin College. Another was how a possible award from Congress based on Massachusetts’ claim for damages caused by the War of 1812 would be divided.

\textsuperscript{30} The margin 70\% to 30\% was substantial, though the total vote – 24,223 – was only a small percentage of the District of Maine’s population at that time. See Banks, \textit{Maine Becomes a State}, p. 146 and 182. Political participation in the District of Maine was low, a product of the restrictions on the right to vote, an elite-dominated politics, and the percentage of the population living on isolated farms.

\textsuperscript{31} King was a banker, lawyer, shipping merchant and lumberman. He had originally been a Federalist. The other four were: John Holmes, a lawyer in York County. Originally a Federalist, he switched parties in the War of 1812 and was elected to the Massachusetts Senate in 1816; John Chandler who had always been a Republican; Albion Keith Parris who was elected to Congress from the District of Maine in 1816 and then thanks to presidential patronage was appointed a US Judge for the District in 1818. The final member was William Pitt Preble, also of York county. He was a graduate of Harvard, appointed county attorney for York County in 1811 and then thanks to presidential patronage chosen as US attorney for Maine in 1814. For brief biographies, see Albert Bushnell Hart, ed. \textit{Commonwealth History of Massachusetts. Vol. III.} (New York, New York: The States History Company, 1929) pp. 561-564.

\textsuperscript{32} Banks, \textit{Maine Becomes a State}, p. 150.
There were thirty-seven lawyers, seventeen public officials, thirteen physicians, thirteen ministers (eight Baptists, four Methodists and just one Congregationalist), eight school-teachers, and two newspaper editors. Although farming was the dominant occupation in the state, only eight of the delegates called themselves farmers. Of the delegates identified by party, few were Federalists. Because that party had led the opposition to separation, most Federalists had thought it pointless to run for delegate. Since most of the delegates were Republicans, their occupational make-up suggests that the elite of the state were not just Federalists. Because the Republican ranks included men from so many occupations and so many regions, it was likely that delegates would differ on many issues.

Compared to the state’s other geographic areas, Portland, the nearby towns in Cumberland and York counties, and the larger coastal towns within a few days sail of Portland, were the best represented. It was easy for them to attend the convention meetings in Portland.

The beliefs and views that delegates carried with them to Portland would have a profound effect on the document the delegates would approve. As pointed out earlier, Republicans, unlike Federalists, did not believe in strong state government. Baptists, Quakers, Universalists, and Methodists also feared a strong state: Massachusetts had forced them to support with their taxes the Congregationalist establishment. Farmers’ anxieties were more political, stemming from searing memories of the putting-down of Shays’ Rebellion and more recent memories of battles with Massachusetts sheriffs and judges who did in Maine the “great proprietor’s” bidding. And many Republican merchants and businessmen shared the fear of strong government: they had

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33 The information on the occupations of the delegates is included in George Chamberlain, *Debates and Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of Maine, 1819-1820* (Augusta, Maine: Charles Nash, Printer, 1894), pp. 57-120.
direct experience competing against Federalist businessmen who enjoyed special privileges from the Massachusetts government.

**Universal Suffrage**

Despite their resentments at Massachusetts, the delegates, when they turned to drafting, used as a guide the Commonwealth’s constitution, with which they were familiar. Nevertheless, the changes they made were major; the constitutional order they created would have a strong populist core and a weak executive and judiciary. One of the convention’s first acts was to approve a Declaration of Rights, similar in some respects to that of Massachusetts. The delegates, however, added a right to freedom of speech; the Massachusetts Declaration had spoken only of freedom of the press. The second change was to guarantee the absolute freedom of religion, although the delegates did not explicitly guarantee it to Catholics. One of the most important breaks with Massachusetts practice occurred when they took up suffrage, rejecting the Commonwealth’s practice of restricting the franchise to men of a certain wealth and income. The delegates approved in its place “universal suffrage.” With little debate, the delegates in what would become Article II, Section 1 granted the right to vote to all men over 21. In a similar action, the delegates rejected the income and wealth tests that the Massachusetts

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34 The Massachusetts Constitution which was in effect in 1820 had been adopted in 1780.

35 What the delegates wanted to do was protect the rights of Baptists, Methodists, Quakers, and Unitarians from the up-to-then dominant Congregationalists. They ignored the plea of the small Irish Catholic community near Newcastle for an explicit guarantee of equality for Catholics.

36 Under Massachusetts law a man had to meet an income and property test in order to vote. See Banks, *Maine Becomes a State*, p. 156.

37 Universal, except for paupers supported by their towns, men under guardianship, and untaxed Indians.
Constitution placed on candidates for state and national office. One issue of controversy was an effort by some delegates to restrict suffrage to white men. Support was meager, and the delegates passed over the issue without acting.

**A Dominant Legislature**

The delegates did adopt the Massachusetts structure of state government with its executive, judicial, and legislative branches, but they changed it in an important way; they made the legislative branch dominant and gave future legislatures many tools to exercise their power. While the new state’s voters would elect the governor, it would be the legislature, meeting in joint convention, that would elect the other two members of the state’s executive branch – the secretary of state and the treasurer. Another provision insured that the state militia could not take sides against farmers; the legislature would elect the major generals of the militia. The most powerful control that future legislatures would have over the executive, and specifically the governor, was a seven-man executive council elected by the legislature. Under the new constitution, the governor had to win the council’s approval for any proposed action, however minor. The governor, for example could not sign any agreement, pay any bill, or make any appointment without its approval. The council’s approval was also required for the appointment of the lesser offices in the militia – adjutant-general and the quartermaster general.\(^\text{38}\)

The constitution also kept the state’s executive branch small. The only state-wide elected official would be the governor. Unlike Massachusetts, there would be no lieutenant governor.\(^\text{39}\)

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\(^{38}\) As a further means to keep the militia responsible, the constitution gave the power to elect officers – below the rank of major general – to the members of the militia companies.

\(^{39}\) In case the governor died, resigned, or was incapacitated, the president of the state senate would become governor.
In addition, the convention delegates ignored another Massachusetts precedent: they did not require that governor to be addressed as “His Excellency.”

Control over the judiciary would also be tight. Because of the executive council’s power to approve any appointments, the attorney general, supreme judicial court judges, and county judges and sheriffs had to be as acceptable to the legislature as to the governor. Even an appointed judge could not afford to ignore the legislature because it had the power to remove through impeachment any judge, sheriff, or state official. Appointments to the judiciary depended on the judges “good behavior” – as defined by the legislature. Unlike present practice, judges did not get multi-year or lifetime tenure. The delegates clearly wanted to make sure that Maine avoided creating a powerful independent judiciary like that of the Commonwealth.

The delegates also wanted to make sure that the state’s public officials were responsive to the people. All state and town officials would have one-year terms. On the second Monday of every September and “forever” afterwards, there would be an election at which the people could remove their public officials and elect new ones. This provision of annual elections helped to create, beginning in the 1830s when competing and highly organized parties emerged, an intense partisan political culture of mass participation.

**Apportionment: Who Will Hold Power?**

Because the new constitution would make the legislature dominant, the most protracted and divisive debates took place over its apportionment. What is at stake in writing any apportionment formula is who will hold power. Every apportionment creates “winners” and

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“losers.” And once an apportionment formula is in place it is hard to change. Most men elected under an apportionment system resist changing it, knowing that they, their community, or their economic interests might have a weaker voice. That is why Articles III and X, which set the rules for the make-up of the new state’s house and senate were so hard fought.

The formulas the delegates did adopt shaped the future distribution of power in the new state. As they approached this question, the delegates no doubt looked first at the formulas in place in Massachusetts that set the representation of the towns in the District and in Massachusetts in the State House in Boston. Nevertheless, the delegates quickly rejected them. The Massachusetts Constitution apportioned its senate seats to the counties, and set the number of senators each received based on the amount of taxes people in that county paid in proportion to the state’s total – not the county’s share of the state’s population. The effect was to give Suffolk and Essex counties, the wealthiest in the Commonwealth, the strongest voices. The formula that governed the make-up of the Massachusetts House was different, and on its face seemed populist and all-inclusive. Each town in the Commonwealth, no matter what its size, had the right to send at least one representative to the House. On the face of it, smaller towns would clearly have the upper hand, but there was a rub. Each town was responsible for paying the salary and expenses of the representative they sent. Wealthy towns and those close to Boston had little problem picking up the additional cost, but poorer, rural, smaller, western towns as well as towns down east in the District of Maine could not afford the cost. As result, most small towns did not send a representative unless they had a pressing specific issue they needed resolve.

41 The delegates who drafted the Articles of Confederation and the others who wrote the U.S Constitution, fought bitterly over the formulas that would determine the make-up of their Congresses.
Not until 1812 did Massachusetts agree to pay salaries and expenses for all House and Senate members.  

The Maine Constitutional Convention delegates rejected the Massachusetts formulas. In respect to the make-up of the future senate, they decided to allocate the seats to the counties, but based on population not wealth. The winners were the four most populous counties, all in the south – York, Cumberland, Lincoln and Kennebec. By so doing, however, they had not taken an action against wealth, as the most populated counties in Maine were also the wealthiest. No doubt the delegates from the southern counties considered this formula to be fairer.

Delegates reached their decision on the senate relatively easily, but when they turned their attention to the house, it was a very different story. The make-up of the house was a real battle. There appear to have been three contending interests. The first was the small towns of self-sufficient farmers on the inland frontier; the second was the larger towns in York, Cumberland and Lincoln counties, and third was Portland alone, the state’s largest town. The conflict was not just about size; there were underlying economic and political issues. Portland and the larger towns on the coast and the southern counties were wealthier and more settled and commercial. The inland small towns, on the other hand, were where farming predominated were newer and poorer and had little money to pay representatives to attend the legislature.

The smaller towns did not want the house apportioned strictly on population, but instead wanted each town, no matter its size, to have at least one representative. This was the practice in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont. The towns on the inland frontier feared that a

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42 Apportionment in Massachusetts is described in detail in Banks, Maine Becomes a State, pp. 159-160. Although each town had a right to one seat, larger towns could have more seats based on their population. Boston, as a result, had by far the largest delegation.
population-apportioned house would give the larger commercial towns too much power. Delegates who wanted to protect farming and rural interests knew that giving each small town one vote could help do that. Delegates from the larger more commercial towns had the opposite view, fearing that a rural-dominated house would pursue the farmers’ interest at the expense of their merchants, shipbuilders, and merchant shippers. They wanted a house apportioned on population.

After considerable debate and multiple votes, the delegates eventually negotiated what would be the make-up of the Maine House of Representatives. The result was a defeat for the small towns; each town would not get its own representative. This victory for the larger towns suggests that geography might have been a big factor; the convention met in the state’s largest town, Portland, and most of the larger towns were close by. Under the agreed-on formula, each house member would theoretically represent approximately the same number of people. For the first election expected in April, the constitution set the standard at 1,500 inhabitants. If a town had fewer than the standard, the constitution required a combination with other small towns to create a standard-sized district. Many house districts, therefore, would consist of multiple towns. Larger towns, those with 1,500 residents, for example, would get their own seats. Under the formula, there was also a way for larger towns to get more seats if they grew. The small towns did, however, win two consolation prizes. One was that the state would pay senators and representatives for the time they spent at the legislature, and thus small towns would have regular voice in the Maine Legislature. The second was that as the larger towns grew, their ability to gain extra seats would be limited. Although each town with 1,500 residents received one seat, to get a second required not 1,500 additional residents, but 2,250, and to get a third, not 1,500 or
2,250, but 2,950 new residents.\textsuperscript{43} Theoretically, districts were supposed to have equal population, but, in fact, that standard only applied to the smaller towns. As towns grew, the voice of their citizens became progressively weaker.

The real loser in the Maine House formula was Portland. Apparently, delegates from the smaller rural towns and the larger towns in southern Maine had joined to limit Portland’s political power, fearing that it might dominate the Maine House as Boston did the Massachusetts House. Under the formula agreed to, Portland’s population earned it just three seats. On a strict population basis, it should have received five seats. The convention weakened Portland’s power in the first legislatures and well into the future. The new constitution limited any town to no more than seven seats in the house. Portland could never dominate the Maine Legislature as Boston dominated its.\textsuperscript{44}

\textbf{Unintended Consequences}

There were consequences of the apportionment agreement that were probably unintended. One was that many house and senate seats were in “multi-member districts.” Portland, for example, had three house seats and Cumberland county three senate seats. Neither towns nor counties were divided, as is the practice now, into smaller one-candidate districts. In

\textsuperscript{43} Interestingly, one result of the formula would be that other towns in Cumberland would be overrepresented. House seats were “allocated” to counties on a population basis (although the legislature, not the counties created the districts.) Because Portland received just three representatives, the process required that the seats that Portland did not receive be re-distributed to other towns in the county. The result was that non-Portland citizens were better represented than Portland’s.

\textsuperscript{44} This special provision of the formula did not mention Portland by name. Legally, it put an upper limit to any town’s representation, but its intent was to limit Portland’s ambitions. In later decades the other elements of the representation formula (constant increases in the numbers of new residents required to again additional seats) would also weaken the strength of Lewiston and Bangor in the Maine House.
elections, every resident of Portland could vote for three members of the house and every voter in Cumberland County could vote for three senators. In those places, political minorities could not win seats and thus had no voice in the legislature. Another unintended consequence was a weakened voice for small towns. This was not a consequence of the formula but of how towns carried out its provisions. The common practice in multi-town districts was for one town to choose the district representative for one year, and another town the second year and so on. This practice did “equalize” the representation among the towns, but the men the district sent usually spent just one year in the legislature and were most often ineffective. The larger towns, those with their own seat or seats, often sent the same man year after year, and his seniority and experience gave the larger towns a real advantage in advancing their interests.

Some issues received little attention at the convention, but would later have important political consequences. One was the method of resolving elections if no candidate received a majority. The constitution’s language required a “successful” candidate (for governor, state senate, or state representative) to get a majority of the votes cast. But sometimes, if more than two candidates were running for the same office, no candidate for an office would get the required majority. The processes the constitution established for filling the “vacant” seats varied by office. If there was no “successful” candidate for governor, the first step was for the house to pick any two men from amongst the top four vote getters. It then presented those two names to the senate, which, choosing from them, then elected the new governor. In some cases, a

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45 The combination of “winner-take-all” elections, a common practice in most American states, and of Maine’s multi-member districts, often created legislative majorities for the dominant party far larger than their share of the total vote.
governor so chosen would not be the endorsed candidate of the dominant party nor the top vote-getter.

These procedures would give considerable power to organized minorities, a problem that the delegates had little reason to expect; after all the state’s constitution was drafted in the Era of Good Feeling when political parties had almost disappeared. In fact in some elections in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, no candidate for governor received a majority, largely because factions of dissidents or later pro-temperance and anti-slavery parties ran their own candidates. Though single-issue parties represented only a small proportion of the electorate, they were highly motivated and well organized. In the legislative maneuvering that went into choosing a governor, they had power out of proportion to their numbers. To try to get their candidates elected in that environment, the major parties, bidding for the support of the minor party, took positions on issues they wanted to avoid.

The process for filling vacancies in the senate gave even greater strength to highly motivated factions. In fact, unfilled senate seats were so common in the 1840s and 1850s that the first weeks of any new legislature saw a time-consuming battle among parties and factions to choose men to fill those seats. Here, the mandated process was to hold a joint convention of all the recently elected “successful” members of the house and senate, in other words, those who had won majorities. The pool from which the joint convention had to choose a senator was extremely wide – everyone who had run for that seat – giving factions substantial room for maneuvering. The stakes in filling senate vacancies were often very high. In a few bitterly contested elections, none of the candidates for governor won a majority, and the Senate was split down the middle, so the decision on who the Legislature would elect to fill the vacant senate seat would determine who would be the next governor. Sometimes the stakes were even higher. If
the incoming legislature was required to elect a new US Senator, filling a few state senate vacancies determined control of the legislature and which party could choose the next US Senator.

The process for filling house seats where no candidate was “successful” seemed more straight-forward and “democratic” but it was often lengthy and complicated, and it gave even greater power to small factions or third parties. If there was no victor in a race for a seat in the House, the constitution required the town selectmen to convene another town meeting for a re-vote. If the district consisted of one town, the process was straightforward, but if a district consisted of a number of towns, the re-vote could take a long time. Scheduling town meetings was always a problem, and if the re-vote at the various meetings did not produce a majority winner, a third “election” would have to be scheduled, and so on. A committed and dedicated minority could prevent anyone from being elected. For example, in the 1840s, the Liberty Party in certain districts was strong enough to prevent either the Whigs or the Democrats from electing their candidate. If either of the dominant parties wanted to make sure their candidates were chosen, they had to bargain for the Liberty Party’s support. Such support could be forthcoming, but only when one or the other candidate agreed to be “anti-slavery.” The pro-temperance groups used the same strategy. This process forced the Whig and Democratic parties to take stands on issues they wanted to avoid.46

46 In 1847, as both were equally threatened by the Liberty Party tactics, the Whigs and Democrats united to push through the Legislature for submission to a popular referendum three constitutional amendments to allow a plurality and not require a majority to elect a governor, senator, and member of the House. The voters did approve the amendment that changed to plurality the standard for house elections, but rejected doing away with the majority standard for the senate and the governor.
The new constitution was also silent on other issues we would think important today. The delegates paid no attention to the government of towns, and there was no mention of cities.\textsuperscript{47} The only mention of counties was the acceptance, without comment, of the names and boundaries of the nine counties Maine inherited from Massachusetts. One reason may have been the fact that Maine was following the Massachusetts practice, and in the Commonwealth county officials – sheriffs, coroners, registrars of probate, and judges – were appointed.\textsuperscript{48} Counties were administrative arms of the state. No one at the convention appears to have urged that counties be governed by popularly elected officials.\textsuperscript{49} Up until the late 1840s and 1850s, governors with the executive councils appointed virtually all county officials, giving them direct control over powerful positions in each county. Perhaps William King and other men who led the campaign for separation wanted this power to help turn out their vote.

But, of all the issues the delegates ignored, the one with the most profound effect was their silence on voting. While the delegates did enact male universal suffrage and annual elections, the voting process – the counting of ballots, the printing of ballots, and voting

\textsuperscript{47} Maine granted its first city charter to Portland in 1832.

\textsuperscript{48} Influential men had sought appointments to county office when Maine was part of Massachusetts and would again after separation. Securing an appointment as a county sheriff or judge brought political power, increased social status and often a lucrative income. County officials had the right to pocket most of the fees the county was allowed to collect.

\textsuperscript{49} County self-government would come late to Maine. In the 1820s a first step was taken by the legislature when it gave county residents the right to elect the county treasurer and registrar of deeds. Twenty years later in 1842 the legislature allowed county residents to choose their own county commissioners, and finally the reformist Fusion Legislature in 1855 initiated a successful constitutional amendment to give county residents the right to elect sheriffs and registrars of probate. See Edmund Hobart Bartlett, \textit{Local Government in Penobscot County: The Maine Bulletin}, Second Series No. 21 (Orono, Maine: University of Maine, 1932)
locations – was ignored. By their silence, the delegates left that important process to the local elites, town officials, and beginning in the 1830s to political parties.

Delegates did realize that at some point amendments to the constitution might be required. They created a process for it but did not make it easy. Consistent with their desire for legislature-dominated state government, they put the legislature in control of the process. An effort to amend the constitution had to begin there. The house and the senate had to approve the language by two-thirds majorities. Then the legislature would convene a popular referendum, which required a majority of the voters to pass the amendment. While they did create a way to amend the constitution, there was no way to summon a new constitution convention. The delegates certainly expected that governmental structure and the rules they wrote in 1820 would survive forever.

The Consequences of Constitutions

A constitution, like other political creations, is the work of political men. Its articles and sections are not neutral or even-handed; the language does not give equal power and resources to all regions, classes, and economic interests. Although Ronald Hayduk was writing about election laws, his observations are applicable to constitutions. “Like other aspects of government, they are contested terrain,” he explained; “They are products of contending political

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50 The Maine Constitution, as mentioned earlier, did clearly grant universal suffrage, required annual elections, and set the second Monday of September as Election Day.

51 On December 6, 1819 the District held a referendum on the draft constitution. The voters approved it by a wide margin. The vote was 9,040 in favor and 797 opposed. For voting results, see Banks, Maine Becomes a State, p. 182. It was not until January 1820 that the constitution was formally approved, as that was the date when convention delegates reassembled to receive the results of the referendum and certify them. see Banks, Maine Becomes a State, p. 182. That January meeting is the reason why most people call it the 1820, and not the 1819 Maine Constitution.
actors and interests and they embody the gains of the victors.”

The political scientist Theda Skocpol made a similar point when she was describing the long-term effects of any political institution. "The overall structure of [a constitution] … provides access to some groups and alliances, …[and] concurrently denies access and leverage to other groups and alliances." The constraints and opportunities contained in their rules shape the goals and strategies of politicians and political parties.

The delegates at the 1819 constitutional convention established the formal structures of state power in Maine and the ways that men could compete for its public offices and resources. Their actions, along with the state’s geography, its economy, and the make-up of its population, would shape state politics, the actions of its politicians, and the path that its political parties would take. We start the study of these developments in the decade of the 1820s.

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CHAPTER II

THE 1820S: FROM DEFERENCE TO POPULAR MANDATE

Introduction

The strategies and means that men used to win and to keep political power in Maine would change significantly in the decade after the state won its independence from Massachusetts. The men who controlled Maine politics at the beginning of the 1820s were those who had led the campaign for Statehood. But the politics of the latter part of the decade was a consequence of two important factors. The first was the transformative impact in 1828 of Andrew Jackson’s campaign for the presidency. Jackson brought tens of thousands of men to the polls for the first time. In the process he ended the politics of deference in which the Maine Junto had thrived and brought instead a radical new popular politics to the state. The second important factor was the strong role that leaders of Jackson’s National Committee played in trying to create State Committees in every state. These Jackson leaders were the ones who introduced serious political organizations to the politicians of Maine.

The decade following Maine’s separation from Massachusetts was one of accelerating population and economic growth. More than 100,000 men and women streamed into the state, joining the nearly 200,000, already here. The great majority came from Massachusetts, and most
from rural towns, and virtually all were Protestants. They were seeking cheap and fertile land in a state they expected to be more sympathetic to their needs than Federalist Massachusetts.

But, not everyone came to farm. Many, again mostly from Massachusetts, came to take advantage of expanding opportunities in industries, such as lumber, fish, shipping, and shipbuilding that were part of the exploding Atlantic economy. It was exports that energized the state’s economy.

With the exception of the lumber industry, the nature of the state’s industries focused their leaders more on Washington than on Portland, which at that time was the capitol of Maine. They were more interested in what their congressmen and senators did than what their governors did. This was in many ways inevitable with an export focused economy. Most of the state industries looked outward – to the major cities on the Atlantic Coast, the South, and the Caribbean. And that focus made their politics more Washington-centered than state-centered. Shipping merchants, shipbuilders, lumbermen all had “wants” that only the President and the Congress could meet. Opening new markets for their lumber, fish, and ships was the top priority, followed immediately by keeping competitors out of their American markets. The only business leaders who had a direct interest in the Legislature were the lumbermen who needed state approval for dams, sluices, and booms. Thus, only the lumber industry was deeply involved in state politics.

Another reason why the state’s most powerful economic interests were not active in state politics was that the state government was weak and did not have much capacity to act. The state’s “constitutional order,” created by the founding 1829 Constitution, was at fault. The delegates intentionally created a weak state government. The governor had little executive power while the Legislature, designed to represent local interests, was powerful. Terms of
office, just one year, prevented continuity, and the formula for apportionment intentionally over represented local interests.

The other reason, and basically the root of the entire problem, was the state’s geography. Its six major and many smaller rivers created many competing economic regions. No one policy met all of their needs, and virtually all possible policies would hurt some of the regions. There was no dominant industry or region that had the power to force its will on the state. It was far easier to defeat a piece of legislation aimed to benefit a specific region than it was to pass one. Maine was at the mercy of its geography. In the legislature of the 1820s, for example, nearly all of the major towns petitioned the state requesting financial help to develop its economy. In every case, their requests were turned down.

Despite the fact that Maine was fragmented geographically and economically, if one looked at political power in the decade of the 1820s, it appeared to be centralized. The Junto, made up of men who had led the campaign for statehood, held most of the powerful elected and appointed positions in Maine. They used jobs and contracts to reward the network of men who brought out the votes for their candidates. One indication of the strength of the Junto was that the men they chose to run for governor rarely had an opponent. But their power was in fact limited. It rested in large part on their recognition of how fragmented the state was. One consequence was that while they controlled the elections, they paid little attention to what the Legislature did except when it was choosing state officials or a US Senator. They never advanced a program and never put their weight, as DeWitt Clinton had done in New York with the Erie Canal, behind any programs that brought the state together economically. In fact, the Junto’s political system was quite decentralized, mirroring the state’s geography. It had no
formal organization as it reflected the interests of the influentials who dominated the diverse communities of the state and represented their particular interests.

The state’s politics, however, would change a great deal in the decade. The Era of Good Feeling and the broad consensus which had united America’s leaders ended with the 1824 election. In its place, partisan politics emerged. Angry at what he called the “Corrupt Bargain” which had denied him the presidency, Andrew Jackson and his supporters started their campaign for president soon after John Quincy Adams had been sworn in. Focused on 1828, they set up a National Jackson Committee and Jackson Committees in every state, and the result was the country’s first national partisan political organization. The impulse behind the partisan political organization that emerged at the end of the decade came not from local sources but outside developments.

Jackson’s campaign and his attacks on aristocrats and corrupt politics created a new kind of popular politics that would challenge the Junto’s power over the state and the influentials’ power over their own communities. His campaign also brought into politics a new generation of what F. O. J. Smith, the ambitious editor of the Argus, called the “new men” – young, ambitious, and hoping to take advantage of new political world that Jackson had brought into being. Smith also brought into being the state’s first structured political organizations.

Jackson’s presidency would also have significant consequences. The appetite for patronage would become an even more central factor for political men than it was under the Junto. And the battles over patronage would push Maine politicians into creating the state’s first public political alliance, which would later become political parties.
Population Changes in the 1820s

In the 1820s, farm families continued to stream into the state in large numbers, seeking to carve out farms in the forests. For most, the goal was self-sufficiency. Most were migrants from Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Those with some assets found land in the southern counties or near the coast. Most had to settle for remote inland frontier. Settlers from Massachusetts brought with them tools, seeds, some animals as well as bitter memories of their experiences under the rule of Massachusetts Federalists and their more immediate experiences with failed banks and worthless bank notes caused by the Panic of 1819. In the decade of the 1820s the attractiveness of Maine’s lands led the state to add more than 101,000 people and grow in total numbers and at a faster pace than any other New England state.\(^1\) To keep up with the expansion, the Maine Legislature chartered fifty new towns in the decade.

The more commercially-oriented people streamed into the coastal towns and those at the mouths of rivers. While less in numbers that those who came to farm, this commercial growth was more concentrated. In the ports, one could find shipyards, large ocean-going and smaller coastal vessels, warehouses, sawmills, and churches. Similar sights could be seen at the mouths of and the banks of the state’s rivers, particularly on the Kennebec, where saw mills and merchant’s warehouses dotted the landscape. Population also grew rapidly in the more commercial towns such as Bangor, which added 1,646 people\(^2\) and Portland, which grew from 8,581 to 12,598.

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\(^1\) Total population in 1830 would be 399,000. The rate of growth for the state in the 1820s would be 30%.

\(^2\) *Maine Census Data-Pre 1950*, a web page maintained by the Raymond H. Fogler Library of the University of Maine, offers the population for each town from 1790 to 1940.
Since foreign immigration was minor in the nation and Maine in this decade, the state remained overwhelming Protestant. Catholics were few, most were French-speaking farmers in the isolated Acadian communities in the St. John River Valley. At the end of the 1820s, the state’s Catholic population was probably no more than 2,000.

**Economic Changes in the 1820s**

The pace of economic growth was slow in the first years of the 1820s as it took time for business to recover from the bank failures, foreclosures, and unemployment the Panic of 1819 left in its wake. After 1823 however, the state experienced steady and moderate growth, stimulated by the rapid growth of the Atlantic economy as the pent up demand held in check by Napoleonic Wars was finally released.

As was true since the District of Maine was first settled, the national and international demand for certain of the state’s natural resources was the main driver of its economy. Those resources in the greatest demand were lumber and fish. Merchant shipping and shipbuilding drove growth as well, but they responded primarily to the needs of the extractive lumber industry. Ships that carried lumber to market also carried some farm products and fish.

There seemed to be a limitless demand for Maine’s virgin white pine lumber. It was the building material of choice for contractors in the burgeoning coastal and inland cities and the growing southern and Caribbean plantations. Rising prices sent loggers northward up the Androscoggin and the Kennebec onto the Western Mountains and Upland Plateau. In the 1820s
they began to move further up the largely unknown Penobscot, which would later become the state’s major producer.³

Hundreds of ships left Maine annually carrying lumber to the east coast ports: Salem, Portsmouth, Boston, New Bedford, Providence, New York, Baltimore, and Savannah. From Saco, on average each year fifteen lumber-laden ships left for ports to the south; from Portland, twelve; from Bath, ten; Wiscasset, fifteen; and Waldoboro, eleven.⁴ Many more left from Bangor. During that decade, the West Indies was also a big market, needing lumber for sugar mills, warehouses, wharfs, as well as houses, vegetables, and fish for their slaves

Many of the coastal towns far downeast focused on deep-sea fishing. Like the lumber industry, the source of demand was the growing eastern cities as well as plantations in the south and the West Indies. "The Maine fisheries did not exist in a vacuum," fishing historian Wayne O’Leary explained; “They were part of a national – and in some ways international economy."⁵ “The expanding slave systems of the Spanish islands required cheap but nourishing food for their laboring masses. Fish met that requirement."⁶ A government program gave additional energy to the fisheries’ growth. Thanks to the political power of Federalist Massachusetts, the US Congress had established in 1793 a bounty program to subsidize cod schooners. The rationale was that the subsidy would create a healthy fishing industry, which in turn would ensure that the US Navy had a large pool of experienced mariners in case of war. Amendments to the law in


⁶ O'Leary, Maine Sea Fisheries, p. 117.
1819 gave a big boost to the cod-fishing fleet. A schooner in Maine of more than thirty tons could receive an annual payment of $105; schooners larger than ninety-tons could expect an annual bounty of $360.\textsuperscript{7} The effects of this subsidy program reached deep into the fishing towns. Provisions in the law required that the benefits be widely shared. Any ship that received a subsidy had to have an American captain and a crew that was three-fourths American. Another provision required that five-eighths of the bounty paid to a ship had to go to the crew.\textsuperscript{8}

There were no subsidies for the farmers carving out farms in the forests of the inland frontier. But still the farmers came. There were many reasons why Maine’s lands were attractive. The most important was the widespread view that Maine lands were unusually fertile and produced bounteous harvests. In fact, nutrients left from trees fallen in previous centuries as well as ash created when settlers burned trees and brush to clear land for crops had produced bumper harvests.

Though their goal was self-sufficiency, the pioneer farmers, nevertheless, were forced to participate somewhat in the commercial economy as they annually had to pay in cash their town, county and state taxes, and they had to pay off their debt to the landowners who sold them their land in cash as well. There were others, “commercial” farmers, a minority, often near the coast or a navigable river, who actively planted for commercial markets.

Produce and other products left Maine in vessels in the coastal trade or in ocean-going ships. The coastal ships carried Maine lumber, fish and farm products: pork, bacon, lard, flour, etc.

\textsuperscript{7} O’Leary \textit{Maine Sea Fisheries}, pp. 42-43.

corn, bread, butter and cheese to Boston, Salem, Providence, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore merchants. The West Indies purchased Maine farm products and the state’s cod.

Carving a farm out of the wilderness was backbreaking work for new farmers, but for many it was only one of their problems. The Panic of 1819 had left the nation littered with failed banks, abandoned shops, and idle ships. In addition, prices had fallen and money was hard to come by. Banks, for example, in Bucksport, Castine, Wiscasset, Hallowell, and Augusta had failed, making their banknotes worthless, leaving the farmers and artisans, unfamiliar with the commercial economy, destitute. The depression and the refusal of the banks to honor their obligations left a raw and festering wound.

The shipping industry started to shift its focus in the 1820s. Previously, its prosperity had depended on the carrying the state’s natural resources to distant markets. In fact, most of the ships built and operated in Maine served the lumber industry. But the industry’s scope and reach was beginning to expand. Some added Maine’s fish and agricultural products to their lumber cargoes. Some imported luxury goods to sell to Maine’s newly wealthy merchants, shipbuilders, and shipowners.

And they were beginning to get their feet wet in what would be their dominant role in the 1840s and 1850s, namely carrying Southern cotton to the expanding mills in England and France. In 1815, output of cotton in the southern states had been just 164,000 bales, but by 1830

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10 See American Advocate (Hallowell), June 18, 1825 Until the Civil War, all of the money in circulation was issued by private profit-making banks. They had an incentive to issue as much paper money as people were willing to accept.
it would reach 554,000.\textsuperscript{11} Ship owners, especially those from Bath, jumped at this opportunity. On its first voyage in 1825, Levi Houghton’s ship \textit{Clarissa} carried a load of cotton from Charlestown to Liverpool. In the next two years, she made two other identical voyages. In December 1827, we find the \textit{Clarissa} in New Orleans where she loaded cotton, this time bound for France. Returning home, she loaded cotton in Savannah and returned to Havre.\textsuperscript{12}

While new markets were opening up in many areas, one traditional and lucrative market – the British West Indies – had disappeared. Frustrated with President Adams’ position in trade negotiations, the British in 1826 had closed all of its West Indian ports to American ships.\textsuperscript{13} Ships in the West Indies trade were unable to leave port and those that did had half-empty holds. The result was a dramatic drop in rates, wiping out hoped-for profits. Ports, like Portland, which specialized in the West Indies trade, were filled with idle ships and unemployed mariners and longshoremen.

Work at Maine’s shipyards mirrored the growth of merchant shipping. Just as lumber had driven the demand for ocean-going ships, it was the owners of ships who kept the shipyards busy. Maine’s merchant shippers were the Maine shipyards’ biggest customers. The future of Maine’s shipyards darkened considerably, however, when Congress, with the support of President Adams, passed a new tariff law that placed high rates on virtually all manufactured products imported into the United States. The Tariff of Abominations, as its critics called it, was

\textsuperscript{11} John G. B. Hutchins, \textit{The American Maritime Industries and Public Policy, 1789-1914} (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1941) pp. 236-237, 264. To meet the demand for cotton, plantation owners had borrow substantial funds to, buy more slaves, clear hundreds of thousands of acres for cotton production, and invest in roads and wharfs so that their cotton could be sold.

\textsuperscript{12} Baker, \textit{A Maritime History of Bath, Maine}, p. 248.

\textsuperscript{13} Throughout the 1820s Maine ships continued to expand their trading in the Spanish West Indies, particularly with Cuba and Puerto Rico.
initially drafted to help the Pennsylvania iron and coal interests, but legislative log-rolling expanded the law to protect from foreign competition virtually all manufacturers. The problem for Maine yards was that the high tariff dramatically increased the cost of building a ship. The political impact of the Tariff of Abominations was not just on the shipyards; tariffs had raised the prices on virtually all imported goods. The 1828 law made tariffs a major political issue.

Manufacturing in the 1820s contributed little to economic growth. It remained as small and locally focused as it had been before statehood. With the exception of lumber that was manufactured by sawmills, Maine’s shops produced few products that were exported; most production served household needs (shoes, stoves, pottery, wagons, and plows) in nearby towns or in the nearby rural areas. The biggest step forward for manufacturing was on the Saco River where its waters fell dramatically into the Atlantic. Excited by the good profits investors were earning at the new cotton mill on the fall line of the Charles River at Waltham, a few Massachusetts’ capitalists decided to build a similar mill on the Saco in Maine. It could make cotton cloth far more cheaply than a woman could at home. The legislature responded quickly with the necessary charters.\textsuperscript{14} The Saco Manufacturing Company constructed the state’s first large cotton mill – a seven story, 210 by 47 foot cotton mill with 12,000 spindles and 300 looms\textsuperscript{15} on the Fall Line where the Saco fell forty feet in less than seven-hundred feet.\textsuperscript{16} Most of

\textsuperscript{14} Some of the charters approved in the 1820s included Salmon Falls Manufacturing Company (1822), the Kennebec Manufacturing Company (1823), the Gardiner Manufacturing Company (1823, and the Brunswick Falls Cotton Factory (1829). The legislature included in the charter of the Saco Mill two unique benefits. First, the owners would not be personally liable for the debts of the company and second the company would be exempt from local taxes for five years. See Jacques Downs, \textit{The Cities on the Saco} (Norfolk, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 1985), pp. 50-52.

\textsuperscript{15} Downs, \textit{The Cities on the Saco}, pp. 50-52.

\textsuperscript{16} The “fall line” of the Saco was within a few hundred yards of the Atlantic Coast
the employees were young women from farming families, eager for work to supplement their family’s falling incomes.

Maine’s Junto and Pre-Party Politics

The Junto Takes Control of the New State’s Politics and Government

On the first Monday of April 1820, Maine voters went to the polls to elect their state officials. That day they chose as their first governor William King, the principal leader in the fight for separation, giving him 21,082 of the 22,014 votes cast.\textsuperscript{17} He had no opponent.

Seven weeks later on May 31, the state’s first legislature assembled in Portland, the temporary capitol. One of its first tasks was to fill the higher offices of the new state. There was no opposition, and the results were not unexpected.\textsuperscript{18} It chose the group of men, who, along with King, had led the campaign for separation from Massachusetts. This group, called by its critics the “Junto,” would dominate the state’s politics for its first decade. John Holmes and John Chandler became the state’s two US Senators; William Pitt Preble, the Justice on the new Maine

\textsuperscript{17} All of the statistics for Maine elections included in this and future chapters, unless otherwise noted, are found in the Edmund S. Hoyt, \textit{Maine Register: Maine State Yearbook and Legislative Manual for the Year 1879-80}. (Portland: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1879). The \textit{Maine Register} was published every year, beginning in the Civil War period and every edition included the results for all the governor elections up to that date

\textsuperscript{18} One reason why neither King nor the other members of the \textit{Junto} faced any real opposition was a deal they had made earlier with Maine’s Federalist minority. If the Federalists ended their opposition to separation from Massachusetts, and Maine became a state, the Federalists would receive a certain percentage of the patronage the Junto would control. Richard P. McCormick, \textit{The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Jackson Era} (New York, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966), p. 51.
Superior Court; and Ashur Ware, the former editor of *Argus*, Secretary of the State Senate. The remaining member of the Junto was Albion Keith Parris who did not need a position; thanks to an 1818 presidential appointment, he was the US Judge in Maine.\(^{19}\) Like most of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, all of the members of the Junto called themselves Republicans.

The men who led Maine’s campaign for separation were by no means revolutionaries or even radical democrats like Thomas Paine or Daniel Shays. Most were lawyers with commercial practices, and none were new to politics. Some were long time Republicans, others recent converts from Federalism. Two would become Whigs in the 1830s. All had been successful. Their leader William King had moved to Bath in 1802 where he started as a merchant and shipbuilder, later becoming one of the largest shipowners in the United States. He organized and was the first president of the Bath Bank, owned a small cotton mill in Brunswick, and speculated in real estate throughout the state. The town of Kingfield was named for him. His many critics called him the “King of Bath.”\(^{20}\)

The Junto members’ power was made possible by the alliances they struck with men in larger and smaller towns who Martin Shefter called "local notables,"\(^{21}\) Ronald Formisano called "influentials,"\(^{22}\) and Richard P. McCormick, the “gentry.”\(^{23}\) They were the lawyers, merchants,

\(^{19}\) Parris was chosen to succeed King by the Junto. King had resigned his position as governor soon after he was elected to accept an appointment from President Monroe as a special Commissioner to negotiate a treaty with Spain.


ministers, landowners, shipping merchants, lumbermen and bankers who dominated the small largely isolated communities that made up the state of Maine. In this thesis, I will call them the “influentials.” In the town of Augusta, for example, John Davis, Henry Fuller, and Ruel Williams held the reins of power. They were wealthy and their community regularly chose them to be moderators of the town meetings and representatives to the state legislature.\textsuperscript{24} From the ranks of the influentials, governors chose sheriffs, judges, and justices of the peace. Influentials saw to it that friends ran for state representative and state senator. Candidates for national and state office sought their support, knowing they could influence the artisans, farmers, and common people who depended on them.\textsuperscript{25}

Influentials controlled local affairs because of their economic power and because of the culture of deference that existed throughout Maine and much of the country, a culture that had been challenged during the American Revolution but which had reasserted itself in the Era of Good Feelings. The common people took little interest in politics, believing "that the routine conduct of politics was not the people's business."\textsuperscript{26} Politics belonged to the men with wealth, pedigree, and education. And if the common people did vote, they deferred to the advice of their betters. They had little choice. The secret ballot was largely unknown. Instead, “open voting” –

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Shefter, \textit{Political Parties and the State}, p 62.
\end{itemize}
the practice of requiring a man to state his preference publicly to the town clerk or selectmen – allowed influentialis to know how everyone voted.27

The Junto’s ability to create alliances with influentialis rested on the favors they could do, particularly through patronage. Control of the state allowed them to give allies appointments as sheriffs, judges, officers in the militia, and justices of the peace. Their close friendships with national politicians, and the seats two of their members held in the US Senate, allowed them to offer loyalists lucrative positions as US collectors of customs, postmasters, and judges. One of their strongest friends in Washington was the powerful Georgia planter and politician William H. Crawford who at that time was President Monroe’s Secretary of the Treasury. As Secretary, he controlled more patronage than any other member of the President’s Cabinet and used that power to build up a network of men across the country who owed him favors.

Political life, however, under the Maine Junto was dull.28 The group, operating more like a gentleman’s club, chose the top candidates. It held no public meetings. Its members preferred to work behind the scenes, where they could share their plans, work out misunderstandings, and act in common when they felt their rule was threatened. Juntos were common in many of the states at that time. There were no political parties as such: centralized leadership, state conventions, and internal discipline were largely unknown. The Essex Junto, for example, was said to rule Massachusetts; the Richmond Junto, Virginia; and the Nashville Junto, Tennessee. New York was dominated by Martin Van Buren’s Albany Regency, itself a junto, but one that held conventions and expected acquiescence once decisions were made. Most members of the

27 Formisano, The Transformation of Political Culture describes the elite politics of Massachusetts and Maine in the period from 1800 to 1830. See pp. 136-144.

Maine Republican and Federalist elites did not protest Junto rule, satisfied by the patronage directed their way. With little competition there was no reason to ask influentials to make a major effort to turn men out to vote. In the years from 1823 to 1828, the Junto’s candidates for governor were unopposed. Low turnout reflected the lack of competition and the reluctance of the common people to vote. In 1821, 24,338 men voted for governor, in 1822 it was 22,180. In 1823 it fell to 19,400.\textsuperscript{29} It revived somewhat in 1824 – a presidential year – reaching 20,439, but then fell even further to 15,252 in 1825.\textsuperscript{30}

Politics in Maine had not always been so lackluster. When the then District of Maine was part of the Massachusetts, well organized Republican and Federalist elites competed actively for power, led by party committees based in Boston. Beginning in 1815, this competition had intensified as the District’s Republicans and Federalists battled over separation at the numerous caucuses and conventions that preceded the state-wide referendums. After statehood, however, the Federalists, discredited in the public eye for their opposition to separation and lacking the state patronage they had received from the dominant Massachusetts Federalists, had disappeared as a political force. Without competition, politics atrophied.

Although the members of the Junto were professed Republicans and had been active members of a well-formed Republican organization while Maine was part of Massachusetts, there was no Republican “party” as such in Maine. The Junto did not seem to want any formal

\textsuperscript{29} Hoyt, \textit{Maine Register}.

structures, fearing perhaps that they might offer a forum for men to organize to oppose their rule. There was no state committee, no state chairman, no platforms and no state conventions. The only party structures were rudimentary – poorly attended county conventions\(^{31}\) and a caucus of the Republican members of the legislature.

In 1821 for example, when King resigned as governor,\(^{32}\) the Junto engineered the nomination of one its members – Albion Parris. They made no effort to convene a popularly elected state convention. First, friendly influential were brought together in county conventions which then endorsed Parris. Then a caucus of Republican legislators was convened, and responding to those county meetings, formally nominated him.\(^{33}\) Parris would be elected four more times. Each year a legislative caucus of Republicans would be convened and would give Parris its endorsement.

While the party structures were weak, the Junto’s newspaper was powerful. The *Eastern Argus* (*Argus*) was the state’s only statewide newspaper. Originally established at the beginning of the 1800s to build support for Thomas Jefferson’s campaigns, by the 1820s it offered news of the President and Congress, reprints of speeches, reports on political campaigns in other states, and local news from the state’s cities and towns. Featuring, in addition, reports on the prices of commodities in Portland, Boston, and New York as well as the arrivals and departures of ships from Maine, the *Argus* had a wide readership among the state’s elites.

\(^{31}\) For examples of the announcements of county Republican meetings, see *Eastern Argus*, June 5, 1820, June 18, 1822, August 28, 1822, July 29, 1823, and August 9, 1825.

\(^{32}\) President Monroe appointed him the US Commissioner for Spanish Claims. Spain had agreed, pursuant to a treaty, to provide $5 million to meet any claims that American merchants had against Spain. As Commissioner, King was expected to determine the validity of the claims and make the payments to the merchants.

The Legislatures in the Junto Era

The first legislatures of Maine had many issues to deal with, but they responded particularly aggressively when laws were proposed to stimulate investment and economic growth. Many of the bills came from influentials. Most were non-controversial. Loggers and lumbermen, for example, wanted “special acts” to allow them to re-engineer lakes, ponds, and rivers that would help them get their logs to mills.\(^{34}\) Another non-controversial action was granting charters for new corporations. For incorporators, such charters had great value, but they aroused little opposition at that time, since granting a charter had no cost to the state or the taxpayer.

Another legislative action, equally non-controversial, showed how important the state’s resource exports were to its economy. Merchants throughout the country were apparently concerned that products they purchased were of poor quality or underweight. Though the complaints were not aimed at Maine specifically, the state’s larger merchants wanted to get an economic advantage, and they urged the legislature to adopt an inspection system of its major exports: lumber and fish; beef and pork; and firewood, stone lime and lime casks.\(^{35}\) Opposition was minimal since the merchants paid the costs of the inspections.

Not all issues the early legislatures faced were non-controversial.\(^{36}\) One that brought farmers out in opposition was a proposal that Governor King made early in his brief term to

\(^{34}\) Among the ones passed were the Damariscotta Canal and the Cumberland & Oxford Canal (1821); the Orono Boom Corporation, the Calais Boom Corporation and the Hancock Brook Canal (1822); and the East River Sluice Company (1823).

\(^{35}\) 1821 *Laws of the State of Maine* (Brunswick, Maine: J. Griffin for the State, 1821).

exempt all manufacturing firms permanently from taxation.\textsuperscript{37} This was consistent with King’s view that manufacturing deserved special attention because it should become Maine’s most important industry. The problem with King’s plan was that farmers and other taxpayers would pay the taxes the manufacturers did not. The proposal failed.\textsuperscript{38}

Conflict often had its origins in the state’s geography. One dispute that occupied much of the 1820s was choosing a site for the State Capitol. Towns fought for the designation because it would bring in money: construction contracts, salaries for state officials and legislators, and the expenses of men petitioning the legislature. Brunswick, Hallowell, Waterville, Belfast, and Augusta all pushed their claims, as did Portland which had been the home of state government since 1820. The prospects of a town rose and fell, as their representatives fought and bargained for the prize.

The legislature would eventually make a decision on the state capitol,\textsuperscript{39} but geography would remain a big obstacle to making even more important decisions. One reason for the failure was that Maine did not have a single dominant city or industry that could enforce its will on the state. New York State had the city of New York and Massachusetts had Boston, but in Maine large towns with varied industries, individual harbors and ports, and distinct river economies competed against each other. What divided the legislature time and time again were bills pushed by towns seeking state financial support for dams, navigation improvements,


\textsuperscript{38} King’s effort did have some success. New manufacturing companies would be exempt from taxes for five years.

\textsuperscript{39} In 1827 the legislature chose Augusta. All of the other towns accepted the decision except Portland which would try for decades to get the legislature to reverse its decision.
bridges, and roads. They were unable to pay for these investments themselves and wanted the state to foot the bill. The number of and enthusiasm for ambitious proposals probably reflected the public excitement over the construction of the Erie Canal.\textsuperscript{40} Financed by the State of New York, this 363-mile canal connected New York City, the Hudson River, upstate New York, and the Great Lakes. What had made the Erie Canal possible? New York’s own geography and Governor DeWitt Clinton pushed the state-financed canal through the legislature.\textsuperscript{41}

The divisive fights for state aid had begun in 1823 when Portland merchants came to the legislature requesting aid to construct the proposed Cumberland & Oxford Canal. Support for this canal was concentrated in Cumberland and Oxford Counties and in Portland’s merchant community.\textsuperscript{42} As might have been expected, Kennebec merchants were opposed, arguing that the state should not finance a local project. The majority of legislators agreed.\textsuperscript{43} A pattern emerged: every proposal advanced by a town ran into powerful opposition from its competitors. Arguing that it unduly benefited one city, Waterville merchants fought and defeated in 1825 a bill prepared by Augusta merchants for state help eliminating obstructions on the Kennebec. In 1826, Augusta and other upriver merchants used the same argument to defeat a proposal from a group of Gardiner merchants to construct a bridge across the Kennebec. When a group of

\textsuperscript{40} It opened on October 26, 1825.


\textsuperscript{43} The Portland merchants won, however, two consolation prizes: the state approved a lottery to help finance the project as well as a charter for a new bank that supporters argued would attract private capital to the project.
businessmen proposed a more comprehensive approach – a State Board of Internal 
Improvements with a $100,000 appropriation to fund projects throughout the state – Portland 
merchants led the opposition, apparently believing improvements anywhere else in the state 
would weaken Portland’s pre-eminent position.

The state’s geography was certainly one reason why Maine would not put its resources 
behind economic development projects, but another was the ruling Junto. It seemed primarily 
concerned about keeping itself in power and, unlike DeWitt Clinton, was uncomfortable 
advancing controversial ideas.

The Junto Stumbles

In 1824 presidential ambitions intruded into Maine’s quiescent politics, creating the first 
real divisions among the dominant Republicans. These divisions were not parties, nor were they 
organized factions, but instead loose alignments or alliances. From them, however, parties 
would emerge seven years later. The divisions started in 1823 in Washington DC. The question 
was which ambitious man would succeed President James Monroe, who was the last of the 
“founding fathers” of the nation. There was no clear successor with similar stature, but four men 
actively sought the presidency: Henry Clay of Kentucky, Andrew Jackson of Tennessee, William 
H. Crawford of Georgia, and John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts. Each started with a regional 
base: Crawford, the South; Adams, New England; and Clay and Jackson, the South and the 
West. Jackson had the widest national support. He would bring to the campaign a hatred of 
monarchy, aristocracy and political privilege formed as a young boy who fought the British in 
the Carolinas during the American Revolution. Besides the loathing he developed for
aristocracy, he also took away from his experiences a reverence for the classless Republic he believed the founding fathers had created.\(^{44}\)

In most of the states in the Union prior to 1824, party structures barely existed. Everyone professed to be a Republican and since Republican candidates had no opposition, there was little need for organization. Yet, as the 1824 presidential election moved closer, pre-party groups, like the Juntos in the various states, began to side with different candidates for president. In some cases, the reason was to support a favorite son, in other cases personal friendships, and in others hoped-for patronage from a victorious president. The Maine Junto decided to support William H. Crawford, the Georgia planter and politician. One reason was that Crawford was King’s patron. As Secretary of the Treasury, Crawford helped King financially by depositing US surplus funds in King’s Bath Bank, and he also gave King a big voice in the distribution of the Treasury’s patronage in Maine.\(^{45}\) Another reason was that Crawford had been instrumental in the Junto’s separation campaign. As Secretary of Treasury, Crawford had won the repeal of a Congressional law that would have penalized Maine’s shipping merchants if Maine separated from Massachusetts. Once that law was repealed, a major economic argument for remaining a part of Massachusetts disappeared.\(^{46}\) Another reason no doubt was the close economic relations that King and other Maine shipping merchants had with the Crawford’s South.

The decision of the Junto to support Crawford was a mistake, one that would crack the Junto’s image of invincibility. They had ignored the popularity of John Quincy Adams, who like


\(^{45}\) See Banks, *Maine Becomes a State*, p. 124 for references to Crawford’s papers.

most of Maine’s residents, was a son of Massachusetts. Knowing they had control over the Republican influential in the county conventions and the legislative caucus, the Junto must have thought they could translate that into a popular victory in a presidential election. But, the dynamics of a presidential election were different than backdoor negotiations, particularly when voters were given the choice of a New Englander vis a vis a westerner or southerner.

By supporting Crawford, the Junto gave those jealous of its power a great opportunity. They rallied for Adams. Some were Republicans who had been active in the separation campaign but felt that the Junto had monopolized the patronage rewards that statehood had promised. Others were former Federalists angry that the Junto had not honored its agreement to give them a fair share of patronage or who saw the chance to vote for a man from a famed Federalist family. Some were men whose families for decades had monopolized certain top patronage positions in Maine and felt threatened by the Junto’s power. One such man was Joshua Wingate. His father-in law had distributed national patronage in Maine during Thomas Jefferson’s presidency. Beginning with an appointment in 1802, family members had held, almost as a sinecure, the office of Collector of Customs in Bath.47 Loosely knit, this pro-Adams alignment did battle with the Junto and its dependents who supported Crawford.

The campaign in Maine was a two-man race – Crawford against Adams – as neither Jackson nor Clay had any support.48 Elsewhere those two other candidates were more popular. In Maine, the Crawford and the Adams’ campaigns were led by different groups of influential. There were no pressing issues that divided the two camps. Instead they attacked the personalities

48 According to Maine’s state records, not a single vote was cast for either Jackson or Clay. Their campaign did not reach Maine.
of their opponents and lauded the character of the man they preferred. When the Maine votes were counted, Crawford and the Junto were crushed. Adams won overwhelmingly, receiving 10,289 or 81.5% of the vote, and Crawford just 2,336 votes. Turnout was very low; just 19.1% of the men eligible to vote went to the polls.49

Adams not only won Maine, but swept all of the New England states. When the Electoral College met, however, there was no winner. Jackson had come out on top, but he did not receive the needed majority in the Electoral College. He did get more votes than anyone else in the College. Adams came in second, followed by Crawford and Clay. Jackson had won the popular vote thanks to the strong support he received from southern and western voters.

Since no candidate had a majority, the final choice moved from the Electoral College to the US House of Representatives where each state would have one vote. Bargaining among the candidates, particularly between Adams and Clay, was intense. In the end Clay swung his support to Adams, and the House chose Adams to be the President of the United States. Most men in Maine were happy with the outcome: a New Englander was president. But this decision made in Washington would have profound consequences for the Junto and for the growth of political parties in Maine. Jackson and his supporters around the country believed they had been robbed of the presidency by a sinister and oligarchic conspiracy, and they attacked what they called a “Corrupt Bargain,” which had denied Jackson his rightful victory.50 And realizing how


50 In the House Clay delivered a number of states to Adams. One that particularly outraged Jackson was Clay’s home state of Kentucky. Adams had not won a single vote in that state and its legislature had instructed its delegation to vote for Jackson, yet Clay got Kentucky’s Congressmen to vote for Adams. See Sean Wilentz, Andrew Jackson p. 48. Both Adams and Clay denied that there was such a “bargain,”
close they had come, they decided to create a national political organization whose goals would be to elect Andrew Jackson president in 1828.

**Calls for State Organization**

The 1824 presidential campaign shattered the Junto’s image of unassailable authority. In addition, its power had been weakened because the anti-Junto pro-Adams forces now had considerable national patronage to dispense; the man they had supported had been elected president. The anti-Junto alliance would gain additional strength because they would soon enjoy a share of state patronage; the Junto had recognized the muscle of its opponents, and had agreed in 1826 to support Enoch Lincoln as a compromise candidate for governor. Once he was elected, he would dispense patronage to both sides.\(^{51}\)

While both the Junto and the anti-Junto coalitions still called themselves Republicans, underneath major changes were afoot; these two coalitions were evolving into organized factions. In 1828 one would again support Adams, and the other Jackson. In the 1829 state elections each alliance would run their own candidate for governor and for the state legislature. By 1832, they would be distinct political parties. In the years before 1828, however, the structure of Republican organization barely changed. The nomination process for governor remained with the legislative caucus.\(^{52}\) Neither alliance created a state committee, elected a state chairman, or held a state convention. In some counties, Republicans met together or within their

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but Adams quickly appointed Clay Secretary of State soon after the House of Representatives made its decision.

\(^{51}\) Enoch Lincoln would be reelected in 1827 and 1828. For all Maine state elections returns, see Hoyt, *Maine Register*.

alliance at poorly attended conventions to nominate local candidates and to endorse the nominations by the legislative caucus. The Argus remained the backbone of the Maine Republicans and tried to keep the two feuding groups together.

Jackson’s campaign for the presidency would break considerable new ground in America’s politics. It would have more limited but still important consequences for Maine. The Jackson campaign built the first real national political organization, one that reached into virtually every state and county. The men who ran Jackson’s campaign for president in 1828 had started back in 1826. They believed in aggressive political organization. An important step was winning the support of Martin Van Buren, a man known for his skills at political organization, having created the Albany Regency which, using centralized control and internal discipline, dominated New York State. Van Buren offered more to Jackson than organizational skills. He also put forward a national strategy that the campaign adopted; keep the issue of slavery out of politics and unite “the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North.” This is the strategy that Jackson would follow in 1828 and 1832 and Van Buren, as the Democratic presidential candidate in 1836 and 1840, would follow as well. From those beginnings, this national alliance would be the foundation on which the Democratic Party was built.

While Van Buren worked out of Washington DC, a Jackson Central Committee in Nashville coordinated the campaign. It corresponded regularly with supporters across the country, asking them to create state organizations, one of whose immediate priorities would be to create Jackson committees in counties and cities. Partisans were urged to organize conventions,

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rallies, barbecues, and other spectacles to arouse the public.\textsuperscript{55} A key part of their strategy was a national network of pro-Jackson newspapers that "amplified the voice" and would "transmit news and party doctrine to followers at the local level."\textsuperscript{56} The Central Committee started some of the papers and subsidized others.\textsuperscript{57}

Jackson’s message was as transformative as his organization was. He excited the common people who had been largely passive since the American Revolution. Jackson’s editors emphasized the undemocratic character of Adams’ election and reiterated again and again the charge of “a corrupt bargain” which threatened republicanism.\textsuperscript{58} Robert V. Remini described Jackson as encouraging “a … conflict between an aristocracy intent on further aggrandizement and the people concerned for the preservation of their liberty and property.”\textsuperscript{59} Jackson increased the sense of urgency by personalizing the conflicts to “make them death struggles with a hated foe.”\textsuperscript{60} His message resonated with the anxieties and fears that attended the expansion of the commercial economy and brought hundreds of thousands of common men into politics for the first time.

\textsuperscript{55} Jackson’s campaign organization is described well in Holt, \textit{Political Parties and American Political Development}, pp. 41-42.


\textsuperscript{58} Watson, \textit{Liberty and Power}, p. 91.


\textsuperscript{60} Holt, \textit{Political Parties and American Political Development}, p. 43.
The Jackson campaign no doubt wanted to get the Junto’s support. The *Eastern Argus* was a big prize. For the Junto, the decision to support Jackson was self-serving and pragmatic. The Junto members, no doubt, had little personal enthusiasm for this rough war hero from the west who appealed to the common man. As men of substance, already powerful and with much to protect, they joined the campaign, not because they believed in Jackson’s cause, but because a Jackson victory could allow them to rebuild their power; they hoped to get control of national patronage in Maine. The race in Maine, however, would be difficult, since the incumbent John Quincy Adams would still be the “favorite son” of New England as he had been in 1824. Few expected Jackson to carry Maine or other New England states. But he had a good chance at the presidency because of his wide support in the South and much of the West.

**The Junto Offers the *Eastern Argus* to Jackson**

The *Argus* was Maine’s largest paper. It would become Jackson’s major voice in the state, a part of the national network of papers the Central Committee was putting together. But, if the Junto wanted to win the thanks of Jackson and the Nashville Central Committee, the *Argus* would need a new editor with energy, verve, and political acumen. Their choice was the thirty-one year old F. O. J Smith, who was writing for the *Independent Statesman* which was a small Republican paper in Portland. He began work at the *Argus* in September of 1827. The Junto certainly knew that Smith was a Jacksonian: they may not, however, have known how strong a Jacksonian he was and how ambitious he was.

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61 One suspects that the Junto secured a subsidy for the *Argus* from the Jackson Central Committee.

62 Some of the other papers in Maine that were part of the Jackson and Democratic Republican network were the *Maine Patriot and State Gazette* (Augusta), *the American Advocate* (Hallowell), and the *Eastern Republican* (Bangor). The major National Republican paper in Maine was the *Portland Advertiser*. 
Francis Ormand Jonathan Smith was born in Brentwood, New Hampshire. There he had shown a strong interest in journalism, religion, and politics, writing for the *Portsmouth Journal*. Later he moved to Portland where he wrote for the *Christian Intelligencer*, a Universalist publication, and the *Independent Statesman*. Smith came from a humble background and liked to boast that he was a “self-made man.” In some ways, he was typical of the men who were attracted to the Jackson campaign: young and ambitious. Like many of them, he saw politics as a path toward success and recognition where his obscure background would not be an obstacle. To his new job Smith brought an endless capacity for work, a talent and relish for invective, an ability to write, and surprising political savvy.

Using the pages of the *Argus*, Smith brought the Jackson message to Maine, reaching out to the “YOUNG MEN, the rising generation of the country.” He warned them that Adams and the Federalists would try to take away “their rights and equal privileges.” Echoing Jackson, he appealed to their frustrations and fears, telling them they had to fight back against the “arbitrary encroachments of wealth, ambition, and corruption” which would restrict their opportunities. Smith urged the young men to join the campaign to protect their interests. He never defined who the young men were, but he seemed to include struggling farmers, the unemployed, successful artisans, ambitious shipowners, aggressive loggers and everyone who was not an Adams supporter. He also never identified who their enemies were other than Adams and the Federalists. Like Jackson’s, Smith’s message was crafted to be all encompassing. Like

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64 *Eastern Argus*, September 5, 1828

65 Smith never used the words National Republican to refer to his opponents, always calling them “Federalists.” The Federalists had a poor reputation in Maine. They had opposed Maine’s separation
Jackson again, Smith never outlined or proposed a program of legislation or an agenda for state action in Maine.

Although Smith was at the helm of the *Argus*, the Junto ran the Maine Jackson campaign. But there is no evidence that the Junto followed the directions of the Nashville Central Committee. There was no state committee, nor a state chair, nor county and city campaign committees – no new formal party structures. There was also no evidence of any independent Jackson organization, nor the spectacles, rallies, and barbecues that the Central Committee had called for. The Junto seemed uncomfortable with new structures, perhaps fearing that they might offer a meeting place for opponents to organize themselves. They seemed to want to rely on the informal networks of influentials that they had managed in the past. The Junto did, however, follow the Jackson national organizational strategy in two ways. The first was by offering the *Argus* to be part of the campaign’s national network of papers. The second was by organizing county conventions. Smith regularly used the *Argus* to call young men to meet in county conventions where they could inform themselves on the issues and choose state and local candidates loyal to Jackson. In one speech Smith went so far as to urge them to join “committees of correspondence.”

Did Smith himself try to follow the Central Committee’s directions? He did urge men to attend county conventions, but he did not call for a state committee, a state convention, county committees, or for internal discipline – key attributes of what we today call a “political party.” Thus he was not unlike the Junto. But Smith’s actions seemed to suggest that he had some kind from Massachusetts and had, in Smith’s eyes, in the midst of the War of 1812, committed treason by participating in the Hartford Convention.

of vision. It seems as if his goal was to create a “movement,” largely unstructured, with Jackson’s papers (and their editors) playing the key role, educating and mobilizing men to turn out on Election Day. Smith, however, did take one important step toward creating a party. He gave the Jackson movement in Maine a name. Wanting to draw a clear distinction from the Adams supporters who called themselves the National Republicans, he called the Jackson supporters the Democratic Republicans.

**Deference Collapses in the Face of Popular Politics**

The fall was election season in Maine. In 1828 there would be the presidential, congressional, and state elections. In past years, the months of August, September, October, and November passed with only a minor intrusion of politics. But the fall of 1828 was anything but. The Jackson campaign had energized it supporters and its opponents. Thousands of people were paying attention, believing they had a stake in the outcomes.

The first signal that a dramatic change was underway was in September when the normally dull election for governor and the legislature was held. Enoch Lincoln, the incumbent, had not taken sides in the presidential race and was unopposed once again. He was supported by the Junto and the anti-Junto alliances. Still, 28,109 men voted, an increase of over 8,000 over the previous year’s state election. The high excitement generated by the Jackson-Adams battle was turning people out in an otherwise uninteresting state election. On the Adams side, the chance to

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67 In fact, we will have to wait until the 1830s to see the emergence of structures and activities we normally associate with political parties.

68 See Democratic Republican endorsements for presidential election, *Eastern Argus*, October 28, 1828. National-Republicans never referred to their opponents as Democratic Republicans. Their term was “Jacksonians” which they thought of as derogatory.
vote for a New England favorite son mobilized many voters, and the chance to vote for a man running against corruption and aristocracy mobilized others. The final total was that 28,109 votes for Enoch Lincoln in the uncontested election for governor. In fact more of the Adams voters turn out in the state election than Jackson voters, electing more National Republicans to the state legislature than Democratic Republicans.

The 1828 presidential election in November, however, was the transformative event. With it a new era of politics emerged. It was the most intensely competitive in the state’s brief history. The sides seemed evenly matched, and each candidate aligned himself with different forces. Jackson took the side of equalitarianism and opposed privilege. He was suspicious of the commercial economy. Adams, on the other, took the side of order and authority and opposed taking equality too far. He embraced a more commercial economy. In many ways their views reflected their backgrounds. John Quincy Adams was a man of Massachusetts, son of a respected former president, widely traveled, and Harvard-educated. Jackson was a westerner, a military hero, rough in dress and language, poorly-schooled, outspoken, and emotional.

Smith’s articles in the *Argus* stoked the fires burning among the ranks of the Jackson supporters. He often wrote on economic subjects in a way that Jackson supporters could understand. One group he aimed at in the last days of the campaign was the shipowners and the maritime merchants of Portland. In no uncertain terms he blamed the economic depression on Adams, both for Britain’s closure of their West Indies ports to American ships and for the havoc visited on shipyards by the Tariff of Abominations. He compared business conditions in Maine’s harbors now and in the year Adams was elected. “Four years ago, the people of this state found a ready cash market for every commodity. Lumber and every other article, whether

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the produce of our forests, our farms, our workshops, or our fisheries, commanded a high price.”

But then, thanks to Adams “we lost the West India trade, and with it a market for our beef, and fish, and lumber, and a profitable employment of our sailors.” And then the “iniquitous Tariff.” Now “look down into our docks around our wharves, and see the forests of masts rising from vessels laying idle.” A pound of cotton used to earn a freight of two and one half cents, and now just a half a cent. New vessels of excellent workmanship were sold at a sacrifice. A dealer in lumber suffered a loss of $3,000 last year, and a respectable farmer brought in load of produce to raise a little money and he could not get rid of it at any price. The state’s harbors were “idle.” 70

Who caused the depression? Adams and the Federalists? 71

Excitement was at a fever’s pitch when men went to the polls in November. Turnout was high. 72 But Smith’s efforts were not enough to overcome Adams’s status of a favorite son. When the towns finished the counting of the votes, Adams won Maine showing wide statewide support, winning all the counties with the exception of Cumberland and Oxford. 73 The anti-Junto alliance was elated by the results. But a month later their elation was dashed, for now Jackson supporters had cause for celebration. The Electoral College at its meeting in December elected Jackson president. The vote was 178 to 83. Favorite-son Adams had won Maine and the rest of New England, but Jackson had swept the West, the South and populous New York and

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71 Jackson supporters always attacked their opponents, by calling them “Federalists,” despite the fact that the Federalist Party had dissolved as a political force ten years earlier.

72 Adams won by 20,773 votes to 13,927.

73 The Argus published election results for the 1828 presidential election in its issues of November 7th, 13th, and 25th, 1828. F. O. J. Smith was particularly proud of one fact – one that gave him attention in national Jackson circles. The only seat in the Electoral College that Jackson won in New England was Maine’s Cumberland County seat. 73
Pennsylvania. Martin Van Buren’s strategy was successful. Jackson had united “urban workingmen and small farmers of the North with yeoman farmers and much of the slaveholding planter class of the South” into a winning coalition.⁷⁴

Jackson had lost Maine, but the campaign had transformed Maine’s politics, turning out nearly 34,000 men, 6,000 more than in the record-breaking election just two months earlier. Forty-two percent of the eligible males voted, three times as many as voted in the presidential race four years earlier.⁷⁵ A new era of popular politics had opened. What caused the change? One reason was that the race for president was bitterly contested. Another was that the two candidates had starkly different views of the future for the American Republic. Still another was the prodigious efforts that each candidate’s allies made to get their supporters to vote. A final one was a change in the “constitutional order,” one that had torn down a major obstacle to voting. A man excited by a campaign, even if he had been aroused only a few days before the election, could just go and vote. His name was on the list, a result of a law passed in 1821, just a year after separation, required town officials to “make out a correct and alphabetical list of such inhabitants of their respective towns … as are constitutionally qualified to vote.”⁷⁶ This placed the burden of registration firmly on the local officials, not on the voters.

Equally important, the Jackson campaign shattered the culture of deference that had held common people back from politics. Jackson’s attacks on what he called a new aristocracy

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⁷⁴ Holt, Andrew Jackson, p. 53.


⁷⁶ Laws of the State of Maine Volumes I and II From 1821 to 1834 (Portland, Maine: Thomas Todd and Colman, Holden and Co, 1834), p 556
energized them, fearing that the promise of the American Revolution was endangered and that they might lose hard-fought-for rights and liberties. The bitter attacks on Adams launched by Jackson’s paper energized ordinary men. Editors dragged this Harvard-educated Massachusetts “aristocrat” through muck and mud, sullying not only Adams but also the long unquestioned authority and status of influentials everywhere. In addition, Jackson’s many newspapers reached far into the hitherto isolated communities across the state that the influentials had long dominated, giving the men who had traditionally relied on the advice of their “betters” uncensored access to competing candidates and ideas. These influentials no longer controlled communications.

Jackson’s election had many national implications, but in Maine it accelerated the growing tension between the two Republican factions. In early 1829 when the new legislature organized itself, the National-Republicans were in full control. Believing that President Jackson was removing all Maine National-Republicans – men who had supported Adams – from national patronage jobs and replacing them with Democratic-Republicans, they elected a new Executive Council that rejected any Democratic-Republicans that Governor Lincoln tried to re-appoint.\(^77\) State government was swept clean of all Jackson supporters.\(^78\) The sacking of National-Republicans appointees by Jackson and the Democratic-Republican men angered both sides, further separating the Republicans into two hostile and suspicious camps. The new bitter acrimony of presidential politics was injecting itself into state politics.

\(^77\) Maine’s constitutional order gave the legislature great power. The Governor needed the approval of the Executive Council – elected by the Legislature – to take any action whatsoever.

\(^78\) See Hatch, *Maine: A History* Vol. I, p. 195-196. The legislature also used the opportunity to fill both of Maine’s seats in the US Senate. One went to John Holmes, the former member of the Junto who had defected to N-Rs.
The loss of control over state government and its patronage seems to have aroused the Democratic-Republicans to finally take seriously the Jackson campaign’s call for a higher degree of organization. To win control of the state, they had to get all of their potential voters to the polls. In early 1829, a few months after the fall elections, Maine Democratic-Republicans finally began to put together the organization that the Jackson’s Central Committee had called for two years earlier. A State Central Committee was created consisting of five men, and County Committees were created in each county. They were chosen by the Democratic-Republican members of the legislature “and other gentlemen from different parts of the state.” The Central Committee members appear to have been closer to the Junto than to Smith’s young men. Whether they won patronage jobs because they were members of the Committee or they were placed on the Committee and given patronage jobs on the understanding they would devote considerable time to building the party is unclear. The Committee outlined its plan in a circular distributed to all County Committees. Their goal seemed to be to reach every man in the state as they charged the County Committee to see to it that local committees be appointed “in every SCHOOL DISTRICT to ascertain the number of Democratic voter and BRING THEM TO THE POLLS.” Importantly, their priority was not to convince men to shift their allegiance, but to get all of their supporters to the polls. They also wanted a centrally run organization. The circular continued: “when you shall have ORGANIZED YOUR TOWN, which we pray you to attend to without delay, forward the names of all your District Committees to the County Committee with the number of Republican Voters you will be able to throw in the Fall.”79 The goal of this effort clearly was to win the upcoming September election.

79The circular received by the Lincoln County Democratic-Republicans was reproduced in the NR paper the Portland Advertiser, July 14, 1829
Maine’s First State Political Convention

When the legislature convened in early 1829, Governor Lincoln, perhaps worried that he might face an opponent, announced he would not be a candidate for re-election. In response, the National-Republican senators and representatives caucused and nominated one of their allies—Jonathan Hunton—to be the Republican candidate for governor. Shut out of that nominating process, the Democratic-Republicans in the legislature caucused and took a unique step, a first for Maine, calling for a state convention that would choose the Democratic-Republican candidate for governor. Their decision seemed to reflect a need to find a nominating vehicle they could claim was an authentic voice of the people—more legitimate than a legislative caucus. There is no evidence that it was part of a plan to create a more structured political organization. Their convention would be in Augusta in June, and all Democratic-Republicans were encouraged to attend. Using the Argus, which reached all parts of the state, Smith actively promoted the upcoming convention.

The run up to and the events at the Democratic-Republicans’ convention give us a glimpse of new developments in the pre-party era; not only was there a deepening split between the state’s Democratic-Republicans and National-Republicans, but there was a new emerging split within the ranks of the Democratic-Republicans themselves. The Junto found itself challenged by a younger and more radical group of “Jacksonians,” men who were pulled into the campaign by Jackson’s and F. O. J Smith’s appeals. The issue that divided the D-Rs was who would control Jackson’s patronage. The stakes were high: presidential patronage was of great value. An appointment as surveyor in the customs house, as laborer at the naval yard in Kittery,

80 See Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith…” p. 50.

81 For background and actions by the state convention, see Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith,” pp. 50-5.
or as a postmaster could make a “middling” family very comfortable and bring them great respect. Appointment as collector of customs could make a man wealthy.\textsuperscript{82} Appointment as a judge or marshal in the Courthouse could give an ambitious man, one with his eye on Congress or the governor’s office, an invaluable head start. Patronage bestowed another less tangible but no less real benefit. It was public recognition of a man’s importance and a signal to others that he had a bright future.

What seems to have set off this public conflict between the Junto and the young men was the decision of the Junto to hold a secret meeting on February 20\textsuperscript{th} just four months after Jackson’s victory. The committee recommended a slate of Maine men who should receive presidential appointments. A critic reported the results of this meeting: “every office from Portsmouth to Eastport” was “regulated or agreed to.”\textsuperscript{83} Few knew who attended the meeting or what its recommendations were, but what was clear to the ambitious young men was that the Junto members had grabbed the real jewels. President Jackson, for example, chose Junto member William Pitt Preble to the prestigious position as Minister Plenipotentiary to the Netherlands and Junto member William King to the lucrative jobs as Collector of Customs in his native Bath.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} A collector of customs received a very generous salary as well as the right to collect for himself certain fees. In addition, the collector of a large port had many employees, some very well paid. By directing his men to one campaign or another, the collector was politically very powerful.

\textsuperscript{83} See an article from the \textit{Wiscasset Citizen}, reprinted in the September 1, 1829 edition of the \textit{Portland Advertiser}.

\textsuperscript{84} In a later action that must have further enraged the young men, King received another jewel of an appointment, this time from the state. The position of Commissioner of Public Buildings was created to oversee the design and construction of the new State Capitol.
Whether he was motivated by principle or by personal ambition is not clear, but soon after the February meeting Smith slowly began to turn against the Junto in these patronage disputes, favoring instead the bids of the new and younger men. In one case that greatly angered the Junto, Smith opposed the bid of sixty-six year old John Chandler, a longtime member of the Junto, for the very lucrative and politically powerful position as Portland Collector of Customs. His man was John Anderson, the thirty-six year old Cumberland County congressman and a strong Jacksonian. One consequence of Smith’s growing independence was that the men who wanted a larger share of Jackson’s patronage began to look at him as a leader. The state’s National-Republican press was fascinated with the tension that appeared to be growing amongst its enemies. No doubt they saw some opportunities. “Many of the Jackson party have been treated unfairly, there is no doubt of that fact: and there are many who begin to shake off the trammels of the Junto.”

Smith added fuel to the fire with articles in the Argus that appeared to support the young men’s claims. To maximize opportunities for new men, Smith endorsed proscription – the practice of removing, after an election victory over the opposing party, all its adherents from public office. Everyone who worked hard should enjoy the benefits of victory, and the common people had every right to their share of public offices. Smith also called for “rotation in

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85 Anderson’s effort failed, but with Smith’s support, Portland later elected him Mayor, serving from 1833 to 1836. Later Anderson, by then a leader of the then dominant Jacksonian Democratic Party, won the presidential appointment to be Portland’s Collector, holding the office from 1837-1841 and then from 1843-1848. See Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774 –Present (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2005)

86 Portland Advertiser, September 4, 1829.

87 See F. O. J. Smith to T. Pilsbury and others, October 22, 1829, F. O. J. Smith Papers, Maine Historical Society.
office” – appointments should be for a limited duration. If a man did get a patronage job, he should step down after a year or two to make way for someone else on the way up. Smith was walking a fine line in his relations with the Junto, but he was helped by the unique circumstances of 1829. Since National-Republicans controlled state government in Maine, Smith could argue that he was recommending the proper way to deal with National-Republicans if they were defeated in the upcoming September state elections. He avoided any direct criticism of the Junto for the way Maine’s national patronage was handled.

The Jacksonians and the Junto did cooperate to hold the June convention, yet each side urged their own supporters to become delegates. The Junto wanted to nominate a moderate, a man likely to win; the Jacksonians wanted a strong committed Jackson man. Writing in the *Eastern Republican*, a Democratic-Republican paper in Bangor, Jacksonian leaders told their supporters: “Let no fence-riders, no timid eleventh-hour Jackson man, no twadder, no vaporing, scheming, double-faced politician, be selected.”

But at the Augusta convention, it was the Junto, not the Jacksonians, who turned out the greatest number of delegates. Two Jacksonians did make a bid for the nomination for governor, but together they received only 60 of the 241 votes cast. The Junto’s candidate won – Samuel Emerson Smith, a lawyer, judge, and moderate. In fact Judge Smith had actually voted for Adams in 1828, an act the Junto considered an advantage as it signaled to those Democratic-Republicans who had voted for Adams that they would be welcomed back to the fold.

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89 See Convention Proceedings, in *Eastern Argus*, June 16, 1829. Interestingly, one of the men elected as a secretary of the convention was Edward Kavanagh, a Catholic. He had been a member of the Maine House of Representatives from 1826 to 1828 and would later be a Congressman and then briefly governor of Maine.
Maine State Government at the End of the 1820s

As the year 1829 ended, Jeffersonian Republicans had been in control of the state for nearly a decade and in Augusta men were busily constructing Maine’s new State House on a bluff overlooking the Kennebec River.90 The new capitol would house, when it opened in 1832, all of Maine’s state government.91 The governor, treasurer, secretary of state, state land agent, and top officers of the militia would have their offices there. The two-month legislative sessions were the highlight of year, the only times when the building was busy and full.

The state government’s structure and its activities reflected the Jeffersonian philosophy that the least government is the best government. The state’s total budget (1829) was just $100,000. The “administrative” function came to just $12,000. Neither the governorship nor the other state offices were full time, and often those who held them spent much of their time elsewhere working on their own affairs. In addition, the state had no programs, other than the $20,000 it spent on Indians, prisons, and “defectives.”92 The major activities of the state were its legislature and court system. The Legislature’s budget came to $22,000 with most going to the per diems and travel paid to individual legislators, salaries for part time clerks who supported the legislature when it was in session, and printing the state’s Acts and Resolves. The Legislature spent much of its time approving charters and special acts, requested by groups of businessmen. The cost of the Supreme Judicial Court and the secondary and subordinate courts came to $18,000. The courts’ outputs were trials that punished crimes against people and property and

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90 From 1821 until 1832 Portland was the home of the Maine state government.

91 The exceptions were those who worked at the State Prison in Thomaston.

decisions that resolved commercial and property disputes, giving businessmen and others confidence in their contracts and agreements.

The state paid its bills with revenue primarily from the “general property tax” which fell on all real and personal property in the state. The tax was collected by the towns and passed back to the state. Since everyone’s property was taxed by the state, there was strong political pressure, particularly from the cash-poor new settlers on the inland frontier, to keep taxes to a minimum. Two other sources of revenue were taxes on the capital stock of the state’s banks and on the income from the sale of public lands.93

**Popular Politics Comes to State Elections**

The recruitment of new people into politics continued into the 1829 September state elections, as the candidates for governor of the Democratic-Republican and National-Republican factions faced off. Judge Smith was the candidate of the Democratic-Republicans and John Hunton, the candidate of the National-Republicans. F. O. J. Smith enthusiastically backed Judge Smith. The *Argus* went after Jonathan Hutton, the National-Republican candidate, with both barrels. Writing under his own name and a *nom de plume*, Smith was abusive, scurrilous, and probably libelous in his attacks. He spent little time praising Judge Smith. The *Portland Advertiser*, the leading National-Republican paper, supported Hunton and launched equally personal attacks on Judge Smith. One of the consequences of this campaign, like the presidential one a year before, was that the reputation of influentials suffered another blow. Both Hunton and Smith, notable and influential men, wound up when the campaign ended covered with muck and

93 Jewett, *The Public Finances of Maine*. See Appendix Table A. (II. Expenditures)
mud dredged up by the opposing factions’ newspapers. The battle between these two Republican factions captivated the state.

When the results were in, this bitter state campaign for governor had brought out a record number of votes. Almost 46,551 men voted, 12,000 more than in the presidential race the year before and more than twice as many as voted for governor in the years from 1821 to 1827. The turnout was a startling 57%. The era of popular politics had definitely come to Maine.

The results of the 1829 state election also brought out both Jackson and anti-Jackson men. The election results bore this out. Both Smith and Hunton received about 23,000 votes. Some were questionable, and since there was a scattering of 245 votes, neither candidate seemed to have received a majority. For the first time, (but certainly not the last) the provisions of the 1820 Constitution setting a procedure for the legislature to resolve contested elections for governor had to be invoked. But it was not easy because the legislature was evenly divided as well. It took weeks to decide who controlled this new legislature and thus even longer to learn who would be governor. The National Republicans had a one-vote majority in the house, but control of the senate would rest on how four seats – where no candidate had received a majority – would be filled. That battle required over 50 roll call votes. The National-Republicans won control of the legislature, but not until they were forced to use rump conventions, semi-legal tactics, and blatant dishonesty to pull it off. As it turned out the legislature did not select the

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94 Hoyt, Maine Register.

95 See Hatch, Maine: A History Vol. I. pp. 199-203. The public outrage at those tactics hurt the National Republicans for years, helped along by F. O. J. Smith’s relentless reminders in his editorials. For Smith’s view of the fight for control of the legislature which convened in 1830 see his pamphlet: History of the Proceedings and Extraordinary Measures of the Legislature of Maine for the year 1830 (Portland, Maine: No Publisher, 1830.)
governor after all; control of the legislature gave the National-Republicans control over the
counting of votes, and they declared that Hunton had won a majority and was the governor. This
battle was a foretaste of what was to come. In the late 1840s and early 1850s, when anti-slavery,
pro-Temperance, and Democratic factions ran their own candidates for governor, neither of the
dominant parties could win a majority of the popular vote. Often a seriously divided legislature
made the final choice of the governor but in a way that left the losers angry and the public fed up
with parties.

The Democratic-Republicans had not elected their candidate for governor, but they had
much to celebrate as 1829 began. They had come within a hairsbreadth of electing their man. In
addition, their candidate for governor had received almost 10,000 more votes than their hero
Andrew Jackson a year earlier. Clearly Jackson’s message was continuing to bring new men to
the polls just as his campaign had. The Democratic-Republicans had won five of the state’s ten
counties: York, Cumberland, Oxford, Penobscot and Waldo. The results also suggested that the
Democratic-Republicans were benefitting from the state’s population changes – men seeking
self-sufficient farms who were flooding into the rapidly growing inland rural areas were more
likely to vote Democratic-Republican. The election results left F. O. J. Smith bubbling with
enthusiasm: “We can now promise our friends with the most perfect confidence, that another
year will see the state decidedly and strongly republican,” he told the readers of the *Argus.*

When the 1829 campaign was over, F. O. J. Smith, the young man whom the Junto had
hired just two years earlier, was now one of the most well-known of the state’s Democratic-
Republicans. Smith’s success in 1828 in winning Cumberland County for Jackson and the great
increase in votes that Samuel Smith received in 1829 gave him a reputation for leadership and

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96 See *New Hampshire Patriot*, October 5, 1829 for reprint of the article from the *Eastern Argus.*
political acumen. His travels throughout the state during the 1828 and 1829 campaigns won him firm friendships with the growing number of Jacksonians across the state eager for recognition and advancement. His support for rotation in office and prescription of opponents made him particularly popular with the ambitious young men.

Smith’s opposition to Chandler, however, earned him the enmity of the Junto,\textsuperscript{97} and he must have realized by the end of 1829 that he and the Junto would soon part ways. He began to make plans to establish his own newspaper. An ambitious young man, Smith was ready to make his own mark in politics.\textsuperscript{98}

**Conclusion**

The ways in which men acquired and maintained political power in Maine changed significantly in the decade after statehood. There was no factor more important in forcing these changes than the massive increases in the size of the electorate, a consequence of the Jackson-Adams 1828 campaign. Mobilizing this electorate required more political activists and one with more useful skills, a compelling message, and new political structures. One thing that did not change was the importance of patronage.

Soon after Maine became a state, political power fell into the hands of a small group of men whom critics called the “Junto.” Well respected because they had led the fight for separation from Massachusetts, and armed with political experience learned in the


\textsuperscript{98} Newspaper editors often became politicians. Ashur Ware, for example, had been the editor of the *Argus* and then a member of the Junto. Absent an organized party structure, editors were powerful because they were often the most visible partisan figures.
Commonwealth’s politics, they dominated the early legislatures and either by election or appointment held most of the major state and national offices. This small group chose the men whom the voters would elect. State and national patronage was the basis of their power.

In Maine, there were hundreds of public offices and scores of contracts controlled either by the governor or the president. Because they occupied most of the top positions in both governments, the members of the Junto were able, thanks to the judicious use of patronage to secure the support of the influentials: the merchants, landowners, lawyers, and lumbermen who dominated the state’s many isolated towns. These men could turn out for the Junto’s candidates enough family members, friends, and men over whom they had influence to win majorities in the low turnout elections of the time. This political system worked well for the Junto. Their candidates rarely faced any opposition. Whether they had created this political world they presided over, or whether it had created them, the fact is that only a small percentage of men turned out to vote and those that did often deferred to opinions of their “betters.”

While they were quite familiar with the more structured politics of Massachusetts, the Junto chose its candidates by give and take bargaining among its members. At this early pre-party stage, there was little need for formal organizations. Most of its decisions were made in private. The Junto felt no need to create any new state or local political structure that would energize local leaders, provide a means of resolving disputes, or turn out the maximum vote. They did not have to because they had no opposition and did not need additional voters. The few public political structures were fleeting and temporary. The Junto usually convened a caucus of legislators each year to ratify its nomination for governor, and Junto members often convened a rump county convention to ratify their choice and provide some indication of public support.
These informal processes, coupled with the legislative caucus and the county conventions, were probably sufficient in a politically deferential culture.

In the early years of the decade, the Junto’s political power was dominant, but deep forces were at work weakening the social structure on which the Junto’s political system was based. New technologies and new means of communication were changing the way people understood the world. Travel had become easier thanks to the appearance of steamboats on Maine’s rivers and its coast, and on account of the construction of private turnpikes that connected the major towns. In addition, people in long-isolated communities now had new sources of information, thanks to newspapers newly opened in the larger towns, many of which reprinted articles on current affairs first published in Boston or Washington papers. News from the White House and Congress, partisan speeches by prominent men, and reprints of the scurrilous attacks candidates launched on their opponents, reached voters in previously isolated communities. The influential were no longer the only voice in their communities.

In the first year of Jackson’s presidency the outlines of a new political system were beginning to emerge. The central and revolutionary change was that tens of thousands of new men had become politically active and were voting. A robust, enthusiastic, and popular politics was overcoming the old politics of deference. The increased size of the electorate not only required a political message that excited the common people, but also organization. New structures were needed to help recruit, mobilize, and turn out men by the thousands on Election Day. The Jackson campaign in Maine built up a new political structure – Jackson county conventions – to accomplish these tasks. The Jackson conventions would later be the foundations of Democratic-Republican county conventions that would become so important in the early 1830s.
A state organization was also needed to coordinate their entire effort, and Jackson supporters created Maine’s first partisan state-wide political organization – the Jackson State Committee. Its job was to create Jackson County Committees, and for them, in turn, to appoint Jackson Town Committees and so on until the entire state was organized. At this time, these committees had a somewhat narrow scope. Their purpose was to support Andrew Jackson.

As consequential as the effect of his campaign was on Maine, the first years of Jackson’s presidency would have equally important ramifications. Political men began to create the institutions from which political parties would emerge in the 1830s. These political developments reflected the importance of patronage as much as did the institutions in the Junto era. In fact, the quest for patronage was an even stronger motivation for political men in 1829 because the amount of patronage, particularly what emanated from Washington, was much larger than it was when the Junto first came to power. Congress opened up thousands of new patronage positions when it required the Post Office to add thousands of new offices and mail routes, and when it hired the hundreds of collectors, inspectors, and clerks needed to collect the revenue expected from the newly passed 1828 Tariff.

Patronage was also at the root of another new political development – the emergence of Maine’s first organized political “factions.” One could call them “pre-party” groups. The situation in 1829 was volatile, and political men were anxious. Hundreds of them knew their futures were at stake. Some were Adams supporters, fired by Jackson to open up positions for his own men, and the rest were Jackson supporters who an Adams-controlled legislature was stripping of their public offices. At one time, they had all been Republicans, but now each group started to meet separately, believing that they had to protect their interests. If they organized themselves in disciplined, self-conscious groups, moreover, they might be better able to win
elections and give themselves power over patronage. The Adams supporters called themselves the National-Republicans, and the Jackson men identified themselves as Democratic-Republicans. Now the factions had names.

The Democratic-Republicans were an alliance of the Junto and the young ambitious men that F. O. J. Smith had brought into the county conventions and then into the Jackson organization. These young men, in fact, were not just a faction, but were the first of a new generation of political activists. The growth in the electorate had made them critical to winning elections. The larger electorate demanded work and skill that neither the Junto nor the influentials had. And there were not enough of them able and willing to do the hard political work required. For them politics was a sideline. Protecting and growing their economic interests was far more important. But the young men had more time to invest in what they thought might be their opportunity to advance. And they were highly motivated; their successes and failures were clear. Did they turn out the voters needed or not? Did their man win his election? These new men would work hard to master the needed skills. Their pursuit of their dream of success is what would give the Jackson movement in Maine its vitality and power. Sometime in the future they would become professionals in the business of politics.

But their ambition was also unsettling to the Junto and the men who held the top public offices for years. The young men thought they were the backbone of the Jackson movement and they expected there would be rewards. Collisions were inevitable and would become common. One of the first occurred soon after Jackson’s election. The Jacksonians, as the young men had started to call themselves, were enraged when they discovered that the Junto had met secretly and adopted a list of men it would recommend to President Jackson and that list recommended only Junto men for all the best jobs. Patronage was certainly a two-edge sword. It was the glue
that helped to unify a campaign around a single man, but it also tended, once the man was in office, to split the group as it fought for the spoils. The only way to avoid this conundrum was to have a man or a committee with sufficient power and authority make sure that patronage was used wisely, but efforts to do that were still well in the future.

Maine’s National-Republicans were somewhat isolated from the conflicts occurring inside the Jackson organization, so they could focus more on the 1829 election. They decided to make no effort to patch up their disputes with the Democratic-Republicans. Instead, they effectively made the split permanent when they decided to run their own man for governor. Maine would have in 1829 its first real contested gubernatorial election. But they needed to build support for their candidate. They did not make the nomination in a small private meeting, but instead used a public and formal organization, the “legislative caucus,” a step they hoped would unite their faction for the upcoming battle in which they hoped to get their candidate wide public attention.

Perhaps because they were worried that their internal conflicts would make them weaker, the Democratic Republicans went well beyond their opponents and decided to hold Maine’s first state-wide convention, and that body would choose their candidate for governor. The men who called the convention did not know who it would nominate, but they did know that they needed public attention; they needed to let the competing wings have their say; and they needed to come away from the meeting united. Political men were taking steps towards the creation of a political party, not because of an abstract belief in the idea of what a party should like, but to solve concrete problems. Not only did they call for a convention, but they asked towns to select delegates. The delegates debated and then voted between four candidates. And they made their choice with a recorded roll call vote – all firsts for Maine.
As the decade ended, Maine’s political system was clearly evolving in new directions. The explosion of the electorate would continue to be the major force, and ambitious men would find that organization – initially through loosely organized factions – was the best way to advance their interests. Only organization could recruit sufficient men to win a campaign, only organization could offer rules and paths for advancement, and only organization could deliver a compelling message throughout the state. Also it took organization to fund and edit a party newspaper, to convene a convention in every county, and to win enough support throughout the state to insure that a political ally won nomination for governor.
CHAPTER III

THE 1830s: JACKSON AND THE ORIGINS OF MAINE’S POLITICAL PARTIES

Introduction

Economic and political power in Maine shifted significantly in the 1830s. It was in this decade that Maine Democrats first took power, thanks in large measure Andrew Jackson’s success in bringing the “common people” into politics.

Economically that state was dominated by lumbermen’ shipping merchants, shipbuilders, and the “great proprietors” who owned vast swaths of land. As the demand for Maine lumber soared, a group of “lumber barons” made their fortunes in the woods, on the rivers, and in the lumber mills. They took their places next to shipping merchants, great proprietors, and shipbuilders as the economic elite of the state. Unlike Massachusetts, there were few manufacturers amongst this elite, since there was only one cotton mill in the state, at Saco.

Farmers were the most numerous group and although they were not a political power in the state, it was their votes that made the Democrats into the dominant party in the state.

There was another “business” or “enterprise” in the state, though few described it as such. This powerful enterprise was Democratic organization, fueled by the hundreds of patronage jobs made available to it by Democratic presidents and governors. The men who occupied these jobs performed all the functions of the state and national government in Maine, staffed the Democratic organizations, and turned out the Democratic vote on Election Day. They were as
ubiquitous in Maine as workers in the lumber industry. As a group their overriding interest was winning elections, not in implementing policies. Promoting a policy or opposing one was what one did in campaigns, but no one wanted to alienate any voters. The politician’s job was to get as many of their voters to the polls as possible.

Political parties constituted one of Maine’s largest “businesses.” Like most, they needed organization to accomplish their work. In the early 30s, their leaders transformed the Democratic-Republicans and the National Republicans, the factions that had emerged at the end of the 1830s, into the Democratic Party and the Whig Party. By the end of the decade they had county and town organizations nearly everywhere in the state, and they competed in presidential, congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative races. Because of the constant increases in the size of the electorate, they had to create caucuses and conventions to mobilize volunteers. Their attempt to build strong organizations often suffered from the effects of the patronage paradox. On the one hand, the riches of patronage were the glue that held the party in power together, but the riches produced endless competition, bitterness, and frequent splits. By the end of the decade, the Democrats were the most well organized as they benefited from over a decade of this patronage. Their critics called them not the Democrats, but the “Office-Holders Party.”

As in the 1820s, the drivers of Maine’s economy were the Eastern cities, the Caribbean sugar plantations, and the Southern cotton plantations. The stake that Maine’s export-driven industries had in foreign markets made them strong supporters of free trade. It also made them natural allies of the South, which was also an export-oriented economy and an even stronger supporter of free trade. These export and international trading interests found a ready ally in the Democratic Party and gave it substantial support.
The coastal economy prospered until the Panic of 1837, but on the inland frontier the new farmers were increasingly angry. Many came to Maine with high hopes but the soils turned out to be far less fertile than expected. Most frustrating, however, was the fact that the prices for the crops they squeezed out of the soil were falling, due to the opening of the Erie Canal, which brought a flood of western produce into the eastern markets. These inland farmers would become enthusiastic supporters of Presidents Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren, and Maine’s own home-grown Jacksonians.

As before, the state’s geography seemed to fuel conflict. The lumber industry spoke with many contending voices. The loggers and lumbermen on each river continued to fight those on the other rivers. Often these battles reached the Legislature. One of the most bitter was over a canal that Penobscot river interests wanted to build to divert logs cut on the St. John away from their normal path and instead down the Penobscot River to Bangor. Even the shipping interests were divided, though they united in opposing high tariffs. The men who traded with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia wanted Congress to do one thing, while those who concentrated their trade in the Caribbean another, and those who concentrated on the United States East Coast still another. But the biggest conflict was between the more prosperous and commercially focused coastal towns and the smaller, more rural, and financially troubled towns on the inland frontier. The state’s fragmented geography made concentrated state actions very difficult. Equally challenging was the effort to create unified political parties. Those party structures that prospered were geographically-based, and reflected the fragmented geography of the state.

In the state’s political system, the major changes were the continued rapid growth in the size of the electorate and the creation of two distinct political parties – the Democrats and the Whigs. The two parties emerged out of the bitter presidential race of 1832 which pitted the
challenger Henry Clay against the incumbent president Andrew Jackson. In this election, the two parties competed in every county and city. The Democrats, energized by the charismatic figure of Andrew Jackson, turned out to be the winners, controlling both the White House and Maine State Capitol. They continued to hold this lead throughout most of the 1830s.

In 1837, the political winds shifted as the Panic of 1837 engulfed the state. This depression temporarily broke the monopoly the Democrats held on political power. The Whigs came to power because they successfully convinced voters that the Panic was caused by the anti-bank and anti-development policies of Jackson, Van Buren, and the Maine Jacksonians. Democrats regained power in 1838 and 1849 but the continued economic depression kept politics unsettled. One result, however, was that the Democrats abandoned the Jacksonian policies that the Whigs had attacked as anti-business. Still, despite the economic crises, the Maine state government and the state’s political parties remained small and weak.

**Population Changes in the 1830s**

The stream of families and men moving to Maine’s inland frontier from Massachusetts slowed considerably in the 1830s. Immigration had slowed because the Yankee Protestants from rural Massachusetts who had made up most of the immigrants in the previous decades were turning to upstate New York, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. An easy route for their trip west had opened via the Erie Canal, starting in 1824. In addition the public land policies of the national government offered new settlers, starting in 1829, the right to buy 60 acres of land in the new
states at $1.25 an acre.\textsuperscript{1} Their growing seasons were longer, the soils more fertile, and price per acre less than Maine’s.

With little migration from Massachusetts, most of Maine’s population growth was coming from large families common to rural farming districts. Foreign immigration remained very small, except for a small number of Catholics and Protestants moving south from the Maritime Provinces for work on the wharfs, ships, shipyards, and warehouses in the port towns.

While inland Maine was less attractive than it had been, the large and small commercial towns on the coast, where shipping, shipbuilding, and fishing were prospering, continued to grow. Coastal towns were further helped by families leaving their inland farms for better opportunities. Overall the state added 102,000 people in the decade, reaching a total of 501,793 in 1840. The pace of increase was just 25.6\%,\textsuperscript{2} the slowest since the 1780s.

With little immigration from outside, Maine would remain overwhelming Protestant through the 1830s. Yet, some Irish, overwhelmingly Catholic, did find their way to Maine, particularly men who found work as laborers in construction, on the wharfs, and in logging crews out of Portland and Bangor.\textsuperscript{3} Even the very small numbers of Irish Catholics provoked a bitter reaction, especially when native Protestant workers felt threatened economically. In Bangor in 1833, “several hundred well-armed sailors” rampaged through the waterfront areas

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\textsuperscript{2} In the first decade of the 1800s, the District of Maine had grown by 50.7\% and in the next by 30.4\%. In the decade of the 1820s the rate of increase was 33.9\%.
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“pulling down Irish shanties.” When they “began to apply the torch to Irish dwellings and howl for Irish blood,” the town fathers had to call out the militia. 

Although growth was slowing, the Legislature still had to charter sixty-three new towns to keep up. The port towns, increasingly integrated into the Atlantic economy, grew rapidly. Portland added more than 2,600 people to an already large population, while Bangor nearly tripled in size from 2,867 to 8,627. Merchants were aggressive in promoting economic growth and were frustrated at the slow decision-making process in the town meeting style of government. A “city council” form of government was more hierarchical and more able to make unpopular decisions. The legislature responded and granted Maine’s first city charter to Portland in 1833 and to Bangor a year later.

Economic Changes in the 1830s

The Maine economy expanded steadily in the 1830s until 1837. Speculation in western lands, a decline in cotton prices, and economic problems in Great Britain led to the decision on May 10, 1837 by the New York banks to suspend species payments. So began the Panic of 1837. Prices, profits, and wages collapsed. Growth came to a screeching halt. This panic and its aftermath would have profound political impacts on the state.

Compared to other sectors, lumber best survived the Panic. Demand for lumber was high and Maine lumbermen were able to get pine boards to the cities on the East Coast faster and less expensively than from any other state, thanks to Maine’s many rivers, ports, and the hundreds of

ships available to carry its lumber. In 1840, Maine’s primary extractive industry produced
225,000,000 board feet of lumber, more than any other state except New York. Maine's forests
in that year accounted for 15% of all of the lumber produced in the United States.\(^5\)

The state’s geography divided the lumber industry, preventing it from speaking with one
voice. Each river system had a unique economy. A logger who worked on the Penobscot, for
example, had few common interests with lumbermen at work on the Androscoggin or the
Kennebec. He cared when the first snows fell on his river, how cold its winter was, when its
spring rains came, and when its ice broke. Whether he was a landowner, logger, or saw mill
owner, he relied on the Penobscot to bring supplies and machinery up to his camps and to get
logs down to the sawmills. In fact, the Penobscot River men prospered most when the logging
and sawmilling on the Androscoggin, Kennebec or the Saint John failed because of weather or
public policies.

Competition between river systems was particularly bitter. Loggers on the Penobscot, for
example, ran into bitter opposition from those on the Allagash and the Saint John when they
planned a one-mile canal to bring to market on the Penobscot pine logs that otherwise would
have been driven by St. John-based river crews.\(^6\) Each river system opposed any publicly
financed improvements on competing rivers.

The booming demand for Maine pine allowed some “lumber barons” to acquire great
wealth and join successful merchants, shipowners, and shipyard owners in the ranks of Maine’s
economic elite. One of these was Eleazar Coburn who started as a land surveyor and then served
in the Maine House and Senate. His operations were not restricted to ownership; he also drove


logs downriver and ran sawmills. His son Abner inherited the business, expanded it, invested in railroads, and later would become governor of Maine.

For farmers, the decade of the 1830s was one of growing frustration. The high hopes they had when they settled in Maine were fading. Farmers in the older rural towns in the south were first to suffer. In these rural towns population stagnated; but in some, like Buxton, Lebanon, Lyman, and Parsonsfield – all in York County – the population actually fell. For those who wanted to continue farming in Maine their best choice was to find virgin land, which meant moving north or east and starting all over again.

The other major problem was the collapse in the prices for wheat, grain, and pork – all products that Maine farmers sold. Merchants in Boston, New York, and other East Coast cities stopped buying Maine farm products; Midwestern products were cheaper. Clarence Day put the blame on the opening of the Erie Canal: “Freight rates between Buffalo and New York dropped at once from $100 to $15 a ton, and steady streams of Western products, especially wheat and flour, poured into Eastern markets.”

Readers of the Maine Farmer were, no doubt, shocked in 1837 to read that fellow Maine farmers 100 miles inland were eating bread made from flour milled in Rochester, New York. As frustration with their circumstances grew, some caught "Genesee" or "Ohio" fever and set off for upstate New York or the Midwest. Others moved to town seeking wage work. They had worked hard, but others, usually village or city people, were doing far better.


Maine’s shipping industry expanded very rapidly through most of the 1830s until 1837, when expansion ground to a halt. Yet a few years later in 1840 it was busier than it had been at the start of the decade. Maine’s ocean-going ships were in the business of carrying freight from any port to any other port. They were no longer a captive of the extractive industries. And the profits their owners earned rose and fell with the volume of imports and export.

Shipowners had many profitable trade routes from which to choose. Some concentrated on trade with British Canada, particularly New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island, carrying manufactured products north and bringing back farm products, salted fish, cordwood, and gypsum.9 Others specialized in the domestic coastal trade, carrying lumber, fish, and food products to Philadelphia, New York, and Boston and carrying back manufactured products and luxury goods.

Dependent on merchant shippers for orders, shipyards boomed as shipowners expanded to take advantage of the explosion in foreign trade. In fact, Maine’s shipyards were extremely successful, building more wooden-hulled ocean-going sailing ships than the yards in any other state. What accounted for Maine's success? Experience in building wooden-hulled ships was one reason. Most important, however, was that Maine yards had the lowest cost structures, a result primarily of the fact that they paid lower wages than their competitors in other states. Wages were low because Maine had a large underemployed workforce: marginal farmers needed to earn cash.

Many of the ships built in Maine were designed specifically to carry cotton across the Atlantic. “Cotton bottoms” is what these ships were called. Since many of the ships built were for the cotton trade, Maine shipyard owners also developed a major stake in the South. For

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many it was a market for their ships; others relied on the South for needed supplies, such as white oak, which was essential for wooden ships and was quickly disappearing from Maine forests.

The deep sea fishing industry also prospered in the decade, though it too was hurt by the 1837 Panic. Demand for codfish held up in America’s eastern cities, the Spanish West Indies, and the American South. In 1840, Maine sold 42.1 million pounds of dried, smoked, and pickled fish – 37% of the American total – and double what the state had produced a few decades earlier.\(^{10}\)

While the high demand for cod could have supported a large cod-fishing industry, it was the Congress’s Cod Fishing Bounty Law that made the state’s fishing industry quite profitable. As could be expected, the subsidy was very popular, and the state’s Whigs and Democrats competed trying to score political points in coastal towns. The subsidy was less popular in the rest of the nation. Southern and Western Congressmen complained that it was a special interest law that benefited only one region of the nation. In fact, they were right: just two states – Massachusetts and Maine – received virtually all of the benefits.\(^{11}\)

Manufacturing experienced some growth in the 1830s but its pace was slower than in Massachusetts and elsewhere in southern New England. As was true in the previous decade, the largest manufacturing sector in Maine was sawmilling.\(^{12}\) Other sectors such as granite, lime, woolens, and bricks were much smaller, but showed some progress. In one sector, however,

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\(^{10}\) O'Leary, *Maine Sea Fisheries*, p. 11.


\(^{12}\) In 1840, there were 406 more sawmills than there were in 1830. *Sixth US Census (1840) Recapitulation*, p. 116.
cotton textiles, the growth was much more significant. A newspaper reported in 1836 that there were cotton mills in South Berwick, Saccarappa, Gorham, Winthrop, and Gardiner with the largest in Saco.\textsuperscript{13} The cotton mills and woolen mills were a dramatic step away from an extractive economy. They imported their raw material from the South, applied low wage labor, machinery, and water power to it, and sold the finished product into national markets.

Up until late in the 1830s, the majority of Maine’s politicians were hostile to high tariffs. Maine was politically a “free-trade” state, reflecting the power of its merchant shipping and shipbuilding industries and the lack of large manufacturing sector. The state’s Democratic Party lined up behind the interests of the merchant shippers and shipyards, supporting free trade. The \textit{Jeffersonian}, a Jacksonian paper, explained that Maine “has no manufacturing that stands in need of protection.”\textsuperscript{14} In fact, up until the late 30s most Maine’s manufacturers were so small and served such local markets that foreign competition was not a threat. The state’s Whigs, in fact, found little response to their call for higher tariffs. However, as cotton mills grew in future years in numbers and size, an economic constituency would emerge in Maine that supported higher tariffs.

Maine’s lack of iron and coal deposits severely handicapped its ability to create a vibrant manufacturing sector. Manufacturing also suffered from the state’s lack of railroads. In 1840, there were 3,000 miles of railroad track in the United States. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire each had good share of that total: Maine had no railway mileage.

\textsuperscript{13} See “Cotton Manufactures” \textit{Portland Advertiser}, September 3, 1836

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{The Jeffersonian}, July 3, 1832.
Factions Begin to Act Like Parties

Although they had failed to win the race for governor and for control of the Legislature in 1829, the Democratic-Republican faction was optimistic about their chances for 1830. They had come within a few hundred votes of victory. In early 1830, they planned their race for the September state election, knowing they would face a candidate from the National-Republican faction. They would have the benefit of presidential patronage which would give them many campaign workers, and they expected that Jackson’s popularity in Maine would bring more of their voters to the polls.

The Democratic-Republicans also decided to make the figure of Andrew Jackson the central issue in their campaign, identifying themselves with the President. They also embraced his opposition to corruption and the new aristocracy growing in America. And they broadcast his opposition to tariffs, to nationally-financed internal improvements, and to the growing power of banks. The National Republicans also featured Jackson in their campaign, attacking “King Andrew” for his activist presidency, for “trampling over” the prerogatives of Congress, and for threatening the American Republic.

The Democratic-Republican strategy worked. The polarizing effect of President Andrew Jackson’s appeals to common people brought out a record number of men to the polls. Twelve-thousand more voters turned out in the rerun between Judge Smith and Hunton. Smith received
7,000 more votes than he had the year before and won, beating Hunton by a 1,500-vote margin.\footnote{Hunton had beaten Smith in 1829 by fewer than 50 votes.} Political participation was soaring. The six years since the 1824 presidential race had produced remarkable changes; 20,439 men voted for the governor six years earlier, while nearly three times that or 58,092 men voted in the 1830 governor’s race. The state election in 1830 was another victory for popular politics.

Smith’s victory was especially important to the leaders of the Democratic-Republican faction. Now they would have control over state as well as presidential patronage and contracts. Jackson’s popularity; the county, town, and school district organizing that the Jackson campaign had urged them to undertake; and the regiments of campaign workers that national and state patronage made available paid off. In the 1831 state election, Judge Smith was easily re-elected, beating his National Republican opponent by nearly 6,500 votes, a much wider margin than he had in 1830. In addition, the Democratic-Republicans won a majority of the seats in the house and senate and thus controlled the legislature.

The tight battles in 1830 and 1831 had also pushed the N-R faction to act more like a political party. They decided to imitate the Democratic-Republicans despite the fact that they lacked the regiments of campaign workers that the Democratic-Republicans could call on. Specifically, they called for their first state convention. In fact, they went beyond the Democratic-Republicans. In their “call” for the convention, they announced it was “open to all,”\footnote{\textit{Portland Advertiser}, June 29, 1830.} an action which might have shocked Maine politicians used to “closed-door” meetings. Stealing another idea from the Jackson National Committee “handbook,” they formed their own
“State Committee” and it issued the call for their 1831 state convention. Interestingly, there is no record of the Democratic-Republicans holding a convention during those two years. Popular participation through a state convention was clearly a tactic, not a principle, for them. They had a sitting incumbent governor who was a good vote-getter, and they had highly-motivated patronage job holders to turn out voters.

The fact that by 1831 Democratic-Republicans were firmly in power in Maine did not reduce the conflict within that faction. On the one hand, there was the ambitious F. O. J. Smith who had made himself the leader of the new men, and on the other the Junto itself and their allies. In fact, F. O. J. Smith had worked hard, and the balance of power was beginning to shift his way and against the Junto. Governor Smith tried to keep both factions happy through an even-handed distribution of patronage, but the enmity intensified. The anti-Junto forces added strength when Portland voters elected F. O. J. Smith to the Maine House and even more so when Smith set up his own newspaper the Augusta Age, which freed him from the power of Junto. 18

The Democratic-Republican victories in 1830 and 1831 began an era of Democratic dominance in Maine. "Between 1830 and 1855, Maine elected eight Democratic senators but only three who were National Republicans or Whigs. Out of twenty-five gubernatorial elections during that time, the Democrats would win twenty-two. Out of ninety-five congressional races,

17 American Advocate, July 8, 1831.

18 Thomas L. Gaffney “Maine’s Mr. Smith: A Study of the Career of Francis O. J. Smith, Politician and Entrepreneur” (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Maine, 1979), p. 68. Interestingly, Smith would leave the Age in a year to return to Eastern Argus after it separated itself from the Junto. In later years, Smith would actively seek out newspaper allies, knowing the power of the newspapers in party affairs.
Democrats would win seventy.” In those same twenty-five years, a Democrat presided over the state senate every year and over the state house of representatives in all but two years. In that same period, the Democratic candidate for president won the popular election in Maine five times, the Whig candidate only once. Up until the middle of the 1850s, much of the political conflict in Maine occurred within the Democratic Party, usually fueled by patronage fights.

**New Voters**

Starting in early 1832 the leaders of both the Democratic-Republican and the National-Republican factions prepared for the presidential campaign. The issue they expected would be the focus of the campaign was the demand from the Bank of the United States, the largest and most powerful corporation in the country, for a renewal of its corporate charter. The Whigs were strong supporters of the renewal, and they expected it could win the election for them. Jackson, they knew, was strongly opposed, angry at the Bank’s role in opposing him in the 1828 campaign and its support for Henry Clay, his opponent in the upcoming 1832 campaign. But Jackson’s opposition had deeper roots than partisan politics. He believed that the Bank and its powerful president, Nicolas Biddle, were growing more powerful than Congress, and that the Bank was an unconstitutional aberration and a threat to popular sovereignty. The Bank

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20 See James H. Mundy, *Presidents of the Senate of Maine from 1820*, (Augusta, Maine: Secretary of State, 1979) and *Speakers of the Maine House of Representatives from 1820*, (Augusta, Maine: Clerk of the House, 1981). Mundy’s brief biographies indicate the party affiliation of each of these legislative leaders.
personified the new aristocracy, as the Bank had placed in the hands of “a few Monied Capitalists extraordinary power over the nation and the economy.”

Interestingly, the 1832 presidential campaign was the first in which a national convention chose a candidate. In fact, both Andrew Jackson and his opponent Henry Clay were selected by national conventions. The presidential campaign heated up after Jackson was nominated by the Democratic-Republican convention in Baltimore. The delegates re-nominated Jackson for President and accepted Martin Van Buren, Jackson’s choice and his chief strategist, as their candidate for Vice President.

At about the same time, expecting that they had Jackson on the defensive and that he would have no alternative but to acquiesce, the National-Republicans who were also in control of Congress passed the bill re-chartering the Bank of the United States. Jackson took that as a direct and personal attack. Astonishing his opponents, Jackson issued on July 10 a ringing veto of the Bank Bill, one that created a political firestorm and made the Bank the central issue of the presidential campaign. In 1828 Jackson had campaigned against fraud, the Corrupt Bargain, and the crying need for reform. But his veto message turned his 1832 campaign into a another great battle, this time against the “money power” and an overweening and all-powerful Bank. The message was “a masterpiece of political propaganda that appealed to popular fears of foreign influence, state rights fears of strong central government, lower class fears of privileged

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22 This was the first national Democratic Republican Convention. The National Republicans had held their first national convention in Baltimore, nominating Henry Clay, late in 1831.

aristocracy, and democratic fears of uncontrolled power.”  

Attacking “the laws … that make the rich richer and the potent more powerful,” Jackson promised he would take up the cause of the “humble members of the society – the farmers, mechanics, and laborers – who have neither the time or the means of securing like favors to themselves.”  

Jackson had created for the voters a powerful enemy that had to be crushed so that they could take advantage of the rights and opportunities that the United States offered.

In Maine, the Democratic-Republicans organized for the fall elections. Jackson’s National Committee in Nashville and the president’s men in Maine continued to push F. O. J. Smith’s men and the Junto to cooperate. In February, they agreed to put aside their differences for a while and agreed to support incumbent Governor Smith for another term.  

As the Jackson campaign continued its drive towards organization, a new State Committee was organized. Its Chair was Nathaniel Mitchell, who had recently been appointed by Jackson to the powerful position of Postmaster in Portland. Another prominent member of the Committee was Robert Dunlap, who had until recently been the President of the State Senate.

The Jackson papers in Maine went into full campaign mode, filling their pages with reprints of speeches by Jackson supporters across the county and articles featuring Jackson’s fight against the bank and his Veto Message. The largest pro-Jackson paper, the Argus, went even further, turning Jackson’s rhetoric into appeals to specific political constituencies that were important in Maine. The Argus went after workingmen, telling those who had recently come

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26 See *American Advocate*, February 25, 1832. Also, once the leaders of the Junto and anti-Junto groups had agreed on re-nominating Smith, there appeared to be no need for a state convention.
together in nascent workingmen parties in the coastal towns of Portland, Belfast, Wiscasset, and Kennebunk, that Jackson agreed with their calls for fair taxation, ending imprisonment for debt, ending “monopolies,” and demolishing “the schemes of Aristocrats.” The paper also appealed to the powerful shipping merchants in Portland by reminding them of Jackson’s opposition to tariffs and his support for free trade.

Following the directions of the *Argus*, Jackson county conventions also reached out to the worried farmers, telling them that it was banks, subsidies to manufacturers, and opulent capitalists who were the source of their problems.

Just as the Democratic-Republicans sought to make the election a referendum on President Jackson, so did their opponents. The National-Republicans wanted to make the major issue of the campaign “executive tyranny.” Henry Clay, the opposition candidate, sounded an alarm that he hoped would resonate across the country: “We are in the midst of a revolution, hitherto bloodless, but rapidly tending towards a total change in the pure republican character of the Government, and to the concentration of power in the hands of one man.”

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28 See *Eastern Argus*, August 23 and August 26, 1831.

29 Resolution of Waldo County Democratic Convention, *Eastern Argus*, August 28, 1832. The Waldo Democrats also sought to tap farmers’ anger at the Erie Canal. One convention resolution opposed using any “revenue of the US collected in Maine or any other northern state, in building roads and canals in the western States.”

This election continued the energizing and deepening of the electorate. More than 60,000 Maine men went to the polls – 66% of those eligible to vote.\textsuperscript{31} Just eight years earlier in 1824 the percentage of eligible men voting was just 19%. Putting Jackson at the center of its campaign paid off for the Democratic-Republicans. Jackson won Maine with 54% of the vote. He had increased his vote by 20,000. On the other hand, Clay increased his vote over what Adams had received four years earlier by just 7,000.

Voter enthusiasm for Jackson helped the entire Democratic ticket, particularly in the earlier state election where Democratic-Republican Governor Samuel Smith won re-election by the same margin Jackson received. The Democratic-Republicans also kept control of the legislature. To F. O. J. Smith, the one other important result was that his “faction” had won a majority of the Democratic-Republicans in the Legislature. Equally important was the fact that he had won a seat in the State Senate. F. O. J. took advantage of these developments and quickly engineered his election as President of the Senate. An ally, Nathan Clifford, won the race for Speaker of the House. The anti-Junto group was clearly in the ascendency. On the National-Republican side, William Pitt Fessenden, a young Portland lawyer, won a seat in the House. In later years, he would become the most prominent spokesman for the Whig Party.

One other consequence of the 1832 election was that the two “Republican” factions had begun their formal separation; each now began to call themselves a “political party.” And they took on new names: the National-Republicans called themselves Whigs and the Democrat-Republican chose as their name Democrats.

The 1832 election was path breaking in two other respects. Jackson won a national landslide, taking all but eight of the states. He won the entire South with the exception of South Carolina, all of the West, as well as New York, New Hampshire, and most of Maine. The coalition that elected him reflected the goal that Martin Van Buren had set in 1826 of creating an alliance of “planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North.” The Democratic Party goal in all subsequent presidential elections would be to recreate this 1832 coalition.

**Smith and his Jacksonians Take Over the Democratic Party**

Fresh from the success of Jackson’s and Democratic-Republican’s victory, F. O. J. Smith decided to make his move. He had real advantages at his command: a strong base of support among the ambitious young men whose cause he had championed, his own newspaper – the *Augusta Age*, control of the legislature, and the high opinion that many national Jackson leaders had for his successes in Maine. Confident of his strength, he decided to go after those who stood in his way, specifically the Junto and its supporters. His first target was the incumbent Governor Judge Smith who had, F. O. J. believed, sided too often with the Junto. If F. O. J. was going to keep the loyalty of the young men, he had to find them patronage opportunities, and what better source than the jobs held by Junto supporters. F. O. J. also had a more personal reason to go after Judge Smith: he felt betrayed. Right after his election as President of the Senate, he had run for but been defeated in a race for Attorney General. He blamed his loss on the governor, complaining that Judge Smith had not actively backed his campaign. F. O. J. decided to

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33 The Attorney General was elected by the Legislature, as were other constitutional officers.

34 Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith” pp. 65-68.
orchestrate the removal of Governor Smith by denying him his expected re-nomination as governor. For this plan, he recruited his friend Nathan Clifford, the Speaker of the House.

F. O. J. Smith and Clifford would use the political structures created by Democratic-Republicans over the previous three years to accomplish their goals of removing Governor Smith and striking a decisive blow against the Junto’s remaining power. Their first step was to convene the caucus of the Democratic members of the legislature. It had been normal procedure to use a caucus during the Junto’s years to re-nominate an incumbent governor if he wanted another term. But when the legislative caucus convened on March 1, 1833, the governor’s supporters were shocked. In a startling action, the caucus made no endorsement. Instead they put out a call for a Democratic State Convention to be held in Augusta on June 25th. Reportedly, they chose Augusta because its remote location would discourage people from other parts of the state from attending.35 Smith, Clifford, and their supporters implemented their strategy and mobilized the town and county committees to convince scores of ambitious young men to be delegates – those who felt slighted by the patronage policies of Governor Smith or the Junto. It was at this point that the state’s newspapers started to call the F. O. J. Smith/Nathan Clifford group the “Jacksonians.” F. O. J’s candidate was Robert P. Dunlap, a true-blue Jacksonian and one of the members of the Jacksonian State Committee. Unexpectedly, the *Argus*, now no longer under the control of the Junto, helped Dunlap’s cause when it wrote approvingly of the principle of rotation in office.36 Out-organizing the Junto and the others who supported Governor Smith, the Jacksonians prevailed. Dunlap won the nomination by a vote of 185 to 79. In the subsequent

35 Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith” p. 76-77.

36 Gaffney. “Maine’s Mr. Smith” p. 77.
1833 state election, Dunlap beat his Whig opponent by 7,000 votes. With this victory, the Jacksonian faction now had full control of the governor’s office. Thanks to their army of campaign workers and the continued mobilization of new voters by President Jackson’s stirring appeals, the Democrats won re-election for Dunlap in 1834 in an election that turned out more than 73,000 voters, 13,000 more than turned out in the record-breaking presidential and state elections of 1832.

A New Participatory Civic Culture

The tremendous increases in voter turnout and voter participation that took place in Maine were not unique. Jackson’s campaign had brought hundreds of thousands of new voters to the polls and changed the complexion of American politics. Mary Ryan describes the revolutionary transformations that were taking place, giving parties and universal male suffrage their due credit: "Illiterate and ignorant men, steeped in poverty, and lacking any other claim on social responsibility, were not only permitted to cast their tickets, they were enticed, cajoled, treated, and blessed as they did so."  

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37 Dunlap had been a member of the state's House of Representatives, President of the State Senate, and member of the Executive Council. Dunlap would serve as governor until 1838. He would then be elected twice to the US Congress. He then received a patronage appointment as Collector of Customs in Portland serving from 1848-49. After that he won the patronage appointment as Postmaster of Brunswick. See Robert Sobel and John Raimo, eds., Biographical Directory of the Governors of the United States, 1789-1987 Vol. II. (Westport, Connecticut: Meckler Books, 1978).

38 In 1835, Dunlap’s Whig opponent was former Junto head William King. King had gone over to the Whigs, angry that President Jackson had not extended his appointment as Collector of Customs in Bath beyond 1832 and because, he believed, that Jackson’s banking policies caused the failure of his Bank of Bath.

Another element of the transformation was a new political culture, driven by the election calendar, itself a creation of the Jacksonian constitutional order. Joel L. Silbey, a political historian, describes the political world of 19th century America: "Voters were at the polls several times in each twelve-month period, year in and year out."\(^{40}\) In Maine, a new voter soon found himself in a perpetual campaign, an all-consuming political culture. In the blustery month of March of 1834, for example, the voter attended a town meeting to vote for selectmen, a town clerk, constables, assessors, and other officials. Six months later, on the second Monday of September, he went to town meeting to vote for a governor, state senator(s), state representative(s), and a county treasurer. If the candidate for state representative did not win a majority, the voter returned to his town meeting time and again until someone won a majority. In early January, the voter would read in his paper of the meetings of the new state legislators in Augusta where they would choose the state's attorney general, treasurer, secretary of state, and the executive council for the next twelve months. Every two years, voters elected Congressmen and depending on the sequence might watch their legislators battle to elect a United States Senator. Every four years in November, they would vote for a President. Four months later, the March town meetings started the cycle all over again. This constitutionally-mandated election calendar generated a highly politicized and involved electorate.\(^{41}\)

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\(^{41}\) These offices were elected by the legislature as mandated by the Constitution. Thus they were called the "constitutional offices."
The “Party Ticket” System of Voting

The new culture of democracy was spreading rapidly in Maine. As had been described, starting in 1828, thousands of men were coming to the polls each year for the first time. On average, their number had grown by 4,000 each year. But their participation was often challenged. The voting process, at least until 1831, had exposed new voters to serious intimidation. The historical record for these practices is sparse, however, and comes mostly from Massachusetts. In some towns a man had to declare his vote publicly at town meeting; in others he had to give his vote in writing to the selectmen who put it in the town meeting minutes; in others he had to stand in public with other voters supporting the same candidate to make it easier for the selectmen counting. Only a brave voter was able to announce publicly that he was casting his vote against the man supported by his minister, landlord, or employer. In 1831 the Jacksonian-controlled legislature had tried to remedy the practice, banning *viva voce* voting and requiring instead that voting be by paper ballots deposited by the voter into a town’s locked ballot box. This law was one of last efforts by the legislature until the 1890s to control and regulate the voting process. In fact, the inaction by the legislature left a major void -- whether by conscious decision or benign neglect – for the new political parties to fill. It would be the parties, not the state, who publicized Election Day, urged people to vote, prepared the ballots, and supervised the balloting and the counting of votes. One of the reasons why parties would become so powerful was their control of the voting process.

What emerged from this 1831 “reform” was what politicians and scholars both called the “party ticket” system of voting. According to Richard Bensel, the author of a detailed

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examination of nineteenth century voting practices, this system of “party tickets” was ubiquitous across America starting in the 1830s.\textsuperscript{43} Each party printed its own party tickets listing its candidates and the names of the offices they were seeking. These “party tickets” were pressed into the hands of the voter when he approached the ballot-box. As each party ticket had a distinctive size or color or distinguishing symbol, everyone could see which ticket the man took and put in the ballot box. Among those surrounding the ballot box were the powerful men in the community: landowners, mill owners, merchants, and powerful patronage holders. While men of independent means could hide how they voted from peering eyes, many men – mill workers, the poor, those who worked for the state and national governments, and “floaters” who sold their votes – had to display their choice to the men they were obligated to.

The potential for abuse was significant. In fact, in the 1834 election when passions around the Bank of the United States were white-hot, workers often faced coercion. Whigs had not abandoned their efforts to win a new charter for the Bank despite Jackson’s 1832 victory, and the Bank was a major issue in the 1834 Congressional elections. In those elections, Maine’s Whig businessmen used their power and the party ticket system to try to force working class voters to support pro-Bank candidates. One well-known Portland businessman printed a card that said he would not employ a man who was against a national bank. Another said that he gave preference in hiring to men who voted as he did.\textsuperscript{44} The reality of balloting was hardly consistent with lofty ideals, but Maine was not unique. “The polling place in nineteenth century America


\textsuperscript{44} See Hatch, \textit{Maine, A History}. Vol. I., p. 217. Also see \textit{Eastern Argus} March 26, 1834, April 10, 1834, and September 19, 1834.
was often the one of the least democratic sites in the nation,” wrote Richard Bensel. It would not be until the 1890s that the legislature would pass, in the form of the Australian ballot, another major law regulating the voting process.

Politics Becomes a Profession

The complicated tasks required in the new popular politics demanded a new political “workforce.” The time required to turn out voters and the complexity of manipulating the caucuses and conventions was far beyond the capabilities of the local influential – men who had carried out the simpler political tasks of the 1820s era. What appeared in the late 1820s and the early 1830s was a new type of political actor – the full time politician. In fact, organized political parties and full time politicians emerged at the same time – each required the other. Unlike that of the influential, whose power came from owning land, a commercial farm, a bank, or a mill, a professional politician’s power came from an elected office or a patronage job. Party combat was not easy. A successful politician needed real skills, far different from those of the influential. He had to be outgoing and affable, adept at the intricacies of caucuses and conventions, skilled and comfortable in negotiations and compromise, and willing and able to move quickly from one alliance and coalition to another. He also had to be comfortable dealing with voters from all religious, ethnic, and occupational groups. He also had to be loyal to the party and the man and who appointed him. Since one of his primary tasks was getting out the vote on Election Day, he had to know how to make direct appeals to voters, since the old techniques of the early 1820s – assembling alliances of local elite groups – no longer worked.


While it was accepted that a government job allowed the holder to take time off for politics, much was expected of that politician. He had to be able to turn out the voters and win elections. If he did not deliver his quota on Election Day, his job would be at risk.

**F. O. J. Smith as Party Leader**

One of Maine’s full-time politicians was F. O. J. Smith. In fact, starting in 1827 and continuing till 1838, Smith was also one of the state’s most successful politicians. From the beginning, his major source of income had been politics, first as editor of *Argus*, then as a state representative, then state senator, and later president of the state senate. He also received an income as editor of the Jacksonian *Augusta Age*. Smith was certainly not the only full-time politician in Maine, but we know more about him than his contemporaries because much of his voluminous correspondence from that period found its way into the collections of the Maine Historical Society.47

Besides being one of the new breed of professional politicians, Smith was also an ambitious one. In the 1830s, the goal of any ambitious politician was to win control over more powerful and lucrative patronage positions because that is what attracted loyal followers. His success in electing Dunlap to the governor’s office would give him substantial influence over state appointments. But now Smith set his eyes on national patronage and to win control of that he had to have direct access to Andrew Jackson. To that end, using his base in Portland and Cumberland County, Smith ran for Congress when the sitting Democratic Congressmen from

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Portland resigned.\textsuperscript{48} In the special election, Smith won, and when he was in Washington for the Congressional sessions, Smith reached out to the Jackson leadership to try to get their agreement to give him control over all appointments in Cumberland County, particularly the “plum” positions of collector of customs and Portland postmaster. Both positions were well-paid and each controlled considerable patronage. Resistance was stiff, but Smith took on the Junto and anyone, even fellow Jacksonians, who opposed him. A year after his special election, he ran again for a regular two-year term for Congress and won re-election, giving him more opportunities to expand his influence in Washington.

His second successful congressional election seemed to change him. He began to act if he controlled the Maine Democratic Party. In his early years at the \textit{Argus}, much of his success had come from promoting the careers of other ambitious young men. But as he rose higher, Smith began to lose contact with his base of young leaders. He stopped listening to their calls for recognition and preference and pursued aggressively his own ambitions. Smith, in fact, no longer was trying to create and energize any party structures, as he had done with the county conventions in 1828. He did not put any real energy behind the State Committee or any other structures that would mobilize and strengthen the party. His goal seemed to accumulate personal loyalties to him, by distributing favors but also by instilling fear in those who might oppose him.

In fact, in his single-minded focus on enhancing his own power, he violated one of the sacred rules of politics at the time; he attacked and tried to defeat other fellow Democratic office-holders. Angry that the Democratic Congressmen from the Hancock-Washington, Penobscot, and Lincoln congressional districts had not supported him in his struggle to control more of the

\textsuperscript{48} The sitting congressman had won a lucrative and prominent patronage job from President Jackson.
national patronage, Smith denied them critical support at election time. Two of them won
despite Smith’s actions, but his actions in the Lincoln County race helped to defeat Edward
Kavanagh, the incumbent Democrat and the state’s only Catholic officeholder.\textsuperscript{49}

Smith’s single-minded ambition had become a major obstacle to his further success.
Smith was not the leader of a party, but a man using a party to advance himself. In the process,
he was losing his base: the new men no longer saw him as an ally who could help them succeed.
His efforts to punish sitting Democratic Congressmen made many influential Democrats feel
insecure in their own jobs and worried that Smith could turn on them. Smith’s plan to control
presidential patronage threatened those who wanted to keep their own personal contacts with the
White House. Democratic congressmen whom Smith tried to undermine become determined
opponents. Smith also lost the support of Nathan Clifford, the former Speaker of the House and
a man who had helped Smith put Robert Dunlap in the governor’s office, in a dispute over
Smith’s effort to win election as the attorney general. Smith felt that Clifford had not helped
enough. While Smith might have appeared to the outside as unassailable, an anti-Smith alliance
was forming, its leaders believing that Smith was an “autocrat”\textsuperscript{50} who wanted to create a
“Cumberland dictatorship.”\textsuperscript{51} Smith was on his own. There were no party structures to hold him
back, nor were there structures that could soften his actions or support him when he was
attacked.

\textsuperscript{49} Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith” p. 123-124.

\textsuperscript{50} Portland Advertiser, January 30, 1835.

\textsuperscript{51} Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith” pp. 127-128.
Jacksonianism on the Inland Frontier

In the early 1830s the US economy was booming, fueled by two powerful forces. The first was the insatiable demand for southern cotton by English and French cotton mills. To meet this demand, southern plantations borrowed increasing amounts of money to invest in more land and more slaves. Banks willingly provided the needed funds, confident that cotton prosperity was permanent. Another boom was fueled by the flood of settlers moving to the rich farming land of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. Their purchases of land, seed, and equipment were financed by relatives, speculators, and thinly capitalized western banks that received much of their funds from larger aggressive banks in New York and Philadelphia. Business also thrived on the Maine coast, where shipping merchants active in “cotton trade” bought more ships to carry cotton to Europe.52

The farmers on Maine’s inland frontier did not share in this prosperity. In fact, the new commercial economy was leaving them behind. Because the Erie Canal and the new Ohio canals that opened in the early 1830s allowed cheap goods to easily reach Eastern markets, Maine farmers could not get fair prices for their crops from their traditional customers. Maine’s Jacksonians saw in the farmers’ plight at opportunity. They blamed the low prices on public improvements like the canals, the Bank of the United States, and government-fueled speculation. When a resolution appeared before the Maine legislature supporting Jackson and attacking the Bank, Maine farmers responded. The rural farming counties of Oxford, Somerset, Piscataquis, Penobscot, Washington, and Hancock gave the Jacksonians solid support. There was little opposition in the rural counties: the Whigs at this time had little presence in the rough environment of the inland frontier.

52 Duncan, Coastal Maine, p. 288.
Stimulated by the popularity of Andrew Jackson, the farmers’ deep suspicion of banks, and the need to win votes in the rural towns, Maine Jacksonians took up the farmer’s cause. They pushed legislation, bitterly opposed by the Whigs, to end what they believed were destructive and unfair policies of the banks, manufacturers, and railroads.

Their major target was the Maine banks’ practice of issuing “small bills” – paper money in very small denominations such as 10 and 25 cents. Merchants often paid farmers and artisans with these small bills, but when a bank was unable to redeem its paper with specie, the bank failed and the farmers and artisans were stuck with worthless paper. In fact, farmers and artisans detested paper money, preferring silver or gold coins that would always retain their value. They also detested the law that protected stockholders in banks that failed from being personally liable for the outstanding notes of the bank. The Jacksonians pushed hard for a tough “small bill” law, and then settled for a compromise bill in the legislature, which subsequently passed in March 1835.\(^5\) Opposition came primarily from the more commercial counties like Kennebec and York, where Whigs, merchants, and banks were more common.

The Jacksonians also won support on the inland frontier when they tried to repeal some pro-manufacturing laws passed in the early 1820s. One target was tax exemptions for manufacturers that Governor King had strongly supported, over the farmers’ objections. Farmers believed that financial subsidies for manufacturers came out of their pocket, since they had to pay higher taxes to make up for what the manufacturers did not have to pay. Farmers were also angry that stockholders of manufacturing companies enjoyed the same privileges of bank

\(^5\) Potter, “Public Policy and Economic Growth” pp. 97-98.
stockholders – not being liable for debts of their failed company. The new laws were popular with the farmers, but Whigs complained that they would discourage manufacturers from investing in Maine.

Laws that were proposed to counter railroad abuses also found strong support on the inland frontier. The prospect of railroad development in Maine was widely popular, but news of railroad abuses in other states led the Jacksonians to push for laws to prevent these abuses. While the popularity of prospective railroads was so strong that many anti-railroad laws did not pass, the one law that did pass in 1826 hit the railroads promoters hard. Stockholders in a railroad would be liable for any of the debts of the company.

The pro-farmer laws that the Jacksonians pushed through in 1835 and 1836 should not leave the impression that all Democrats were hostile to corporations or to railroads. In fact, many bankers, manufacturers, land speculators, and railroad men found the Democratic Party to be a welcoming home. Many Democrats were financially successful. Reuel Williams, for example was a very wealthy Democrat with extensive interests in lumbering and commerce. When the legislature in 1836 had to elect a US Senator, the Jacksonian majority chose Williams to represent Maine in Washington. And F. O. J. Smith himself, the leader of the Jacksonians, was quite successful, thanks to land speculations and corporate promotions.

54 Potter, “Public Policy and Economic Growth” pp. 87-8.
55 Eastern Argus, February 16, 1834 and Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith” p. 129-130.
56 For detail on Smith’s business interests and ventures, See Gaffney “Maine’s Mr. Smith” pp. 161-169.
Martin Van Buren: the Architect of the Democratic Party

Andrew Jackson had no interest in a third term – he was 67 – but he wanted to ensure that his successor would carry on his policies. His choice was his vice president, Martin Van Buren. Jackson pushed his nomination through at the Democratic national convention held in Baltimore in 1835.\(^{57}\) Van Buren’s nomination was popular among Maine’s Democrats: he was Jackson’s choice; a strong opponent of the Bank; a relentless critic of the Whigs; and a supporter of a strong and disciplined party organization. In fact, it was Van Buren, many say, who invented the party caucus, the nominating conventions, the patronage system, and the Democratic Party.\(^{58}\)

The major problem that Van Buren had in securing the nomination was Southern suspicion that he could not be trusted on slavery. Their anxiety about the “reliability” of northern politicians on the slavery issue was heightened by a number of developments in the early 1830s: the Nat Turner Rebellion in Virginia, the campaign of northern abolitionists to send anti-slavery pamphlets to the South using the US mails, and the abolitionists’ campaign to generate mass petitions to Congress calling for the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.\(^{59}\)

Wanting to secure southern support for his nomination, Van Buren used his power in New York

\(^{57}\) It was at this convention that the Democrats adopted the 2/3rds rule, which required that any candidate for the presidential nomination had to receive at least 2/3rds of the delegate votes. This rule – the constitutional order of a party -- would give the South an effective veto over the Democratic presidential nomination in future years and cement its dominance of the party. In fact in 1840, the 2/3rds rule would deny Van Buren his re-nomination because of Southern anger at Van Buren for his lukewarm support for the annexation of Texas.


\(^{59}\) Many of these petitions may have come from Maine. William Lloyd Garrison had made a three week tour of Maine in October of 1832 and reported winning the support of “a minister or two” in every town he visited. See Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York, New York: St. Martins Press, 1998) p.140.
to come down hard on anti-slavery activists, knowing that southerners would decide how safe he was on the slavery issue by how strongly he responded. In a well-publicized effort on the eve of his presidential campaign in 1835, he ordered his supporters in New York to disrupt abolitionist meetings and prevent them from sending anti-slavery materials through the mails. In 1836 as the presidential campaign was heating up, he supported what was called the “Gag Rule” that required that every abolitionist petition submitted to Congress be immediately tabled before it was read on the floor.\(^6^0\)

Van Buren’s actions reassured Southern politicians, and with President Jackson’s strong support, the booming national economy, and his popularity in the north, Van Buren was elected president, defeating William Henry Harrison, the Whig candidate.\(^6^1\) Van Buren won Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, North Carolina, and Virginia as well as Illinois, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Maine. This was largely the same coalition of states that elected Jackson in 1828 and 1832 – the coalition of “the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North” which had been Van Buren’s creation.\(^6^2\) In Maine, Van Buren won an easy victory. And in the September state election that year, the Maine

\(^6^0\) Widmer, *Martin Van Buren*, p. 113.

\(^6^1\) Harrison was the candidate the Whigs ran in many of the northern states. There were two other official Whig candidates. The national party leaders had decided to run three candidates hoping to send the election into the House of Representatives. They had been unable to agree on a single candidate because they were deeply divided on the issues. What had united them since 1828 had been their bitter hostility to Jackson.

voters also easily re-elected Democratic Governor Dunlap to his third term, and the Cumberland County voters re-elected F. O. J. Smith to Congress.

**The Democratic Party Organization in the Middle of the 1830s**

By 1834 there were two distinct political parties in Maine. What had been alliances in 1828 and then factions in 1830 and 1832, had become the Democrats and the Whigs. They were rudimentary in comparison to the more formal party structures of the 1840s and 1850s.

In the 1830s, the Democratic Party was the most well-organized and cohesive. The foundation of its strength was patronage. "Patronage ... was the meat and potatoes of 19th century politics," wrote the Harvard sociologist Theda Skocpol. Patronage also created in Maine a structured Democratic organization with two clear hierarchies with internal discipline. At the top of one was the president, first Jackson and then Van Buren and at the top of other was the governor, first Judge Smith than Dunlap. They often cooperated but not always. The president was more powerful since he controlled the most important and best paid national patronage positions. Maine’s governor had more patronage jobs, but they were less well paid and less powerful. Both expected personal loyalty as the *quid-pro-quo* from those whom they appointed.

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63 A Democrat sat in the White House for the entire decade of the 30s, and a Democrat sat in the governor's office in Augusta for nine of those years. In the 1840s, a Democrat would occupy the governor's office for nine years, and a Democrat and renegade Whig (Tyler) occupied that White House for seven of those years.

64 Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, p. 83.

65 In fact, appointees were also expected to support the careers of the men who appointed them. One place where this happened was in the county conventions.
While it monopolized political power in the state, the Democratic Party in the middle thirties still had little formal state-wide structure. The only state wide institution, if you can call it that, was the Caucus of Democratic legislators. It usually met a few times a year to elect the legislative leadership, choose the party’s candidate for US Senator, if one was up for election, and to re-nominate a Democratic governor who had decided to run again. If there was no incumbent governor, however, the caucus would call together a convention to choose the candidate. For example, in 1835 when there was a vacant seat in the US Senate, it was the caucus of Democratic legislators that chose Williams as the Democratic candidate. After 1832, there was no permanent state committee.

The calls by the Jackson National Committee for a state committee and state chair in 1832 appear to have been forgotten, since in the middle of the 1830s there still was no evidence of a permanent state committee, a state chair, a state party office, or a state director. This may have been due to a fear by F.O. J. Smith, who was running the party at that time, that a formal state structure might become a forum for his opponents. This was one of the reasons the Junto had opposed a state party organization. Another reason why a state structure did not really take hold might have been the state’s geography. Traveling was tedious and difficult, and holding any statewide meetings was difficult. It could take a week to gather delegates from all across the state and a week for them to return home. Using the legislative caucus to make a nomination minimized time and expense, and it also brought some statewide legitimacy to nominations.

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66 See announcements of nominations by the Democratic Legislative Caucus in the *Portland Advertiser*, February 25, 1834, and *Eastern Argus*, May 23, 1837.

67 Although I have found no written evidence, it is my belief that Democratic state constitutional officers participated in the Democratic legislative caucus.
Legislators, after all, had to travel, with all expenses borne by the taxpayers, to Augusta once a year, and it was easy to add making party nominations to their legislative business.

The Democrats’ statewide structure was weak, but its county parties seemed strong and vibrant. F. O. J. Smith and his Argus deserve most of the credit, as Smith was the first – during the 1828 campaign – to promote these lesser conventions. No doubt, his motivation was, in large part, self-interest; he used them to mobilize his ambitious young men. In the 1832 campaign, county conventions came into their own. They offered many opportunities for men to distinguish themselves and compete with others for nominations for state senate, county treasurer, and recorder of deeds. Since the county conventions also debated national issues, they gave young men with wide-ranging ambitions the chance to familiarize themselves with national issues.

While it was not tightly structured, the Maine Democratic Party, like any successful institution, offered a clear and accessible career path for advancement. Aspiring politicians learned about government in town meetings, the legislature, and as clerks in the state courts, the Post Offices, or the Customs Houses. Party organizations offered a different set of opportunities.

68 See announcements of conventions in Waldo, Cumberland, Hancock, and Cumberland counties in Eastern Argus, August 3, 1830.

69 For a representative sample, see notices of the York County Democratic Convention in Eastern Argus, June 28, 1831; the Democratic Republicans of Portland, in the Eastern Argus, June 14, 1833; the York Democratic Republican Convention in the Jeffersonian June 30, 1834; and the Lincoln County Republicans in Eastern Argus, July 19, 1836.

70 This description is based on the report in the Eastern Argus of August 28, 1832 on the Oxford County Convention.

71 At that Oxford County Convention on Augusta 13, 1832, for example, they passed a resolution praising President Jackson and another that attacked Jackson's enemies -- the Bank of the United States and the "Federalist Party," the major protector of the Bank. See Eastern Argus, August 28, 1832.
A new young man who set his eye on winning election as a delegate to the county convention would “work” his town caucus. Another, perhaps more experienced, might work caucuses in a few towns to secure the nomination for a state representative seat. The more established leaders went after bigger game – chair of the county convention, delegate to the national party convention, presidential elector, or nomination for the State Senate or Congress.

Another strong part of the Democratic organization was its newspapers. As before, the most important party paper was the *Eastern Argus*, but in the 1830s other papers – the *Augusta Age*, the *Jeffersonian*, the *Saco Democrat*, and the *Eastern Republican* – gave the party strong voices in other parts of the state. They disseminated their message throughout the state, week after week, cajoling and educating Democrats with articles and editorials, texts of President Jackson’s and later President Van Buren’s speeches and messages, and articles reprinted from out-of-state Democratic papers. They cheered distant Democratic victories and celebrated Whig defeats. They encouraged men to attend the county conventions and the local party caucuses. Articles offered detailed coverage of the legislature. After each campaign, the papers printed the election returns, offering party leaders the raw materials from which to extract lessons and formulate new strategies. The papers were often the voice of ambitious Democratic politicians or of a group of like-minded Democrats. Often, however, the major source was the printing contracts let by Democratic-controlled national and state governments.

But what gave the party its organizational unity and strength was not its legislative caucus, its career path, or its newspapers, but its patronage. The promise of a job or the threat of losing a job was the glue that held the Democrats together, the fuel that energized them, and the

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72 The Jefferson Administration had established the *Eastern Argus* in 1802 to give it a voice in the District of Maine.
rod that maintained discipline. It is also what made the Maine Democrats so different from the state’s Whigs. Democratic politicians used these jobs to build organizations that tried to reach into every city neighborhood, town. Control over patronage was actually widely distributed up and down the hierarchies. Political customs of the day gave considerable discretion to loyal congressmen, the senators, county sheriffs and judges as well as top appointed officials such as US marshals, postmasters and collectors of customs. They could use the patronage jobs they controlled to fight for greater power amongst their party peers. Every Congressman, Senator, as well as the Governor and the President had his own organization. The Democratic Party was as fragmented as the state’s geography and its economy.

Moreover, patronage was a two-edged sword. Hoped-for patronage bound the party together, but also created a breeding ground for men angry that they had not gotten their fair share. Often, dissatisfied men bonded together in what became organized factions. Battles over appointments, such as those between F. O. J Smith and the Junto, were chronic within the Democratic Party. In fact, intra-party conflict in this period was often more bitter than the inter-party conflicts with the Whigs. There was no one person, no state chair, for example, who controlled and directed all patronage. The Junto and F. O. J. Smith had tried to build such a system, but they both failed. And it was not disagreements about policies that created these inter-party battles; it was about who controlled the politically powerful and lucrative jobs.

However endemic internal conflict was to the dominant Democratic Party, its greatest strengths were the popularity of Andrew Jackson and his message, and the party’s belief, widely shared from the top to the bottom of the party’s ranks, in the power and importance of party itself. Democrats believed in their party, believed in its importance to them and the county, and
believed that a united party was the only means the common people had to secure "equal treatment under the law, equal treatment within the society, and equal opportunity in the economic realm." For the Democrats, the party was almost a holy order, an "object of reverence."

The Whig Political Organization in the Middle of the 1830s

Up until the Panic of 1837, the Whigs were no match for the Democrats. In 1832, they lost to the Democrats by 4,000 votes; in 1833 by 7,000; in 1834 by 5,500; in 1835 by a massive 29,000; and in 1836 by 9,000. There were three major reasons. First, they lacked a dynamic leader like President Jackson who had a compelling and believable message that identified a clear enemy. Instead, they ran against “King Andrew,” a far more abstract enemy. Second, the Whigs simply did not have enough motivated men to canvass all the voters, get all their voters to the polls, put Whig party ticket in every voter’s hand, and to oversee every ballot box. Third, they were ambivalent about political parties, and certainly did not have the reverence for “party” that the Democrats did. Whigs were hobbled by the fact that they did not believe that parties were legitimate expressions of people's opinions and by their belief that parties were "manipulative, power-hungry, selfish attempts to place certain unfit men into positions of power."

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73 Silbey, "To One or Another of These Parties..." pp. 74-75.


Lacking their patronage resources, the Whigs’ state structure in the 1830s was far weaker than that of the Democrats. Their only enduring state-wide presence was the caucus of Whig legislators which sometimes nominated the party’s candidate for governor.\textsuperscript{76} At other times a state convention nominated the Whig candidate. Even though they lacked the resources of the Democrats, the Whigs did try to create an organization. In 1834, for example, they set up their own Whig Central Committee and it issued “circulars” as did the Democrats. One of its first actions was a circular that put forward a plan of organization. It urged “every gentleman” to do the duties assigned to him: “(I)n each county, there would be a committee of five, in each town and plantation a committee of three gentlemen, and an active agent in every school district. They are to identify every favorable Whig voter.”\textsuperscript{77} This plan was very similar to the one issued by the Jackson Central Committee in 1829, except for the Whig’s constant use of the word “gentlemen” to refer to its active supporters.

In fact, the Whigs were hampered by the fact that they “drew their leadership from the community’s social elite, whereas the Democrats built their machines around professional politicians who had little prestige other than what their party or patronage positions gave them.”\textsuperscript{78} The Whigs at times seemed desperate to attract people to their banner. In 1834, to build support for their nominee, they called a "grand convention" for Waterville. They chose the day when Colby College held its commencement and when a travelling circus was expected,

\textsuperscript{76} For example, the Whig caucus met in Augusta on March 1, 1836 to nominate a candidate for governor – Edward Kent -- and to choose electors to run against the Democrats pledged to support Martin Van Buren for President. In 1837, a year later, another caucus re-nominated Kent for Governor. See \textit{Portland Advertiser}, April 11, 1837.

\textsuperscript{77} See \textit{Eastern Argus}, August 1, 1834.

\textsuperscript{78} Holt, \textit{Political Parties and American Political Development}, p. 55.
hoping that such attractions would boost attendance.\textsuperscript{79} Whigs also tried to emulate the Democrats’ success with the \textit{Eastern Argus}, encouraging party supporters to subscribe to the \textit{Kennebec Journal} and the \textit{Portland Advertiser}, both strong Whig papers.\textsuperscript{80} The Whig papers did not have the reach of the Democratic ones, whose state and national printing contracts allowed them to print thicker papers in greater runs. One advantage the Whigs did have, however, was that they were not consumed with patronage battles. This lack of patronage allowed them to be more unified.\textsuperscript{81}

\textbf{How the Two Parties Looked at Government}

While both parties looked somewhat similar in form, they differed greatly in their attitude towards government’s role in society. The difference reflected in large part the varied ways that the parties’ supporters felt about the growing commercial economy. L. Ray Gunn described the Whig perspective: "(T)he consequences of market expansion varied with an individual's relationship to that market. It could be an enormously liberating experience for those integrated into the economy for the first time, opening new opportunities for enterprise and new avenues for social and economic advancement. But it could also result in a devastating loss of opportunity, position, and status for those in older areas, who, with the extension of the market, confronted

\textsuperscript{79} Hatch, \textit{Maine A History} Vol. 1, p. 216.

\textsuperscript{80} Like F. O. J Smith, Whig editors also became powerful forces within their party. Luther Severance founded and edited the \textit{Kennebec Journal}. With the contacts he made, he later won election as a state representative, state senator, and then a congressman. Later he became a national figure; the Whigs, for example, elected him a Vice President at their National Convention in 1848.

\textsuperscript{81} Between 1830 and 1856, the Whigs had some control over state patronage for only two years, 1838 and 1840, and only national patronage for 5 years -- 1841 and 1849-1853. When Tyler became president in 1841 after the death of Whig President Harrison, he stopped distributing patronage to Whigs
new sources of competition.\textsuperscript{\textasciitilde82} Comfortable with the expanding commercial opportunities, the Whigs "embraced the new world order and looked for ways through government support and action, to promote, expand, and strengthen it."\textsuperscript{\textasciitilde83} They appealed to those who saw opportunities in the new economy. Government was essential to mobilizing capital and labor. Government policies that promoted one section "indirectly served all segments of the community."\textsuperscript{\textasciitilde84} Whigs looked favorably on banks, paper money, corporate charters, lawyers, internal improvements, tariffs, and government aid. Believing in the necessity and value of government, they were more programmatic than the Democrats, advancing specific policies on tariffs, taxation, public lands, and internal improvements. While Whigs accepted in large measure the growing popular politics of the period, they wanted a “talented elite to administer what was for the mid-nineteenth century … an interventionist government.”\textsuperscript{\textasciitilde85} Whigs also supported a positive role for government in promoting social welfare and in legislating against the personal behaviors and practices they felt threatened the common good.

The Democrats tended to speak most directly to those who felt injured or fearful about the changing economy. They too wanted economic growth, but they blamed the hard times and


\textsuperscript{\textasciitilde83} Joel H. Silbey, ““To One or the other of These Parties Every Man Belongs:” The American Political Experience from Andrew Jackson to the Civil War” Byron E. Shafer & Anthony J. Badger \textit{Contesting Democracy: Substance & Structure in American Political History 1775-2000} (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2001) p.70.


the growing inequality in the society on government involvement. They argued that “legislators were all too liable to promote their own interests or the narrow interests of the minority they represented. Alliances struck and bargains made within Congress would thus allow legislation to pass which actually sacrificed the interests of the majority." 86 Democrats opposed the Whig-supported bank charters and their paper money, corporate charters, tariffs, and publicly financed roads and canals. Tariffs were subsidies for monopolists, paid by workers and farmers; banks were means for the wealthy to control the economy for their own ends, and increased national spending brought more spoils for special interests and few benefits to the common people. They believed that the Whigs were “predators against the freedom and interests of the nation’s producing classes.” 87 Instead of supporting an activist government to maximize the popular welfare, Democrats called for “a highly populistic political system, one that empowered adult white males and championed their rights against many of the social and political elites in the nation” 88

Democrats generally opposed Whig efforts to create an activist government to improve social and moral behavior. Unlike the Whigs, they were reluctant to ask government to enforce the strict Sabbath, to outlaw liquor, or to require the reading of the King James Version of the New Testament in schools. Democrats did not take these positions without regard to their political consequences. Opposing Whig laws to legislate a “Yankee morality” made the Democrats attractive to the small but growing number of Catholics settling in Maine, who feared Protestant-sponsored reform.

86 Ashworth, Slavery, Capitalism and Politics p. 294.

87 Silbey, ”To One or the other of These Parties Every Man Belongs” p. 74-75.

88 Ashworth, Slavery Capitalism and Politics, p. 295.
The Panic of 1837

Van Buren took the oath of office in March of 1837 with an ambitious plans, but they were soon forgotten when the Panic of 1837 struck a few months later. Speculators, particularly those trading in western lands, had been operating on tight margins for years, were unable to pay off their loans. Banks collapsed first in the west, and then in early May the major banks in New York shut their doors. The Panic spread quickly “and soon overwhelmed Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans and every other commercial city.”

Today we would have called the Panic a “great depression.” The Maine economy suffered as much as the rest of the county and remained prostrate for years, not recovering until 1841. Edward Potter described Maine in those trying times: “Land sales fell 95% between 1835 and 1841, 40% of the state’s banks were forced out of existence, and 45% of the state’s bank stock was lost. Lumber exports from Bangor estimated in 1835 by Niles Register to be worth $3,000,000 were valued by the 1840 census approximately $650,000.” The shipbuilding industry experienced similar declines. As could be expected, when the economy collapses, the political consequences can be dramatic and long-lasting. The Whigs saw their chance and quickly began to blame the depression on Van Buren and the Democrats.

Maine’s Democratic Party and its dominant Jacksonian faction were rocked back on their heels and were immediately on the defensive. Governor Dunlap, one of the Jacksonian leaders, announced that he would not be a candidate for re-election, having realized, no doubt, that 1837 would be a bad year for Democratic incumbents. Dunlap’s decision was a blow to the Smith and the Jacksonians because his control of state patronage was essential to their control of the party.

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89 Widmer, Martin Van Buren. p. 96.

90 Potter “Public Policy and Economic Growth in Maine” p. 135. See Potter’s footnotes for sources.
Choosing a candidate for governor would be especially difficult because the party was divided between the Smith wing and the anti-Smith wing. What divided them were Smith’s high-handed tactics, his aggressiveness in pushing his own interests, and the fact that other Democratic leaders did not feel he had their interests at heart. Party leaders met at a state convention on June 28, 1837. The anti-Smith men turned out in large numbers, and as a result the convention picked as its candidate a long-time opponent of Smith – Gorham Parks of Bangor.91 Parks’ chances in the upcoming election looked good at first blush. He was a strong supporter of Van Buren who was still very popular among Democrats and Parks would be the first candidate for governor from eastern Maine, and thus could expect an extra share of that region’s vote.

But, the Democrats would enter the campaign against the Whigs with two major disabilities. The first was that many men blamed Martin Van Buren and the Democrats for the Panic. The second was the role played by F.O. J. Smith. He was bitter at Park’s victory at the convention and he had become bitter at Martin Van Buren, the Democratic President. Smith had opted for revenge. Smith went after Gorham Parks with a vengeance, orchestrating in the press a battery of attacks on Parks’ morals and ethics, and sowing confusion in Democratic ranks. Smith also struck back at the new Democratic Party leaders who had rejected him. He was also bitter at Martin Van Buren, not for matters of patronage or Democratic Party disputes, but for the president’s banking policies. The reason was that Smith was as ambitious in business as he was in politics. He had become a speculator and financial promoter, and the Panic had put him close to ruin. To survive he needed to keep his investments afloat and to do that he needed banks willing to lend money. He was angry at Van Buren because, like Jackson before him, the president was a “hard money” man. Van Buren believed that the policies that allowed banks to

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91 See Augusta Age, July 5, 1837.
issue currency in excess were responsible for the Panic. When Van Buren would not retreat on his policies, Smith, as aggressive as ever, took a major leap and assembled a group of like-minded business Democrats in Maine, and using his seat in Congress, helped to assemble similar groups in other states. He wanted to pressure Van Buren to change his policies. Attacking Parks was a way of hitting at Van Buren. Soon Smith’s aggressive lobbying would turn into semi-public opposition. But in the campaign, most of the state’s Democratic leaders remained loyal to Parks and refused to join Smith in his attacks. One reason for their loyalty was that most of the party leaders were presidential patronage office holders and did not want to alienate the president. Another was the anger that many leaders of the party felt towards Smith.

Parks’ Whig opponent was Edward Kent, a Harvard-educated lawyer from Bangor. One of the reasons the Whig chose him was that he was also from eastern Maine and that would eliminate a supposed advantage of Parks. The Democrats were facing a very difficult campaign. Kent ran an aggressive campaign, blaming the depression on Van Buren’s and Jackson’s war on the Bank of the United States. In the same vein, he struck at the Maine Democrats for passing anti-bank laws, claiming that those laws were the reason why banks were unwilling to make loans. He also blamed Van Buren and Maine Democrats for the continued timber thieving by New Brunswick lumbermen in Maine’s lands in the far north.

In the September election of 1837, the effects of the Panic and Smith’s apostasy doomed the Democrats. More than 11,000 more Whigs voted than in 1836, knowing that they had a real chance to win. Many Democrats, confused and demoralized by the intraparty fighting, stayed

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92 See Gaffney, “Maine’s Mr. Smith” pp. 151-161 for an excellent description of Van Buren’s policies and why F. O. J. Smith opposed them.
home. Kent won, though the election was still remarkably close; his margin was 188 votes of 64,353 cast.

In electing Kent, voters put a Whig in the Maine governor’s office for the first time. And for the first time, the Whigs would control state patronage. Many Democrats lost their sinecures. Kent was true to Whig values of more aggressive government. Unlike the Democrats who preceded him in the governor’s office, he laid out an activist plan in his Address to the Legislature in 1838, including the repeal of the small bill law, a program of internal improvements, and aggressive actions to repel the New Brunswick lumbermen. He also put before the legislature two issues new to the state’s political life, issues that the Democrats had long ignored. He told the legislators that he was an opponent of slavery and wanted to see it abolished. He also spoke highly of temperance. In the months after this address, however, neither the state’s papers nor its politicians picked up on Kent’s effort to inject slavery and liquor into the state’s political life. Those issues would emerge with great power in the next decade.

Fairfield: A New Breed of Party Leader

The 1837 election destroyed the Jacksonians’ power in the Maine Democratic Party. In fact, it also pushed the Democrats to abandon their activist Jacksonian policies; they would in the 1840s become as pro corporation and pro-economic development as the Whigs. Smith’s attacks on Van Buren, furthermore, made Smith a pariah in the Democrat Party. Van Buren turned on Smith, seeing him now as an enemy, and cut him off from any presidential support and favor. Without the support of Van Buren, Smith had no influence on presidential patronage and thus

party activists had no reason to seek Smith’s support. For his part, Smith pursued for a few years his efforts to try to reverse Van Buren’s banking policies, creating a group that called itself the Conservative Democrats. By 1840 he and his new conservative friends had all joined the Whigs to support Harrison for President. Smith tried mightily to secure patronage from the Whigs, but they did not trust him. Soon after the 1840 presidential race, Smith would turn away from politics to promote and speculate full time, teaming up with Samuel F. B. Morse to launch Morse’s telegraph, an enterprise that made him a fortune.94

With the Jacksonians in collapse, three ambitious Democrats stepped into the vacuum, men who would bring a new type of leadership to the party, quite different from that of the Junto in the 20s or Smith in the 30s. John Fairfield was a Bowdoin graduate, lawyer, and at the time a member of Congress. Hannibal Hamlin had been a strong supporter of Jackson and Van Buren, and he had joined in the Maine Jacksonians crusade against the banks.95 He was also a newspaperman, owner of the Oxford Democrat, a House member since 1835, and Speaker of the House in 1837. Nathan Clifford was also a prominent Democrat, though less Jacksonian than Hamlin. He had been Speaker of the House in 1833 and 1834 and for four years had served as the state’s attorney general. An early ally of Smith, Clifford had broken with him.96 All three were outgoing and affable and had generally avoided taking sides in the factional battles that recently divided the party. The three men set as their goal electing Fairfield governor. Their first step was to win the party’s nomination at the upcoming 1838 Democratic convention.

94 Mundy, Presidents of the Senate of Maine, “F. O. J. Smith” (no page number).
96 For biographies of Clifford and Hamlin, See Mundy Speakers of the Maine House of Representatives.
Clifford worked the delegates from the southern part of the state and Hamlin did the same in the northern and eastern areas. Together the three men reached out to all factions of the party: the remnants of the Junto, Smith’s Jacksonians, and the anti-Smith coalition.

Fairfield’s message was inclusiveness. He understood that the party was a complex institution and it needed to be governed and led in way that united all the party leaders. Fairfield seemed to think of himself as a manager who would help the party leaders make decisions, and not be the sole decision maker himself. His appeal for a new type of party resonated, and at the convention, Fairfield overwhelmingly defeated his opponent, 311 to 17.

Fairfield’s adversary in the September 1838 election was the incumbent Whig Governor Edward Kent. The contest was sharp and bitter, and it energized men on both sides. The Whigs used the same approach that had worked for them in 1837: attacking the Democrats for being anti-bank and anti-development. But the Democrats did a good job of turning the tables, and attacked Governor Kent for not ending the depression. The Cod Bounty Law also became a major campaign issue. Both the Democrats and Whigs sought advantage. The issue was a battle in the US Senate. Most of the South and West wanted repeal, while most of the Northeast supported continuation of the subsidy. The debate did put the Maine Democrats on the defensive because one of President Van Buren’s strongest allies was Senator Thomas Hart Benton of

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98 Gorham Parks was not a candidate. The President Van Buren appointed Parks the US Marshall for Maine. Some might say that Van Buren had rewarded him for his race for governor while other might say the appointment was to get him out of the way for a better candidate – Fairfield.

Missouri, who was a leading critic of the Cod Bounty Law.\textsuperscript{100} It was critical to Maine Democrat’s chance of political success that they had to be seen as militantly opposing a repeal or any weakening of the Bounty Law. Maine Democratic Senator Reuel Williams helped their effort substantially when he directly attacked Benton. And both Williams and John Ruggles, the state’s other Democratic Senator, made much in public of their vote against the Benton-supported repeal bill.\textsuperscript{101}

In the Fairfield-Kent race, the issue of slavery made its first appearance in a Maine political campaign. Whigs attacked Fairfield for being a “man with Southern principles” since most thought that the South controlled the national Democratic Party. The Democrats for their part criticized Kent for attending an abolitionist meeting.\textsuperscript{102} What made the greatest difference in the election results, however, was that the Democrats were united again and strongly supported Fairfield. A record number of men went to the polls – 89,595. The Democratic vote was nearly 13,000 more than the year before and put Fairfield over the top with a majority of 3,500.\textsuperscript{103}

In his inaugural address, Fairfield outlined his agenda for the state. Compared to former Democratic Governor Dunlap, Fairfield was more moderate, perhaps even conservative in his views. The Panic of 1837 and Kent’s victory had broken the back of the Jacksonians. The new

\textsuperscript{100} O’Leary, \textit{Maine Sea Fisheries}, pp. 48-52, 373. O’Leary offers a detailed narrative of the Congressional history of the Fish Bounty Law.

\textsuperscript{101} O’Leary, \textit{Maine Sea Fisheries}, p. 51 and \textit{Portland Advertiser}, February 5,1839

\textsuperscript{102} Hatch, \textit{Maine A History}. Vol. I. p. 236.

\textsuperscript{103} F. O. J. Smith was also a candidate. He was endorsed by a new small Conservative Party which included other Democratic businessmen angry at Van Buren. Democrats attacked Smith and the Conservatives as “traitors.” See Hatch, \textit{Maine A History} Vol. I. pp. 233-34.
Democratic governor made that clear, telling the legislators that he opposed any “sudden and important changes in laws with which the people have long been familiar.” He also signaled that Democrats would keep taxes low, calling for a “system of rigid economy” in “public expenditures.” He was equally conservative on internal improvements, endorsing only a limited program of road construction in the state’s public lands to the north.  

One year later in 1839 a united Democratic organization, fully staffed by national and state patronage holders, showed its ability once again to get out the Democratic vote. In a rematch with Kent, Fairfield won by a larger margin – 6,300 votes – than he had the year before. And the Democratic Party ended the decade as it had begun – firmly in control of the state. Fairfield would be re-elected governor in 1839, and in 1841 and 1842. With the exception of one aggressive action, calling out the militia to oppose the actions of New Brunswick in protecting its claims to Northeast Maine, his policies and his rhetoric were moderate. Fairfield had clearly learned some lessons. He turned his back on the Jacksonians’ agenda, and he was a new kind of political leader, intent on uniting the many party leaders, restraining his own ambitions, trying to manage better the patronage disputes that too often embroiled the party. Yet, Fairfield’s successes also created a new problem that would grow in future years. Maine Democrats would no longer have a compelling message: the attacks on the “Corrupt Bargain,”

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104 Governor’s Message, *Augusta Age*, January 9, 1839.

105 See Howard Jones, *To the Webster-Ashburton Treaty: A Study in Anglo-American Relations, 1783-1842*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1977) pp. 36-41. One reason for the string of campaign successes that Fairfield would enjoy was his aggressive defense as governor of Maine’s interests in the long standing dispute over ownerships of timberlands in Maine’s far north east with the province of New Brunswick and Great Britain. His decision to call out the state militia to defend its territories in the Aroostook County War was very popular.
“Corruption,” and the “Money Power,” which had resonated with the common people and excited Democratic voters. By the end of the 1830s, the Democrats would be a party whose primary goal was to win elections and maintain their control of patronage, but indistinguishable from the Whigs on the issues.

**The Legacies of Jackson**

Jackson’s two terms had profound effects on Maine Democrats. One was the changing composition of the party’s leadership. By 1840 the Democrats had controlled the White House for twelve years, and the State House for ten of those twelve years. For an entire decade, Democrats had occupied all of the hundreds of national and state patronage jobs. Its leaders were no longer ambitious young men seeking recognition; these same men had become solid men in their communities, whose status came from their public office. Intent on maintaining these privileges, they were no longer interested in “rotation in office.”

The Democrats’ years in power had also changed the structure of the party. While a caucus of Democratic legislators still met when there was an incumbent governor to re-nominate, it was the party’s “officeholders” who were now in control. We get a glimpse of the men who held the reins of power through the eyes of a newspaper reporter who attended the 1837 Democratic state convention. The men were “members of Congress, ex-members of Congress – members of both branches of the State Legislature – Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs, Customs House Officers and Postmasters,”106 and “County Commissioners, Registers of Probate, Clerks of Court, & etc.”107 Interestingly, even in the late 1830s there was little public mention of a state

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106 See *Portland Advertiser*, July 4, 1837 and July 16, 1837.

107 *Portland Advertiser*, July 4, 1837.
committee – except the temporary ones charged with the limited task of convening a state
congression. The statewide institutional presence of the party was still minimal; there was no
state party chair, no year round state committee, and no state headquarters. 108

There was also a legacy of factionalism. These “officeholders” were the leaders, but they
were not entirely secure. In a patronage system, there were always men who felt ignored and
unrewarded. Some of the dissatisfaction was under the surface, and some was more public. One
indication of these frustrated voices was the resolutions coming from party county conventions.
The calls issued to the party leaders from these grass roots were for “rotation in office.” The
Cumberland County convention of 1839, for example, resolved: ““Rotation in office” was both
“useful and proper.””109 The Kennebec County convention of 1839 made a clearer point, asking
the party’s present public officials to “limit their terms of office to the shortest period which the
public service will admit.”110 The resolution of the Democratic town convention of Gorham had
even a stronger edge. Those delegates must have had in mind some long serving office holders
when they resolved that “rotation in office [is] essential and absolutely necessary and that its
application should be uniform, universal and impartial.”111 One could almost feel the tension
between the office holders and the outsiders. Existing office holders wanted to keep their

108 Interestingly, there were some who wanted a more structured state party. At the 1837 state convention,
the delegates passed a resolution that called for the Democratic members of the legislature “to elect
annually a State Committee to be called a Central Committee.” See Augusta Age, July 5, 1837. I can find
no evidence that party leaders took any action on this recommendation.

109 Augusta Age, August 27, 1839.

110 Augusta Age, July 9, 1839.

111 Eastern Argus, June 27, 1837.
positions as long as possible, and young men wanted a rapid turnover of offices so they could have the opportunity to advance.

Another legacy was that Democratic presidents had become accustomed to using their patronage powers to insure the loyalty of party officialdom. Because so many of the Democratic Party’s top leaders held well-paying national patronage jobs, presidents could enforce their will. Jackson had used that power to bring recalcitrant Congressmen into line to support him in the Nullification Crisis and to support his veto of the Bank. Van Buren, for his part, used that power to destroy F. O. J. Smith, after Smith started to organize against Van Buren. Support for the policies of their Democratic presidents during the 1830s was not much of a burden for Maine’s Democratic Party leaders, as most party leaders supported their president’s policies. But, if in the future a Democratic president’s policies were unpopular with Democratic voters, party leaders dependent on presidential patronage would find themselves caught between two powerful forces.

Another was the tight and lasting embrace between the southern and northern wings of the party. Jackson and Van Buren had made the Democratic Party one of the few truly national institutions of that decade. It united in common purposes men from all parts of the country: from northern commercial cities and small towns to plantations in the South, to the new settlements in the West, and to Congress and the White House. It operated on varied scales from town and city caucuses, county conventions, national conventions, and within the White House and Congress.

\[112\] In fact, most scholars believe that the origins of Democratic Party’s hostility to the national government are found in the fact that the party’s foundation was the South that feared a national government with the power and authority that could turn against slavery.
Jackson also left a party with a strong populist core, its activists "hostile to policies and institutions that they perceived to be promoting aristocracy or privilege."\textsuperscript{113} The party was united around the fear of strong government, particularly the national government. And it was that populist core that gave the party the intense loyalties of hundreds of thousands of voters. Jackson, after all, had taken on and defeated the Bank of the United States, this "colossus, this Hercules, this Mammoth; this Beast with seven heads and ten horns: this dragon, this Hydra-headed monster."\textsuperscript{114} These loyalties would last for decades.

**Conclusion**

There were two major drivers during the 1830s behind the changes that occurred in Maine’s political system. The first was the explosive growth in the electorate. The second was the appearance of two distinct political parties, the Democrats and the Whigs, around which political conflict would revolve.

More and more men were going to the polls. In 1828 slightly less than 35,000 men voted in the presidential election. By 1840, more than 92,000 men voted in the presidential election, an increase of almost 200%. In 1832 the bitter conflict between Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay for the presidency produced the Democratic Party and the Whig Party. Their leaders had independently decided that they could better compete for votes and political power, if they created their own distinct political structures. The struggles of these two parties in the 1830s had

\textsuperscript{113} Silbey, "To One or Another of These Parties..." p. 75.

profound effects on Maine political system, including increased partisanship, more intense party loyalty, and greater efforts to bring more men to the ballot box.

To handle the greatly expanded electorate, Democrats and Whigs had to find new ways to organize themselves so they could compete more successfully. They needed political structures that could identify and mobilize potential leaders, resolve disputes over competing candidates, and help them turn out the largest possible vote. To manage and operate these new structures, such as the county and town conventions, they also needed a greatly expanded cadre of leaders with the skills appropriate to the world of the 1830s. Instead of the influentials who did the political work under the Junto in the 1820s, the parties of the 1830s needed men with real “people” skills: friendly, affable, able to work with all sorts, knowledgeable of election law, and experienced in managing caucuses and conventions. And because such work took considerable time, the men tasked needed to be able to devote considerable time to the tasks.

Thus, we see in the 1830s in Maine, particularly in the dominant Democratic Party, the emergence of men who were “professional politicians,” men who worked full time at politics either as an elected official or as a patronage appointee. One of the best examples was F. O. J. Smith. He worked in politics day and night, first as editor of the Argus, then the Augusta Age, then as state senator, then as President of the State Senate, and finally as a member of Congress. Politicians like Smith had to be able to work constantly because of the intense schedule of elections that made up almost a perpetual campaign. In September, there were state elections; November, the national elections; and in March and April the city and town elections. And before each election there was more work to do, identifying sympathetic voters and convening and managing caucuses and county conventions.
These professionals were also highly focused and motivated. If their party lost the
election, they lost their jobs. If their party won, and they did not turn out voters in the numbers
expected, they lost their jobs. The volume of time required to do their party’s work was one
reason why office-holders would become so powerful within their parties; their public offices
allowed them to devote as much time as was necessary to do their party’s work.

These developments were most pronounced in the Democratic Party, in large measure
because its leaders had command of far more resources than the Whigs. The Democrats who
occupied the White House for the decade had control over all the national jobs in Maine, and the
Democrat who occupied Maine’s governor’s office had similar control of all the state positions.
In fact, it was in the 1830s that the Democratic Party first established its political dominance in
Maine. The Whig Party tried to compete, but with far more limited resources they could not
match what the Democrats.

The structures that the Democrats built to mobilize their leaders and voters existed
throughout the state. The most important were the county conventions held each year to
nominate men for county office and the district conventions which nominated men for the state
senate and for Congress. And there were city conventions (in Portland and Bangor), town
caucuses, and even ward caucuses. In all of these meetings delegates chose their party’s
nominees, but they also functioned as a “school of politics” where they learned to speak in
public, negotiate with multiple groups at the same time, control a crowd, master caucus and
convention proceedings, and win the attention of the more powerful. For many, this is where
they began their career as a politician.

Twice in the 1830s, prominent Maine men made bids to dominate the Democratic Party.
The first was F. O. J. Smith. He understood that control over patronage was the key to political
power, and sought, by installing his own man as governor and by ingratiating himself to the
Jackson White House, to win control over all patronage in the state. But he made no attempt to
build up state-wide structures. Instead he sought to achieve power by putting people under
obligation to him for their patronage jobs and by instilling fear in those who might oppose him.
In the process, he stopped helping other men to rise in the party. His effort collapsed in 1837
when President Van Buren shut him off from any influence over presidential patronage. The
second man who made a bid to lead the party was John Fairfield, who had assembled a coalition
to elect him governor in 1838. As governor and party leader, he acted very differently than
Smith. He saw himself more as a manager, responsible for seeing that all men reaped benefits
when the party was victorious. Yet, as governor and party leader in 1839 and 1840, Fairfield
made no real effort to institutionalize a state convention or to create a permanent central
authority, such as a state committee or a state chairman.

It was hard to write about the 1830s without devoting a special attention to Andrew
Jackson. His personality and his populist message energized Democrats and made them fierce
supporters, but had the opposite and equally strong effect on the Whigs, making them fierce
opponents. The Jackson legacies were many. One was the development of intense party
loyalties, fueled in part by the rapid growth in the number of “party” newspapers. Few
newspapers were independent or non-partisan. Nearly all supported one party or another. In
Maine most papers were Democratic. Most men read only one paper. They rarely heard the
opinions of the other party. Begun in the 1830s, this phenomenon of intense party loyalty
became a key feature of the American political system.

Another phenomenon also seen first in the 1830s was that voters not only became loyal to
their party, but they supported the ticket from the top to the bottom. There was virtually no
ticket splitting. If a man voted for a party’s candidate for President or Governor, he was almost certain to vote for every other one of the party’s candidates from Congressman down to the county recorder of deeds. This type of voting was made possible by a change in the state voting system that began in 1830. Instead of voting in public, men were required to put a printed ballot in the box. To “help” that process, county parties printed distinctive ballots that included the names of every party candidate up for election. Party agents thrust these party tickets into the hands of every friendly voter, and party agents watched to see whether they put the Democratic or Whig ticket into the ballot box. It was easy to vote the entire ticket and it was equally easy to know who the man voted for.

With party loyalties so strong and straight ticket voting so common, parties competed, not by trying to get their opponents’ voters to defect, but by trying to turn out every one of their own voters. To mobilize their voters, parties demonized their opponents and it was anger that allowed party workers to get their voters to the polls. In such campaigns, the regiments of patronage workers that the Democrats had under their control gave them the advantage over the Whigs.

Jackson also showed how important a compelling message could be to a candidate or to a political party. His attacks on the “Money Power” and the aristocrats and oligarchs had fueled the expansion of the electorate but particularly the growing number of Democratic voters. Candidates, like Jackson, who had a compelling message, could energize their party for generations.
CHAPTER IV

THE 1840S: PARTY STRUCTURES FACE NEW SINGLE-ISSUE MOVEMENTS

Introduction

The Democratic Party dominated Maine in the decade. With the exception of 1840, the Democrats would elect every year their man to the Governor’s office and elect controlling majorities to the Maine House and the Maine Senate. The growing Irish vote was important, but most important was the loyalty that tens of thousands of men felt for Andrew Jackson and his campaigns against the “Money Power.” As a result of the Democratic domination, Maine’s state government policy reflected the priorities and ideas of Democrats.

In respect to the state’s population, growth continued to slow in the decade. Most of that increase was from natural births. Immigration into the state remained minimal; immigrants from rural Massachusetts now headed for Northeastern cities or in the booming Midwest.

There was, however, one small stream of foreign immigration in the 1840s that would eventually have a profound effect on the state and its politics. These were Irish Catholics fleeing the Great Famine. They were brought to Maine by labor recruiters who were looking for men to do the exhausting work of building canals, railroads, dams, and wharfs and docks. They clustered in cities like Portland and Bangor, and much to the chagrin of the Whigs quickly registered to vote. Riots often broke out between Protestant workers bitter at the new
competitors whom they claimed were pushing down wage rates. Facing the hostility of Protestant workers and the ire of the Whigs, the Irish Catholics would turn almost to a man to the Democratic Party.

Two new forces joined the state’s dominant economic interests during the decade. The largest was the railroad industry that arrived in the 1840s. They opened up service to Boston and Montreal. Other lines connected Portland with Brunswick Bath, Lewiston, Augusta, and Waterville. Because the railroads needed expansive legislative charters to reassure investors and to escape competition, they quickly became a powerful force in the Legislature, sometimes displacing the lumber industry’s dominant position in that body. The second large new industry was the cotton manufacturers. By 1850 there were nineteen fairly large cotton mills operating on the fall-lines of the major rivers. Much of the capital of these cotton mills also came from out-of-state sources.

The cotton mills and certain other industries were also pioneering a new kind of manufacturing for Maine. The owners imported raw materials and their mills turned out goods that were sold as finished products in national and world markets. The growth of manufacturing was also creating in Maine, for the first time, a political constituency for higher tariffs.

The characteristics of the other major elements of the state’s economic power system changed only in small ways. The farmers remained the largest “industry” but they remained powerless, lacking any influential leaders, after the Jacksonians abandoned their anti-monopoly legislative agenda. The lumber industry was still ubiquitous and powerful, particularly in the northern and eastern regions. On the coast, fishing, shipping and shipbuilding remained as powerful as before. All of the coastal industries trained their eye on Washington rather than Augusta. The cod fishing schooners’ priority was to protect in Washington their Cod Fishing
Bounty from attacks from Southern and Western politicians. Shipbuilders and merchant shippers continued to fight for free trade and a more aggressive foreign policy that would open up new markets for their ships.

Maine’s trade and business with the South also intensified. It was increasingly Maine ships that were loaded with cotton in the Southern ports and Maine merchants who financed and led the voyages to Liverpool and Le Havre. And it was Southern cotton on which Maine cotton mills depended. And often Southern plantations were the final destination for the second-grade cod that the Maine’s fishing schooners caught.

Another new member of the state’s power structure was the Democratic Party. It might be hard to think of a party as a key member of the economic power structure, but the fact is that the Party “employed” probably a thousand workers, men who held patronage positions working for the state, county, city, or national governments. But unlike private businesses, the Party did not make a product for sale; it did not fish or mill lumber; it did not buy or sell merchandise; it did not manufacture products for sale. And the Party did not measure its success by its rate of profit. It had a different goal – turn out sufficient voters to win elections.

Neither the Whig nor the Democratic parties were particularly interested in governing; in fact, neither had specific platforms they wanted to implement, yet there were some differences between them. The Democrats advocated free trade and the Whigs higher tariffs. The Democrats were suspicious of banks, while the Whigs embraced them; and the Democrats embraced Catholics, while the Whigs feared them. But both parties resisted being tied down to strong positions. They were not political leaders, but followers. Their goal was not to lead the state in a particular direction but to maintain their patronage. They did not take aggressive and
stands on issues. Instead, they tried hard to exclude the controversial issues such as prohibition and slavery from the party entirely.

But the power of the Democratic Party, and in fact the whole two-party system, would face a major challenge in the last three years of the decade – a challenge that would uproot the political system that had been in place since 1832. The sources of this challenge were the single-issue citizen movements that the two dominant parties had tried to ignore. One was the popular movement to ban the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages in Maine. The second had two elements, both related to slavery: one smaller group wanted to end slavery; and the second and larger one wanted to stop slavery from expanding into the western territories.

Although in the 1840s the two parties developed more robust structures and more skilled leaders, these improvements were inadequate to defeat or defuse the challenges of the single-issue movements. The pull of the ideas of these movements severed the party loyalties of increasing numbers of voters. The campaign strategies of each of the parties actually further weakened party loyalties, as each reached out to appeal to anti-slavery and prohibition voters in the other parties. By the end of the decade, both the Democratic and the Whig structures were weakening as the parties were wracked with divisions. Those in the dominant Democratic Party were the most severe, as leadership split into two wings, one was led Senator Hannibal Hamlin, who professed hostility to slavery and the other by a group of men who saw as their goal maintaining the alliance between the Democratic Party and the South.
Population Changes in the 1840s

The population movements of the previous decades intensified in the 1840s. The stream of families moving to Maine from Massachusetts had ground to a halt. Still, the state grew in numbers – thanks primarily to natural increase. During the decade, Maine added 83,000 people bringing its total to 583,169.¹

The more commercial towns and cities on the coast and major rivers were also enjoying growth, thanks to the continued expansion of lumber, fishing, shipbuilding, and shipping. Artisans, laborers, and aspiring merchants were attracted from as far away as Boston and Britain’s Maritime Provinces. Moreover, some small towns on the fall lines of the rivers, where promoters had constructed cotton mills, were undergoing explosive growth.

These population movements would shift the balance of political power in the state from its south to the east. Mill towns such as Saco, Augusta, Hallowell, and Brunswick began to be heard from as well as shipbuilding towns such as Waldoboro and Thomaston, and newer commercial towns such as Waterville, Farmington, Camden, Hamden, and Old Town. Portland grew, but Bangor, the commercial center for the powerful Penobscot lumber industry, was beginning to challenge Portland’s status as Maine’s most important city.²

¹ The state’s rate of growth was continuing to slow. During the 1820s it was 33.9%; in the 1830s, 25.6%; and in the 1840s, 16.2%. See US Census 1820, 1830, and 1840.

² Portland, the commercial and shipping center of the south reached would reach 20,815 in 1850, and Bangor would double in the decade, reaching 14,432.
exert its political influence was hampered by the state’s constitutional order which limited its representation in the Maine House and Senate.  

The make-up of the state’s population remained overwhelming Protestant, with Baptists, Free Will Baptists, and Methodists the largest denominations. All had strong evangelical and reform traditions. The state’s small Irish Catholic population was also increasing quite visibly in the larger cities. Labor contractors brought many of them to Maine, hiring them to labor on major construction projects. Employers liked the Irish because they would work for wages that native Mainers rejected. The Irish were recruited to Bucksport to build Ft. Knox; those in Augusta came to build the State Capitol and Kennebec Dam; and those in Lewiston to build new mills, dams and canals. In Portland, many of them worked on the docks. Irish construction laborers were also recruited to build the state’s new railroads.  

Because most heavy construction took place near cities, the Irish tended to settle nearby, and often became a substantial minority. In 1850 for example, 11% of Portland’s population was Irish, 12% of Bangor’s and 23% of Lewiston’s. Unskilled Yankee workers saw the Irish as an economic threat as the competition for jobs led to tensions and clashes. One “nativist riot” occurred in Portland in May of 1848 and another in March of 1849 a week before St. Patrick’s

33Portland made many efforts to become the dominant force in the state. One was to renew the effort it lost in the 1820s to become the state capitol. In the late 1840s it made major effort to remove the state capitol from Augusta. For a view of this effort from the perspective of an Augusta Whig paper, see “Seat of Government,” Kennebec Journal, August 2, 1849.


Day. This hostility forced the Irish to look for allies. Concerned that the Whig ideology of using government as instrument of social reform would be used to push Protestantism at their expense, Catholics tended to gravitate to Democrats as their belief in limited government was more appealing.

**Economic Changes in the 1840s**

In 1843 after the effects of the Panic of 1837 ended, the nation grew rapidly, as can be seen from the booming population in other states, yet Maine’s growth was muted. Coastal towns and cities did well, thanks to the success of its merchant shipping, shipbuilding, sawmilling, and cod fishing. But the inland frontier suffered as farmers were faced with two grim realities; first, most of their soils were thin and easily exhausted and second they were losing both their traditional out-of-state markets as well as a portion of the Maine market.

**The Lumber Industry**

The lumber industry had more quickly recovered from the Panic of 1837 than other economic sectors. The 1840s was a period of steady growth and profitability, but the industry was in the throes of change. In its relentless search for virgin pine forests, it sent loggers further east and north up the Penobscot and then onto the Piscataquis, the Mattawamkeag, and the West Branch. The size and scope of the lumber industry made it the most powerful political force in Augusta. Yet, interestingly, the industry rarely spoke with a united voice. There were too many divisions, a reflection of the state’s geography.

There were also major divisions between those who speculated in land, those who logged, those who drove the logs down river to the mills, and those who owned the booms that
sorted the logs for rafting to the saw mills. In 1847, for example, the legislature was the arena for a battle between David Pingree, of Salem, Massachusetts, who owned the Penobscot Boom and the men who drove the logs down the river.\(^7\) What was at issue was money – what rates would the legislature allow Pingree and his monopoly to charge for handling, storing, and separating their logs.

This new competition drove down prices that Maine lumbermen could command and some of Maine’s most entrepreneurial lumbermen responded by leaving the state. Isaac Stephenson, who had learned the lumber business in Aroostook, started operations in Wisconsin in 1845, buying land, building dams, and operating booms. Later, he would represent Wisconsin in the United States Senate.\(^8\)

**Farming**

For most of Maine farmers, the 1840s were bad years. Midwestern farm products flooded into Maine’s traditional markets in the northeastern cities at an accelerated pace. Massachusetts’ Western Railroad reached the Hudson River from its starting point in Boston in 1841. Now trains could carry Midwestern grain and pork directly into Boston, avoiding the long shipping routes. In the years from 1843 to 1847, according to the *Bangor Whig and Courier*, Maine imported from Western and Southern sources 330,000 barrels of flour, 40,000 barrels of pork, and 600,000 bushels of corn.\(^9\) In fact, as a result of the flood of Midwestern farm produce

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\(^7\) Wood, *A History of Lumbering in Maine*, p. 134


\(^9\) *Bangor Whig and Courier*, January 30, 1847.
and Maine’s tired soils, the state’s total farm production would virtually stagnate during the
decade.

Maine farmers could do little to halt the flood of Midwestern produce that seized their
markets, but they did respond – in very different ways. The more successful commercial farmers
tried to improve their own competitiveness by investing in fertilizers, improved seeds and better
breeding stock. Some turned to the Maine Legislature, petitioning it in 1841 to create an
agricultural school with an experiment station.\textsuperscript{10} Most likely, commercial farmers were in the
lead in this effort as they had money to invest in the improvements such a school would
recommend.

\textbf{Merchant Shipping}

Recovery from the deep depression caused by the Panic of 1837 started in the early
1840s, beginning first in the demand for cotton. Maine’s shipping was growing beyond its
traditional role as an auxiliary to the extractive lumber industry. While they were carrying cotton
to market, they also were providing a wide range of shipping services to industries throughout
the Atlantic.

Shipowners often specialized in certain cargoes, trading routes, or regions. An increasing
number concentrated on the "triangle" trade.” Maine ships delivered lumber, fish, and farm
products to Savannah, Charleston, New Orleans, or Havana, where they loaded cotton or sugar
bound for Europe. There they took on cargoes of manufactured and luxury goods which they
carried to Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. Most of Maine’s shipping merchants specialized
in carrying bulk cargoes where low rates, not speed, were most important. The fuel for the

rapidly growing triangle trade had become Southern cotton. US exports of cotton doubled from 1830 to 1840.\textsuperscript{11} To win business, Maine’s merchant shippers planted deep roots in the plantation South. Some set up branches in southern ports. Business with Southern merchants, factors, brokers, businessmen and politicians led to close personal friendships. In some cases those friendships flowered into marriages. Some of the closest relationships were between the ship owners in Bath and merchants of New Orleans.\textsuperscript{12} The single largest fleet owner in the state was Edward O’Brien of Thomaston who had started in 1827 and over his lifetime completed more than 120 ships. Most of his ships were built specifically for carrying cotton.\textsuperscript{13}

The close economic ties between Maine and the South often had political consequences. A number of Maine politicians such as Edward Kavanagh, John Dana, and Shepard Cary, lined up in 1843 behind John C. Calhoun, the fire-eating advocate of Southern rights, who wanted the Democratic presidential nomination at the 1844 national convention. That same group of Calhoun supporters also tried to elect one of its own to the US Senate to fill the seat Reuel Williams vacated when he resigned. They also tried to win for Edward Kavanagh the Democratic nomination for Governor.\textsuperscript{14}

Shipping merchants had an increasing stake in national and Congressional politics. In fact, their profitability depended on what Congress and the US State Department. They did not want Congress to weaken the provisions of the Navigation Act of 1817 which restricted the

\textsuperscript{11} For American cotton exports, see North, \textit{The Economic Growth of the United States}, “Table A-VII Value of Total Exports and Cotton Exports, 1815-1860” p. 233.

\textsuperscript{12} Owen, \textit{History of Bath}, p. 214.

\textsuperscript{13} Bunting, \textit{Live Yankees}. p. 29.

coastal trade to American-owned and built ships.¹⁵ Under this Act, foreign owned ships were prohibited from visiting more than one American port on any trip to the United States, putting them at a distinct disadvantage. Equally important, they lobbied Washington to push foreign countries to open up their ports to American ships. High tariffs hit shipping merchants in their pocket books. They knew that high tariffs reduced imports and thus the amount of cargo looking for ships. They also feared that raising tariffs would result in foreign governments retaliating and increasing tariffs on American goods, which would quickly lead to reduced exports and less cargo. Since the Democratic Party was anti-tariff, the state’s shipping industry tended to be Democratic.

**Shipbuilding**

In 1841, the importance of shipbuilding and cotton to Maine was highlighted when William Henry Harrison, the recently elected President of the United States, visited Maine. One of the purposes of his trip was to visit the Bath shipyards where so many of the nation’s ships were constructed. There he marveled at the *Rappahannock*. Then under construction, it would be the largest wooden merchant ship ever built in the United States. Its owners built it to carry southern cotton to Europe.¹⁶

The greatest competitive asset of the Maine yards was their low wage structure. Wages made up the largest part of a ship’s cost – more than lumber or fittings. Maine wages were low

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¹⁵ See Roger Duncan, *Coastal Maine*, p. 280. In addition, maintaining intact the Navigation Act, the shipping interests also had an interest in increasing the national government’s spending on lighthouses and other aids to navigations. See the petition of ship masters and merchants in Bucksport, Ellsworth, and Calais for beacons and buoys on the Muscle Ridges. *Congressional Globe*, Vol 10, No.5, December 24, 1842.

for two reasons: the state’s marginal farmers who had to find wage work at any price and skilled men from shipyards of depressed New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were equally eager for work.\(^{17}\) A ready supply of labor was even more important in the 1840s than in previous years because much of inexpensive oak needed to build a ship had already been stripped from the state’s forests. In fact, by the 1840s most of the lumber and other components used in Maine-built ships came from outside the state.\(^ {18}\)

Like shipping merchants, shipbuilders rarely attended the Maine Legislature. The state had no power or influence over the demand for ships or the costs of building a ship. But because they too had a stake in “free trade” they also paid close attention to Congress. In addition to supporting a general reduction in tariff rates, they concentrated their ire on the tariffs that made a Maine-built ship more expensive. Their fought against the high rates on the iron, copper, cordage, chains and anchors, all materials needed to construct a wooden-hulled ship. England was their major supplier. A young Democratic Congressman, Hannibal Hamlin, reported to his fellow congressmen that these tariffs forced a Maine shipbuilder to incur an extra $2,290 in costs to build a 500-ton ship, an extra $1,274 to build a 250-ton brig, and $617 more to build a 100-ton schooner.\(^ {19}\)

\(^{17}\) Nevertheless, the workers tried to improve their position, using direct action and legislative action. In the latter part of the 1840s, ship carpenters led a state-wide effort to convince the legislature to mandate a ten-hour day. In 1848, the legislature did respond passing a law that made ten hours of work a legal day’s work. See Charles A. Scontras, Collective Efforts Among Workers: Beginnings and Foundations, 1820-1880 (Orono, Maine: Bureau of Labor Education, University of Maine, 1994) pp. 128-134.


Shipbuilders also paid close attention to their senators and congressmen to make sure that Congress did not weaken the provision in the Navigation Act that prohibited foreign-built ships from entering the American coastal trade. Because the tariff issue was so important, shipbuilders, like the shipping merchants, aligned themselves more with the Democrats than the Whigs. The Thomaston town historian called his shipbuilding town a “Democratic stronghold.”

**Fishing**

The fishing industry was flush in the 1840s. Cod continued to be the most important product. The subsidies for cod schooners contained in the 1819 Cod Fishing Bounty Law were essential to the state’s fishermen.

Defending the Bounty Law was one of the top priorities for any Maine senator or congressman. In fact, the Maine congressional delegation, more than Massachusetts’, became the primary supporter of the Law. Maine Democratic Senator John Fairfield was one of the leaders, for example, of the delegation’s efforts to protect the Bounty, which was attacked once again in 1846 by Democratic Senator Benton of Missouri who was speaking for many westerners. Maine beat off this attack but the increasing power of western states in Congress made the fight to protect the Bounty Law harder every session.

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22 O’Leary, *Maine Sea Fisheries* p. 64.
Manufacturing

In the first years of the 1840s one of the most contentious issues before the Maine Legislature was the state’s policy on manufacturing. It was an issue because Maine’s manufacturing was not growing as fast as that of the other New England states. The Whigs, seeking advantage, put the blame on the Jacksonian laws passed in 1836, which made investors in manufacturing companies personally liable for a company’s debts. The Whig Portland Advertiser called that Democratic policy “the most direct and most suicidal legislation [that] has driven away manufacturing capital from among us.”23 Ultimately the Whigs passed a repeal law in 1844, which was signed by Democratic Governor Anderson.

It is not clear whether the repeal of the Jacksonian legislation, or the final recovery from the Panic of 1837, or the high cost of water power sites in Massachusetts that made Maine more attractive, but in 1850 there were nineteen cotton mills in Maine, employing 2,959 women and 780 men.24 Promoters had started to develop sites on the fall lines of the Kennebec, the Saco, and the Androscoggin. On the Kennebec at Hallowell in 1844 a syndicate opened the Hallowell Cotton Manufacturing Company, and a year later the Kennebec Mill opened in nearby Augusta.25 In 1845 Saco, which had been the site of the state’s first cotton mill, welcomed the Laconia Company when it opened a mill at Biddeford. But it was the Androscoggin that attracted the greatest interest, because of the immense power potential of the Great Falls in Lewiston.


These cotton mills pioneered a new type of manufacturing in Maine. They were vast multi-storied structures, far larger than those of any other industry, filled with noisy machinery where hundreds of women and men toiled under the direction of a manager. As the number of cotton mills increased in Maine, they would create for the first time a strong political force in Maine for higher tariffs.

In fact, it was in 1841 and 1842 that the tariff became a major issue in Maine. The Whigs, who controlled Congress, advanced a bill that called for a major increase in tariff rates. Maine Whigs, speaking for the state’s nascent manufacturing interests, strongly supported the efforts of their national leaders in Washington. The Democrats opposed the Whig bill, believing the law would hurt rather than help Maine. Democratic Governor John Fairfield, in his Inaugural Address to the Legislature, summed up the Democratic position, attacking the higher tariffs that the Whigs wanted to pass as conferring “special favors upon one specific sector of the country.”26 Fairfield was speaking for the shippers and shipbuilders and the farmers while the Whigs were speaking for the manufacturers.

No doubt reflecting his Whig editor’s frustration at Maine’s Democratic-controlled government and its lack of support for high tariffs, a correspondent of the *Bangor Whig and Courier*, who had just completed a trip to Boston, wrote: “for every day and almost every hour of every day, there comes into Boston harbor, some brig, or schooner, or sloop laden with the products of Maine, to be poured into the lap of Boston. She [Maine] is drawing from the market of Boston heavy supplies for her consumption thus stimulating the industry of Massachusetts and

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this rather more than she should do for her own welfare, since she should engage more earnestly in manufacturing herself.”

Later, the Democratic *Augusta Age* struck at the Whigs for supporting a high tariff because it would help manufacturing, while hurting Maine’s most important industries. The *Age* wrote: “Shipbuilding is one of [our] most important interests. Our manufactures of cotton and wool bear no comparison with it. Now there are very few states, if any in the Union that would be more seriously injured by a whig [sic] protective tariff than our own. It would be destructive to our great ship-building and navigation interests which have been so prosperous under our moderate tariff.”

It was not Augusta, but Washington that Maine manufacturers kept their eye on. Congress could help or hurt them. It could make foreign companies into fierce competitors or render them harmless. And the tariff issue was always before Congress and thus manufacturers had every reason to pay attention. It was the Whigs who traditionally advocated for higher tariffs, and that is why Maine manufacturers tended to prefer the Whigs.

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27 *Bangor Whig and Courier*, June 22, 1847.

28 “*Tonnage of Vessels*” *Augusta Age*, March 8, 1849.

29 But manufacturers were not always united behind high tariffs. There were companies, such as the Portland Sugar House who used raw materials grown abroad. They wanted to lower tariffs on the raw materials they imported and raise tariffs on what they manufactured.
Railroads

It was not until 1842 that the first major rail line reached Maine.\(^{30}\) In the 1830s all along the eastern seaboard, investors – often in partnerships with states and cities – had been constructing railroad lines. Only a few miles had been built in Maine because the legislature, reflecting the state’s varied geography and its many power centers, could never agree on whose proposal to support.

The first line to reach into Maine was the Portland, Saco, and Portsmouth RR, which started in Boston and completed its tracks into Portland in 1842. It used the standard – narrow gauge – track that was common to Massachusetts and northeastern railroads. Portland merchants, however, had grander objectives. Access to Boston was not enough. They wanted Portland, not Boston, to be the major railroad center of the Northeast. Under the leadership of John Poor, they went after a direct connection between Portland and Montreal. Because Poor’s goal was to connect to Canada, his proposed railroad would be “broad gauge,” the standard in Canada. His hope was to capture much of the Canadian trade that went through Montreal, trade that was unable to reach the Atlantic in the winter because the St. Lawrence River froze over. Poor organized in 1845 the Atlantic & St Lawrence RR to build that railroad. Speaking for Portland, Poor sought state funds to help finance the line.\(^{31}\)

Poor’s push for state funding, along with the campaigns from other towns for similar funding, produced a backlash. Poor did not get the funding he asked for. Moreover, the regions that, because of their location, had little chance of getting a railroad, banded together. They put

\(^{30}\) One shorter railroad preceded it. The Bangor and Piscataquis Canal Rail Road ran for 12 miles and was finished in 1836. The Franklin Rail Road, connecting Whitneyville and Machiasport, ran 7.78 miles and was opened a year later in 1843.

before the people a constitutional amendment aimed at prohibiting state financial aid to any railroad. It would prohibit the state from incurring debt of more than $300,000 except in the case of war. It passed, ruling out any state financial aid at any time to any railroad, or for that matter any canal or manufacturing project.32

This battle over the state financing of a railroad produced a permanent change in the state’s constitutional order – one that further exacerbated the struggles between Maine’s regions. Reflecting their weak-government philosophy, the Democrats had supported the amendment while the Whigs were opposed.33 Poor then turned to the cities of Portland and Montreal for funds. He was successful, and against seemingly impossible odds, construction on the Atlantic & St Lawrence began in Portland in 1846. On its way to Canada, the Atlantic & St Lawrence reached the New Hampshire border in 1850.34

Portland’s plans to make itself the center of trade in New England did not stop with the line from Portland to Montreal. A group aligned with it secured a charter for the Kennebec & Androscoggin RR whose goal was to build a broad gauge line from the Atlantic and St. Lawrence to Waterville.35 At the same time, the men behind the Portland & Kennebec RR were expanding their narrow gauge system. Maine now had two incompatible railroad systems, built on different gauges.

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32 *Portland Advertiser*, October 12, 1847

33 *Augusta Age*, August 13, September 10 and 24, 1847

34 The Atlantic and St. Lawrence reached Montreal in 1853 and that was the year the through service began between Portland and Montreal.

35 Poor promoted another set of lines that would connect the Atlantic and St. Lawrence with Waterville, and then Bangor, and then to St. John, New Brunswick. But his plan for a European & North American Railroad linking the Kennebec and Androscoggin to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia would not be opened till the 1870s. Chase, *Maine Railroads*, pp.26-30
While the public face of the battle was between competing railroad systems, the conflict was as much between towns. For example, the Portland & Kennebec RR reflected the power of Kennebec Valley merchants, while Portland, Lewiston, and Waterville merchants promoted the Atlantic & St. Lawrence. The lobbying between these systems and by railroads throughout the legislative sessions was.

The state’s new railroads joined the lumbermen as being the most deeply involved industries in Augusta and the Legislature. Railroads depended on their charters. A railroad charter usually specified the towns that a railroad could serve, its route, its financing, and the taxes it would have to pay. Usually, a railroad sought a charter that linked a large number of prosperous towns, while competitors fought those changes, wanting those prosperous towns for themselves. Each railroad also wanted a charter that gave them a legally sanctioned monopoly. They also wanted a charter that protected shareholders from any responsibility for the company’s debts – a protection their potential investors demanded. They also needed the power of eminent domain to take the private property required for their tracks, stations, and marshalling yards.

Proposed railroad charters or amendments, unlike those of manufacturers, often provoked bitter battles among the legislators, with some lasting for years.

In respect to Washington, Maine’s railroads had little interest. The Democrats, who were in control of the White House or Congress for much of this decade, opposed national financial aid for internal improvements such as railroads. As a result, there was little that Congress could do to help Maine railroads.

By the end of 1840s, however, Maine railroads, financed largely by cities, towns, and businessmen, had made some progress. Maine had four different railroads, 173 miles of track, a connection to Boston, and a line to Montreal under construction.37

Maturing Party Structures and the Single-Issue Movements

The Panic and its Political Consequences

The Panic of 1837 had unsettled the state’s politics. The election that year had favored Edward Kent as the state’s first Whig governor. Yet, the Whig success was fleeting. The Democrats fought back and elected John Fairfield in 1838 and 1839. Preparing for 1840, the Whigs were eager and the Democrats anxious. Each party knew that good organization was the priority, but the Whigs took the challenge more seriously. The prize in 1840 would be the election of a governor in September, and a president in November. The Whigs were particularly optimistic about their prospects because an economic recovery had collapsed and once again the nation was in a recession.

The Democratic Party had some serious advantages. It could deploy hundreds of campaign workers for the elections, thanks to a sitting Democratic Governor and a sitting Democratic President. Yet, the Democrats did not seem to have strong state leadership. They were divided into scores of rival power centers centered in Portland, Bangor, smaller coastal

ports, and mill towns – a product of the state’s diverse geography. These competing power centers reflected the autonomous role of the collectors of customs and the postmasters in the cities and ports. And there was yet another powerful group, based in Augusta, which itself competed for power: the party’s legislators who organized themselves as the caucus of Democratic legislators. The Whigs had a far weaker state-wide organization; they lacked the army of paid office-holders. But the Whigs appeared to reach out more actively to citizens. On June 17th, the Whig State Committee issued a call for its State Convention in Augusta to choose the party’s candidate for governor. The turnout was enormous: 1,048 delegates attended, according to the Portland Advertiser, making it one of the largest conventions to be held in Maine. The legislative caucuses of the two parties played important public roles. The Whig members of the Legislature issued a “Call” for Whigs to vote for Harrison for President. The Democratic members did the same, issuing an “Address to the People” calling for all to vote for Van Buren for President.

In fact, the state organizations always had to fight for their power within the party. State conventions, legislative caucuses, and state committees constantly faced competitors. One reason was the state organizations rarely met because travel was so difficult and time consuming. A second reason was the growing power of the counties, which reflected the state’s diverse geography and were often natural geographic and political units, as they mirrored in many cases the watersheds of the major river systems. The counties had recently won increased power. In

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38 Portland Advertiser, April 21, 1840.

39 Portland Advertiser, June 19, 1840.

40 Augusta Age, October 10, 1840. I could find no record of state convention, or a Democratic legislative caucus deciding to re-nominate the incumbent governor for re-election, yet this article did indicate that he was the approved candidate.
the system created by the State Constitution, the counties were mere arms of the governor who along with the Executive Council appointed most county officials. The only officials in the 1820s and 30s elected by county voters were the Register of Deeds and the Treasurer. However, that changed dramatically in 1842 when the legislature conceded to the counties the right for their voters to elect the clerk of the courts, the county attorney, and three county commissioners. Now locally elected officials controlled the jobs and contracts of the counties. If they allied with the local collector of customs and the postmaster, counties could now wield considerable power in the party as well as in the state. The county parties by the later 1840s were far stronger than they had been in the earlier decade. Many had permanent or at least semi-permanent leaders. For example, an active Cumberland County Committee called together the Democratic County and District Convention. A Democratic Committee convened the Oxford District Convention. Similarly, in Portland, the Democratic City Committee called together and organized the Ward Caucuses to choose men to run for the state legislature from that city. The same was also true for the Whigs. A City Committee called Portland Whigs together for caucuses in all seven wards. They also convened a General Caucus to choose a candidate for Mayor.

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42 Eastern Argus, July 13, 1840.

43 Eastern Argus, September 7, 1840.

44 Portland Advertiser, March 26, 1840.

45 Portland Advertiser, April 17, 1840.
The 1840 Election: The Whig’s Moment

The 1840 election was a grudge match. It pitted Edward Kent, the Whig, against John Fairfield, the Democrat. Kent had beaten Fairfield in 1837, while Fairfield had beaten Kent in 1838 and 1839. Maine Whigs had finally learned that one of the Democrat’s advantages was organization, and they worked to improve their own, knowing that they would have many advantages in the 1840 election. The economy was sliding back into recession; they could count on the support of former Democratic leader F. O. J. Smith and his Conservative Democrats; and there was widespread enthusiasm for the party’s candidate for president, William Henry Harrison.

Kent came in first with a plurality. Later the Legislature would give him a victory. The Whig success also sent William Pitt Fessenden, a young Whig, to Congress representing Portland. Like a few other Whigs of that day, Fessenden was opposed to slavery. Although he rarely spoke about his views publicly, when he took his seat in Congress he would vote against the “gag rule” which the South, trying to prevent any debate on anti-slavery petitions, pushed Congress to pass.

46 David M. Gould, An Exemplary Whig: Edward Kent and the Whig Disposition in American Politics and Law (New York, New York: Lexington Books, 2012) pp.56-58. Kent’s margin over Fairfield was 70 votes out of 91,174 but there was a scattering of votes for other candidates, keeping Kent from the needed majority. The State’s Constitution required that a candidate for governor must receive a majority of the popular vote. If no candidate met that requirement, the choice passed to the state legislature. First, the House of Representative would pick two names from the list of candidates who had run (but not necessarily the ones with the most votes), and those two names would be submitted to the Senate. There, the Senators would elect one of the two. In 1880, a constitutional amendment would eliminate the requirement of a majority, and substituting for it "plurality."

47 Pitt would leave Congress after one term choosing instead his law career. In 1845–46, he would be in the legislature, as well as in 1853-1854. In 1854, the legislature would elect him to be a US senator.
Only some of the political energy that fall went into September state elections. An equal amount went into the presidential election in November. The Democrats re-nominated their leader, Martin Van Buren, the incumbent President, a man known for his strong views. The Whigs chose William Henry Harrison, an Ohio politician and a military hero, because he had no known strong views.\footnote{Gail Collins, \textit{William Henry Harrison} (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2012) p. 73.}

The campaign that the Whigs waged for Harrison would bring major changes to American politics and political campaigns. His managers avoided issues and ran Harrison as the common man, raised in humble beginnings, in what many called the “Log Cabin Campaign.” The organizers’ aim was to make the election a spectacle, one that would attract voters. “Whig campaign headquarters were often constructed in the form of log cabins, and hard cider abounded at all party rallies. Whig souvenirs, containing pictures of “Old Tippecanoe” sitting in front of a log cabin with a barrel of hard cider, soon blanketed the country. Campaign banners, badges, and other paraphernalia were displayed in larger quantities than ever before.”\footnote{Robert J. Dinkin, \textit{Campaigning in America: A History of Election Practices} (New York, New York: Greenwood Press, 1989) p. 50.}

Harrison’s campaign was also the first in which the Whigs had run a highly professional and centralized national campaign. It actually looked as if they were imitating the Nashville National Committee that had run Jackson’s campaigns. Robert J. Dinkin, the authority on 19\textsuperscript{th} century political campaigns, called it “the most efficient campaign organization that the county had yet seen.”\footnote{Dinkin, \textit{Campaigning in America} p. 50.} An executive committee in Washington was responsible for all activities. They created a master file of Whig supporters by assembling all the mailing lists used by Whig
Congressmen and Senators, and they concentrated similar attention on the states, establishing district committees, issuing instructions to local leaders, and compiling reports from party workers everywhere in order to keep track of how the campaign was going. The Whigs had one other advantage in the 1840 presidential race. They chose John Tyler of Virginia to be their Vice Presidential candidate. Tyler got the nod because he was a Democrat, but also because he had been a vehement critic of Jackson and Van Buren. Harrison’s managers did not inquire any deeper into their possible Vice-President’s views.

Harrison’s “Log Cabin Campaign” was a great success, and it had a tremendous effect on turnout. The carnival atmosphere brought out tens of thousands of new voters, just as effectively as the sharp ideological divisions had in the 1828 and 1832 elections. The Whigs had pioneered a new brand of “popular politics.” Total turnout was 80.2% of those eligible to vote—an extraordinary number, and a far higher percentage than in any previous election (or any subsequent one). Harrison beat Martin Van Buren by 145,000 popular votes, and his Electoral College victory was far greater, 234 to 60. In Maine, Harrison won by a small margin, but it was the first time a Whig candidate for president had won Maine. Following their two fall victories, Maine Whigs had every reason to look forward to a bright future and to the lucrative rewards of national and state patronage.

The turnout of voters in 1840 was the largest in the nation’s political history, but in some ways it also marked the end of a political era. This was the last election in which the parties concentrated on making converts. Henceforth, parties’ focus would be on mobilizing the already faithful and getting them to the polls. To do this, both parties would concentrate on building

51 Dinkin, *Campaigning in America*, p. 51.
deeper networks of state, county, and town committees that could identify every possible voter and get him to the polls. With all of this information available, “political leaders could predict how most men would vote. The question was whether they would vote at all.” Both parties relied heavily on their many partisan newspapers and on spectacles to excite and mobilize their voters.

**Whig Hopes Collapse**

The excitement that the Whigs experienced from the national victory disappeared quickly. A month after his inauguration in 1841, President Harrison died, and Vice President John Tyler, the anti-Jackson Democrat, advanced to the presidency. But this new president was more of a Democrat than a Whig. He was critical of high tariffs, federally-financed internal improvements, and a proposed new Bank of the United States, all longstanding Whig goals. When Henry Clay, the Whig leader in Congress, used his party’s majorities in the House and Senate to pass the party’s program and tried to force Tyler to sign those bills, the president rebelled. Whigs branded their president as a traitor.

Tyler’s ascendance to the White House threw both the Whig and Democratic parties into turmoil. As one would expect, patronage was the cause. Tyler was bitter at the Whig leaders who opposed him and offered them far less patronage than they expected. Infighting within the Whigs became endemic as they fought over meager spoils. Fessenden complained about the

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whole experience, regretting the "disappointed office seekers [who] sapped the vitality of the party." Whigs of all types, as well as F. O. J. Smith and his Democratic Conservatives, claimed their rights to the national patronage spoils. In fact, Fessenden himself was drawn into a bitter dispute over which Whig would get the plum position of Collector of Customs in Portland. It was much sought after because whoever won the position would quickly become one of the most powerful Whigs in Maine. To make the patronage mess even more confusing, Tyler, knowing that the Whigs felt he was a traitor, tried to use his patronage to create a new party, one which would support him for re-election in 1844. To that end, he offered many Democrats top jobs in exchange for their future support. He found many takers. One in Maine was Washington County Democrat Bion Bradbury who accepted Tyler's offer to be Collector of Customs at Lubec. Other Maine Democrats got plum appointments as collectors of customs in Belfast and Kennebunk. The positions made these men powerful among the Tylerites as well as within their own Democratic Party.

Tyler’s battle with Henry Clay and his rejection of the party’s program devastated Whig morale. Disheartened as the 1841 election approached, Maine’s Whigs also found themselves facing the heavy burden of defending an agreement with England that ended the Aroostook War and gave Maine less land than it claimed. The Whig name was all over this deal, since it was negotiated by Daniel Webster, Tyler’s Secretary of State and New England’s most well-known Whig. John Fairfield, who was again the Democratic candidate for governor, called it a “sellout.” The result in September was a solid Fairfield victory. He beat Kent by a margin of


more than 10,000 votes. The 1841 election was important for two other reasons. For the first time, the slavery issue entered into state politics. The state’s small abolition movement had run a candidate for governor under the banner of the Liberty Party. In that same election, voters elected Israel Washburn Jr. to the Maine House. Like Fessenden, Washburn was in the minority among Whigs because of his opposition to slavery. Later, as a Congressman, Washburn would join Fessenden in creating in the 1850s the Maine Republican Party. He would also be the Maine governor who would mobilize the state when the South attacked Ft. Sumter in 1861. In the 1842 gubernatorial election, the popular Fairfield ran yet again, and was elected with a 14,000 vote majority over the Whig candidate.58

William Pitt Fessenden, the Portland Whig, had decided not to run for re-election to Congress in 1842. Part of the reason was his desire to return to his successful law practice, but a larger part was the anger that he and many of his northern Whig colleagues felt at the South. One of Fessenden’s biographers, Charles A. Jellison, described Fessenden’s frustrations: “From the first it appeared to Pitt that the Whig Party in Congress was dominated by the interests of its Southern minority, and in many instances its Northern members seemed to be guided less by conscience and party principles than by fear of offending their Southern brethren.”59 A letter to his abolitionist father further reveals his thoughts: “The more I become acquainted with the course of things, the nearer I am brought to your opinion, that the slave interest is the controlling interest in this country, and that Slaveholders are determined that northern industry & northern

58 In that 1842 election, the Liberty Party ran a candidate again, this time winning 4,080 votes.

rights shall not have even a chance to be left alone.”

In 1842 Fessenden’s anti-slavery views were a minority among Maine Whigs. Texas Annexation and the Mexican War would soon turn many Whigs against the South, but Whigs were handicapped when they did make an effort to appeal to the anti-slavery vote because the Whig national conventions often chose southerners who were slaveholders as their presidential candidates.

**Maine Sends John Fairfield and Hannibal Hamlin to Washington**

A few months after the 1842 state election, the Democratic US. Senator Reuel Williams declared that he would not run for reelection. John Fairfield, the governor, quickly announced that he would be a candidate. Since Fairfield was widely popular and the Democrats controlled the legislature, he easily won the votes of a majority of the legislators and was elected Maine’s newest US Senator. Later in 1843, Hannibal Hamlin, a friend and ally of John Fairfield, decided to run for Congress in a special election. He was a strong Jacksonian and popular with voters and with the party leaders alike, having served well for many years in the Maine House, including two terms as Speaker. On one issue, however, Hamlin was out of step with many of the state’s Democratic leaders. They, like most national Democratic Party leaders, wanted to keep the slavery issue out of politics. Hamlin, however, called slavery a “curse, a moral

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61 There was little chance that Fairfield could be elected governor again. He had already served four terms, one more than the Democratic custom of three. He would have faced a strong challenge from inside the party if he had run again.

62 Because of conflicts over reapportionment, the Congressional elections were not held until 1843. Hamlin had run for Congress in 1840 but had been defeated.
wrong," although he made it clear that he was not an abolitionist. When conservative
Democrats in the legislature earlier had tried to pass Maine’s own “gag” law, preventing
discussion of any anti-slavery petitions, Hamlin fought it. In Congress, he would become one of
the most prominent Democratic critics of Texas Annexation and of the Mexican War. Like
Fessenden and Washburn, he would become one of the founders of the Republican Party.

The Democrats’ State Government

Maine’s state government in the 1840s remained weak and small, a consequence of its
control by Democrats for all but two years of the period from 1830 to 1849. In fact, it accurately
reflected the Democratic view of what was the proper role of government. Maine’s government
provided virtually no services to its citizens or businesses; nor did it support economic
development projects. The only real “service” citizens received from the state was the court
system that decided criminal and civil disputes.

Public spending had changed little over the fifteen years since 1829. Over those same
years, other states, such as Pennsylvania, Maryland, Massachusetts, and New York had invested
in canals, railroads and even businesses, but Maine had refused. Total state spending in 1844
(not counting debt and interest) came to just $167,000. The single largest expense was for the
Executive. Just $66,000 supported the governor, secretary of state, attorney-general and their
clers. The Legislature received $33,000, followed by the Courts at $16,000. With respect to
services for citizens, the state spent $27,000 on Education, $17,000 on Defectives (insane asylum

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and prison), $5,000 on Indians, $3,000 on Agriculture, and $1,000 on Highways. This money was allocated to support various public services. Citizens only came into contract with the state government in the spring. That was the season when the towns collected a state tax, along with a town and county tax. It was called the “general property tax” since it taxed all real and personal property. By law, the towns had to send a specific amount, determined by the Legislature, to the state. Democrats, who depended on the votes of the inland frontier’s farmers who were always cash-poor, regularly voted down programs that might require tax increases. The Democratic governor, John W. Dana, summed up his party’s view of government in his 1847 Address to the Legislature. “The world had been enthralled for ages,” he said, “with too much legislation.”

The Businesses of Augusta

Virtually the entire business of the state took place in Augusta, and in just one building – the State Capitol. Three types of people came to Augusta. The first was the legislators who came to advance the interests of their towns and citizens. The second type was politicians and their party friends. The third type was businessmen who came to secure a very valuable document – their corporate charter. Nearly all businesses got the charter or special law they wanted without much debate. The state tended to grant such privileges to whatever group of businessmen requested them. The reason why Maine was so free with its charters was that there

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64 Jewett. A Financial History of Maine. See Chapter 1 "Formative Period, 1820 -- 1835," and Chapter 2 "Extravagance and Its Aftermath." Much of the debt of the state was its expenses incurred in the Aroostook County War.

65 The only other source of income was a tax on the capital stock of the state chartered banks.

were still vast swaths of untouched forests, rivers whose waters still ran wild, waterfalls looking for mills, and towns and cities eager for a mill or a railroad. And since the legislature distributed these resources to all comers, without regard to party, and without any cost to the taxpayer, there was little controversy. In this non-controversial practice, the state was pursing what Theodore Lowi described as a “distributionist” policy. But there were two industries whose charter requests often brought legislators into bitter conflict. This happened when two or more promoters were seeking the same privilege. Two railroads, for example, might each demand a charter giving them the right to serve the same city, or two loggers may want the exclusive right to dam the same stream in a unique way.

In fact, out of all of the state’s business interests, the “lumber lobby” and the “railroad lobby” appeared in Augusta most often. Other major interests, such as the merchant shippers, shipbuilders, and cod schooner captains rarely appeared. Augusta rarely heard from any organized civic or trade associations; the reason was that they did not exist. In fact, there were virtually no state association, like those quite common now, that had then any presence in

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68 See Theodore J. Lowi. "American Business, Public Policies, Case Studies and Political Theory." World Politics, Volume 16, No. 4, 1964. He describes American public policy in the first half of the 19th century as an era of "distributive policies." Government provided rights and privileges to people to use public resources for private purposes. Because there was so few people and so much in resources, such policies produced few political conflicts; there was plenty for everyone. In those decades, the state had minimal taxes and minimal expenses and thus there were few conflicts between interests over taxing and spending. Lowi argues, however, that by the end of the 19th century, this system came to an end and as there were more people and fewer resources eventually, government began to adopt "regulatory" and "redistributionists" policies in an effort to manage the increasing bitter conflicts among people and interests over government activities.

Augusta. There were no associations of teachers, lawyers, sheriffs, insurance agents, real estate brokers, blacksmiths, or stagecoach owners, for example. The only two associations that did appear in Augusta in the 1840s were the Maine Temperance Union and the Maine Anti-Slavery Society. They were pioneers, but they came to advance a cause not to promote the interests of industry or a group of businesses.

The “business” or ‘association” that was a constant presence in Augusta was the political party. Whigs and Democrats had a massive stake in what happened in Augusta. It was the place where all the decisions were made that could help them or hurt them. It was where the governor and the executive council decided who was going to fill the state’s patronage jobs. It was where the votes for governor and for the members or the legislature were counted, and where the legislature battled to pick a governor or state senators when no candidate received a majority at Election Day. Augusta was also the place where the legislators chose the attorney general, secretary of state, the auditor, and the state’s US Senators. And it was in Augusta where Whig and Democratic legislators caucused or joined conventions to pick their party’s candidate for governor.

The Maine Legislature was critical to the Whig and Democratic Parties for another reason. The Legislature set the “rules of the game,” for how the parties and candidates would compete for power. It set the dates for elections, determined the number of judges and observers at the ballot box, decided what offices would be appointed and elected, and set the vote-counting procedures. It also decided contested elections. All of these rules and decisions had winners and losers. The Legislature might not provide many services to its citizens and might be irrelevant to many of the state’s businesses, but to the Whig and Democratic parties that were in the business of politics, it was where they had to be.
President Tyler Chooses Manifest Destiny

Following their elections to the US Senate and to Congress, respectively, Fairfield and later Hamlin arrived in Washington in 1843 and found Congress bitterly divided. The cause was President Tyler's efforts to annex Texas.70 Frustrated by the hostility of his own party, which rendered him largely powerless on domestic policy, he saw an opportunity to make his mark by appealing to the growing popular enthusiasm for manifest destiny. He also saw that an expansionist foreign policy might be the foundation on which he could pull together a new coalition that might re-elect him as president in 1844. He chose to focus his attention on bringing the slave-holding Texas Republic into the Union. Up until Polk, politicians of both parties, both southern and northern, had shied away from the annexation of Texas, knowing that the issue would be extremely divisive.71 Yet, Tyler plowed ahead. He appointed a special representative to negotiate a formal agreement with Texas. When he had a draft treaty agreement, he and his Secretary of State, John Calhoun, tried to get the Whig-controlled Senate to approve the agreement, but they failed in June of 1844 because they could not assemble the needed 2/3rds majority. Southern politicians generally supported Tyler’s plan, while the North was divided. In Maine most Whigs opposed annexation, as did Liberty Party supporters, but Democrats were split.

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70 Texas had fought for and won independence from Mexico in 1836.

71 Gary May, John Tyler, pp. 96-97.
The 1844 Campaign: A Referendum on Expansion and Texas

President Tyler’s failure to win Senate approval for the treaty did not dissuade him from his goal of bringing Texas into the Union. Thus, annexation became the major issue in the 1844 presidential campaign. At the Democratic National Convention, Martin Van Buren was the front runner, but the man who conceived the Democratic Party as an alliance between the planters of the South and the plain republicans of the North was rejected because some southerners felt he was not pro-slavery enough. Van Buren would never forget this slight. The Democrats turned instead to James Polk, a slave-owner and long-time follower of Andrew Jackson. Polk strongly supported annexation. Maine’s newest Senator, John Fairfield, was briefly considered for Vice President, but was dropped when a Georgia delegate told the convention that when Fairfield was governor of Maine, he had refused to turn over to Georgia a ship captain and a mate whom Georgia claimed had helped in slave stealing.  

The Whigs choose Henry Clay as their candidate. He was less enthusiastic about annexation than Polk. The two campaigns followed now well-trod paths. Party newspapers relentlessly attacked their opponents, as did out-of-state speakers touring the state. Mass meetings and rallies became standard. Assessments on the salaries of patronage holders and party officials financed the campaigns. Organization, voter contact, and getting out the vote were the priorities. The party in power in Washington and in the state could rely on patronage workers to do much of the work. The prospect of winning or losing hundreds of well-paying jobs stimulated every state party to make their maximum efforts.  

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Annexation was as major an issue in the Maine state elections in September as it would be in the November presidential election.\textsuperscript{74} Annexation and expansion were popular.\textsuperscript{75} The Democratic State Convention, for example, supported annexation in its platform.\textsuperscript{76} H. J. Anderson, the Democratic candidate for governor, was pro-annexation. Anderson won the governorship by 48,942 to 38,501 votes and a few months later James Polk won Maine by a vote of 45,719 to 34,378. He prevailed in that national election by a vote in the Electoral College of 170 to 105.

The election of 1844 put South-North issues, and even slavery itself, into the center of the state’s politics. Anxieties about the South helped the Maine Liberty Party to increase its vote to 6,245. Everyone knew that Texas was large enough to produce a number of new states, all likely to be slave states, and if they all entered the Union, they would put the South firmly in control of the US Senate and the Electoral College.

Democrats, Whigs, and the Problem of Turnout

The Maine Whigs were not happy with their performance in the 1844 elections. They believed that their problem was turnout; their total vote had fallen off from what they had produced in the 1840. Maine Whig leaders pointed to their lack of organization. In a circular they sent out to friends in other states, they wrote: “that they had relied too much on meetings and arguments and not enough on organization to get out the vote.” They urged their friends “to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{74} Many Democrats, such as Fairfield, did not support annexation but nevertheless supported Polk.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}. p. 35.
\item \textsuperscript{76} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}. p. 44.
\end{itemize}
redouble their diligence, to secure the great, the vital point, a perfect, systematic and detailed organization, by which it will be rendered certain that every voter will be at the polls.”

But it was not simply a matter of organization. Turnout was a problem that bedeviled the political parties in the 19th century, and it was turnout, both parties realized, that now determined the results of elections. The elections of the 1830s in Maine had created highly partisan electorates, with voters fiercely loyal to their parties. In the 1840s those loyalties persisted. Tens of thousands of men went regularly to the polls to vote for their party. In addition, voters’ loyalty extended to the party’s total ticket. Few men voted for the best candidate and thus few split their tickets. Members of the Liberty Party and the Maine Temperance Alliance were the exception. Because of voters’ loyalty, if a party could get its voters to the polls, it would sweep into office the party’s entire slate. Fewer than 100 votes decided the election of governors in 1829, 1837, and 1840. Turnout made the difference between success and defeat.

Getting out vote was often hard. There were no problems with those who could be called the “core voters,” the party regulars who turned out rain or shine for every election. The problem was with the peripheral voters. “Party meetings were often far away, as were polling stations. There was always something else to do,” Joel Silbey explained. “It was therefore necessary [for party leaders] to rouse the troops in each new election campaign to get them to the starting line.” Bad weather, too much work on the farm, a sick wife or child, or a dull


78 All Maine election returns are from Hoyt, Maine Register.

campaign, any of these could keep peripheral voters from the polls. The ups and downs in Maine’s election totals year to year reflected not changes in the participation of core voters but in the motivation of the peripherals. If a party could get its peripherals to the polls, it was likely to win.

**The Skills Required of Party Leaders**

With all of these complicated tasks to accomplish, politicians had to have many talents. Writing in his *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893*, Joel Silbey said: “the local politicians who shaped this era were extraordinary tacticians.”\(^8^0\) Their job was challenging and required great amounts of time. Of the challenges party leaders faced, the two most difficult were preventing splits and distributing patronage. Theda Skocpol described one of the ways party leaders in the 1840s tried to maintain unity. "Party leaders tried to avoid taking hard stands…. Normally they let implicit allusions and symbolisms in their campaigns evoke the diffuse attitudes towards government that resonated...but (they) remained vague and flexible on the specifics."\(^8^1\) Leaders preferred symbols and gestures because they could be interpreted so many ways. Clear stands on any issue, particularly controversial issues, were avoided as leaders were unwilling to risk the chance that some part of the party would bolt or stay at home on Election Day. They also needed to be good at human relations and had to keep their party together at all costs.

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\(^8^1\) Theda Skocpol, * Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origin of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1992), p. 81. Her words are as an apt for the pre-Civil War period, as for the years after the Civil War.
The Two Faces of Patronage

Patronage played an even greater role in party development and conflict in the 1840s than it did in the 1830s. The amount of patronage available to party leaders had expanded. The expansion of postal services created more local postmasters and added clerks in the larger city post offices. The 1842 Tariff covered many more products, requiring more surveyors, examiners and clerks in the customs houses of the state’s ports. But the power to dispense patronage had many unintended consequences as well; jealousy, resentment, and anger were common. For each man who got the nod for a patronage position, there were more who felt that the party leaders who made the decisions had ignored their contributions.

The career of Senator John Fairfield illustrates the problems that politicians had in distributing patronage. Soon after he arrived in Washington as a new Senator, controversies over appointments demanded his time. At issue were the decisions that President Tyler would be making on the collectors of customs in Bath, Passamaquoddy, Castine, and Kennebec as well as over the U.S marshal and the customs inspector in Portland. In 1845 when Democrat James Polk entered the White House, replacing John Tyler, he announced that all national patronage positions were now open for change. Office seekers deluged Fairfield.82 "I am plagued to death with nominations for Maine," Fairfield wrote to his wife. The senator met constantly with men seeking offices, but the pressure did not end there. If Senator Fairfield decided that he wanted a man to have a specific job, he had to secure the support of many others. "I have, in the first place, to fight the battle before the President, then before a committee of the Senate and lastly

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82 The turnover of US jobholders under Polk was virtually complete. For example, of the 16,000 postmasterships, only 3,000 holdovers survived his administration. Wescott, New Men, New Issues, p. 37.
before the Senate itself. ”

Pressures on Fairfield came from all directions. Democrats like Bion Bradbury, who President Tyler had appointed to a lucrative job, pushed Fairfield to help them keep their jobs while others lobbied him to convince President Polk to replace these "traitors."

Frustrated with the factionalism and political fragmentation that patronage conflicts created and wanting more control over national patronage in Maine, Fairfield suggested to President Polk a more rational and centralized patronage system in which he – Fairfield – would coordinate the president's and other party leaders’ patronage in Maine. Such a position, Fairfield certainly knew, would create a more unified party, and at the same time make him the most powerful Democrat in the state. Like most powerful politicians of the day, Polk seemed to prefer that Congressmen and office seekers make personal appeals to him, thus keeping the power and influence in his own hands.

**The Patronage Bounty in Maine**

The president in the 1840s controlled approximately 600 patronage positions in Maine, making him one of the biggest employers in the state. These presidential appointments were much in demand. Many paid well over $1,000, while the governor of Maine, the most well-paid state official, received just $1,500. The chance to be a US judge, US attorney, or US marshal

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83 Letter of John Fairfield. February 18, 1846. Arthur B. Staples. ed., *The Letters of John Fairfield*, (Lewiston, Maine: Lewiston Journal Co, 1922). Many presidential appointments had to be confirmed by the Senate, and thus appointments made by the President still had the additional hurdle of the Senate.

84 Fairfield to wife, *The Letters of John Fairfield*, December 24, 1844.

85 The collectorships in Belfast and Bath all paid more than $1,000 (not counting the fee income). The Postmaster in Portland received $2,000. And in the Customs House in Portland, there were nine men working for the collector, who received salaries of more than $1,000. Details on state and national offices and their salaries are found in Samuel L. Harris, compiler, *The Maine Register and National Calendar for the Year 1843* (Augusta, Maine: Daniel C. Stanwood, 1843).
attracted many lawyers. The opportunity to be a collector of customs and or a postmaster in a port or large city attracted those interested in generous salaries and lucrative fees.\textsuperscript{86} The most coveted patronage job in the state was collector of customs for the Portland District. It paid $2,000 per year (plus generous fees).\textsuperscript{87}

The resources that the president had at his disposal went far beyond such powerful appointments. His Treasury Department subsidized favored newspapers with printing contacts. The Post Office let contracts to favorites to carry the mail. There were also other contracts to construct post offices, customs houses, military facilities, and contracts to supply food, uniforms, and arms for the Army and the Navy.\textsuperscript{88}

The state employed approximately 200 men, 80 of whom worked for the state directly and 120 for the counties.\textsuperscript{89} Legislative leaders had perhaps 10 appointments, most of those clerkships. Many of the state jobs were in the Insane Asylum, the State Prison, or the state courts. The county jobs were probate judges, registers of deeds, county clerks, county attorneys, county commissioners, sheriffs, and deputy sheriffs.\textsuperscript{90} The state also let extensive contracts, to

\textsuperscript{86} For a list of US and Maine officers for the early 1840s, see \textit{The Maine Register and National Calendar for the Year 1843}.

\textsuperscript{87} The collectors also had many opportunities, some legal and some illegal, to supplement their salaries through various fees and payments.

\textsuperscript{88} See \textit{Portland Advertiser} and \textit{Eastern Argus}'s legal notices for public announcements of proposed projects and contracts. Under Democratic Presidents, the announcements would be published in the \textit{Eastern Argus}, and under Whig Presidents they would be published in the \textit{Portland Advertiser}.

\textsuperscript{89} In addition, the state had other employees, but they were not patronage appointments. Maine had between 170 and 190 legislators (depending on the decade). Legislators received a \textit{per diem} when the legislature was in session. The Speaker and the Senate President enjoyed an additional supplement. A mileage allowance for travel was another source of income.

\textsuperscript{90} These are my estimates: 15 employees in the State Insane Asylum and another 15 at the State Prison, perhaps 25 in the executive branch, which includes the governor, attorney general, treasurer, secretary of
print the annual *Acts and Resolves, Maine Reports*, and legal announcements – all usually went to printers associated with the party’s newspapers. In addition to his ability to appoint men to salaried jobs, the governor could also appoint local justices of the peace. They received no salary but the appointment made the justice an important man in his community and gave him the right to collect fees from individuals who came before his court.

While the governor made these appointments, he had to share that power with the Executive Council. The Legislature elected that body annually, voting by region. The result was that the state work force was not totally dedicated to the governor’s interests, but shared their loyalties with powerful local politicians rooted in local geographies and economies which had representation on the Executive Council.

**The Social Bases of the Two Parties.**

Up until the fallout from Texas Annexation and the Mexican War, both parties retained the political bases they had built in the 1830s. The Democrats’ core support remained the inland rural towns, the tiny French-speaking towns in the St. John’s Valley, the Irish neighborhoods of Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor, the small coastal fishing villages, and the artisans and workers in the coastal and commercial towns. Rural towns such as Liberty, Freedom, Unity and Appleton often gave the Democrats 3 to 1 majorities. When Democrats in those years described their core areas, they pointed to the “small agricultural towns.”

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state, and the adjutant general and various clerks, and perhaps 10 men in the state court system. In addition, I estimate that there 10 positions in the sheriff’s offices in each of the twelve counties.
Democrats described the Whig’s core areas as “aristocratic cities and large towns.” The Whig’s base was strongest in the prosperous old towns on the coast and on the Kennebec River but Whigs could be found in every rural town, particularly among the lawyers, merchants, market farmers, members of old Congregational families, ministers, and the wealthy. Many Whigs had fathers who had been Federalists. On a county basis, Kennebec gave the Whigs their most consistent majorities. The Whigs continued to attract, as they had in the 1830s, those most involved in the commercial economy. In a study of 408 men who sat in Maine legislature between 1843 and 1853, Wayne O’Leary drew a portrait of the leadership of the Whigs. The Whigs were men who “tended towards privileged occupation status, real and personal wealth, and a business orientation.” Compared to Democrats, they were more likely to own shares in manufacturing corporations and in banks and railroads. Many of the Whig legislators were involved in more than one line of business. Almost one-fifth of all Whigs in the sample were merchants or lawyers and owned corporate stock.

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91 Citizen of Maine, (anonymous) *A Review of Some of the Doings of the Legislature During the Session of 1841*, (Augusta, Maine: George S. Carpenter, 1841)


Single-Issue Politics: the Expansion of Slavery

Rejection by the US Senate did not stop President Tyler’s drive to annex Texas. The November 1844 elections, in which annexation was the central issue, had brought many pro-annexation Democrats into the Congress. Seizing on this opportunity, President Tyler, although a lame-duck, submitted to Congress a proposed Joint Resolution, based on the treaty that the Senate had rejected. The new resolution was not a treaty, requiring 2/3rds approval of the Senate. Instead it was an Act admitting Texas into the Union as a state, one that required only a simple majority. Congress approved the Joint Resolution in March of 1845, just a few days before James Polk took the oath of office as president. The strongest support for the resolution came from the South and from pro-annexation northern Democrats. Most Whigs opposed it. What aroused so much opposition in the north was the fear that annexation would allow the South to win control of the national government. After Congress has agreed to the Joint Resolution, the Republic of Texas became a new state in the Union late in 1845.

In the Congressional debate most of Maine’s delegation opposed the Joint Resolution. Only one Maine Congressman (a Democrat) voted for the resolution. The two Whigs voted against, as did four Democrats. Hannibal Hamlin, the freshman, made a long speech explaining his opposition. Hamlin’s action did not sit well with his Southern Democratic colleagues or with Northern Democrats who did not want to antagonize the South. The struggle over Texas was the first major battle between the North and the South since 1820 when Missouri had sought admission to the Union as a slave state.

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Organized anti-slavery activity in Maine, however, did not begin until 1832, following a three-week tour of Maine by William Lloyd Garrison. This tour led to the creation of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society. Anti-slavery beliefs at the time were largely church-based, and adherents were trying to educate people one by one. They would not take political form until 1841 when some of the Society’s leaders decided they needed to attract more followers and more attention. They broke with the Society and decided to form the Liberty Party and run a candidate for governor. The Liberty Party’s early leaders were largely ministers and reformers. Many came from Whig backgrounds. They opposed slavery, certain it was a moral evil. They rejected both the Whig and the Democratic parties, which they thought were complicit in slavery, since they were unwilling to break with the Southern leaders of their own parties.

The Liberty Party’s early performances were poor – 1,662 votes in 1841. But they persevered. In fact, they set out to create an organized party, modelled most likely on the Whig Party with which many were familiar. To match the Democrat’s *Evening Argus* and *Augusta Age* and the Whig’s *Portland Advertiser* and *Kennebec Journal*, they started their own paper, the *Liberty Standard*. Following the lead of the Whigs and Democrats, they organized town and county committees, and soon began to recruit candidates for the legislature. The party's focus on organization paid off. In 1842, its candidate for governor received 4,080 votes. In 1843, the party’s vote for governor reached 6,746. Anger at Tyler’s plan to annex Texas brought them new voters, many of whom were Whigs.

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Single-Issue Politics Grows

The popular anger in the north at Texas Annexation intensified when the recently elected Democratic President Polk continued the expansionist policies of President Tyler and launched a war against Mexico. Polk had been trying to force Mexico to sell to the United States the province of California, which includes what is now California, Arizona, and Nevada. When the Mexicans refused, Polk moved troops to the Texas border and provoked an incident that Polk used as his excuse to declare war on Mexico on May 13, 1846. The war, which the US forces quickly won, was popular, particularly in the South. But for many in the North it produced another round of fear that the South’s goal was to control the national government. Already worried about plans to carve new slave states out of Texas, now northerners faced the prospect of even more slave states coming from newly acquired California. Fearful of the South’s aspirations, a new phenomenon emerged in the north, most strongly amongst the Whigs but also in some Democrat circles. It was a new ideology, a “northern nationalism,”\textsuperscript{100} committed to unite the North in order to stop the South’s plan to create more slave states. Despite the public clamor over the expansion of slavery, the dominant Democratic Party avoided taking a public stand. It worried that the issue would divide the party, reduce turnout, or even worse, provoke a split. Democratic leaders also did not want to risk the revenge of Democratic President Polk who had made support of his policy of accommodating the South a test of loyalty to him.

Yet, less than a month later, Congressman Hamlin joined others in taking a step that would widen the growing divide between the North and South and fuel a split in the Democratic

\textsuperscript{100} For the best exposition of the development of this concept please see Susan-Mary Grant, North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2000)
Party. Whether it was a matter of principle or a recognition of the political advantages in taking
the North’s side more aggressively, Hamlin joined with a small group of northern Whig and
Democratic Congressmen and introduced on August 8, 1846, a ‘Proviso’ to the bill Polk had sent
to Congress to fund the Mexican War. Named after David Wilmot, a Pennsylvania Democratic
Congressman, the Proviso would prohibit slavery in all territories seized from Mexico. It
quickly passed the House where the North had a majority but failed in the Senate. Support for
the Proviso would be the rallying cry of northern Democrats and Whigs. Mark Scroggins
described the immediate consequences: "During the rest of that summer and fall of 1846, the
Wilmot Proviso was the most widely discussed and hotly debated topic in the country. To
Northerners, the Proviso was an earnest expression of their deepest and most heartfelt
convictions; but to Southerners, it was a gratuitous insult that would deprive them of the fruits of
Manifest Destiny.”

Single-Issue Politics and the 1846 State Election

The political situation in Maine had changed dramatically in a year. The widespread
enthusiasm for annexation had dissipated as more people began to understand the consequence:
less power for the North in Washington and more power for the South. The 1846 elections were
unique. “For the first time,” Richard Wescott wrote, “the candidates in Maine were questioned
as to where they stood on the extension of slavery.” The Whigs relentlessly attacked
Democratic hypocrisy: “[The people of Maine) feel…..that the leaders of the loco [Democratic]

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101 Mark Scroggins, Hannibal: The Life of Abraham Lincoln’s First Vice President (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1994) p. 54.

102 Scroggins, Hannibal pp. 54-55.

103 Wescott, New Men, New Issues p. 50.
party have bowed in degrading subservience to the dictation of the slaveocracy, and thus lent their influence and their votes for acquisition of the Slave power in the Union.\textsuperscript{104} The Democrats in their platform tried to \textit{finesse} the slavery issue. The Democrats supported Polk’s War, but also took the position that they did not want any more slave territory. The Liberty Party came out against annexation, the war, the expansion of slavery, and slavery itself.

The 1846 election results made it clear that the fears of the South and the Slave Power had become a major political issue in Maine. Turnout was definitely up from 1845. John Dana, the Democratic candidate for governor, got 36,031 votes to the Whigs 29,557. But the big surprise was that the Liberty candidate for governor, Samuel Fessenden, the father of William Pitt Fessenden, attracted many Whigs and polled 9,398 votes.\textsuperscript{105} To more and more Whigs, loyalty to their party was taking a backseat to the cause of stopping the expansion of slavery. But the impact of the anti-expansionist votes was far greater than the number of votes that Samuel Fessenden received. Liberty Party voters had turned the state election upside down and paralyzed state government. They had prevented John W. Dana, the Democratic candidate for governor,\textsuperscript{106} nineteen state senators, and sixty state representatives from winning, thereby forcing them all into run-off elections.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{104} "The Election" \textit{Bangor Whig and Courier}, September 21, 1846.

\textsuperscript{105} Some Whigs, it became clear, were comfortable voting for a third party although they could never vote for a Democrat.

\textsuperscript{106} The legislature elected in 1846 was Democratic-controlled. Thus, when the legislature chose the governor the beginning of its 1847 session, it elected Dana.

\textsuperscript{107} See report by agent in the party's \textit{Liberty Standard}, April 22, 1847. The Constitution required that all candidates -- to be elected -- had to get a majority of the popular vote. (The success of Liberty party in preventing candidates from winning majorities so threatened the parties that some Democratic and Whig legislators proposed changing the Constitution to allow candidates for any office who received the most votes to be elected, rather than only those that received majority, as the Constitution required.) For even
These elections further boosted the power of the anti-slavery forces. Because Liberty Party voters were loyal to their cause, their leaders were able to force major party candidates to commit to vote anti-slavery. If a Whig or Democrat candidate would commit, the Liberty Party would urge, in the next vote, their men to support the Whig or the Democrat who took the pledge. The commitments that the Liberty party had extracted from Whig and Democratic legislators had an immediate result. When the new legislature met for the 1847 session, for example, it voted to support the Wilmot Proviso. Democratic state party leaders, in particular, found themselves in a very uncomfortable position. They could oppose the Proviso, showing their loyalty to Polk, but alienate the growing group of Democrats opposed to Southern expansion, or they could ally themselves with those who supported the Wilmot Proviso and risk losing their presidential patronage. Northern Democrats who supported the Wilmot Provision called party leaders who supported Polk’s pro-South policies “doughfaces.”

Anger at the South’s plans to expand slavery into the western territories continued to grow, and more men saw the Proviso as the means to thwart the South’s plans. When the Wilmot Proviso again came up for a vote in 1847 in Congress, all of Maine’s Congressmen present voted to support it. Evidencing the growing independent role of the counties, Whig county and district conventions passed resolves condemning the Mexican War as unjust and designed to

more detail on the number of re-votes required for the Maine House, see “Representative Elections” Kennebec Journal, October 2, 1846

108 Though the Constitution’s drafters had certainly not planned it, this requirement of a majority empowered insurgents at the expense of the major parties.


110 For an excellent analysis of the power of Southern Democrats over the national party and Northern Democrats in the pre-Civil War period, see Michael Todd Landis, Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014)
“aggrandize the slave power.” Even parts of the Democratic establishment sided with those supporting the Proviso. The *Eastern Argus*, which was now the voice of the Democratic Party’s leaders, called on Democrats in Maine “to not sanction any vote which will lead to the introduction into the Union of another inch of slave territory.” But President Polk soon made it clear that he expected loyalty from the men who held national patronage and made his policy of accommodating the South a test of that loyalty. On the final passage of the funding bill, from which Southern senators had stripped the Proviso, five of Maine’s Democratic Congressmen shifted their vote in the face of pressure and voted for funding without the Proviso. Only two congressmen voted against final passage: one was the sole Whig and the other was the Democrat, Hannibal Hamlin. The Democratic Party, long beset by geographic factions, now for the first time, was beginning to divide on ideological lines.

**Jacksonian Opposition to the “Slave Power”**

Hamlin was alone among the Maine Democratic Congressmen in his strong anti-slavery stand, but not alone in the Democratic Party itself. In fact, he was one of a growing group of Jacksonian Democrats who found compelling reasons in their Jacksonian heritage to oppose the South. Jackson had taught them that the ‘Money Power’ was an evil that must be fought because unfettered and unaccountable power threatened the rights and liberties of the common people. In the 1840s, Hamlin and others ceased to worry about the “Money Power,” but now saw in its

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112 *Eastern Argus*, February 3, 1847.

113 Wescott, *New Men, New Issues*, p. 68.

stead a rising and aggressive “Slave Power” led by Southern plantation owners trying to seize control of the national government by creating new slave states. This Slave Power now threatened the American Republic, and men had to resist. By their opposition, they were turning their back on the orthodox Democratic view that slaveholders were upright agrarian yeomen. They advanced a new view – that plantation owners were grasping aristocrats who endangered the American experiment. They rejected the long-held Democratic strategy, first articulated by Martin Van Buren, that the Democratic Party’s future was an alliance of southern plantation owners and common people of the north.

What motivated Jacksonians like Hamlin to oppose the expansion of slavery into the territories was not a concern about the plight of slaves, but a fear that slavery in the territories would destroy the promise that the western territories had for (white) “common people” seeking a better life. The anti-expansion Jacksonians viewed slavery not as an issue of morality, but as an issue of justice for future white settlers in the western territories. They created what would later be called the ideology of “free soil,” which appealed directly to white farmers and workmen. These new recruits added real strength to the political forces opposing the expansion of slavery.

While the growth of the free soil ideology in the Democratic Party widened the split with the party regulars, the Whigs were growing more united on the slavery issue. Fessenden and Washburn were no longer minority voices within their party. One reason was certainly the matter of principle, but another was clearly political. Whigs were desperate to stem defectors to

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the Liberty Party. Every Whig knew that if Liberty Party followers voted Whig, the Democrats would go down in defeat. At their 1847 state convention in Augusta, the Whigs made an appeal to the Liberty Party vote with strong platform. The delegates attacked the Mexican War whose goal they believed was “self-aggrandizement, and the extension of slavery.” They argued that the real purpose of the recent war was to “extend and strengthen the institution of slavery and by the multiplication of the Slaveholding States to control the political power of the country by retaining a majority in the US Senate...”

Hamlin’s Campaign for the US Senate

In 1847, there were two conflicting forces in the Democratic Party. The dominant one was the state party leadership, most of whom were holders of national patronage and thus loyal to President Polk. They supported Polk’s policy of accommodating the South. The minority included men like Hannibal Hamlin who had supported the Wilmot Proviso and whose resentments against the President and against the South were growing. As suspicious as each group was of the other, the two groups, nevertheless, were not in open warfare.

All of that changed when Senator Fairfield died unexpectedly at the end of December of 1847. Within weeks, Hannibal Hamlin announced his candidacy for the seat. He was, in

117 Bangor Whig and Courier, July 26, 1847

118 Fairfield had died after serving four of his six-year term. There would be two years left in this term. Two years later, the 1850 legislature would need to elect someone to a full six-year term.

119 Hamlin had not run for re-election for a fourth term in Congress, consistent with a Democratic custom that Congressmen should only serve only three terms, a policy that made it easier for ambitious men to move up. Instead, he ran for the state legislature, and in that election he had personally felt the power of the anti-slavery activists. The Liberty Party had run against him and Hamlin had had squeaked through by just 17 votes. But Hamlin’s success gave him a seat in the hall where the new senator would be elected.
fact, in an excellent position to wage his campaign, as he was now a member Maine House of Representatives and, as always, it would be the Maine Legislature that would chose the new senator. Moreover, since the Legislature was Democratic, the new senator would most likely be of that party. An astute politician, Hamlin, worried perhaps to protect his own flank from the Liberty Party and, noting the growing opposition within his party to Polk and the Slave Power, made a strategic decision to turn the Senate election into a referendum on the expansion of slavery. One of his first acts when he entered the Maine House had been to introduce three anti-slavery resolutions. His views had clearly evolved under pressure of events. The resolutions were instructions to the state’s Congressmen and Senators. One resolution said: “The sentiment of this state is profound, sincere and almost universal that the influence of slavery upon productive energy is like the blight of mildew; that it is a moral and social evil. Influenced by such considerations, this State will oppose the introduction of slavery into any territory which be acquired as an indemnity for claims upon Mexico.” At the same time Hamlin made it clear that he was not an abolitionist. As a sign of the changing public opinion in Maine since the 1844 election, all three resolutions passed overwhelmingly. In his campaign, Hamlin featured his support for the Wilmot Proviso and attacked the designs of the South on the national government. His also played the geography card. Up until that time all the state’s US Senators had come from Western or Southern Maine. Appealing to Eastern Maine, Hamlin made much of the fact that he would be the section’s first US Senator. Supporters made much of Hamlin’s home near Bangor, the “capitol” of Eastern Maine.

President Polk and his Maine supporters could not ignore Hamlin’s challenge. As one of the original group that had pushed the Wilmot Proviso, Hamlin, they knew, would be an even

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120 H. Draper Hunt. *Hannibal Hamlin of Maine.* p. 44
louder and more powerful critic of the President’s policies if he had a seat in the Senate. To oppose him, they picked Nathan Clifford, who had been Speaker of the Maine House and a key ally, along with Hamlin, of the venerated John Fairfield. Clifford had also been a member of the US Congress; and most recently Attorney General of the US, thanks to an appointment by President Polk. Clifford had showed his loyalty to the president when he publicly opposed the Wilmot Proviso. In the campaign, Clifford would have the full support of the “presidential party” – the leaders of the state Democratic Party, mostly patronage holders who would use their power to twist the arms of the legislators.\footnote{Hatch, \textit{Maine: A History}, Vol. II p. 336,} Hamlin did prevail over Clifford in the House Democratic caucus, but in the Senate the presidential Democrats were a powerful minority and prevented him from getting the needed Senate majority. “Men who disliked slavery but who hesitated to go against the party leaders held the swing votes in the Democratic caucus.”\footnote{Hatch, \textit{Maine: A History} Vol II, p. 336.}

The Maine Legislature went through four long ballots. Anti-Slavery Whigs and Liberty Party men gave Hamlin support at critical times, revealing the growing weakness of party loyalties. Sharp parliamentary practices, the strong support of the House, and help from Liberty Party and Whig party men eventually put Hamlin over the top.\footnote{As an example of how traditional party loyalties had frayed in the fight for that US Senate seat, the Whig \textit{Kennebec Journal}, strongly opposed to Annexation, the Mexican War, and Southern expansion, congratulated new Senator Hamlin in his victory. \textit{Kennebec Journal}, May 26, 1848.} The anger at the South’s designs had continued to weaken party loyalties. The biggest wound, however, was in the Democratic Party. The party now had two hostile factions: Hamlin and his supporters and President Polk’s supporters. Most party leaders in Maine, whether out of ambition or principle, soon aligned themselves with one or the other of these factions.
The Free Soil Party

Democratic and Whig Party loyalties were challenged again as the question of the extension of slavery became one of the central campaign issues in the presidential election of 1848. The Whig candidate was General Zachery Taylor, a hero of the Mexican War and a slave owner. The Democratic candidate was Lewis Cass, a Senator from Michigan and a supporter of Polk. What was unexpected was the decision by former Democratic President Martin Van Buren to run for President on the Free Soil ticket. The architect of the Democratic Party coalition had turned against his former ally, embittered by the South’s refusal to support his presidential nomination at the 1844 Democratic Convention.124

Organized at a mass convention of 20,000 people in Buffalo, the Free Soil Party brought together reformers, abolitionists, and opponents of the expansion of slavery. The party’s slogan was “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men.” The Buffalo meeting, held on September 27, 1848 led to another mass meeting, this time in Augusta, which formally organized the Free Soil Party of Maine.125 Knowing that it needed to widen the opposition to slavery, the Liberty Party merged into the Free Soil Party. The main thrust of the Free Soil campaign was an attack on slavery on economic grounds. Avoiding the moral and ethical issues, the Free Soil campaign went after Democrats, arguing that if slavery expanded into the territories, white working men and farmers would lose the promise of equality and prosperity. They attacked the Whigs for choosing as their candidate a slaveowner. In fact, some Whigs joined in the attacks on their presidential candidate. Following their state convention, Freeman Morse and William Pitt

124 Widmer, Martin Van Buren, p. 150-151.

Fessenden ardently attacked Taylor as a southern slaveholder of doubtful Whig principles. But the real target of their attacks was the Southern slaveholding class – the “Slave Power.”

Both the Whigs and the Democrats felt threatened by the Free Soil Party, but the Democrats attacked it most vehemently at the beginning of the campaign, thinking that it would appeal to many concerned Democrats. In the presidential race, the Free Soil Party under Van Buren won 12,157 votes or 13.9% of the vote. Its vote was nearly twice what the Liberty Party normally got. The Democrat, Lewis Cass, won Maine, while the Whig Zachery Taylor won the national vote. Significantly, The Free Soilers got enough votes to deny the Whigs victories in Cumberland, Franklin, Penobscot, and Piscataquis counties. Hannibal Hamlin, though his positions were very similar to those of the Free Soil Party, took no risks, remained a loyal Democrat, and supported Cass. Much of the Free Soil vote came from Democrats. What was most interesting, however, was that so few people in the north, the region most in opposition to the expansion of slavery, had voted for the Free Soil Party. Party loyalties were fraying for some, but not for most. David Wilmot noted the persistence of “the force of old party organizations.” Patronage was as important a motivator for Whigs as it was for Democrats.

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126 See Wescott, New Men, New Issues, p. 67


128 Wescott, New Men, New Issues, p. 70.

129 In the state’s gubernatorial vote, the Liberty Party received 12,037 votes or 14.7% of the total, a vote large enough to deny conservative Democratic governor John Dana a majority, and forcing him into the Legislature for the run-off.

Maine Whigs were rewarded well. Within a few months, Taylor had removed the US marshal, every collector and every surveyor except one, and many postmasters, replacing them with Whigs. Even Democratic lighthouse keepers lost their jobs.\textsuperscript{131}

**Prohibition: A Second Single-Issue Force Enters Politics**

While the growing northern resentment at the South was testing the unity of both the Whig and the Democratic parties, another issue-oriented movement was showing that it too had public support. In the 1846 legislature, where the Liberty Party had displayed its growing power, the movement to prohibit the production and sale of liquor also scored a dramatic success by passing a major new piece of legislation with wide Whig and Democratic support. In a few years, this prohibition movement would split the Whigs and Democrats along new fault lines, different from those on the slavery issues. It would further weaken party structures and loyalties.

In 1846, the state’s prohibitionists had pushed through the legislature a tough state-wide anti-liquor enforcement bill. A young reformer, Neal Dow, a Whig, led this effort. On the one hand, his tactics were new to Maine, though probably copied from the petition campaigns that abolitionists had waged against slavery in the Congress. On the other hand, Dow rejected the Liberty Party’s strategy of forming a new party and running candidates. Instead, he told his supporters to work inside both the Whigs and the Democrats to become a powerful force in both parties. Dow’s Maine Temperance Union urged supporters to attend their own party caucuses and put themselves forward as candidates for county, district, and state conventions where they

\textsuperscript{131} Eastern Argus, May 10, 1849; Portland Daily Advertiser, May 7, 1849, and Edward Kent to Elijah Hamlin, April 22, 1849, Hamlin Papers.
could nominate prohibition men as the party's official candidates. During the campaigns, Dow's supporters would endorse the strongest anti-liquor candidate, no matter what his party. In the 1846 session, Dow brought hundreds of supporters to Augusta, carrying a fifty-nine foot petition with 3,800 signatures. Though opponents claimed the bill would violate personal liberties, the majority responded to the organized public pressure and passed the bill. Dow’s success demonstrated how a well-organized single-issue movement could become a legislative force.

The seeds of prohibition’s success had been sown many years earlier. Anti-liquor organizing had started back in 1834 with the founding of the Maine Temperance Society. The early leadership, like that of the Liberty Party, included many ministers and reformers, most of whom were Whigs. One politician who Dow had worked closely with in the early years was Edward Kent, the Whig governor. In Kent’s first address to the legislature in 1838, he had defended lawmakers who wanted to act against liquor, saying that "legal enactments" were quite proper to "put the seal of public reprobation upon the tariff of ardent spirits."

The Temperance Society's early goal was to promote personal abstinence, but many Society members wanted to go further and use the power of the state to suppress drinking. In

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132 Wescott, New Men, New Issues. p. 31.

133 Neal Dow, The Reminiscences of Neal Dow (Portland, Maine: The Evening Express Publishing Company, 1898) p. 314. Although Dow was a Whig, he worked equally well with Democrats. He had one priority -- tough temperance legislation and pushed Whigs and Democrats equally hard.

134 Wescott, New Men, New Issues. p. 49.

135 Wescott, New Men, New Issues. p. 31. The Temperance Union was founded one year after the Maine Anti-Slavery Society.

fact, in 1835, just a year after the Society's founding, the legislature responded by passing a “local option” law that gave towns the right to regulate the manufacture and sale of liquor within their boundaries. Two years later, the effort to use the state to control the liquor traffic got a further boost when some of the Society’s members founded the more political Maine Temperance Union. The Union posted a success in its first year, pushing through the first "prohibitory" law, which banned state-wide the sale of liquor in amounts of less than 28 gallons. But, while the law looked like a great victory, it was ineffective, because its enforcement powers were very weak.

The 1846 law that Dow pushed through the legislature gave the prohibition enforcement some real teeth. His success demonstrated the growing public concern about liquor and the widespread support for its prohibition. But, the passage of the enforcement law also produced a backlash. It was one thing to have a strong law on the books that was not enforced; it was another to have a strong law that was enforced.\(^{137}\) While many celebrated the passage of the bill, many others, both Whigs and Democrats, believed were angry, believing that the state had no right to regulate personal behavior.

The strong support for the 1846 law and the resulting backlash among Democrats and Whigs offers a glimpse at a new fault line that would divide the two major parties. Prohibition had strong support within both parties, but each party had strong anti-prohibitionists wings as well.\(^{138}\) For the next eight years, the prohibition movement would give birth to organized factions both pro- and anti- that took root in both the Whig and Democratic parties. Each fought


\(^{138}\) Eastern Argus, May 27, 1847. Most likely representing the view of many Whig as well as Democratic leaders, the Democratic *Eastern Argus* editorialized that "moral questions" have no role in the "foundations and compositions of parties."
in their own party for prohibition candidates and a prohibition platform. And at election time, they were becoming more willing to ignore their own party loyalties and vote for the strongest prohibition man on the ballot.

**Slavery and Prohibition**

In 1849, the prospect of another open seat, this one in the governor's office, renewed the conflict within the Democratic Party. Governor John Dana, a Democrat and member of the Polk faction, announced that he would not run for re-election. For Hamlin, Governor Dana’s stepping down was good news; he was not an ally. But the bad news was that Hamlin now had to find a candidate for governor who would be an ally when he ran for a full six year term in the US Senate in 1850. He knew that pro-expansionist Democrats would oppose him along with the Whigs. At the Democratic State Convention in Portland, the Hamlin forces supported Dr. John Hubbard of Hallowell for governor. Most of the Democratic Party leaders, however, supported Colonel John Hodgdon of Houlton. The convention was contentious and bitter, with the factions battling over delegate credentials and the seating of delegations. The central issue in dispute was whether the northern and eastern towns should be entitled to at least one vote, no matter how small they were. Hubbard supporters on the convention floor, however, were in the majority, and they voted down the pleas of the Hodgdon men. Lacking the credentialed delegates needed to win, Hodgdon was defeated and Hubbard, Hamlin’s candidate,


140 Zachery Taylor, a Whig, was elected President in 1848 and took office in 1849. Most of the presidential wing of the Democratic Party had lost their jobs, but they still tended to act a group and they were bitter at Hamlin for his lack of support for President Polk’s policies.
was successful. Although the Hamlin faction had won, they wrote a Democratic platform that tried to walk the tightrope between the two factions. It strongly opposed the extension of slavery, while at the same time asked all Democrats to be tolerant of the views of other Democrats on slavery.

Bitter at the manner in which they lost, the Hodgdon delegates threatened to “bolt” – run a candidate for governor in opposition to convention’s choice. This is what party leaders always feared, as it would almost guarantee a victory to the other party, the Whigs in this case. To maintain some unity, party leaders from the opposing factions convinced Hodgdon not to bolt. Nevertheless, Hubbard was in deep trouble, because many of Hodgdon’s supporters were likely to sit out the election. If that happened, Hubbard would lose to the Whig. After the convention, Hubbard could only count on the solid support of Hamlin’s followers; he needed to find many new voters if he was to win.

To find a new block of voters to replace the Democrats angry at Hubbard’s nomination, Hubbard and Hamlin turned to the new rising force, prohibition voters, who willing to vote the issue and not the party. This movement against liquor had thousands of believers. Some were Democrats, but most where Whigs. To secure those votes, Hubbard came out strongly for the new prohibition law, and in doing so turned his back on an entire section of his own party.

Until this point in Maine’s political history, it had been unthinkable for a candidate to run against one wing of his own party and appeal for the support of a major wing of the opposing party. To hold up their part of the deal, the prohibitionist Whigs would have to abandon their own party for this election. The fact that Whig party leaders had only given mild support to the

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141 *Augusta Age*, July 5, 1849.

142 *Eastern Argus*, July 4, 1849.
1846 enforcement bill made it easier for Whig prohibitionists to support Hubbard. In the
election, Hubbard came out on top, beating the Whig by 11,500 votes.\textsuperscript{143} Hubbard lost both the
old Polk Democrats and the anti-prohibition Democrats, but he kept the Hamlin faction, the
Democratic prohibitionists, and core Democrats who always supported the party’s ticket, and his
new Whig prohibition allies.

Hubbard’s victory increased the factional split in the Democratic Party. The Polk wing
of the party and the anti-prohibitionists were livid. One of those was Governor Dana, a man
opposed to both prohibition and the Hamlin wing of the party. He did all he could in the last
weeks of his governorship to try to sabotage Hubbard’s term as governor and Hamlin's chances
of re-election to the US Senate. He filled all the vacant offices in state government with “anti-
Hamlin men.”\textsuperscript{144}

The Fragmentation of the Party Structures

At the very time the Democratic and Whig parties needed to impose discipline and unity
against the power of single-issue politics, their state-wide structures began to crumble. For
example, the responsibilities of the various structures seemed to change constantly. The
problems are clearest on the state level. In the Whig Party, for example, in 1847 a “Whig
Legislative Committee” was the entity that called for a State Convention.\textsuperscript{145} Then the situation
seemed reversed in 1848 when the Whig Convention called on the Whig legislators to select a

\textsuperscript{143} Even though Hubbard was the candidate of the anti-slavery Democrats, the Maine Free Soil party still

\textsuperscript{144} Scroggins, \textit{Hannibal}. p. 81.

\textsuperscript{145} Bangor Whig and Courier, July 26, 1847
State Committee. Nothing more, however, was heard of that State Committee. In 1849, it was Whigs in the legislature who picked up the ball and organized a Legislative Convention to nominate their candidate for governor.

The top decision-making process in the Democratic Party was even more confused, probably because of the existence of two well-organized factions, and their growing hostility to each other. In 1847, the Bangor Democrat, a Hamlin supporter, called for a state convention, apparently hoping to unseat the sitting Governor Dana. But the Democratic legislators meeting on July 22 ignored the paper’s plea and instead endorsed Governor Dana for another term. Again in 1848, the Democratic members of the legislature re-nominated Governor Dana for governor.

In 1848 the caucus of Democratic legislators, most of whom were not Hamlin supporters, decided to elect the members of the State Committee. As this Committee would be responsible for organizing the 1849 Convention which would select a replacement for Dana who was retiring, its membership was a high stakes issue for both Hamlin and his opponents. Reflecting rapidly changing interests and using some very sharp-witted parliamentary procedures, a group of pro-Hamlin party insiders decided on their own that it would be the State Committee created at the 1846 state convention, not the one created by the legislative convention of 1848, which would have responsibility for setting the rules and credentials procedures for the upcoming

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146 Kennebec Journal, May 26, 1848
147 Kennebec Journal, July 26, 1849
148 Augusta Age, June 25, 1847
149 Augusta Age, July 30, 1847
150 Augusta Age, June 16, 1848
Democratic Convention. The Hamlin supporters had found the way to give themselves the upper hand at the convention.

Conclusion

The Whig and the Democratic parties made major improvements in their state-wide organizations in the 1840s. Each party now had a regular system of town and county conventions, legislative caucuses, and state conventions. The Democrats had a more regular structured system than the Whigs, probably because they dominated the state’s politics, electing the governor every year beginning in 1841. The Democrats used a state legislative caucus to nominate an incumbent governor but called a state convention to choose the candidate if the governor had served the three terms that custom allowed. State conventions were held, for example to nominate John Fairfield in 1841, H. J. Anderson in 1844, and John W. Dana in 1847. State Committees were often mentioned in party newspapers, but only as chosen by a legislative caucus for the limited purpose of convening the state convention.

The Whigs had a somewhat similar system, but since they lost most all of the gubernatorial races, they held conventions more often, as few men wanted to run losing elections more than one or two times. In neither party did the State Committee render any independent power, except when it was organizing the convention. And there didn’t appear to be any State Committee at any other times or a State Committee Chair who exercised power independently.

In the 1840s, the parties extended their reach far into the counties, cities, towns, and villages. They had what Altschuler and Blumin called a "high level of institutional

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151 Augusta Age, May 24, 1849
organization.”\textsuperscript{152} In this decade, each party had a system of private caucuses and public conventions aimed at energizing activists and followers to get out the vote and to bring the party together if there were any disagreements.\textsuperscript{153} In their review of politics in the 1840s, Altschuler and Blumin found that the parties’ presence extended "across nearly the whole range of political activity, incorporating once-informal hierarchies and relations into party structures, organizing local elections that previously had resisted partisanship, and building a strong and seemingly stable set of institutions for carrying out the task of recruitment, discipline, mobilization and reward."\textsuperscript{154} The 1840s was a decade when the strongest loyalty was “party feeling.” Joel Sibley noted an “irrepressible bond of unity among party members, believing as they did in ‘everything for the cause and nothing for men’”\textsuperscript{155}

Reflecting the high level of organization, the rhetoric of politics became increasingly militaristic. The editor of the \textit{New York Globe} wrote in 1848: “Parties in our republic, in their contests, may be compared to contending armies; there must be system, discipline, order, regularity, union and concert of action.”\textsuperscript{156} Campaigns were expected to create “perfect systems of organization.” This began at the local level, supported by campaign papers, good speakers, and meetings.\textsuperscript{157} “Let every school district in the state have its vigilance committee, let the


\textsuperscript{154} Altschuler and Blumin. \textit{Rude Republic} p. 47.


\textsuperscript{156} \textit{New York Globe}, April 19, 1847

\textsuperscript{157} Silbey, \textit{The American Political Nation}, p. 51.
committee canvas every vote, learn the names of the wavering, stimulate the inactive, and pour a flood of democratic truths into the fortress of the doubting. A perfect poll list was “worth more than twenty speeches.”

The political world in Maine was different in the 1840s from the 1830s in still another ways. The explosive growth of the electorate which had started in 1828 came to a halt in 1840. The presidential election of that year, which pitted the Whig William Henry Harrison against Democratic Martin Van Buren, was the high-water mark of popular participation in elections. In subsequent years, while the total vote would continue to rise because of population increases, the percentage of eligible men who voted fell. With fewer new men voting for the first time, the imperative of turnout became even more important to the parties. To win an election, they had to get all their voters to the polls.

While politics and the political landscape had changed a great deal over the decade, the state government had not. It was still small and weak and little changed from the 1820s. The imprint of the Democrats as a small government party was well reflected in Augusta. There were hundreds of patronage jobs, many well paid, but those men just managed the system, and no doubt probably could have done with far fewer men.

Despite their efforts to increase cohesion and get out their maximum vote, the parties began to face some powerful cross currents. Those pressures were so strong that, as of the 1840s, the parties were facing internal splits and increased number of men turning their backs on unity and party loyalty. The challenges came from four major sources: the persistent fragmentation of the states’ economic and political system caused by the state’s geography; the growth in the power and independence of counties; the destabilizing consequences of the manner in which

patronage was distributed in 19th century America; and the growing ability of single-issue movements to win over men who had previously been loyal to political parties.

First, Maine’s geography created scores of distinct economies. There were as many competing economic power centers in the state as there were diverse geographies. Second, the long-standing way that that patronage was distributed gave powerful patronage holders (ambitious Congressmen, Senators, newspaper editors, postmasters, and collectors of customs in the ports and the larger towns) the opportunity to compete with each other for future power and influence. Each had their own patronage to distribute, and each had a great deal of independence as to what they did as long as they supported the top men on the state party ticket. Underneath the professions of unity, they were often involved in pitched battles with other ambitious power centers in their own party.

Third were the county governments and the county political organizations that controlled them. They were growing and increasing their independent political power. Because of the fact that the Legislature made many changes in county government in 1842, the governor no longer appointed most of the county officials. County voters now chose many of their county officers. Newly elected county officials found they had budgets for clerks and officers – all patronage available for distribution. In addition, these elected officials had other patronage opportunities: budgets for road and bridge building, for printing, for legal work, and for housing prisoners in county correctional facilities. County parties organized the conventions that chose candidates for state representative, state senator, and for Congress. They had real independent political power.

The most powerful and deciding factor in the weakening of the parties at the end of 1840s was the rapid support that single-issue movements against slavery and the expansion of slavery and for the prohibition of alcoholic liquors gained. Men were passionate about these new issues
just as much as the Jacksonians and Whigs had been about Jackson, “the Corrupt Bargain,” and the “Money Power.” Those issues, however, that had divided the state in the 1830s had lost much of their ability to excite voters. The Bank of the United States had been crushed. Andrew Jackson was no longer a force. The Jacksonians had given up their campaigns against banks and manufacturers, and both parties were enthusiastic for corporations and economic development. It had become in the early 1840s harder and harder to see the issue differences between Whigs and Democrats.

The new slavery issue was particularly difficult for the two parties to handle. Both the Whigs and the Democrats had considerable strength in the South, and many of their party leaders were from the region. It was very much a dilemma for Maine Whigs and Democrats: their voters were mostly hostile to slavery, but their national party structures allied them to the Southern slave owners. The national nature of both the Whig and the Democrats parties made it difficult to respond as their constituents expected.

A whole set of new issues – slavery, the threat of the Slave Power, Free Soil, and prohibition – had been forcing their way into politics, often over the objection of the parties. Far outside the system at the beginning of the decade, these movements by the end of the decade had become entrenched in society, as well as in the party system, either as factions within the parties or as third parties. By the end of the decade, there were many thousands who were giving their votes to their causes and not their party leaders. Knowing that they were a powerful political force, the parties, desperately seeking to find a way to win elections, began to play the dangerous game of reaching out to the single-issue voters for their support.
CHAPTER V

1850-1855: THE DEMOCRATS SPLIT AND THE WHIGS COLLAPSE

Introduction

At the beginning of the 1850s the single-issue movements that got their start in the 1840s would shatter Maine’s Whigs and Democrats. The Free Soil Party and the Maine Temperance Union had both reached high levels of organization. Like the two major parties, they had newspapers and activists in all but the smallest towns. And their members were loyal. Unlike the Whigs and Democrats, they had strong central leadership and compelling messages that appealed not only to their members but also to supporters in the two major parties.

Single-issue leaders were able to insert their causes into the elections and into the political parties by exploiting what turned out to be a major weakness of two-party political system of 19th century America — the prevalence of the “party ticket” system of voting. State election laws gave no special status or privileges to the major parties. There was no party registration, no state-printed ballot, no primaries, and no official candidates. In fact there are none of the obstacles that exist now to insurgent candidates or parties. All a single-issue partisan needed to do to “get on the ballot” was to show up at the polling place with a printed list of candidates on Election Day and put it into the hands of the voters. The recently-built structures of the Whigs and Democrats had no legal or procedural protections against the Free Soil Party, the Morrill Democrats, or the Fusion Party when they ran candidates.
For the Maine Temperance Union, the goal was to pass a strong Maine Law, one that prohibited the manufacture and sale of all alcoholic beverages and was backed up by strong enforcement powers. Taking advantage of the factional fights between regular and Hamlin Democrats, the Union, with both Whig and Democratic support, pushed their law through the Legislature in 1851. This resulted in a bitter split in the Democratic Party and it divided the Whigs. Party loyalty suffered as pro-Maine Law Whigs voted for Maine Law Democrats, and anti-Maine Law Whigs voted for Democratic candidates who opposed prohibition. By 1853, perhaps 15,000 Maine men had voted for parties or insurgents that supported Maine Law, rather than for their own party. One of the results was that in both 1852 and 1853, there were four candidates on the ballot for governor, and none of them was able to win a majority.

The question of whether slavery would be permitted in the western territories was not as contentious in the first few years of 1850s as it had been in the late 1840s. Top Democrats and Whigs had wanted to get the slavery issue out of politics and had passed for that purpose the Compromise of 1850. Party leaders convinced their state leaders that the “slavery issue was settled.” The Free Soil Party, however, paid no attention and continued to run candidates. While slavery retreated from the state elections, public opinion on it was shifting. More Whigs and Democrats were listening to the warning that the Slave Power would seize political power in America and would subjugate the North.

Silence on slavery ended with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. With the strong support of the Democratic president, the bill passed over the objections of most northern Whigs and many northern Democrats. The news of its passage hit Maine like a lightning bolt. Democratic and Whig papers denounced it, and people rallied in public meetings in many of the state’s large towns and cities.
The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act put slavery back on the front burner of Maine politics, creating new splits among both Democrats and Whigs. If that was not enough, a new single-issue movement emerged in 1854. The nativist Know-Nothing Party unexpectedly surged forward from nowhere and won election after election, campaigning against Catholic immigration and Catholic voting and Catholic office-holding. Taking advantage of the fact that so many issues were in play, Anson Morrill successfully recruited the single-issue movements into a Fusion Party to support his campaign for governor. The anti-Maine Law and pro-Southern Whigs and Democrats also united to oppose the Fusionists. In those first five years of the 1850s, perhaps 40,000 Whigs and Democrats had voted at least once for a candidate of another party. For men like these, party loyalty had become a burden.

The collapse of party loyalty probably would not have been so pronounced if it had not been for some other factors. One was the provision in the Maine Constitution that required that candidates for governor and state senator be elected by majorities. This helped the single-issue movements because by law the Legislature was required to make the final choice among candidates who had not received majorities. The legislative debates and bargaining went on for weeks and filled the pages of the state’s newspapers. Often Whigs and Democrats used that time to try to convince state representatives and senators loyal to the Maine Temperance Union or the Free Soil Party to support their candidate. These negotiations gave the single-issue movement unparalleled opportunities to get Whig and Democratic politicians to agree to support them on their issues and to publicize their cause.

Other factors that helped weaken party loyalty included the migration from rural towns to the more commercial larger towns and cities. Men who left their families and communities and moved elsewhere often lost the powerful ties that bound them to their father’s party loyalties.
Also important was the consequence of the fragile financial situation of the newspapers. An insurgent faction could easily buy one, take advantage of rock-bottom postage rates the Post Office charged, and use the expanding network of rural post offices to get their message out to their supporters. Thus, it was easy to get a “Call” to a convention read in all parts of the state within a week. And the improved transportation system – the new railroads and steamboat lines – also made it easier for partisans to attend these conventions.

The population changes that helped break down party loyalties were indeed substantial. Much of this population movement was people leaving the largely Democratic rural towns of the inland frontier. It was estimated that nearly 100 towns had fewer people in 1860 than they did in 1850. Rural people moved to the larger cities, the port towns, and the growing cotton mill towns which all tended to be Whig. These were only part of the population changes in the state. The Irish population was growing rapidly, at least in the larger cities. In Lewiston, for example, nearly one-quarter of its 7,000 residents were Catholics,

But the structure of economic power had not changed that much. The lumber industry was still the largest and the most powerful lobby. The merchant shippers, shipbuilders, and cod fishermen dominated the coast. The farmers, although they were by far the most numerous group, did not have enough power to materially improve their position, though they were a constant force opposing any increase in taxes. One “business” probably fell out of the top ranks of the state’s power structure in the decade and that was the Democratic Party. Plagued by splits and insurgencies, it was no longer the powerhouse it had been in the 1830s and 1840s.

In the 1850s, the conflicts amongst the state’s many economic power centers receded somewhat into the background. The new railroads contributed to this because as they laid tracks from west to east, they opened up the insular politics and economies of the major river valleys.
While geographic conflicts in the early 50s were not as sharp as they had been, the state and the parties were now dividing on contentious political issues.

**Population Changes in the 1850s**

In the 1850s, Maine’s population growth slowed again. In those years the state added little more than 45,000 residents. The *Eighth US Census* reported that 49,000 left the state in the 1850s, joining the 67,000 who had left in earlier decades. Thus in 1860 there were 116,000 people born in Maine living outside the state.¹

The “Yankee” population was declining, but Maine’s Catholic population was growing. The Irish were the largest minority. In addition to the 15,290 Ireland-born people living in Maine, there were probably an equal number born in Maine but of Irish Catholic parentage. The rapid growth of the Irish in Maine following the Great Famine produced extreme tensions. A mob in Bath, for example, burned the Catholic church in the summer of 1854² and a few months later another mob in Ellsworth tarred and feathered the local Catholic priest and then humiliated him by parading him through the town.³ Nevertheless, because of their growing numbers in the cities, the fact that they spoke English, and the fact that they quickly registered to vote once they settled in Maine, the Irish became an important and controversial political force.

In 1854 a Know-Nothing Party was formed in Maine that targeted Catholics. Democrats denounced the new party, but most Whigs were silent, since Catholics were strongly loyal to the

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¹ See *Eighth Census of the United States (1860)* “Recapitulation: Population, Nativity, and Occupation: Nativities of the Free Population.“


Democratic Party. Whig politicians offered evidence of the Irish’s political power which they feared. In Portland, Neal Dow, the leader of Maine’s prohibition movement and a Whig, complained in 1855 that his campaign for re-election as Mayor of Portland failed because of the Irish vote.\textsuperscript{4} The Whigs in Bangor crowed in 1856 that they had won the race for Mayor despite facing a solid block of 500 Irish voters.\textsuperscript{5}

The French-Canadian population was smaller in numbers than the Irish.\textsuperscript{6} These immigrants were not as controversial since most lived in the isolated northeast corner of the state, and the ones who worked in the mills did not plan to stay in Maine, but to return to their homes in Quebec after earning some money. In addition, few registered to vote, and thus they avoided the attention of Whig politicians.

**Changes in Political Opinion in the 1850s**

The fact that most of Maine’s population originated in Massachusetts helps to explain the major shifts in political opinions that occurred in the 1850s. The largest group of Democratic voters in Maine lived on the state’s inland frontier. Most were members of Baptist or Methodist churches. Many of these churches went through “awakenings,” and one outcome was thousands of personal conversions to temperance. Similarly, the people of that region shared a Jacksonian ethos which in the late 1840s began to change. Their parents learned to fear the “Money Power” that Jackson had railed against in the 1830s and they began to sense in the 1850s a new peril –


\textsuperscript{5} Mundy, *Hard Times, Hard Men*, p. 194.

\textsuperscript{6} Three decades later in the 1890s, they would be more numerous than the Irish.
the “Slave Power” which they thought threatened their American Republic in new ways. Similarly, many of the Whigs on the coast and in the larger towns began to absorb the prohibition and abolition messages emerging out of the Massachusetts churches with which they had maintained close ties. Out of backgrounds like these came voters who would shift their political allegiances in the 1850s.

Of course, there were many who maintained their old loyalties. The shipping and shipbuilding industry in Maine had very close ties to the South and thus tended to support the traditional Democratic Party. While many had close relations with the South, these businessmen were increasingly involved in national markets, and they wanted to preserve those relationships. And there were also many Democrats hostile to crusading Protestant ministers and to the Maine Law which they believed infringed on their constitutional rights. And there were many Whig businessmen – merchants, shippers, wholesalers, distillers, and inn owners who had a stake in the profitable business of manufacturing and selling liquor. Men like these would remain loyal to the Whig Party and then the Democratic Party as the radical transformations in political parties occurred in 1854, 1855 and 1856. Many would remain Democrats for the rest of their lives.

During this period, other changes took place in political opinion. Former Whig and Democratic businessmen began to fear the South’s growing power in national affairs and began to feel that the economic interests of northern businessmen like themselves would not get proper attention in a Southern-dominated Congress or White House. Maine artisans and farmers began to feel that the South wanted to shut white men like themselves off from the economic promise of the western territories by making them slave states. And supporters of the Maine Law and of anti-Catholic laws decided that the South was more of a threat to their lives.
Economic Changes in the 1850s

The Lumber Industry

In the 1850s the center of the lumber industry was in Penobscot County, followed by Washington and Aroostook. The Panic of 1857, which affected the whole nation, also hurt Maine’s lumber industry, bringing unemployment, firm failures, and retraction of credit, but the damage was not as great as it was to the state’s shipping and shipbuilding industries. In 1860, lumbering had nearly 7,300 workers.

The economic impacts of the industry were far more extensive than the number of direct jobs it created. Men throughout the state had a stake in the lumber industry. There were bankers who financed the logging camps and drives, lumber merchants who brokered sales, and lawyers who handled transactions. There were also doctors, lawyers, bankers, merchants, shipowners, and other wealthy men who speculated, buying and selling land and logging rights. The state-wide scope of this industry, coupled with the fact that the loggers needed legislative approval to build dams, sluices, and booms, brought the lumber industry to Augusta in every session during the 1850s.

Although the industry was large and powerful, it remained fragmented and divided in many ways. The loggers continued their aggressive competition with each other. A serious

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8 These totals including logging, planning wood, sawmilling, and manufacturing wood products. It does not include the men who worked on the docks loading wood onto ships nor the men who crewed the ships which carried the wood to distant markets. *Eighth US Census (1860)* “Recapitulations: Occupations in the United States.” pp. 656-679.
conflict erupted between the river systems in 1853 and 1854 when Congress was debating what was called the Canadian-American Reciprocity Treaty. Under this Treaty, all products of farms, forests, fisheries and mines produced in either the United States or Canada could enter the other country free of tariffs.\(^9\)

Some businessmen in Maine would benefit and others would not. Kennebec and Penobscot loggers, for example, bitterly fought a special provision that gave a major advantage to their competitors on the St. John. Under the Treaty, these St. John mill-owners would no longer have to pay duties on Canadian logs coming into the United States, nor would they have to pay a special New Brunswick duty on lumber that was cut in Aroostook County.\(^10\) There were also many conflicts between businessmen within the individual river systems. The most lasting of these pitted the men who built river dams to control the flow of water, and the drivers who had to use the dams’ sluices to get their logs downstream. In the 1850s, six different dams were constructed, and the two sides battled over the fees the dam owners charged. It took the Legislature to negotiate a compromise.\(^11\)

In addition, Maine’s lumber industry lagged behind other states. It was increasingly tougher for the loggers to make the heady profits earned in earlier decades. The logging crews had cut most of the Maine’s accessible white pine and they had to turn to spruce, a species less in demand, and one that could not command premium prices. In the 1850s spruce production began to supplant white pine, and by 1861 it would surpass pine as the primary product of the


Maine forests. In fact, the profits that could be made in the Midwestern forests were attracting lumbermen who had gotten their start in Maine. In 1854 for example, General S. F. Hersey, one of the wealthiest Bangor lumbermen, began to invest in land in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. His investments led to towns in Michigan and Minnesota being named after him.13

Farming

In the 1850s the problems of Maine farmers became increasingly serious. Yet, overall production increased. The number of cows, cattle and horses was up. Rye, oats, barley and hay also up. But wheat, Indian corn, and cheese were down. And the stocks of sheep and swine were little changed.14 The problem was prices. As elsewhere in the nation, farmers were producing more but making less. The railroad boom that was sweeping Maine and the nation was the major problem. Clarence Day described the farmers in 1860 as "producing for a living rather than for profit. Thousands of them were not even getting a living from the home farm. Their operations were too small, and they were earning some money elsewhere. Part-time farmers we would call them now."15 Regrettably, the steadiest source of non-farm cash income – farmers logging their own woods – began to disappear. Day explained: "as the virgin growth was harvested ….numerous farms lost an essential source of income."

Low prices and low incomes prevented Maine farmers from modernizing. Farmers could not invest in new machinery or fertilizers, so their farming practices remained poor. Maine


farmers in 1860, according to Day, did not see the value of manure even though the lands needed to be renewed. The stock on most farms was poor and most farmers paid little attention to improving their herds through breeding. While some farmers imported good breeding stock, this practice was not common. There were few herds of strictly diary breeds. Yields of hay from pastures were also low. Farmers did not invest in proper land drainage.\(^{16}\)

Not all the news was bad, and not all farmers did poorly. Both the amount of improved land and the value of farms were greater than they had been ten years earlier.\(^{17}\) A minority of farmers, those who lived near the rail depots and had capital, could take advantage of the new opportunities in the hungry urban markets of Massachusetts. If they invested in new barns, new stock, and fertilizers, they could sell perishables at good prices to cities to the south, products that could not have survived the long trip from the Midwest. To help increase production, these commercial farmers successfully lobbied the legislature to create a Maine State Board of Agriculture that would, through meetings and publications, share best practices: improved seeds, new machinery, manuring practices, breeding strategies, drainage ideas.

Although farmers made up the great majority of the population, the state’s Congressmen and Senators did not have to pay them much attention. The reason why farmers were so weak was that they had so few common interests. Because topography, days of sun, amount of rain, and characteristics of soil varied so dramatically across the state, farmers produced scores of different products. Access to markets also varied. Some farms were near a major river, a coastal inlet, or a large town, while farmers in remote hill towns had no alternative but to practice basic subsistence farming.


\(^{17}\) Day, *History of Maine Agriculture 1604-1860*, p. 271
**Merchant Shipping**

The coastal economy boomed until the last three years of the 1850s, thanks to the shipping industry, shipbuilding, and cod fishing. The wharfs of coastal towns were filled with ships unloading or taking on cargoes to carry them to ports all over the Atlantic. Hundreds of vessels stopped regularly at the coastal towns, connecting them to ports in Boston, New York, the South, and the Caribbean.

The decade of the 1850s had started very well. The discovery of gold in California in 1849 had a dramatic impact. Hundreds of ships left annually for California, many never to return. Fewer ships chasing the same cargo resulted in higher rates. Another factor that raised rates was the Crimean War. Beginning in 1853 the French and English governments contracted for as many ships as they could find to get their men and equipment to the Crimea. Still another factor was the rapidly growing demand of the English cotton mills for Southern cotton during that war. European countries were also importing more rice and tobacco cultivated in the South, as well as wheat and corn grown in the Midwest. In return, America’s new manufacturers wanted the latest British, French, and German machinery and raw materials.

The great profits earned in the early years of the decade encouraged shippers to order more ships. But, when the Crimean War ended, the bubble burst and the Panic of 1857 was on. It closed banks and factories, bankrupting tens of thousands and sending America into a deep

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18 In 1853 it was estimated that since the discovery of gold in California 600 ships had gone around the Cape of Good Hope and never returned. One they arrived in California, their crews jumped ship and went to the gold fields to make their fortune.

19 *American Annual Cyclopedia and Register of Historical Events.* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1861), pp 103-106. The growth in American foreign trade was enormous in the years after Maine became a state. In 1860 the United States’ imports were $360 million and exports $292 million. In 1820 imports had been $62 million and exports $42 million.
recession. The ships built in the expectation of continued robust trade were laid up in ports unable to find cargoes.\textsuperscript{20} But, three years after the depression began the American economy started to revive, and by 1860, the shipping industry was definitely on the mend.

A major part of Maine’s shipping industry became more dependent on the South. A report published in The \textit{Eastern Times} in 1858 shows that relationship. On November 27, 1858, of the one-hundred sixteen ships lying in the port of New Orleans, sixty-six were either built in Maine or were owned by Maine men. And at Charleston Harbor in South Carolina, of the eighteen American ships, fifteen were either owned or built in Maine.\textsuperscript{21} The close economic connections between Maine ship owners and Southern merchants and shippers led to close social ties between the Maine’s coastal towns and cities and Southern political and social leaders. Additional evidence of those close ties was the warm reception that Jefferson Davis, Buchanan’s Secretary of War, received when he visited Portland and other Maine cities in 1858 and when, on the same trip, he received an honorary degree from Bowdoin College.\textsuperscript{22}

Though they agreed on the need for low tariffs and free trade, Maine’s shipping industry had virtually no presence in Augusta, as the state could do little to help it. Focused on Washington, merchant shippers lobbied the Secretary actively but often had different goals. For some the priority was opening up ports in the British West Indies; for others the priority was the ports in the Spanish West Indies; and for others, new European ports. There was another large group in Maine whose goal was increased trade with British Canada. These merchant shippers


\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Eastern Times}, December 17, 1858. A slight variant of that article was also published in the \textit{Portland Advertiser}, December 28, 1858.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Portland Advertiser}, August 24, 1858.
were enthusiastic supporters of the Reciprocity Act of 1854 as it promised increased trade in raw materials shipped between Canada and the United States. Because of their general support for free trade, shippers were more often Democrats than Whigs.

**Shipbuilding**

The first half of the 1850s was one of the most prosperous periods for Maine’s shipbuilders. In 1855 Maine produced 388 ships with a total tonnage of 215,904 representing thirty-five percent of the national total.23 Maine's share of the larger ships – the ones used in the foreign and long-distance coastal trades – was even greater at 56 percent.24

But beginning in 1856 the business collapsed. Overbuilding, fed first by the California Gold rush and later by the immense logistics of the Crimean War, caused it to come crashing down. Many of the shipyards closed up and the ones that remained were desperate for work. Still, the Maine yards built 57,343 tons of ships, a larger amount than any other state.25 The revival would not begin until 1859, but in that year, shipbuilders had another worry; they looked to the future with anxiety, fearing the possibility of a conflict between or a separation of the North from the South.

But the Maine shipyards faced other problems as well. Any decline in world trade, for whatever reason, caused shipowners to cancel their contracts for new ships. Also, the state’s yards had reason to fear the growing competition from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia whose yards could pay lower wages than Maine’s.

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Like the shipping merchants, the shipyards continued to be outspoken supporters of free trade. On international trade they, like the Democrats, opposed high tariff policies, but they were most angry at the tariffs placed, at the behest of American manufacturers, on items needed to build ships, such as hemp, salt, iron fittings, and sailcloth.

**Fishing**

Maine’s cod fishermen did very well in the 1850s. Cod fishing was especially important to eastern Penobscot Bay and the Downeast coast because of the smaller presence there of merchant shipping and shipbuilding.

Maine's cod fishermen knew that the actions of Congress could bring them prosperity or collapse. Their primary goal was to protect the 1819 Bounty Act and its payment formula against efforts by southern and western congressmen to repeal it. From the passage of the first Bounty Law, about $11 million was paid out to fishermen in Maine and Massachusetts. In 1858 the Bounty Act debates in Congress grabbed the attention of all the cod schooner fisherman. The Democratic US Senate that year voted to repeal the cod fishing bounties. The Maine Democrats tried to repair their reputation in the fishing towns, while the Republicans

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26 By the 1850s the Bounty Act was in a precarious position. The forces pushing for repeal –Southern and Western Congressmen were growing in numbers and repeal efforts were beaten back by very narrow majorities. See Appendix 25 “Regional Tabulation of United States Senate Votes on The Fishing Bounty Question, 1839 and 1858” in O’Leary, *Maine Sea Fisheries*. p. 373.


28 See “The Fishing Bounties,” *Portland Advertiser*, June 1, 1858. The US House of Representatives did not concur with the Senate action.
pounced on the opportunity. Republicans also suggested that the Southern attack on the bounties was met to punish Maine for being a friendly home for abolitionists.”

The Canadian American Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 got little support from Maine’s cod fishermen. Proposed by Democratic President Franklin Pierce and approved by the Democratic Congress, the Treaty abolished tariffs on Canadian fish imported into the United States. A likely result would be that the imported cheaper Canadian fish would push down prices that Maine’s fishermen could get for their catch. Republicans in the late 1850s used this issue aggressively when they were campaigning in the fishing communities.

**Manufacturing**

In the 1850s, manufacturing in Maine began finally to expand, due in large measure to the construction of new cotton mills in Lewiston, Saco, Biddeford, and Brunswick. But manufacturing was expanding elsewhere as well. Auburn had begun to assemble boots and shoes; rural Kennebec and Androscoggin counties woolen goods; and Portland was making rum and metal-products. These new mills created new economic and political power centers in communities blessed with raging waterfalls.

Maine’s cotton mills were unique in another respect. Boston capitalists built many of them as only they had the resources to finance the construction and operation of new mills. In fact, Massachusetts shareholders, mill treasurers, engineers, and commission agents decided the

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29 See “The Fishing Bounties,” *Portland Advertiser*, June 1, 1858.

30 Graeme S. Mount, “Maine and the End of Reciprocity” p. 28.

31 *Eighth US Census (1860)*, “*State of Maine, Manufactures* Tables 8-31”, pp. 169-191. Most observers, both those in Maine and from away would have called Maine one of the nation’s most important manufacturing states. Of the 30 states in the Union in 1860, Maine ranked 1st in shipbuilding, 5th in lumber production, 5th in leather, 6th in cotton textiles, 8th in woolens, and 8th in boots and shoes.
paths the Maine's mills took. One of the factors that attracted Massachusetts capital to Maine was the state’s low wage rates. The other major factor was that a mill could buy waterpower far more cheaply in Maine than in Massachusetts. Of course, all these mills depended on a cotton imported from the South.\textsuperscript{32}

Maine might have had a larger manufacturing sector if the Democrats had not been in power in Washington for most of the 1850s. The Democrats strongly supported free-trade and opposed tariffs, unlike their Whig competitors. Democrats usually spoke for exporters, importers, and the shipping industry. But free trade was a serious obstacle to the development of manufacturing in Maine. As a coastal state with many navigable rivers, Maine imported foreign goods deep into the state at a very low cost. Local manufacturers could not compete. Besides Maine’s rushing rivers and the waterpower that they could generate, the state’s major manufacturing asset was its large under-employed labor force – a product of the flight of farm families from rural towns.\textsuperscript{33}

The new manufacturers wanted Congress to pass higher tariffs on foreign produced cotton textiles, woolen textiles, boots, shoes and other goods. As a result, manufacturers tended to be Whigs.\textsuperscript{34} On the other hand, small manufacturers, the ones with just a few employees, had

\textsuperscript{32} The other industries in Maine had significantly fewer employees than the cotton mills. There were 4,401 working in the sawmills, 3,180 making clothing, and 2,901 producing boots and shoes. Employing even fewer were the shipyards, the woolen mills, and iron and machinery manufacturers. See Eighth US Census (1860) “State of Maine, Manufactures, Table 3,” pp. 217-218.

\textsuperscript{33} For detail on comparative wage rates see, Niemi, \textit{State and Regional Patterns in American Manufacturing, 1860-1900}, “Appendix, Part X Average Cost of Manufacturing Employees by Region.” pp. 136 -140.

\textsuperscript{34} Just as industries that were strong supporters of low tariffs, often took contradictory positions, so did some manufacturers. Many woolen manufacturers who supported high tariffs on imported woolen cloth
little reason to pay attention to Congress. For small family owned manufacturers who bought and sold in geographically isolated local markets, the question of tariffs was largely irrelevant.

Unlike the smaller locally-based manufacturers, the new large cotton textile mills had to spend time at the Legislature in Augusta. Sophisticated investors wanted to invest in companies that had charters protecting them from any personal liability should the mills be unable to pay their debts. However, as important as the charter was, the Legislature rarely turned down a request from a manufacturing company.

**Railroads**

In the 1850s railroads became a powerful force in Maine’s economy and politics. Track mileage nearly doubled in the decade, rising to 472 miles in 1860.\(^{35}\) New railroads opened up the economies of the five southern-most counties, particularly the major cities and mill towns on the fall lines of the Kennebec and the Androscoggin Rivers. The lines connected them directly with both Boston and Montreal.\(^{36}\)

There were two major systems in Maine. One connected Portland to Montreal and it used “broad gauge” tracks, while one that connected Portland to Boston and to Augusta was standard gauge. The two gauges were incompatible. A train could only run on one or the other.

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advocated low tariffs on foreign wool. Many boot and shoe manufactures wanted high tariffs on shoes, but low tariffs on leather and hides.


\(^{36}\) Most of the track built in the 1840s was for the Atlantic and St. Lawrence RR, which ran through sparsely populated areas from Portland on the way to Montreal.
Supported by powerful merchants in competing cities and regions, the two systems competed aggressively against one another. Besides the bitter competition between the two rail systems, cities and towns competed against each other for the benefit of being served by a railroad. Without any state strategy and state financing to back a unified system, the lines that were built reflected the influence of cities and towns willing and able to invest in a proposed railroad. Each power center in the state fought for a railroad using its influence in the legislature and its willingness to go into debt to provide the financing needed.

Though smaller in scale than the lines in the rest of New England, Maine’s new railroad lines had a profound effect on the state’s economy. Brokers could ship cotton to the new Maine mills on a regular schedule, and mill owners could ship their textiles out just as easily. The railroads had other positive consequences. One of the most important was that they broke down some of the geographic barriers between the long independent, and often hostile, river systems. No longer were the rivers flowing north to south the only interior transportation routes. Now railroad lines directly connected the cities and businesses on the Saco, Presumpscot, the Androscoggin, the Kennebec, and the Penobscot. In addition to connecting the cities on these major rivers, the railroads crossed hundreds of miles of inland farmland and small villages, often far from the coast. The old divisions of the state – by river system – weakened.

This growing ease of travel also had political consequences. Railroads reduced the costs and time required for party activists to attend state conventions and for leaders at attend state committee meetings. Discounted rates, provided to both parties, allowed many more local leaders to participate in conventions. At the 1853 Democratic Convention in Portland, for

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37 There were some efforts to repeal the 1847 constitutional amendment that prevented any financial aid to railroads but they were all unsuccessful.
instance, 500 delegates and friends reportedly arrived *en masse* from Oxford County on the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railway.\(^{38}\) At the 1860 Democratic Convention in Portland, “At quarter past eight o’clock, the Grand Trunk train arrived bringing the Oxford and Androscoggin delegates. They proceeded to the Kennebec depot to await the arrival of the special train from Augusta. At 9 o’clock the train arrived bringing about 500 delegates.”\(^{39}\) This improved travel was a powerful force encouraging those who wanted to create more unified and centralized party organizations. The railroads also weakened the ability of local political machines to go their own way and ignore the state party.

**Single-Issue-Movements Challenge the Democrats and Whigs**

**Hamlin and the Democratic Party**

The 1850 legislative session was a momentous one for Maine’s political parties. The big issue was whether the legislature would elect re-elect Hannibal Hamlin to the US Senate for a six-year term.\(^{40}\) Although he had made many Democratic enemies by embracing prohibition and appealing in the election to Whig prohibitionists, he would be helped by the fact that an ally John Hubbard was the governor. Many of the Wildcats thought of Hubbard as a renegade and a traitor. Some blamed Hannibal Hamlin for Hubbard’s apostasy.

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38 *Portland Advertiser*, August 9, 1853.

39 *Belfast Republican Journal*, July 6, 1860.

40 Hamlin's contentious victory in 1848 had been for the two remaining years of Senator John Fairfield’s term. Hamlin had been preparing for this 1850 race ever since he was first elected to the Senate.
Nevertheless, Hamlin was well positioned. He had many friends in the legislature, and that was important, as it was the state legislators who elected the US Senators. The bitterness that many felt at Hubbard and Hamlin for the governor’s embrace of prohibition was not, however, the major issue in the legislative contest; it was Hamlin’s opposition to the extension of slavery and his attacks on the Slave Power. The Wildcats put up one of their own – Bion Bradbury, the Collector of Customs in Eastport. The legislature was divided. There were Woolheads – the Hamlin Democrats – as well as Wildcats, Free Soilers, and Whigs. Hamlin had solid strength in the House, but was weak in the Senate, in part because a Wildcat leader, Shepard Carey from Aroostook, appeared at the Senate Caucus and attacked Hamlin, claiming that he was not a Democrat because he opposed laws that would benefit the South.41

An alliance against Hamlin quickly developed amongst the Wildcats and many of the Whigs. Hamlin seemed surprised that the regular Democrats seemed to be more willing to have a Whig elected to the US Senate; than Hamlin, one of their own. Party loyalties were fraying at all levels. For two months, the legislature battled, with the real fight in the Senate. Twice the Legislature delayed for a month the final vote for US Senator, but eventually in July it returned to Augusta to try to make a final decision. In what turned out to be the final vote, Hamlin’s opponents were shocked when he seemed to pull out of his pocket five new Senate votes, giving him a majority of that body and thus the Legislature as a whole. Those votes came from five Free Soil Senators whom Hamlin had won over in secret discussions and their leader, Samuel Fessenden. It was not lost on Democratic regulars and Wildcats that the Free Soilers had given

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41 See Hatch’s narrative of the extended legislative fight of the US Senate nomination. He also has a useful assessment of strength of the contending parties and factions. *Maine: A History*, Vol II. pp 350-353
Hamlin a victory he could not have won in his own party. Like Hubbard the year before, a Democrat had won by making a deal with another party. But that was the reality. Because of his stand on slavery and the South, Hamlin could not rely solely on his own party. He had won his new six-year term, but at the price of deeper divisions in the Democratic Party. A few months later, the Democrats split widened again when the Democratic Legislative Caucus nominated the controversial Hubbard for another term as governor.\(^{42}\) In the 1850 state election, Hubbard was able, nevertheless, to hold on to most of the Democratic votes and beat the Whig, William Crosby, by 9,000 votes. But the Free Soil Party received 7,987 votes.

**The Compromise of 1850**

The actions of Presidents Tyler and Polk in annexing Texas and waging war against Mexico had for the first time raised the prospect of many more slave states, and that prospect inflamed sectional and party divisions. Top national party leaders tried to dampen those passions. Encouraged by Whig President Zachery Taylor and then after his death, by Whig President Millard Fillmore, first Henry Clay and then Daniel Webster and finally Stephen Douglas tried to create a “Great Compromise” that would put to bed all the most contentious issues. For that purpose, they drafted a package of five bills. Together, the package would provide for: 1) the admission of California as a free state; 2) the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia (but not abolish slavery itself); 3) the admission of New Mexico and Utah as states which could make their own decisions on slavery; and 4) the payment of $19 million dollars to Texas to allow it to pay its debts in exchange for giving up its claim to western lands. The fifth and final item was the one which would stir up the greatest resentment in the North: a

\(^{42}\) *Portland Advertiser*, August 6, 1850
stringent Fugitive Slave Act that would allow slave catchers great powers in the North, backed up by federal marshals and local officials.\textsuperscript{43} Brokering, log-rolling, and patronage all played their parts in the long-running legislative negotiations, but eventually in the early weeks of September Congress passed all the bills, and President Fillmore signed them. While few Senators or Congressmen supported all five bills, there were small majorities for each and every bill. Hannibal Hamlin opposed the compromise, voting no. Democratic Senator Bradbury voted yes, and the state’s Congressional delegation split.\textsuperscript{44} President Fillmore, who succeeded Zachery Taylor after his death, signed the bills on September 20, 1850.\textsuperscript{45}

A few weeks later, Portland’s \textit{Eastern Argus} spoke for most Democratic leaders, and probably most Whig leaders as well, when it wrote in an editorial: ”The Republic needs repose. Its business interests have suffered already from the long contest which has just terminated. Let all good citizens rejoice now that that contest is at an end and frown upon all attempts to revive it without necessity.”\textsuperscript{46} Maine responded in the way that the \textit{Eastern Argus} suggested. Except for the Free Soil Party, which would keep up its agitation against slavery, the Maine Democrats and Whig leaders were happy to put this divisive issue of slavery back into the closet.


\textsuperscript{44} Hatch, \textit{Maine A History}, Vol. II, p. 349.

\textsuperscript{45} Eisenhower, \textit{Zachery Taylor}, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Eastern Argus}, September 24, 1850.
The Passage of the “Maine Law” Reignites the Partisan Battles

Due to the wide acceptance of the Compromise, party leaders were able to keep the issue of slavery under wraps for four important years. And in fact the Democrats entered 1851 optimistic about their future. John Hubbard was the Governor and a Democrat, as were both US Senators and five of the state’s seven Congressmen. The party also controlled the State Senate and House and thereby the Executive Council, from which all state patronage flowed. Knowing that Fillmore, the man who replaced Taylor, had been weak and unpopular, Democrats were optimistic that they could elect one of their own as President in the 1852 Presidential Election, and once again national patronage would flow their way. Although the Hamlin faction and the regular faction were still battling, leaders expected that their conflict would probably not threaten the party, since the Compromise of 1850 had put the slavery issue to rest.

The Maine Law

This hoped-for unity in the Maine Democratic Party lasted for less than a year. It was not the slavery issue that upset the calm, but prohibition. Neil Dow, a Whig, along with his prohibitionist allies, had forced through the 1851 legislature a radical new bill dubbed the "Maine Law." Demonstrating how successful the prohibitionists had been in building strength within the two major parties, the Maine Law passed with strong Democratic, Whig, and Free Soil support.47 Then Democratic Governor John Hubbard, an ally of Hamlin’s Woolheads and the

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man who had won prohibitionist support in 1849, promptly signed the bill. The new law went far beyond the prohibition laws of other states. It banned the manufacture and sale of liquor in the state, but most importantly it had tough enforcement provisions. This uncompromising “Maine Law” quickly became the ‘rallying cry’ for prohibitionists in other states. Yet, the Maine Law generated an intense and opposite reaction in Maine: thousands of men, particularly Democrats, thought that Hubbard had committed treason by signing a bill that was a direct assault on personal liberty – the most basic principle in the Democratic creed. The factional disputes that had moderated after the passage of the Compromise of 1850 rose up again with a vengeance. But now the issue was not slavery, but rather prohibition. These opponents of Hubbard called themselves the anti-Maine Law Democrats. The newspapers called them the Wildcats.

Over the next three state elections, Democratic factional disputes would intensify. Hubbard’s signing of the Maine Law was the overt cause, although the competition for patronage from President Piece, after he was elected in 1852, was another cause. Both Woolheads and Wildcats expected to be rewarded generously for their work in the presidential election. The factional battle erupted into open warfare in 1852, when the party’s Legislative Caucus was considering re-nominating Governor John Hubbard for another term. The Anti-Maine Law Wildcats asked the Caucus to instead call a state convention to choose the candidate. Knowing that tens of thousands of Democrats would vote against Hubbard, the Caucus ignored the request for a convention and nominated Hubbard again themselves. Outraged, the Wildcats bolted

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48 His predecessor, the regular Democratic governor John Dana, had vetoed a similar bill when it had passed the legislature. Hubbard, however, had actively solicited the temperance vote in his successful campaign.

49 Portland Advertiser February 10, 1852.
from the Democratic Party, organized their own convention, and nominated Anson G. Chandler.\textsuperscript{50}

Still Hubbard had strong support. He had volunteers from the Maine Temperance Union, the Sons of Temperance, and the endorsement of Neil Dow, the Whig who authored the Maine Law.\textsuperscript{51} These Anti-Maine Law Democrats did very well in turning out votes, despite the fact that they had chosen Chandler just two months before the election. He received more than 22,000 votes. Slavery and the Compromise of 1850 did not cause this split; it was prohibition. The electoral results showed that more than one-third of the state's Democrats did not like the Maine Law. Because of Chandler’s considerable vote, Hubbard was not elected. He had won a plurality but not a majority and thus the legislature would again have to pick the Governor.\textsuperscript{52} In fact, Hubbard had received a smaller percentage of the total vote than any Democratic candidate for governor since the party’s founding. In the popular vote, William G. Crosby, the Whig candidate, had come in second.\textsuperscript{53} A new phenomenon, the cross-party alliance, formed in the legislative bargaining over who would become the next governor. On one side was Hubbard, his Hamlin allies, and some pro-Maine Law Whigs. On the other was Crosby, most of the Whigs, and the anti-Maine Law Chandler supporters. These alliances demonstrated that a man’s party was becoming a less important predictor of his political behavior than his attitudes toward

\textsuperscript{50} Portland Advertiser, July 6, 1852.

\textsuperscript{51} Gienappe, The Origins of the Republican Party, p. 48,

\textsuperscript{52} Hubbard received 41,999; Cosby the Whig candidate 29,127; Chandler, the Anti Maine Law 21,774; and the Free Soil candidate, 1,617.

\textsuperscript{53} Wescott, New Men, New Issues, pp. 104-106.
prohibition and the Maine Law. Because of the of Whig and Anti-Maine Law legislators who were elected, the Legislature chose the Whig, William Crosby, as governor. But the factional battle for governor and the Maine Law was so deep that it extended into the US Senate race. The Legislature was simply not able to elect a new US Senator. Maine would have only one US Senator for the upcoming year.

The 1852 Chandler campaign signaled three important changes in Maine’s politics. First, it was the beginning of a period of extreme fragmentation in the state’s politics. In each of the years, 1852, 1853, 1854, and 1855, none of the candidates for governor would receive a majority. Three parties and many factions competed for voters. In each of those years, because no candidate won a majority, the final choice went to the Legislature where the process was arcane and complicated. The most important element of the process was that the Legislature did not make its choice from the two top vote-getters. Instead, the House picked two candidates who had run for the office and then the Senate picked the winner. With so much at stake for the parties and with just 180 or so “voters” to convince, there was a premium on relentless and ruthless bargaining among the factions.

The second major change was the formation in the legislature of cross-party alliances. Nearly all party leaders, by this time, were trying to peel off voters from opposing parties and factions, ignoring when necessary, the traditional claims for party loyalty. As they saw leaders do it, individual voters became more comfortable doing the same.

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54 For more detail on the breakdown of the parties and shifting loyalties of the voters caused by the Maine Law, see Gienappe, Origins of the Republican Party, p. 89.
The Party Ticket

The third change was that the Chandler campaign demonstrated how easily and quickly an insurgent campaign could be mounted. The Chandler campaign chose its candidate in the first week of July, and nine weeks later delivered to him 22,000 votes. The success of Chandler’s insurgent campaign, as well as Anson Morrill’s in 1854 and 1855 and Hannibal Hamlin’s in 1856 were made possible by the party ticket system of voting.

Voting by tickets was a reform passed by the Jacksonians in 1830 to end the process of public voting which intimidated the poor and the weak and gave the elites a new powerful tool to control voters. The new law required people to vote by inserting into the ballot boxes a piece of paper with the names of candidates printed or written by hand. Very quickly, parties began to print “party tickets” that included all of their candidates. These tickets were small slips of paper, often with a distinguishing mark of some type, which included the names of the party's candidates followed by the offices they were seeking. Taking advantage of this system, the parties in the 1830s and 40s helped ensure that all their voters supported the full party ticket, from the top to the bottom. Voters did not have to be literate, and the parties did not have to make sure that the voters remembered the names of all of its candidates. All the parties had to do was make sure the voter “threw” his ticket into the ballot box. To produce the tickets, the party’s newspapers printed tickets for their own cities and counties in bulk and the local party leaders distributed them to party activists in each town or city ward. Party activists then, usually a prominent man or the holder of patronage job, pressed the party’s ticket into the voter’s hand as

55 The best description of the “party ticket” system is found in Richard Franklin Bensel’s The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century (New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) See pp.14-17 and beyond.
he approached the ballot box. The papers usually printed their party ticket on their editorial page so that everyone would know the party’s endorsed candidates well ahead of Election Day.

The major parties used the party ticket system to build up their institutional power.\(^{56}\) Chandler was the first candidate to show how insurgents could take advantage of this system. What became clear was that the party ticket system levelled the playing field. Since, unlike now, there were no privileged parties and official state ballots, any faction or insurgency had the same rights as an established party. The Whig and Democratic parties or candidates got no special privileges from the system.\(^ {57}\) This equality allowed Chandler, and then later Morrill, and Hamlin to create a party, hold a state convention just months before the election, chose a candidate, print party tickets, and get their voters to put their tickets into the ballot box. Once an insurgent group chose their candidates, their newspapers published their party’s grievances statewide and their call for action. The same newspapers printed the party tickets and mobilized the activists in every town and ward to put the party tickets in the hands of their supporters and to oversee their actions when they approached the ballot box. If an insurgency reflected a wide

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\(^{56}\) From the 1820s through the 1880s the major and minor parties had no legal status. The parties were unregulated private institutions that could do as they pleased. They were not mentioned in the State Constitution or in State Statutes. But the state turned over to parties most of the voting process. The state did not publicize elections, print ballots, recognize parties, regulate election processes, designate official candidates, or regulate caucuses or conventions in any manner. It was the parties who, without regulation or oversite, convened conventions and caucuses, chose candidates, printed party tickets, put the tickets in the hands of voters, and watched the men to see what tickets they “threw” into the ballot box.

\(^{57}\) Until the early 1890s, an insurgent candidate or party could be organized just a few weeks before an election, and, depending on how broadly his party tickets were distributed, would have the same status at the ballot box as the candidates of the major parties.
popular anger, and was well organized with activists jumping on board across the state, it could, at the least, embarrass or, at the most, overwhelm the two older and dominant parties.  

Franklin Pierce: The Presidency and the South

Two months after Chandler had earned 22,000 votes in the 1852 state election, demonstrating the profound split in the Democratic Party on the tough new Maine Law, the state voters went to the polls for the presidential election. Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire was the Democratic candidate. A dark horse, he had won the nomination on the 49th ballot. He was a compromise candidate, a New Englander, but a man the South liked, since he sided with them on virtually every question that came before Congress, including the Annexation of Texas and the “Gag Rule.” The Convention that nominated him also adopted a platform that supported the Compromise of 1850 as well as the Fugitive Slave Act. In the election Pierce defeated the Whig candidate, General Winfield Scott. While the popular vote was close, the Electoral College vote was a rout. Pierce won 245 electoral votes while Scott only won 42. The Free Soil Party fielded a candidate but did not win a single state.

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58 Today, this would be impossible, thanks to electoral reforms of 1892 that have been described as the Australian Ballot. Today an insurgent party or candidate must start many months before the election: filing papers, collecting petitions, organizing conventions, choosing candidates, and getting on the official state ballot. All of these actions require money and expensive lawyers to make sure the filings meet stringent legal tests and to fend off the inevitable challenges from the other parties.


In Maine, Pierce took the state winning 50.6% of the popular vote. The Free Soil candidate however won a respectable 9.7%. Both of the contending Democratic factions – Woolheads and the Wildcats – had supported Pierce at the Democratic Convention and expected to be rewarded for their efforts.

Pierce recognized that, as in Maine, the divisions between the northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party were widening. Michael Holt, the leading historian of the Whig Party, described the divisions: “In the North, a minority of the party had sought coalitions with anti-slavery Free-Soilers, in order to capture state governments, an aim that necessitated denunciation of the gingerly negotiated Compromise of 1850. In the South, in turn, a majority of Democrats had denounced the compromise as a sell-out of Southern Rights.” One of the ways that Pierce tried to bring unity was through patronage, particularly in choosing his Cabinet. But the “representative” group had a distinctly southern flavor as it included Jefferson Davis as Secretary of War, and James Buchanan, a pro-South Pennsylvania Democratic politician as Secretary of State. Pierce, in fact, was an old-time pro-South Jacksonian Democrat, and he would be loyal to that tradition throughout his presidency. This bias, and his insistence that Democrats in the North support his policies, would force Maine Democrats who supported their president’s policies into positions unpopular with many Maine voters.

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61 Only the Free Soil Party continued to raise the slavery issue. The two other parties avoided the issue claiming that the Compromise of 1850 had settled the issue. The Free Soilers complained in their party newspapers about “hopeless corruption of the Whigs and Democrats. Portland Inquirer, July 22, 1852.


63 Landis, Northern Men, p. 81.
Like Tyler and Polk before him, Pierce saw an aggressive foreign policy as the key to unifying his party and the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{64} One goal he adopted soon after moving into the White House was to negotiate a Reciprocity Treaty with Great Britain that would eliminate tariffs on trade between the United States and Canada on any product of the soil or of the sea. Pennsylvania strenuously opposed what turned out to be a successful effort on the part of Canada to add Nova Scotia’s coal to the list of duty-free items.\textsuperscript{65} But Pierce’s major focus was on Spain. In particular, he tried to force Spain to sell Cuba to the United States. This plan resounded well in the South, for many “southern slaveholders envisioned that adding a new slave state to the Union would increase the South’s political clout in Washington.”\textsuperscript{66}

Besides his unsuccessful attempt to give sectional balance to his Cabinet, Pierce also tried to be smarter in his distribution of patronage in the states. To avoid mistakes, to reward the deserving, and to make the fewest enemies, he announced he would follow the advice of local party committees. He also reached out to Democratic Congressmen, long-time personal friends, and regular party leaders for advice. All, of course, had personal favorites that they pressed on the President. In Maine, he tried to keep all the factions happy, offering patronage plums to the Hamlin’s Woolhead faction and to the Wildcats.\textsuperscript{67} Still, Pierce was overwhelmed with office seekers. He met with as many as possible, worried about the potential for bitter feelings. In fact, Pierce’s election, after four years of Whig rule, had brought a swarm of Democrats to

\textsuperscript{64}Landis, \textit{Northern Men}, p. 88.

\textsuperscript{65}Interestingly this provision which would have great benefit for Maine was included in the final agreement, not at the insistence of Pierce and the Americans, but by the British. See Holt, \textit{Franklin Piece}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{66}Holt, \textit{Franklin Pierce}, pp 59-63.

\textsuperscript{67}Hatch, \textit{Maine A History}. V. II, p. 362.
Washington to greet the new President and plead their case. In a letter from Washington, a correspondent described the assault: "I wrote you some time ago that two hundred fighting men were expected here from Maine. I did your gallant and patriotic people an injustice. At the call of their country they have sent a full regiment, headed by three ex-Governors, with the ranks filled with ex-members of the Legislature, over whom ex-presidents of the Senate exercise discipline as sergeants, assisted by ex-Speakers as corporals."68 But Pierce’s announcement that he would follow the advice of local parties in his patronage decisions had unintended consequences. Factions and ambitious men now worked more furiously to take over the local committees that would make the "consensus" recommendations. Instead of bringing unity, patronage balkanized and fragmented the party.

**Championing the Maine Law**

The battles in the 1852 election and the 1853 legislature continued into the 1853 election and 1854 legislature. In the process, the cross-party alliances between the pro-Maine Law Whigs and Woolheads, and the anti-Maine Law Whigs and Wildcats became more regular. Knowing that Hubbard would not be running for re-election and that the State Committee would have to convene a Democratic State Convention, the Chandler forces took the initiative. Angered by the way they had lost the nomination in 1852, Chandler and his advisors called on all his supporters to run as delegates to the convention.69 This strategy worked, and hundreds of delegates pledged to Chandler arrived in Bangor for the convention. They had enough delegates to make up a

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69 Hubbard had served his three terms, and under the Democratic custom would not be able to run again for re-election.
small but workable majority. They easily defeated the pro-Maine Law Democrats, but still had to compromise. They failed in getting a candidate who opposed the Maine Law, but they managed to ensure the nomination of one who was neutral on the Law. They could not get a resolution against the Maine Law into the platform, but they did win the convention’s silence on the issue. Their candidate was Albert Pillsbury.\footnote{Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 106-107. See also \textit{New York Daily Times}, July 2, 1853.}

The pro-Maine Law or “Woolhead” faction of the Democrats did not accept Pillsbury or the Democratic platform. Instead they followed the path pioneered by Chandler, and called their own convention for Portland. They made clear their support for the Maine Law, resolving that “the gross moral evils which afflict society are proper subjects of legislative restraints.”\footnote{\textit{Portland Advertiser}, August 9, 1853.} They chose as their candidate for Governor an ally of Hubbard who had recently presided over the Maine Temperance Convention. His name was Anson P. Morrill, a Democrat who was also a former state legislator, county sheriff, and State Land Agent.\footnote{His brother Lot Morrill was one of the leaders of the anti-slavery Democrats} With Morrill’s nomination, this Woolhead faction would quickly evolve into a more formal group, calling themselves either the “Morrill Democrats” or the “True Democratic Party.” They chose a nine-member State Committee. The effort they were putting in suggested that this was not, however, a one-time insurgency. They appeared to believe they were starting a new political party. In fact, this insurgent Democratic convention in 1853 was the beginning of what would, in 1856, become the Maine Republican Party. These Democratic origins, in fact, made Maine unique, because most of the Republican parties that emerged in other states had their origins in the Whig Party, or in an alliance between the Whig Party and the Free Soil Party or with the Know-Nothing Party. The

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\footnote{Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 106-107. See also \textit{New York Daily Times}, July 2, 1853.}

\footnote{\textit{Portland Advertiser}, August 9, 1853.}

\footnote{His brother Lot Morrill was one of the leaders of the anti-slavery Democrats}
Republican’s Democratic origins would have profound effects on the character of Maine’s Republican Party.

The Morrill Democrats were surprisingly well prepared to launch their new party. Many of their leaders had long experience in the well-organized and disciplined temperance and prohibition organizations. Others had similar experience in the Liberty Party or the Free Soil Party. And some had been long time Democrats, active in the Hamlin wing of the Party, and experienced in campaigning. In the upcoming 1853 election, all the parties – the Morrill Democrats, the Whigs, the Free Soilers, and what had been the Wildcats, but would soon be known as the Regular or Pierce Democrats – knew that votes would be distributed across many candidates. No one expected that either Pillsbury, or Morrill, or the Whig incumbents would win a majority. As a result, they all aggressively recruited candidates to run on their tickets for the state legislature, expecting that the Legislature would wind up choosing the governor. Thanks to ease with which a group of politicians could launch an insurgency just weeks before the election, Morrill did very well, receiving 11,027 votes.

Two Cross-Party Coalitions

As expected, no candidate for governor received a majority in the election when the legislature convened in 1854. The increasing fragmentation of the parties was obvious. Not only was the vote for governor split among many candidates, the same was true in the races for the State Senate seats. In fact, the voters had only given majorities to thirteen State Senators, less

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73 *Portland Advertiser*, April 5, 1853.

74 Democrat Pillsbury received 36,386; Crosby, the Whig and incumbent Governor came in second with 27,061; Morrill was third; and the Free Soil candidate was fourth with 8,906.
than a quorum in that body. According to the Constitution, the elected House members and those Senators who had won a majority would fill the fifteen vacancies in the Senate. They had nearly unlimited discretion in whom they could pick. The Legislature was so divided that the choice of those fifteen senators would decide which party or parties would control the Legislature and thus be able to elect the Governor and the US Senator. As the divisions were deep and bitter, it took a month to elect a functioning Senate, and the result was a victory for an alliance between anti-Maine Law Whigs and Pierce Democrats. The House was controlled by the pro-Maine Law Whigs, Morrill Democrats, and the Free Soil Party. Eventually, the Legislature elected a Governor and US Senator.

The day-to-day narrative is too long to retell here, but the climax was that the alliance of Pierce Democrats and Whigs prevailed, defeating the alliance built around the Morrill Democrats. The Legislature re-elected the incumbent Whig governor William Cosby, and a few days later chose as Maine’s new US Senator the Whig William Pitt Fessenden. Interestingly the Whigs triumphed, even though there were more Democrats than Whigs in the Legislature because the splits in the Democrat Party were so deep. The deal that elected a Whig governor and a Whig senator gave the Pierce Democrats something they coveted: control of the Executive Council whereby they could determine where state patronage went. That power could

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76 James Bradbury, the Democratic incumbent, had announced that he was not be a candidate for re-election. With the US Senate so divided between the Whigs and Democrats, both national party organizations put great pressure on their Maine party leaders to try to elect a man from their party.

77 That battle was bitter, complicated, and with few holds barred.

78 Portland Daily Advertiser, February 7, 1854.

79 Portland Daily Advertiser, February 11, 1854
be critical as the Pierce Democrats expected a bitter future fight with the Morrill Democrats for control of the Democratic Party.\textsuperscript{80}

Why the contending coalitions in the Legislature in January and February of 1854 were so aggressive and uncompromising can in part be explained not by events in Maine but by those in Washington. There, Senator Stephen Douglas was lining up votes for a major new piece of legislation that he hoped would revive and unify the Democratic Party, one that would end the controversy over the extension of slavery by allowing the actual settlers to decide whether the territory would be slave or free. He expected opposition but thought he could contain it. He did not count a striking piece of political propaganda, the \textit{Appeal of Independent Democrats in Congress to the People of the United States}, issued by the Free Soil members of Congress. It denounced Douglas’s effort, and it had a profound effect.\textsuperscript{81} Early indications had been that the Whigs would oppose the Douglas bill, and that most northern Democrats would support it reluctantly. The stakes were high. If Douglas’s bill became controversial, and if slavery and its extension into the territories again became a major issue, the resulting politics could be devastating to the two major parties.

\textbf{The Know-Nothings}

In 1854 in a political world already fragmenting, a new single-issue movement emerged in Maine and elsewhere in the Northeast. Maine was not alone in experiencing the extraordinary growth of this anti-Catholic Know-Nothing secret political society. It had recently won elections

\textsuperscript{80} Hatch, \textit{Maine: A History} Vol II describes the complicated narrative of the bargaining in the 1854 Legislature well. See pp. 365-368.

\textsuperscript{81} Holt, \textit{Franklin Piece}, p. 80-81.
in Norfolk, Philadelphia, Washington, and Boston.\textsuperscript{82} It found a ready audience among the Yankee workingmen, particularly low-wage workers in East Coast cities fearful of the competition of thousands of Irish desperate for work. The movement also found supporters and leaders among Whig politicians who feared the growing Irish vote. Its origins go back to 1844 when the Order of United Americans was founded in New York City to “more effectively secure our country from the dangers of foreign influence.” Its strength was in the larger cities where there were large numbers of Catholic immigrants. Then in 1850, Charles B. Allen of New York City organized the Order of the Star Spangled Banner. Its growth was slow until 1854 when it exploded in size with lodges organized throughout the northern states.\textsuperscript{83} The Order soon was known as the Know-Nothings.

Maine was similar to other states. The Know-Nothings found fertile ground and grew rapidly, often aided by the Whig press which looked at the Know-Nothings as potential allies against the Democrats. The \textit{Kennebec Journal} for example, while claiming to know little about the Know-Nothings, did the party a great favor by reprinting its platform in an editorial that got state wide distribution. The major Whig paper in the state’s largest city, the \textit{Portland Advertiser}, also reprinted it.\textsuperscript{84} The Know-Nothings’ hatred of the Irish is clear from their platform which included: repeal of all laws allowing naturalization; restricting public offices to “real”

\textsuperscript{82}“Know-Nothings Still in the Field” \textit{Augusta Age}, August 28, 1856.


Americans; a war on Romanism and Papal influences; and prohibiting the formation of militia companies made up of foreigners.\textsuperscript{85}

Playing on anti-Catholic biases, the Know-Nothings acted as a secret political party. At secret caucuses they endorsed Protestant candidates who subscribed to their platform. They quickly showed their power, particularly in cities such as Bath, Bangor, and Ellsworth where anti-Catholic riots had occurred.\textsuperscript{86} They were very successful in local elections. In Sagadahoc County, a coalition of Free Soilers and Know-Nothings elected the County Treasurer and County Attorney. In addition, a Know-Nothing was elected as Clerk of the Courts, and three others were elected County Commissioners. In Lincoln County, the Know-Nothings support was critical in the election of the county’s five State Senators.\textsuperscript{87} One of the organization’s most important victories was the election of J. T. K. Hayward as the Mayor of Bangor. He was nominated at a secret caucus on March 6, 1855, and with his help the Know-Nothings took over the city’s police and school board.\textsuperscript{88}

Many prominent Whigs gave quiet support to the Know-Nothings although they avoided any direct alliance. One of them was a young man, James Blaine, a native of Pennsylvania who married a woman from Augusta. In Pennsylvania he had been an active Whig and had written for some local papers. He moved with his new wife back to her hometown in 1854 and with her

\textsuperscript{85} “‘Know-Nothings’ and the Administration Party” \textit{Kennebec Journal}, July 25, 1854.

\textsuperscript{86} An excellent review of the Know-Nothings in Maine, can be found in Whitman, Allan R. “‘A Guard of Faithful Sentinels:’ The Know-Nothing Appeal in Maine , 1845-1855” \textit{Maine Historical Society Quarterly}, Vol. 20, No. 3, Winter 1981.

\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Portland Advertiser}, September 19, 1854.

family’s help purchased a half-ownership in the *Kennebec Journal*. The purchase took place on November 10, 1854. Three weeks later on December 1, the *Journal* published an editorial naming the major threats to Maine as “Slavery, Rum and Foreigners.” Some prominent editors of Whig newspapers and Temperance ministers were more active and outspoken in support of the Know-Nothings, such as Rev. B. D. Peck, the editor of *Temperance Watchman*; James Lincoln, a Whig newspaper man from Bath; and the Rev. John L. Stevens, a Unitarian minister. Peck, Lincoln, and Stevens would be delegates from Maine to the national Know-Nothing Convention in Philadelphia on June 5, 1855.

Stevens began a political and business partnership with Blaine starting in early 1855 when he purchased the half-interest in the *Kennebec Journal* that Blaine had not purchased. Stevens, unlike Blaine, was a Maine native. He grew up in Mt. Vernon and attended Maine Wesleyan Seminary. He had also been an ordained minister of the Universalist Church for ten years.

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90 The purchase was announced in the November 10, 1854 issue of the Kennebec Journal.


93 Obituary of John L. Stevens, *San Francisco Call*, February 9, 1895.
The Kansas-Nebraska Act Ignites a Firestorm

On January 23, 1854, as the Legislature was trying to organize and elect a governor and a US Senator, Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois introduced a bill in Congress that would become the Kansas Nebraska Act. Douglas’s proposal would in effect repeal the agreement made between the North and South in 1820 called the Missouri Compromise, which prohibited slavery from most of the land acquired in the Louisiana Purchase. Douglas’s plan was built on the idea of “popular sovereignty.” The settlers in each territory (soon to become states) would be allowed to decide whether the territory would be “slave or free.” Mainers and most in the North had believed that the 1820 Compromise was a “sacred contract” that would forever limit the expansion of slavery. Douglas believed his Act would calm the nation, but instead it became a rallying cry for Whigs and Democrats across the nation who feared that the Act would put the "Slave Power" in permanent control of the national government.

The Maine Legislature responded quickly. On February 28, it nearly unanimously passed resolutions directing the state's Congressmen and Senators to vote against Douglas’s bills. Whigs and most Democrats joined together in supporting those resolutions. All but five of the state’s many newspapers editorialized against Douglas’s bills. Once again national events dramatically changed the dynamics of Maine's politics. In March, opponents of the Act organized meetings throughout the state to denounce the proposed laws. Morrill Democrats,

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94 Passed in 1820, this bill also granted statehood to Maine and to Missouri. The exception was the State of Missouri itself. that had prohibited slavery from virtually US territories north of 36 30

95 The Portland Advertiser of March 14, 1854 lists them as the Bangor Democrat, the Bath Times, Lincoln Democrat, Norway Advertiser and the Lewiston Democratic Advocate.
Free Soilers and Whigs issued a call for a mass meeting in Portland to attack the Kansas-Nebraska Act for repealing the Missouri Compromise.\textsuperscript{96}

The Morrill Democrats were quick to seize the initiative. In early April, their legislators caucused and called for a mass meeting for June of 1854.\textsuperscript{97} The outrage against the Kansas-Nebraska Act was so widespread that one Democrat said his party had been "completely abolitionized."\textsuperscript{98} Anti-slavery – an issue silenced for four years by the Compromise of 1850 – again fractured Maine politics. The Morrill Democrats, originally organized to protect the Maine Law, now made a major strategic decision; they decided to embrace and try to absorb the growing protests against the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The Morrill Democrats invited all men, regardless of party, to meet in a mass convention in June to nominate a candidate for Governor for the September election. Organizing intensified when a few months later, on May 30, 1854, the US House of Representatives ended its debate and passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act. President Pierce had fought hard for the bill, threatening to deny patronage to Democrats who voted against the Act. But the northern Democrats in Congress split, with 44 voting in favor of Douglas’s bill, and 43 opposed.\textsuperscript{99} Most northern Whigs opposed the Act. In the South, Whigs and Democrats alike mostly supported the Law. In Maine, both of the state’s US Senators, Democrat Hannibal Hamlin and Whig William Pitt Fessenden voted against it, as did all but one

\textsuperscript{96}Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}. p. 114.

\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Portland Advertiser}, April 20, 1854

\textsuperscript{98} Quoted in Michael Holt, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party}. p. 873,

\textsuperscript{99} Holt, \textit{Franklin Pierce}, p. 82
of the state's Congressmen. President Pierce signed the bill into law at the end of May, just a few days before the convention in Portland that the Morrill Democrats had called to nominate a candidate for governor.

The New Skills for New Leaders

Party leaders in Maine were about to enter their most challenging and difficult time. The era of absolute party loyalties was over, and new groups were contending for power. At the beginning of 1854 five parties or movements all were trying to elect their own man as governor. These were the Morrill Democrats, the Pierce or regular Democrats, the anti-Maine Law Democrats, the Whigs, the Free Soil Party and most recently the Know-Nothings.

Party leaders needed new skills. With so many contending political groups and coalitions, the ability to forge compromises and agreements were critical. Thus a party leader had to be skilled at bargaining and negotiations. He had to be accessible, flexible, and capable of maintaining friendships with all types of people. In a time when issues were becoming more important, he needed a solid understanding of the various positions taken by the different national and Maine political leaders. Instead of working behind the scenes, a party leader now had to work in the public sphere, writing editorials, speaking on the stump, and organizing and managing party caucuses and conventions.

In addition, politics had become a profession and for many men a full-time profession. Many men spent their entire lives doing party work, paid through patronage jobs in the state or the national governments. Some started as volunteers for a town committee, and then moved up

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100 The exception was Moses McDonald, a regular Democrat. After he was defeated President Pierce/Buchanan rewarded him for this party loyalty by naming him to be Collector of Customs in Portland, the most well paying and powerful patronage position in Maine.
the pyramid, following either the electoral track or the patronage track. The most skilled and most ambitious could end as a Congressman, a Collector of Customs, or a Federal Marshal.

They also needed great energy and commitment. They had to become omnipresent in campaigns. They had to maintain lists of voters together with their voting preferences. They, not the state, publicized elections, educated the voters, assembled and printed the ballots, brought people to the polls, and saw to it that their fellow party members put the right party ticket into the ballot box. On election night they had to help count the ballots. If they failed to turn out the expected number of votes in their town or their ward, they could expect an angry call from a top party leader. And once the election was over, they had to spend endless hours hearing pleas, requests, and demands for patronage and favors from the men they had brought to the polls. Then they had to approach the leaders above them to plead the causes of the local people who wanted patronage or a favor.

Also politicians, particularly the Democrats, faced more insecurity than they did in the 30s and the 40s when they controlled the state and national governments and all their patronage. Democratic patronage workers had lost their sinecures in 1849 when Whig Zachery Taylor fired them by the thousands. They also realized that factional disputes in their own party could cost them their jobs. In 1849 Democratic Governor Dana refused to reappoint many Hamlin Democrats because he wanted to sabotage Hamlin’s campaign to win a six-year Senate term. Then hundreds of Democrats lost their jobs when the Whig William Crosby was elected Governor by the Legislature in 1853 and 1854.

Party leaders found it harder to do their job as their parties fragmented. They knew that they needed a well-organized and united party with an elaborate and well-integrated structure of town and ward committees, county committees, senate district committees, and congressional
district committees to turn out their voters on Election Day. Yet, the forces of fragmentation and disintegration were so strong that party leaders spent much of their time just trying to keep the party together. They had little time to try to overcome those forces and to build the disciplined and structured organizations they all knew were needed.

**The Morrill Democrats**

Just a few days after President Pierce signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Morrill Democrats convened in Portland. Morrill no longer was calling himself a Democrat but was following the developments in other states, particularly the emergence of Republican Parties.\(^{101}\) Their convention was definitely a meeting of Democrats. Of the 46 people who were officers, or members of Resolutions Committee or the State Committee, 20 were Morrill Democrats, 9 were active in the prohibition movement, and 2 were Free Soilers.\(^{102}\) A bit more than half – 24 – had no previous political involvement. The president of the convention, Charles J. Talbot, a Morrill Democrat and later a major figure in the Republican Party, keynoted, attacking the Kansas-Nebraska Act, supporting the Maine Law, and ending by telling the delegates that the 1854 election would be Maine's most important. He urged that "the friends of freedom and temperance of every party should act together in a solid column."\(^{103}\)

This army that Talbot saw assembling at the Convention had hundreds of foot soldiers but few experienced generals. The few with major party experience were those Democrats, a minority in their own party, who supported the Maine Law and opposed the extension of slavery.

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\(^{101}\) Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, p. 204.

\(^{102}\) Wescott, *New Men, New Issues* p. 115. Also see *Portland Daily Advertiser*, June 8, 1854 and a personal file that Wescott mentions that he assembled for this book.

\(^{103}\) *Portland Daily Advertiser*, June 8 and 13, 1854.
Probably the most experienced organizers were the leaders of the Free Soil Party and the Maine Temperance Alliance. The most experienced anti-slavery and pro Maine Law politicians did not attend. They did not want to threaten their successful careers by making a commitment to something that might fail. Democratic Senator Hannibal Hamlin said he was too busy in Washington. Whig Senator William Pitt Fessenden was otherwise engaged. Still these dissident Democrats and their single-issue followers began to create a new political party. They passed a series of hard-hitting resolutions, elected a State Committee, endorsed Anson P. Morrill as their candidate for Governor, and set about creating a coalition.

The Morrill Democrats were not the only ones in the field for the 1854 election. The remnants of Chandler’s Anti-Maine Law Democrats met and organized, calling themselves Liberal Democrats. The Pierce Democrats chose Albion Keith Parris as their candidate. Divided on the issues, they decided not to adopt any platform resolutions other than one calling for Democrats to support Parris. The Whigs, for their part, met in late June. Their platform differed little from the Morrill Democrats, but they rejected calls from Edward Kent, the former Whig Governor, to “fuse” with the Morrill Democrats, and instead chose as their candidate the traditionalist, Isaac Reed. They no doubt felt that they, and not the Morrill Democrats, would come out on top of the upcoming multiparty contest.

Anson Morrill and his supporters knew that if they were to win they had to expand their base. After all, the Maine Law Party had only received 11,027 of the 94,707 votes cast in 1853. It would start the 1854 campaign and their new party with the base of Morrill Democrats, who

\[104\] *Portland Advertiser*, June 27, 1854.

had originally come together to support the Maine Law. Where could Morrill find additional voters? Certainly he could expect nothing from the anti-Maine Law Democrats or from the Pierce Democrats. He also could expect nothing from those called the ‘Straight Whigs,’ that is the Whigs who supported their party’s traditional program, were not pro-Maine Law, and did not strongly oppose the expansion of slavery. Morrill, however, found support among the prohibitionist and anti-Kansas Nebraska wing of the Whigs. But he had his greatest successes when he met with the single-issue movements. He knew many of their leaders, as many had attended the March and June conventions. He sought the support of the Maine Free Soil Party and received it. In fact, it agreed not to run its own candidate for governor, and instead to endorse Morrill.\textsuperscript{106} Perhaps most importantly, he won the endorsement of Maine's rapidly growing Know-Nothing Party.\textsuperscript{107} Though they were only a few years old, their anti-Catholic message had wide support among the Protestant artisans and laborers.

At about this time, John L. Stevens and James G. Blaine, the co-owners of the long-time Whig paper the \textit{Kennebec Journal}, announced that henceforth the \textit{Journal} would be supporting the Morrill Democrats. Starting on the foundation of this paper, both men, often working together, would build their careers and their power in Maine politics, first within the Morrill Democrats then within the Republican Party. Stevens also became a leader of the Fusionist Party, while Blaine had kept his distance from that effort. Stevens was the more impassioned activist and firmly anti-slavery. Blaine worked more behind the scenes, advising, lobbying, and helping more established leaders like Hamlin, Fessenden, and Washburn carry out their plans.

\textsuperscript{106} Following their endorsement of Morrill in 1854, they supported him again in 1855 and then disappeared into the Republican Party.

By August, a broad coalition supported Morrill. No doubt there had been serious
negotiations between and Morrill and all of his coalition partners. They certainly believed that,
if Morrill won, they would have a clear shot at getting their favorite legislation passed. For the
Pro-Maine Law Democrats and Whigs, their goal was stronger enforcement of the prohibition
laws; for the anti-Kansas-Nebraska Whigs and Democrats and for the Free Soilers, it was laws
that prohibited state officers from aiding in the capture of fugitive slaves; and for the Know-
Nothings and many Whig politicians, it was laws restricting the naturalization of the Irish and
keeping them home on Election Day. Though few of the leaders of these movements had much
experience in state government or in the legislature, they did know how to create strong, unified,
and disciplined organizations that reached into every ward, town, and village.

The Fusionist Strategy and its Benefits

The Morrill Democrats did not have a strong state-wide organization, but they now had
lots of partners with strong organizations, though their presence and strength varied throughout
the state. They made the best of this regional variation and in the process accepted and adjusted
to the fact that there were multiple power centers that existed in the state. Morrill adopted a
strategy, not seen in Maine before, that was made possible by the “party ticket voting system.”
The Morrill campaign constructed its state-wide strategy based on county organizations,
recognizing that in each county the strength of each of its partners varied greatly. They called on
their supporters to “fuse,” namely, to meet at the county level with their partners and to agree on
as many common candidates as possible and to support them through the specially negotiated
party tickets.\footnote{In this focus on the counties, the Morrill campaign was no different than Whigs or Democrats in the past; their county parties had always run the party's campaigns. In addition, the county parties had always negotiated tickets consisting of party leaders, but those negotiations had always been with forces and faction with one party.} Therefore, unlike the other parties, Morrill Democrats would not have their own ticket in every county, with candidates running for every available office.

Instead each county would have its own ticket, reflecting the balance of the strength of the partners in that county. These tickets would be agreed to after hard bargaining between the coalition partners that would divide up the nominations for Congress, county offices, and for the State Senate and State House. For this to work, it was essential that every partner feel that its share of candidates across the state reflected its actual following and strength. The only common item on each of these county tickets was that Morrill was at the top as the candidate for governor. Another reason why the Morrill men adopted this strategy was that in the multiparty race in which no candidate was likely to receive a majority, it would be the Legislature which would chose the governor. By developing party tickets that reflected the actual forces at the local level, they could expect to elect the maximum number of the state representatives and senators.

Another specific element of the "party ticket" system of voting that helped create a coalition was that it allowed all of the coalition partners to maintain their autonomy. In this campaign, each coalition partner would produce its own party ticket, and would put that ticket in the hands of its supporters. Thus the partners retained their own identity and independence. But, as they agreed, each partner would include on its party ticket every candidate that the groups fusing had agreed to support. Therefore, the partner or party would retain its own integrity and independence while supporting common candidates. This approach was only possible because of the way that selectmen and ward clerks were required to count the votes. The selectmen had
to give each candidate every vote he received, no matter what ballot he received it on. Fusion was a powerful weapon in the hands of insurgents.\footnote{Under present law, fusion is impossible. By law in Maine and in virtually all other states, a candidate's name can appear only once on the official state ballot. Thus, it is impossible for parties to "fuse" and support the same candidate. New York allows fusion, and its Conservative Party, Liberal Party, and Family and Workers Party can run their own tickets, sometimes sharing candidates with the major parties, and sometimes running against them. Fusion was outlawed in Maine as part of Australian ballot reform of 1892.}

Fusion was the tactic and it took many different forms. In Franklin County, for example, pro-Morrill Whigs, Democrats, and Free Soilers all scheduled their individual county conventions for the same day in the town of Strong. The parties each chose committees to consult with one other. The result was a joint ticket with an agreed upon candidate for each of the three major offices – a Free Soiler as senator, a Whig as county commissioner, and a Morrill Democrat as county treasurer. In addition, delegates to the three different conventions later met in a combined convention, agreed to unite, and decided to call themselves "Republicans." The Third Congressional District took another approach. There Morrill's supporters called for a People's Convention to assemble in Rockland. They elected an executive committee with equal representation from the pro-Morrill Whigs, Democrats, and Free Soilers and charged it with choosing the best single candidate. After the committee finished its work, the Convention endorsed their choice.\footnote{Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 120. Albion Parris, the Democrat had 28,462, Isaac Reed, the Whig just 14,001 and Shepard Cary, the Liberal Democrat only 3,478.} The success of this fusion strategy was one reason why the Morrill insurgency grew so strong and why it got that name. The Morrill supporters worked so diligently at common endorsements that people called them "fusionists" and called the Morrill
"party" the "Fusion Party." While some county groups called themselves Republicans, the most common name they gave to themselves was “Fusionists.”

In the September election, the Fusionists won a large plurality. Gathering his votes from many party tickets, Anson Morrill topped all the candidates with 44,564 votes, with the Pierce Democrat coming in second and Whig third. Most important, those same party tickets that gave Morrill a plurality produced clear majorities for his supporters in the State Senate and State House. The major force behind his success was the rising anger at both the national Whigs and Democrats for the passing of the Kansas Nebraska Act. The Maine Whigs lost 13,000 votes from their total in 1853. The Democrats lost 7,000. Morrill, on the other hand, did far better than he did in the previous year, adding nearly 30,000. Where did his support come from? According to Richard Wescott, 15,000 of his votes came from the Democrats, 13,000 from the Whigs, 9,000 from Free Soilers (who had decided to support Morrill), and the other 7,000 from men who had not voted in 1853. What accounts for these dramatic shifts? Did men abandon their party loyalties? Some may have and many did not because fusion allowed anti-South and pro-Maine Law Democrats to vote for Morrill on "rump" Democratic tickets, and

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111 The official records of the state identify Morrill as the candidate of the Maine Law and the Know-Nothing Party. These records suggest that the Know-Nothing’s role was much more significant than Hatch portrayed in his Maine A History. The victorious Republicans were probably embarrassed about the critical role the Know-Nothings played in their party’s founding. Regrettably, since the Know-Nothings were a secret society, there are virtually no written records which could give us a clearer understanding of the Party and its influence on the founding of the Fusion Party and hence the Republican Party.

112 Parris, the Democrat, received 28,462, Isaac Reed, the Whig 14,001, and Carey, the candidate of the Chandler group just 3,478. Morrill, however, had not won a majority. The final choice would be made by the legislature meeting in January.

113 Fusion tickets had also elected five of the six Congressmen.

114 Wescott, New Men, New Issues, p. 121
Whigs could do the same on rump Whig tickets. Were there new voters pulled in? Yes, according to Wescott, the Morrill campaign brought about 7,000 new or inactive men to the polls,\textsuperscript{115} perhaps men who had dropped out of politics or young men who had never voted before.

The 1855 Fusion Legislature

When the Legislature met in January, the “Fusionists” had solid majorities in both the House and the Senate. Their strategy had worked, and the victors decided to organize the Legislature and set out a legislative agenda consistent with their "fusionist" principles. When the Senate met to elect its president, they chose a Free-Soiler from Franklin County. The House chose as its speaker a Morrill Democrat who was active in the Sons of Temperance. Since members of the powerful Executive Council would control appointments, the Legislature chose two Free Soilers, two Whigs, and three Morrill Democrats. And a joint legislative convention filled the offices of secretary of state, treasurer, and land agent with a Morrill Democrat, a Free-Soiler, and a Whig.\textsuperscript{116} In most of these decisions, John L. Stevens, the co-owner with James G. Blaine of the \textit{Journal}, was no doubt involved because he had recently become the State Committee Chair of the Fusionist Party. The most important decision of the Legislature was to elect Anson Morrill as governor. Although he had not won a majority, the Fusionists majorities were so large in both houses that Morrill was easily elected.\textsuperscript{117}

The Fusionists also improved their ability to get their message out to voters. They revoked the contract the state had with the Democratic \textit{Augusta Age} for state printing and

\textsuperscript{115} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 121

\textsuperscript{116} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{117} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 129.
transferred it to the Kennebec Journal, a long-time Whig paper which had supported the Morrill Democrats and then the Fusionists.\textsuperscript{118} This action by the Legislature significantly increased the value of the investments that James G. Blaine and John Stevens had made in buying the Journal.\textsuperscript{119}

The backgrounds of Fusion members of the Legislature show how important these single-issue movements were to the new party. Few of the new leaders had much experience in party politics. For two-thirds of them, this was the first time they would sit in the Legislature. They differed in other ways as well. There were fewer lawyers, more clergymen, and more merchants, along with men with "a dozen other curious particulars." \textsuperscript{120}

With solid majorities, the single-issue movements that made up the Fusionists were in firm control. The Legislature passed several bills that were priorities for the prohibitionists, the Know-Nothings, and the anti-slavery activists. The Maine Law men won a tough enforcement law that went far beyond existing practice. Enforcement now would be harsh and quick: any three county citizens could lodge a complaint against a person for violating the Law, and judges could issue search warrants of homes or businesses based on those complaints.\textsuperscript{121} This law made possession ipso facto evidence of intent to violate the law, putting the burden of proof on the accused to prove his innocence. For the Free Soilers and anti-slavery men, the legislature went on record condemning slavery, the Fugitive Slave Act, and the repeal of the Missouri

\textsuperscript{118} Wescott, New Men, New Issues, pp 129-130.


\textsuperscript{120} Portland Advertiser, March 7, 1855 and Wescott, New Men, New Issues, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{121} Hatch, Maine, A History Vol II, p 383.
Compromise. It also approved strict instructions to the state's Congressmen and Senators on how they were to vote on slavery questions. It also passed a “personal liberty law” making it illegal for Maine sheriffs and judges to assist efforts by slavecatchers or federal officials to recapture fugitive slaves.

The Know-Nothings also got much of what they were looking for, as they were probably the largest single group among the Fusionist legislators. James G. Blaine estimated that of the 151 members of the Maine House, between 80 and 90 were Know-Nothings.122 One new law forbade state, county, and municipal courts from issuing naturalization certificates to immigrants, and another law forced immigrants who were citizens to present their naturalization papers to election officials three months before they wished to vote.123 Preventing immigrants from voting also had a partisan benefit for the Fusionists. Most of the Catholic immigrants, when they voted, were likely to vote Democratic. With solid majorities made of men from single-issue movements, the Legislature had implemented their agendas.124

But the Fusionists also had a broader reform agenda. They wanted to weaken the power of party professionals as well as the power of the governor. They wanted to strengthen the powers of the Legislature and the counties at the expense of the Governor and the state. To enshrine these changes in the constitutional order, they drafted constitutional amendments and sent them to the people for ratification. One amendment ended the Governor’s and Executive Council’s authority to appoint county sheriffs, probate judges, and registrars and judges in police


and municipal courts. These officials would be chosen by the county voters. They also stripped from the Governor and Executive Council the authority to choose the State Land Agent, Adjutant General (of the Militia), and the Attorney General—all state officials with considerable power. Instead, these state officials would now be elected by the Legislature. These changes to some degree reflected the growing influence of the local sources of power. The motivation of the Fusionists in passing these amendments is not completely clear from the record. They supported reform, but there may have also been a partisan motivation. They had no reason to know that the Fusionist party they started would remain in control of the state and had many reasons to believe that the Democrats would soon return to power. The Fusionists wanted to make sure that the governor was far weaker than he been in previous decades.

Just a month after it convened, the Fusion Legislature continued on their reform agenda, hoping to increase the momentum for permanent change. Fusionists decided to rebuild their party, this time with a unique structure. Strangely, it was a the Caucus of Fusionist Legislators that took the lead. It issued a “Call” for the people to choose delegates for a convention that would bring together all the people of the state "without distinction of former parties," and it would select a state committee, adopt a platform, and nominate a candidate for Governor. The convention met in Augusta on February 22 while the legislature was in session. As could be expected, it nominated Anson P. Morrill as its candidate for Governor, and then elected a State

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125 Portland Daily Advertiser, January 7, 25, 1855.

126 Interestingly, the Call issued by the Legislative Caucus was signed by more than 125 other Republicans. Clearly, the new party wanted to make clear that they wanted to break with the long tradition of legislative caucuses acting as the state conventions. See Portland Advertiser, February 20, 1855.
Committee\textsuperscript{127} and approved a platform that was “anti-liquor, anti-slavery extension, and anti-foreign.”\textsuperscript{128} Another plank complained about the “debasement of the right of suffrage” by naturalized voters as “an alarming evil,” and urged, according to Gienapp, “strict enforcement or modification of the existing naturalization laws.”\textsuperscript{129} John L. Stevens, the Fusionist State Chair was a leading member of the Resolutions Committee.\textsuperscript{130}

The convention also chose a new name in conformance with similar steps taken elsewhere in the country for their party – Republican. The convention delegates also wanted to create a state party structure new to Maine: one that permanently weakened the role of professional politicians. The Republican Party, for one thing, would be an independent institution, controlled by its supporters and leaders, not by the party's elected state officials. The legislative caucus will lose its powerful role. Power would be held by convention delegates chosen locally. At a state convention, delegates would adopt the party's platform, nominate its candidate for governor, and choose its state committee.\textsuperscript{131} These steps finally answered the long open question of who controlled the party – its legislators or its local leaders.

Republican optimism did not last long after the Legislature adjourned. They quickly found themselves faced in the 1855 campaign with a revived coalition of Pierce Democrats and Strait Whigs who enthusiastically attacked the Fusion Legislature and the laws it passed. The

\textsuperscript{127} For membership, see \textit{Portland Advertiser}, March 6, 1855.

\textsuperscript{128} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{129} Gienapp, \textit{The Origins of the Republican Party}, p. 205.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Kennebec Journal}, March 2, 1855. A few months after this convention Stevens would leave Augusta for the Know-Nothing Party’s National Convention.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Kennebec Journal}, March 2, 1855.
Republicans’ opponents had learned some lessons. They did not talk about slavery, or defend the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Franklin Pierce, the Fugitive Slave Act, or the new aggressive policies of the South. Instead they focused solely on the laws that the single-issue movements had pushed through the Fusion Legislature. Their prime target of attack was the Maine Law and its new tough enforcement provisions. Their strategy received a major boost from the actions of Neal Dow, the architect of the Maine Law, who had just been elected Mayor of Portland on a platform committed to opposing “Rum, Hunkerism, Catholicism, and Corruption.” Intent on aggressively implementing the new provisions of the Maine Law, he had seized liquor supplies, shut down saloons, and enraged his opponents. On June 2, demonstrations erupted. One large protest in front of City Hall brought out Democrats and the Irish against what organizers claimed was a liquor business that Dow was running from City Hall, selling liquor that he had seized from others. Dow called out the militia, which fired into the crowd, killing one and wounding several. Democratic opponents in Portland brought him to trial. The Portland riot was a great issue for the anti-Fusion coalition which attacked the Fusionist for encouraging violence and disorder. The regular Democrats and Whigs also hammered in the Catholic wards of the cities at the Know-Nothings, who were a major force in the Fusion coalition.

These anti-Fusion attacks resonated with voters, some of whom had voted for Morrill in 1854. The Fusionists were on the defensive throughout the campaign, and they faced other problems. Some of their newspaper editors defected because of the intervention of President Pierce. E. K. Smart, the editor of the *Belfast Free Press* and long-time supporter of Morrill, switched his loyalty to the regular Democrats after the President selected him to be Collector of


133 Most detailed description of the Portland Riot can be found in Hatch, *Maine: A History* pp. 383-387.
Customs in Belfast. Peirce’s patronage appointees worked hard supporting the anti-Fusion coalition.

The sharp conflicts over these issues and the parties drew the highest turnout in Maine history – 110,477. Many of the new voters, however, came to the polls to vote against the Fusion laws and the legislators who had passed them. The result in the state election in September was a stinging Republican defeat. The candidate of the regular Democrats for governor, Samuel Wells, got 20,000 more votes than the party’s candidate in 1854. Morrill had increased his vote by 9,000 and the Whigs received 10,610. But, together the Whigs and the regular Democrats had won 58,000 to Morrill’s 51,441. The decision as to who would be governor would be up to the Legislature. But the new 1856 Legislature was the direct opposite of the one that took office in 1855. In the House, for example, only eight incumbents were re-elected. The regular Democrats won 70 seats, the Whigs 21, and the new Republicans just 60. With these majorities, the Legislature elected the Pierce Democrat, Samuel Wells, as Maine’s governor. The Republicans blamed their defeat on Dow and the extreme laws that the Fusionists had passed.

**Regular Democrats and Whigs in Control**

The regular Democrats and Straight Whigs would also use their control of the 1856 legislature to try to lay the foundation for a permanent governing coalition. In regard to state offices, like the Fusionists, they divided up the rewards among their parties. Besides electing the Democrat as governor, they gave the Whigs the ability to choose the Attorney General, the

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Adjutant General, and the Speaker of the House. In addition, the Whig-Democratic alliance rewarded the defeated Whig candidate for Governor Isaac Reed with the office of State Treasurer. The Democrats sought and won control of the important Executive Council. On legislative matters, the alliance rewarded Catholics who helped defeat the Fusionists by repealing the Republicans’ naturalization legislation and the voting restrictions. For the anti-Maine Law voters, they repealed that law, including its tough enforcement provisions. In its place they passed a weak and therefore more acceptable license law. Efforts to construct a permanent alliance between Pierce Democrats and Straight Whigs, however, ultimately collapsed. Support in Maine for the Pierce Administration and for national Whig and Democratic leaders advocating compromise with the South weakened throughout 1856. Maine’s newspapers’ sensational coverage of the outrages that pro-slavery forces committed in “Bleeding Kansas” turned many against Peirce and the national Whigs and Democrats who supported his policies.

The other major problem was that the Whig party was collapsing internally. Their value as an ally was dissolving, as many of their members were leaving for the new Republican Party and a smaller number to the Democrats. Between 1852 and 1855, the Whig total vote had fallen from 29,127 to 10,610. At their 1855 Whig state convention, only 150 delegates appeared. The few delegates debated what should be done. Anti-slavery Whigs urged the party to dissolve and join the new Republican Party, but the convention was unable to act. When resolutions were brought forward that attacked Democratic President Pierce for supporting the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, they were defeated, an indication of how far the remaining Whig Party leaders had moved towards the Democrats. Although they were representing fewer and fewer

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136 *Portland Daily Advertiser*, January 4, 8, and 21, 1856

people, the majority of delegates wanted the party to remain independent, even if small, believing that by continuing their alliance with the Democrats they could continue to share in state patronage and might be rewarded by Pierce with some national patronage.

The results of 1855, nevertheless, were a disaster for the Fusionists. They and their leaders lost credibility. Nehemiah Abbot of Belfast, in a letter to Hannibal Hamlin, urged him to become a Republican and accept the party's nomination in 1856. "The Republican Party," he said, "for the past year has been too much under the control of ultra and extreme men. Its late temporary defeat, is attributable to that fact alone. Had it been managed by men not so ultra on the temperance question, and not quite so strongly tinctured with old fashioned abolitionism, we should have carried the late election."138

**Conclusion**

In the first half of the 1850s, the two long established parties – the Whigs and the Democrats – lost control over the state’s political system. The single-issue messages – the Maine Law, the expansion of slavery, and the restrictions on Catholics – were so compelling that the party structures weakened and in some cases collapsed. More and more voters were abandoning their traditional party loyalties. In fact, in the five gubernatorial elections from 1851 to 1855, the defections of party loyalists were so strong that neither the Democratic nor the Whig candidate for governor was able to win a majority.

Not all voters abandoned their party loyalties, but a large minority did, perhaps 40,000 men, or 4 out of every 10 voters. They voted either for the candidate of the other party, for an

138 Nehemiah Abbot to Hamlin, November 2, 1855, *Hamlin Papers*
insurgent “bolting” from their party’s nominee or for a third (or fourth) party. These swing voters could easily be the margin of victory.

The frenzied political situation of this era was clear evidence that neither major party had been able to cope with the challenges raised by single-issue politics. For decades the two parties, even without strong state-wide structures, had been successful in preventing insurgents from pushing controversial issues into their party’s conventions and platforms. Now, they had no choice but to reverse course. They took strong positions on the controversial issues so that they could compete for the 40,000 issue-oriented swing voters. In the early part of this period, the most controversial question had been the Maine Law, and men broke party loyalties so that they could vote for or against the candidates who endorsed it. In 1854, a new and even more controversial issue sprang up in each of the major parties, specifically the South’s demand that slavery be allowed to expand into the western territories. Martin Van Buren, the man credited with creating the modern political party, knew how destructive the issue of slavery could be and had helped in the 1820s to fashion a two-party system with strong supporters in both the North and the South, so as to keep that issue out of national politics.

Each party targeted potential defectors, weakening their distinctiveness by appealing to voters in parties for causes they had very recently demonized. The Whigs appealed to Free Soil voters by taking stronger positions against slavery than they would have otherwise, and they attacked Catholics to get Know-Nothing votes. Regular pro-Pierce Democrats attacked the Maine Law seeking votes from anti-prohibition Whigs. They also attacked Hannibal Hamlin and his allies in order to appeal to businessmen worried that alienating the South would be bad for business. Morrill Democrats, who were already strongly pro-Maine Law attacked Pierce and the Kansas Nebraska Act seeking to win away votes from the Free Soil Party and from anti-slavery
Whigs. No longer did a party’s campaign concentrate solely on getting their core voters to the polls; now their strategy was to take increasingly stronger positions pry away voters away from other parties.

The Democrats and the Whigs were so preoccupied with defections that they made little progress in creating stronger and more centralized party structures. Strangely, their greatest weakness remained at the state level where processes and procedures had remained unclear. Whigs and Democrats continued to use party caucuses rather than conventions to nominate their candidate for governor. When state conventions were called, they made little effort to produce a big turnout. It would appear that party leaders did not want to take a chance at convening large conventions in contentious times, worried perhaps that they would lose control. Both Whigs and Democrats did elect State Committees and a State Chairman. But the Committee seemed often to be an arm of party’s Legislative Caucus and the State Chair, a mere figurehead whose primary role was to call a state convention to order. The strongest institutional structures of the Whigs and Democrats remained at the local level where well-attended county, congressional district, and senatorial district caucuses met annually to choose nominees from amongst the many ambitious men. During that same period, however, the single-issue movements had vastly improved their own organizations, expanding the reach for their newspapers, putting speakers on the road, producing new forms of literature, holding regular annual conventions, and creating strong central structures. In addition, their activists became extremely competent in organizing and running caucuses and conventions.

It was the genius of the Morrill Democrats – all veterans of the fight for the Maine Law – that they found a formula that could mobilize the single-issue movements into a powerful political force. They did it by building a political party – the Fusionist Party – around these
movements. In their 1854 campaign, the Morrill Democrats won the support of the Maine Temperance Union, the Free Soil Party, anti-Kansas-Nebraska men, and the Know-Nothings. It was an impressive alliance. In that four candidate race, this coalition of single-issue voters came very close to winning a clear majority. But they did win the governor’s office for Anson Morrill because their strength across the state gave them the needed majority in the Legislature.

Their coalition effort was greatly helped by another key provision of the state’s constitutional order. Under state law, all the votes cast for a candidate, despite coming from different ballots, were added to the candidate’s total. This element of the party ticket system allowed coalitions and alliances such as the Fusion Party to flower. Individual single-issue groups could produce a party ticket under their name, with Morrill’s name at the top, and distribute it to their supporters. By doing so, the single-issue movements such as the Free Soil Party or the Know-Nothings could remain distinct and independent in the eyes of their supporters, while at the same time supporting their coalition’s candidates.

By 1855, it was clear that the political turbulence of the first half of the 1850s had affected the two parties very differently. The Whig Party had virtually collapsed. In 1850, their candidate for governor had received 32,120 votes, but in 1855, the numbers had fallen precipitously to 10,610. The Whig voters had defected over the years, some to the Free Soil Party, some to the Morrill Democrats, and others to anti-Maine Law and pro-South Democrats. This collapse seems strange, as one would have thought that because there were many anti-slavery and pro-Maine Law Whigs they would have survived. But in the heady and turbulent years of the first half of the 1850s the Whigs, unlike the Morrill Democrats, made no real effort to reach out and embrace the single-issue movements. Instead, their attempts at alliances were just temporary and tactical.
The Democrats, the dominant party for the previous two decades, did survive but divided. The regular Democrats, closely tied to the pro-South Democratic President did continue thanks in large part to the national patronage that continued to flow from President Pierce. And there were many Democrats who were anti-Maine Law, pro-South, and anti-abolition. President Pierce was able to keep the Regular Democratic Party well organized and well-funded.

The other group, the Morrill Democrats took a different path. After their split from the regular Democrats, they merged with the Maine Law men, the anti-Kansas-Nebraska men, the Free Soil Party, and the Know-Nothings, and created with them a new party – the Fusion Party.

While their platform was an amalgam of the laws being put forward by the single-issue movements, they took the critical step and came out with an aggressive and uncompromising attack on the Slave Power and Southern expansion. At their convention in 1855, to make their position on Southern expansion even stronger, they chose a new name – the Republican Party – to identify themselves even more clearly with the force fighting against the Slave Power, most of whom were calling themselves Republicans. It is also interesting that the Maine Republican Party was a child of one wing of the Democratic Party. Its origins in that party would have many profound and long lasting consequences for Maine’s new Republican Party.

In the 1855 election the regular Democrats showed their strength. The election was fought over the laws that the Fusionists had passed, laws that the new Republican Party had to defend. The results were a victory of the Democratic-Whig alliance. Their victory showed that the majority of the state was not anti-slavery, pro-Maine Law, and anti-Catholic. The campaign against the Republicans was fought over these state issues, and the regular Democrats and the remnants of the Whigs brought out a record number of Catholics, anti-abolitionists, and men who believed that they had the right to drink whatever they wanted. Although Morrill won a plurality
of the popular vote for governor, together the Democrats and the remnants of the Whigs received 10,000 more votes than Morrill. In the process they won control of the Legislature and elected a Democratic governor.

The newly-minted Republican Party had gone down in a stunning defeat.
CHAPTER VI

1856 –1860: THE REPUBLICAN TRANSFORMATION

Introduction

Soon after their rout in the previous year, Republicans began to prepare for their 1856 State Convention. They started with an important asset. They had many devoted activists, men with wide and deep experience in the single-issue movements. And in the spring and summer they acquired important new allies, men from the top ranks of the Whig and the Democratic parties, men who no longer felt they had a future there. One was Whig US Senator William Pitt Fessenden who could see his Whig Party beginning to dissolve. Without a party to support him, he would have little chance of re-election. Hannibal Hamlin, the Democratic Senator, knew that the Southerners who dominated the National Democratic Party would bar him from any further advancement in the US Senate and from being on any national ticket. Fessenden, Hamlin, and scores of other experienced Whig and Democratic politicians decided that their best personal strategy was to try to make something of this stumbling and amateur Republican Party.

As a result, experienced politicians and their allies flooded into the local Republican caucuses, winning elections as delegates and pushing aside the discredited Fusionist founders. They would take over the Republican Convention. That was the easy part: but the next step was to come up with a strategy, a new organization, a platform and a candidate, all necessary if they wanted to reclaim the initiative from the now resurgent regular Democratic Party.
Although the regular Democrats had been weakened by the insurgencies and by their frequent losses in the first years of the decade, they were a formidable force still capable of winning elections. In fact, a majority of the state’s voters probably considered themselves Democrats. Throughout their decades of dominance, the Democrats had built up substantial loyalty. That party loyalty had been passed on from father to son. Along with it came a hatred for Whigs, militant prohibitionists, evangelical ministers, and abolitionists—all of whom occupied prominent places in the new Republican Party.

Democrats also had endorsed an ideology of nationalism which had wide popular support. Ever since Andrew Jackson’s strong stand against South Carolina’s Nullification Ordinance back in 1833, Democrats had believed that the United States should be unified to pursue an aggressive manifest destiny policy. Their belief in unity put them in opposition to those who seemed to encourage confrontation with the South. In fact, they argued that the major threat to national unity was the Republicans’ anti-slavery policies. The Democrats remained strong in the inland frontier, in the Catholic areas in the major cities, and in the coastal ports which depended on Southern raw materials and Southern markets.

The Democrats’ state organization also kept their party a powerful force. The national patronage that Democratic Presidents Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan gave to the Maine Democrats allowed them to deploy an army of campaign workers in every election. Yet, Pierce’s and later Buchanan’s support came at a price. Maine Democratic leaders had to endorse his pro-South policies. and this gave the Republicans their strongest campaign issue, an issue they used relentlessly in all the elections up to and including 1860.

As the Republicans and Democrats were trying to deal with the problems posed by single-issue organizations and develop a winning campaign strategy for the future, the structure
of the Maine economy continued the changes that had begun earlier, creating a new set of opportunities and problems for the two parties. The expansion of the railroads was changing the geography of the state, breaking down some of the isolation of the river valleys and opening up Maine’s interior. By the end of the decade, Maine would have 477 miles of track, double the amount in 1850. The rail system reached Bangor during the decade, and other lines reached further north up the valleys, opening up new forests for loggers and new towns for cotton mill promoters.

State politics also changed. The railroads became deeply involved with the Legislature, often elbowing out the lumber interests. They also become a strong presence in town, city, and county affairs, where they sought financing for construction. Manufacturing also continued its expansion. Men were opening cotton mills, and others started mills that made shoes, woolens, and railroad equipment, as well as quarries that produced lime, granite, and slate. Manufacturers were drawn to the Republicans because of their support for higher tariffs.

The Democrats, for their part, continued their support for free trade, which had been the priority of the state’s merchant shipping and ship building industries. In fact the structure of Maine’s economy would have been very different in 1860 if the Congress had had a high tariff policy in place for those decades. Maine’s manufacturing sector would, no doubt, have been much larger while its shipping and shipbuilding industries would have been smaller and the coastal towns less prosperous.

Other elements of the economic power structure remained the same. Lumber remained the largest industry although railroads were challenging its dominance of Augusta. The shipping and shipbuilding industries were prospering thanks to rapid increases in the amount of cotton that the South was selling to England, France, and more recently to New England. Port cities with
close ties to the South were booming as Maine’s ships and shipbuilders worked overtime to meet the demand for boats that would carry cotton from the South to Europe and New England.

Yet, the issues of free trade, high tariffs, and the newly passed Reciprocity Treaty were not the ones Republican leaders were focused on. In 1856 the Republicans had political problems; they needed to find ways to recover from their devastating loss in 1855. The questions before them were numerous and complex. What were the key constituencies that they should target in the upcoming 1856 election? Should they modify their position on Catholics and go after the Irish vote? Should they modify their position on the Maine Law, risking defections among the most militant prohibitionists? Should they aggressively seek Democratic votes? Should they continue as an alliance of single-issue-movements but redouble their efforts to turn out every possible favorable voter? Did they need a more well-known and moderate politician, such as William Pitt Fessenden or Hannibal Hamlin at the top of their ticket in 1856? What issues should they campaign on?

But probably the most crucial question they faced was how would they organize their new party? Would they continue to accept the weak state party structures, as both Democrats and Whigs had been willing to do in the past? Or would they adopt the more centralized organizational forms that had brought success to the single-issue movements? All of these questions were before the Republican Party leaders as they prepared for their 1856 Convention. Another key question for the Republicans would be, if they came to power, would they develop a new view – different than that of the Democrats – of the proper role and size of Maine’s state government. As many of the new party leaders and voters were former Whigs, it would appear likely that they would aggressively use state authority and resources to confront whatever problems Maine faced.
Building a Party, Constructing a Message, and Creating a Disciplined Organization

The Maine Republican Convention

On Tuesday, July 8, 1856 the local leaders of Maine’s Republican Party arrived in Portland. The enthusiasm they were bringing to their convention was remarkable given that the new party had recently suffered two stunning defeats: the first in the 1855 state election when the alliance of Straight Whigs and Regular (Pierce) Democrats had soundly defeated them. The second was in 1856 when the new hostile Legislature repealed all the bills passed by the Republican founding fathers the years before. Controls on the naturalization of foreigners were gone, as was the tough Maine Law. Maine officials were now expected to help federal marshals enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, and their party was without a leader, a strategy, or clear compelling message.

But events were changing. Recent national events were shifting the political dynamics in Maine. The 1,300 Republican convention delegates were excited. Just a month earlier, the Democratic Party had met in Cincinnati for its National Convention and had nominated James Buchanan of Pennsylvania for president. Republicans knew that Buchanan would use the full powers of his presidency to support slavery and the South, but they had also read of the exciting news that two weeks earlier at the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, the delegates had nominated the well-known and well-respected John C. Fremont to be their party’s candidate for President of the United States.1

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The 1856 National Conventions

At the National Democratic Convention in Cincinnati, the South was clearly the dominant force. The Southern states came unified around their demand that any man seeking the presidential nomination had to pledge to defend Southern interests. Three men competed for the nomination: Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, the architect of the Kansas-Nebraska Act; the incumbent President Franklin Pierce; and John Buchanan of Pennsylvania, a former Congressman and Secretary of State. All were friendly to the South, but Buchanan was the most supportive. In fact, one of his biographers, Jean Baker, called him “a northern man with Southern principles.”

In the voting, Buchanan had a tremendous advantage. The South was nearly unanimously for him. It supported him through multiple ballots. He won on the 17th ballot.

The Democratic platform the convention adopted offered little to Northern Democrats who were finding that public opinion was shifting against them. Instead, it reflected the South’s political power in the Democratic Party and the South’s growing fear that the North was uniting against them. The platform called for a federal government of limited powers, a Congress that had no authority to restrict or limit slavery, and one which would affirmatively uphold “the domestic institutions of the states.” The platform also called for vigorous enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, an end to anti-slavery agitation, and “proper efforts to assure [US]

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3 For a man to win the Democratic nomination, he had to receive two-thirds of the delegates’ votes. Since more than one-third of the delegates were from the South, only candidates acceptable to the South could be nominated, as long as the South was united.
ascendancy in the Gulf of Mexico.” The “Cincinnati Platform” was unpopular, however, with many Maine Democrats, and the nomination of Buchanan was the final straw for Hannibal Hamlin and Lot Morrill. Like many formerly loyal Northern Democrats, they announced that they were leaving their party. They did not say they were joining the Republicans however.

The Republican delegates who met in Philadelphia were nearly all from the North. This was a party built around opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and to any expansion of slavery outside of the original slave states. Unlike the Democrats, this new Republican Party was united around its core principles. At this point there were few internal conflicts. When the delegates convened, the leaders were worried, however, at the chance that the Know-Nothings might run their own candidate. But some sharp dealing by Republican leaders effectively co-opted the Know-Nothings, and most of them eventually agreed to support the Republican nominee.

On the first ballot, the delegates chose John C. Fremont as their presidential candidate. In their platform, the Republicans laid out a clear “northern nationalism” agenda. They put slavery front and center. The platform affirmed Congress’s power to prohibit slavery in the territories, hammered at President Pierce’s pro-Southern Kansas policies, called for the immediate admission of Kansas as a free state, supported the construction of a railroad to the Pacific Coast, and called for a major program of improvements to the nation’s rivers and harbors. In their effort to minimize Catholic opposition to Fremont, the convention turned down a plank that called for a toughening of the country’s naturalization laws. Maine Republicans would make

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4 Baker, James Buchanan, p. 69. Buchanan and the Democrats wanted a more aggressive foreign policy both in the Caribbean and the Southwest, places where the South hoped to create additional slave states.

little mention of a Pacific Railroad or a national program of internal improvement when they campaigned for Fremont.

The Republican National Convention was also James G. Blaine’s first entrance into national politics. He had won for himself a coveted position as one of the Maine delegates. When Blaine came back to Maine, he would use his new prominence to his advantage. When Republicans organized a mass meeting in Augusta on August 22nd to ratify Fremont’s nomination, Blaine was selected to be the event’s Chairman.

The Collapse of Fusionism

Over 1,200 delegates – the largest turnout to a political convention in the state’s history – had found their way to Portland. To build turnout, the party leaders took advantage of a new technology – the state’s new railroads. On the morning of the convention, at about eight o’clock, the Portsmouth, Saco & Portland RR coming from the south brought a large delegation from York County. Soon after, trains of the York & Cumberland, then the Portland & Kennebec, the Androscoggin & Kennebec arrived with cars full of delegates from across the state. The Grand Trunk Railroad locomotive arrived pulling sixteen cars. Although merchants and promoters had built the railroads to carry cotton, farm products, and lumber, the tracks would also be the path on which the Republicans (and Democrats) would build a more popular and unified political party.

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8 *Kennebec Journal*, July 11, 1856.
The Fusionists who had created the party and led it in the 1854 state campaign, the 1855 Legislature, and the 1855 state campaign were discredited. The election defeat and the complete repeal of their ambitious agenda had shocked the Fusionist-Republican leaders and rank and file. The leadership had also lost the confidence of the Whigs and Democrats who they were trying to recruit into their new party. Nehemiah Abbot of Belfast, a Republican and a man with wide political experience and contacts, had spoken for many in a letter to Hannibal Hamlin in November of 1855. He attacked the Fusionists for their “ultra and extreme” leaders who had been responsible for the loss in the September 1855 elections.”

James G. Blaine, the co-owner of the *Kennebec Journal*, had earlier made the same charge against the Fusionists in a letter to the anti-slavery Whig Congressman, Israel Washburn Jr. Blaine had written that too many Republicans were willing to go off half-cocked, without considering the likely consequences. Such men, he thought, must be controlled or the new party would be ruined. In his comments, Blaine seemed to have been at odds with his partner John L. Stevens, who was one of the leaders of the Fusion Party. The failures of the Fusionist leadership created in their new party a vacuum at the top. Into this void, many experienced Democratic and Whig politicians would come.

**New Professional Leaders**

Despite the party’s poor reputation, a new breed of professional leaders appeared at the convention. Many were successful Whig and Democratic politicians who had up to now avoided the Fusionist insurgency, worried that if they got involved and it failed, their political careers

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would be shattered. But the striking successes of Republican Parties in other states and the
impressive ability of Maine’s new Republican Party to attract votes was overcoming their
reluctance. For Whigs, joining the Republicans looked like the only path to political survival.
The Whig Party was collapsing. Its share of the state-wide vote had fallen from 20% in 1850 to
9% in 1855. The party structure was also crumbling as Whig activists turned to other parties.
Whig politicians were becoming leaders without followers.

Northern Democrats such as Hannibal Hamlin had their own political reasons for taking a
new look at the Republicans. They knew they had no chance to rise further in their party since
the South had a lock on the presidential nominations, and it also controlled Congress. The
problem for the Republican Party was its single-issue origins, but if that could be overcome, the
new party could offer a safe refuge in the gathering storm. The first major politician to align
with the new Republican Party was the Whig Senator William Pitt Fessenden. He was soon
joined by other well-known Whigs such as Governor Edward Kent, Congressmen Freeman
Morse, and Elijah Washburn. Then came some lesser-known men like the Fusionists State
Committee Chair and former Know-Nothing John L. Stevens, and the young former Whig,
James G. Blaine, the co-owners of the Kennebec Journal. These new men would change the
balance of power in the party. Months earlier, rank-and-file Whigs and Democrats had flooded
into the new party's caucuses.

The delegates on their way to Portland had heard rumors that Republican Party leaders
were talking to Hannibal Hamlin about being the party’s candidate for governor. Hamlin’s was
probably the state’s most popular politician, and everyone knew that he had announced that he
would be leaving the Democratic Party. He had explained that he was appalled that the recent
Democratic National Convention had chosen James Buchanan as its candidate for president, and
he was equally angry at the convention for its platform which affirmed its support for the Kansas-Nebraska Act and thus endorsed the repeal of the “sacred” Missouri Compromise. One of the many men who played a key role in this process of convincing Hamlin to run as a Republican was the young James G. Blaine. One of the tasks that this new Republican recruit took on was to find out whether Republicans would be willing to accept Hamlin as their candidate. To this end, Blaine polled men from every county and congressional district in the state and reported back to party leaders that Hamlin would be a very strong candidate.

Hamlin in fact would be a great choice. He was indeed the most popular politician in Maine, and as a long-time loyal Democrat he could attract many votes from his old party. In addition, his positions on prohibition, slavery, and immigration were strong enough to satisfy the party’s activists but moderate enough not to alienate Democrats and Whigs.

When the Chairman of the State Committee gaveled the Republican Convention to order, Hamlin was still negotiating with the Republican leaders. He wanted to remain in the Senate, rather than run for governor. When the party leaders agreed that he could resign from the governor’s office if he was elected, and that they would support his candidacy for re-election to his Senate seat, Hamlin agreed to be their candidate. In fact, Hamlin had few other choices. Why did Hamlin decide to shift and join the Republicans? One reason was certainly a matter of principle – he was anti-slavery and he could not support the National Democratic Platform of 1856. Another reason was that he knew that he had no long-term future in the Democratic Party.

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11 Soon after the Republican Convention, Lot Morrill, one of the most well-known Democratic Party leaders, had joined Hamlin in renouncing his connection with the Democratic Party. He had been the Chairman of the Democratic State Committee. He had remained loyal to the Democratic Party even when his brother Anson bolted from the Democrats in 1853 and then later helped to found in 1855 the Republican Party. Portland Advertiser, June 24, 1856.
Although he remained loyal to the regular Democratic Party and supported its candidates against the Morrill insurgents in 1854 and 1855, the Southern Democratic leaders who controlled the national party considered him a traitor. But the major reason was that his first priority was to keep his seat in the Senate, and he decided that the only way to do this was to run for governor as a Republican. Hamlin knew that if the Democrats triumphed in Maine in 1856, most of its leaders would be Buchanan's patronage holders. and they would leave no stone unturned to prevent the Legislature from re-electing him.\textsuperscript{12} If, on the other hand, the Republicans triumphed without Hamlin's assistance, they would elect one of their own. His best strategy was to become a Republican.

**The Professionals Go to Work**

The delegates were elated when they learned of their party’s agreement with Hamlin. This Republican Convention was very different from the one held in February the year before. Experienced leadership had moved in and taken charge.\textsuperscript{13} A Temporary President, a Credentials Committee, Permanent Officers, and a Resolutions Committee were quickly created and set to work. All were mixtures of Whigs, Democrats and Free Soilers. County delegations chose their members for the Republican State Committee. The Kennebec County delegation picked John L. Stevens.\textsuperscript{14} While the committees were working, the convention turned to the selection of its


\textsuperscript{13} For detail on the Republican Convention, see both *Portland Advertiser*, July 15, 1856 or *Kennebec Journal*, July 11, 1856

\textsuperscript{14} See *Portland Advertiser*, July 15, 1856
candidate for governor. The result was a not a surprise. Hamlin received 1,062 votes of a possible 1,159. Hannibal Hamlin, the most popular Democrat in the state, would be the new Republican Party’s candidate for governor. The pragmatism and professionalism of the Republican Party’s new leaders was clear. Hamlin’s opponents would be Samuel Wells, the Democratic incumbent, and George F. Patten, a little-known Whig.

The party's platform also displayed the hand of party professionals. They decided to end the taint of radicalism that many believed had been fatal to the Fusionist-Republicans. Knowing how controversial strict prohibition had become, they wrote a platform that was silent on the Maine Law. Realizing that Morrill had lost hundreds, if not thousands of votes in the immigrant wards of the cities, the platform ignored immigration. In fact, except for a general censure of Democratic Governor Wells, the platform was silent on all state issues. One of Hamlin's prominent supporters, General William S. Cochran of Waldoboro, informed the delegates explicitly “that the issue this year was entirely different from that of last year. Then it [the campaign] was upon domestic affairs… Now it was upon National issues that the State election was to be conducted, and the issue was between liberty and slavery.” The national issue that the Republican Party would focus its campaigning on in 1856 was the rising power of the South, and the threat that the expansion of slavery had for “free labor.” Republicans, in fact, would follow Cochran’s advice in 1856, and in virtually all its campaigns for decades.

15 In fact, the Call to the Convention did not mention the Maine Law, restrictions on naturalization, or strengthening the state’s “personal liberty laws.” It focused entirely on slavery and the South. For text see Kennebec Journal, July 4, 1856.

16 See Richard R. Wescott's analysis of 1856 Platform in Wescott, New Men and New Issues, p. 149. For the platform itself, see 1856 Republican State Platform, Kennebec Journal, July 11, 1856.

17 Kennebec Journal, July 11, 1856.
The new professionals also made changes to the party’s structure and campaign management. These changes reflected current problems but also an unusually strong commitment to organization. Lacking the army of national and state patronage workers which the Democrats could deploy, Republicans needed thousands of volunteers.\textsuperscript{18} To bring them into the party, they created a more participatory structure. Thus, a major effort was made to recruit as many men as possible into the local caucuses to elect delegates to the state convention. Another effort sought to maximize turnout for the July convention, which they accomplished, thanks in large part to the railroads. The new strategy did not end at the convention. Participation was encouraged after the state convention at the town and city caucuses and at the county and district conventions which would nominate Republicans for local office.

The new leaders also took initial steps towards a more centralized structure. The Republican State Committee would meet at other times during the year, directing the party activities between conventions. It would have many responsibilities: running the party’s campaigns, enlisting candidates, resolving disputes, raising funds, scheduling events, recruiting speakers, coordinating the party newspapers, and convening the annual convention. The running of Congressional campaigns was centralized as well. In the past, these campaigns were organized by the county parties; some did the job well and others poorly. In the new system, the state committee took the leading role, picking five men in each congressional district who would run the district’s campaign.\textsuperscript{19} Recognizing the tensions created by the many centers of power in

\textsuperscript{18} The Fusionist Republicans controlled the state for one year after Morrill’s 1854 election victory, but a Whig-Democratic coalition won in 1855 and would control state government during the 1856 campaign. Thus, state officials, and the more numerous federal officials, worked against Hamlin in September and for Buchanan in November.

the state, they instituted a policy that henceforth each county in a congressional district, on a rotating basis, would nominate one of its own as the party’s candidate for Congress. The turnover in the Congressional delegation certainly did not give the state the strongest representation in Washington, but the change did end an immediate political problem of growing tensions amongst party leaders representing the various power centers in the congressional districts.

The State Committee also tried to solve an endemic problem – raising money for its operations and campaigns. Here the party had to work very hard if it wanted to compete with the Democrats who could assess the salaries of nearly a thousand federal office holders.\(^{20}\) One Republican strategy was to seek money outside the state from national Republican leaders. They argued to national leaders that the entire Republican Party should support the Maine effort, since the Maine election was one of the first held in the country, and Republican morale would rise or fall based on Maine’s results. Most of what was done is unknown, but we do know that Thurlow Reed, the Republican boss of New York, channeled the money through Senator Hamlin.\(^{21}\) Another source of funds was the Republican National Committee. It picked up a $300 bill to mail to voters reprints of speeches made by Maine’s Republican Congressmen.\(^{22}\) Another

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\(^{22}\) Washburn to John L. Stevens, August 14, 1856. *Fessenden Papers*, Library of Congress. The outside resources available to the Democrats were much larger since they controlled the national government. According to the *New York Tribune*, the Administration’s Committee in Washington gave to the Maine Democratic Party $15,000 to defeat Hamlin, and assessed the government officers in Maine in the Post Offices, Customs Houses and the Navy Yard in Kittery another $5,000 bringing the total to $20,000. See *Portland Advertiser*, August 5, 1856. One reason why the national party leaders were willing to put considerable money into the Maine election was that its election was one of the earliest. Both parties believed that a victory in Maine would energize their followers in all the other states.
Committee strategy was to assess its candidates. Centralization extended to the committee itself. A state committee chair, elected annually by the members, would direct its work.

A Single Powerful Message

In their campaign, the Republican Party put forward its new, simple, and direct message. It had the same compelling tone that Andrew Jackson’s message had, although the substance was very different. Jackson ran against Corruption and the Money Power. Republicans ran against slavery, the South, and the Slave Power. “KEEP IT BEFORE THE PEOPLE” The Kennebec Journal cried out, “that there is but one great question before our American citizens and that is, Shall Slavery be extended over Free Territory! KEEP IT BEFORE THE PEOPLE that the state issues are suspended, in order that the people of Maine may give their answer to this great question! KEEP IT BEFORE THE PEOPLE that our answer immensely influences, if it does not decide, the state of the question throughout the Union!”

The Republicans also made sure that they did not make the same mistake the Fusionists made: “KEEP IT BEFORE THE PEOPLE that the Maine Liquor Law is not an issue this year. There is no reason therefore why Anti-Maine Law Men may not vote with the Republicans on the great question of Freedom in Kansas.”

The Republicans continued to put resources into energizing volunteers. In the months after the state convention, the party produced public spectacles: mass ratification meetings, public rallies, parades, and torchlight processions. Thousands more attended dinners and chowder suppers. In a major departure from campaigns in the past, party leaders also urged their

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23 Kennebec Journal, September 3, 1856.

24 Kennebec Journal, September 5, 1856.
candidates to campaign publicly and to appear at as many events as possible. Hannibal Hamlin and Lot Morrill joined in enthusiastically. Using the new railroad lines, they were easily able to make stump speeches in a new town 15 miles away every night.\textsuperscript{25} Hannibal Hamlin commented with some pride in later years that he spoke 99 times during the 1856 campaign.\textsuperscript{26}

The \textit{Kennebec Journal} and the \textit{Portland Advertiser} led the party’s newspapers in the campaign. In the \textit{Journal}, Blaine and Stevens editorialized for Hamlin, attacked the Democrats, defended the Republicans, and energized party activists with glowing reports on Republican speeches, caucuses, and conventions, not only in Maine but throughout the country. Stevens and Blaine put considerable resources into the campaign. The other Republican papers – including the \textit{Bangor Jeffersonian}, \textit{Oxford Democrat}, and the \textit{Bangor Whig and Courier} followed their lead.

As the campaign was in its final days, the Republicans kept their campaign focused on slavery and their activists focused on organization. "A Vote for Hamlin is a Vote to Prevent the Further Extension of Slavery," editorialized the \textit{Kennebec Journal}. The Republicans also gave last minute instructions to local party leaders: "Every Good Republican Should be on Hand Prior to the Opening of the Polls," "Act as a Vote Distributor," "Be early at the Poll," "Get Out Your Last Man."\textsuperscript{27}

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} See Hamlin and Morrill speaking schedules for August in the \textit{Kennebec Journal}, August 8, 1856.
\item \textsuperscript{26} H. Draper Hunt. \textit{Hannibal Hamlin of Maine: Lincoln's Fist Vice-President}. (Syracuse; Syracuse University Press, 1969) p. 97.
\item \textsuperscript{27} \textit{Kennebec Journal}, September 5, 1856.
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The Democratic Attack

For their part, in 1856 the Democrats repeated the strategy that had won them their great victory in 1855. They ran against the prohibitionists, abolitionists, and evangelical ministers. They painted the Republican Party as the home of extremists and radicals. The *Augusta Age* told its Democratic readers to run against "the same political sectarianism, the same Neal Dowism, the same Morrillism, the same Know-Nothingsm, the same fanaticism."28 The Republicans wanted to turn Maine, the *Age* warned, into a church-run society: "We see religious papers turned into partisan organs, clerical editors hoisting political flags, churches becoming party clubs, sects combining to control legislative actions, theological creeds constructed from partisan platforms, and political faith made the test of true conversion. ‘Church and State!’ The state subjected to the Church, and its political government to be settled by Church Councils."29

The attacks on the Protestant ministers and on the Maine Law were also part of their appeal to Catholics whom they hoped would take up the places of the Democrats who were defecting to the Republicans. The *Age*, for example, tried to characterize the Republicans as crusading, moralistic Protestants. They highlighted the support that Republicans and Protestants had been giving to the Know-Nothings. They also tried to increase the Catholic vote. Since Portland had a large Catholic population, the *Argus*, for example, published lengthy articles aimed at local party leaders explaining the “naturalization” process, so that they would go out and help Catholics to fill out naturalization papers and register to vote.30

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28 *Augusta Age*, July 24, 1856.

29 Editorial, "Church and State," in the *Augusta Age*, July 31, 1856.

Just as the Republicans did not want to talk about state issues, the Democrats did not want to talk about national issues. Most specifically they did not want to talk about slavery. In fact, they avoided talking about the South and about “Bleeding Kansas,” one of the most emotional issues of the day. When they could not escape national issues, they blamed the problems on Republican radicalism. The Republican Party, the Age wrote," was begotten of and feeds upon excitement. It wars upon the constitution and the laws. It excites to hatred and strife those who are under solemn obligation to each other as brethren, it denies the right and capacity of self-government in the people; it abrogates the republican doctrine of equality among the States, it has aroused violent resistance to, and rebellion against government, it urges to civil war in Kansas, and supplies arms therefore."31

Maine Democrats also tried to take advantage of the racism that was widespread in Maine and the North. Calling the abolition of slavery "a purely sectional issue,"32 the Age attacked the Republicans for being more interested in blacks than in whites. "[The Republicans] would sacrifice the freedom of twenty millions of white people upon the abstract idea of benefiting the slaves."33 This appeal could also have resonated with Irish Catholics who feared black competition for the low-wage jobs that Catholics relied on.

But Democrats were frustrated because the Republicans kept from them the advantages they had in their campaigns against the Fusionists. The Republicans silenced their prohibitionists, abolitionists, and Know-Nothing supporters. Democratic newspapers were frustrated at their lack of targets and tried to expose the Republican strategy. “Let no man be

31 Editorial "The Age for the Campaign" in the Augusta Age, May 15, 1856.

32 Editorial "The Age for the Campaign" in the Augusta Age, May 15, 1856.

33 Augusta Age, May 15, 1856.
"deceived," the Age warned, "(the Republicans) dare not come out like men and meet the issues in the State. Their game is to cry up "national issues" because on these they hope to get up an excitement, to work upon sympathies, to appeal to passions and prejudices, and by this process to blind men to their own interests at home. Voters of Maine, do you not first want to look out for your own interests? Let no man beguile you. Our doctrine is State issues FIRST then national issues.”

The Democrats’ plan to focus public attention on state issues was further frustrated by events in Kansas and Washington D.C. “Bleeding Kansas” was front-page material for many of the state’s newspapers as they reported at length on the attacks by pro-slavery southerners on northern anti-slavery settlers. Reports from Washington also showed that the Pierce Administration was taking the side of the South in the Kansas Territory, using federal troops to break up a meeting of Free-State legislators. And then a bombshell hit the papers. A South Carolina Congressman had beaten Massachusetts Republican Senator Charles Sumner senseless on the floor of Congress.

But, the Democratic campaign effort did not falter. The Democratic National Committee, which understood well the importance of Maine’s early vote on the presidential race, sent Congressmen and Senators to give the Maine campaign an extra boost. Two of their speakers, Judah Benjamin of Louisiana and Howell Cobb of Georgia, were not Democrats but Whigs. They came to Maine to urge Maine Whigs to quit their party and join the Maine Democracy.

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34 Editorial, "State Issues" in the *Augusta Age*, August 14, 1856.


36 *Eastern Argus*, August 4, 1856.

In their final appeals to the voters, the Democrats saw a chance to exploit Maine’s dependence on the South. The Republican victory would be an economic disaster because it would close the Southern market for Maine’s shipping and shipbuilding interests, and Southern Congressmen and Senators would be expected to renew their attack on the Cod Bounty Program.

The Hamlin Campaign

When the votes were counted, it was clear that Republicans had been successful in making the South the major campaign issue. With Republican orators and newspapers hammering at the South and slavery, and with Hamlin at the top of the ticket, Republicans won in a landslide. Hamlin’s margin was a crushing 26,000. He received 69,574 votes, while the incumbent Democratic Governor Samuel Wells received 43,628, and the Whig just 6,554 votes. Hamlin also won 18,000 more votes than Morrill did in 1855. The Republican victory was statewide, winning nearly 300 towns and plantations. The Democrats won fewer than 100 and the Whigs just 4. In addition to electing Hamlin, Republicans also swept the state legislative races, winning 125 of the 151 seats in the House and 30 of the 31 seats in the Senate. Because the Republicans would now have firm control of the Legislature, Hamlin could now expect to return to the US Senate.


39 Following this campaign, the Whig party of Maine virtually disappeared


The sharp contrast on issues had dramatically increased turnout. Nine-thousand more men voted in 1856 than in 1855, and 29,000 more than in 1854. The increased turnout benefited the Republicans. The Hamlin campaign had attracted support from a wide range of groups. According to Richard Wescott, Hamlin got a large majority of the new voters. He also retained the votes of the Fusionists and took 4,500 votes from the Democrats. Hamlin also took 4,000 voters from the Whigs.\textsuperscript{42} Former Whigs such as Fessenden, Kent, and Washburn who were now Republican leaders certainly helped to attract the Whig voters. In all respects, Hamlin was a superb candidate for the Republicans. In fact, no Republican candidate for governor over the next decade would match his margin of victory.

The Republican strategy worked for several reasons. Certainly one was Hamlin’s popularity, particularly among the Democrats. Another was the compelling Republican call to resist the South and the Slave Power. The results in Maine, and those a few months later in the rest of the North, showed the growing strength of a new “Northern Nationalism.” The Republican attacks on the South and the Slave Power were as dramatic and as gripping as Andrew Jackson’s jeremiads against the Corrupt Bargain and the Money Power. In addition, the Republican message worked with all its important constituencies. It energized those who were the Republican “core” voters: the prohibitionists, abolitionists, Know-Nothings and former Whigs. But it also appealed strongly to those Democrats angry at what they now believed were the South’s plans to capture control of the national government.\textsuperscript{43}

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\textsuperscript{42} Wescott, \textit{New Men, New Issues}, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{43} The Maine Democratic Party was not able to satisfy many of its rank and file. Because of its leader’s dependence on the national Democratic patronage, the Maine Party had to support the national Democrats pro-South policies despite the unpopularity of those policies with many Democrats.
\end{flushright}
Most importantly Maine Republicans subordinated all other issues to its single clear message.\(^{44}\) They were, in fact, mirroring what Republican leaders were doing elsewhere. In the 1850s Republican politicians had discovered, Michael Holt wrote, "that fanning and exploiting white northerners' fear and resentment for white southerners" paid great dividends.\(^{45}\) In his study of the Republican parties in the years before the Civil War, Holt describes another important element of the Republican strategy. "What united Republicans in the 1850s and for almost two decades after the start of the Civil War was what they were against, not what they were for."\(^{46}\) In campaigning against the South, the Republicans in Maine and elsewhere also avoided the political minefield of proposing specific solutions.

**Slavery Becomes a Sectional Issue**

Two months after the September state elections came the presidential election. The major issue in the campaign was the South’s efforts to expand slavery into the western territories. Not only in Maine, but also throughout the South and the North, the nation’s politics were polarizing around the issue of slavery. The efforts by Martin Van Buren and most Democratic and Whig national politicians to keep slavery out of national politics were clearly failing.

\(^{44}\) Reportedly, Republican leaders made an agreement with Neil Dow and the Maine Law leaders that if they remained silent in the 1856 campaign, and if the Republicans won control of the legislature, the next legislature would put the Maine Law back into the statute books. Neal Dow, *The Reminiscences of Neal Dow: Recollections of Eighty Years* (Portland, Maine: Evening Express Publishing Company, 1898) pp. 558-559 and *Portland Daily Advertiser*, April 5 and 9, 1856.


The presidential election results showed, as had the race for governor, how important slavery had become in national politics and how popular northern nationalism was in Maine. Fremont crushed Buchanan with a 28,000 vote majority. Maine gave Freemont one of his largest majorities. But nationwide, Buchanan was victorious, winning 19 of the 30 states. Still, Republicans had reason to be satisfied: in their first presidential election they had won 11 states – all the New England states, as well as New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa. In addition, the Know-Nothing Party, which Republicans had worried would be a major threat, had almost disappeared. Its candidate, the former President Millard Fillmore, only received in Maine a few thousand votes.

The voting results in the gubernatorial and presidential race offer insights into how the political demography of the state was changing. According to Wescott, the Republicans strength was concentrated in the “more vigorously developing parts of the state,” in the wealthier towns, and the in manufacturing, and lumbering towns.\(^{47}\) The Democrats did better in the maritime towns and in the Catholic wards of the major cities. Somewhat ominously for the Democrats, their support on the inland frontier was starting to weaken. Many of the sons of the Jacksonian farmers believed that the real threat to their republican rights came not from the Money Power but from the grasping, aggressive Slave Power.

The 1857 Campaign

Because of the size of their victory in 1856, the Republicans had complete control of the 1857 Legislature. For the first time since 1850, the Legislature did not have to elect the governor, as Hamlin had won a substantial majority. But the legislative session was very important because it revealed what would become the Republican political strategy.

The first item on Legislature’s agenda was the election of its leaders, and the second was the election of the constitutional officers of the state. Republican Party leaders, no doubt, were heavily involved in these actions. When the State Senate met, for example, it chose as its President Joseph Williams, a former Democrat.\(^{48}\) Since Hamlin was expected to resign as governor as soon as he was re-elected to the US Senate, the President of the Senate would automatically become governor. Thus, the face of Maine’s Republicans would continue to be that of a former Democrat. Republicans had learned important lessons from Hamlin’s victory, and one of them was the importance of putting former Democrats up front.

When it came to the election of the state’s officers, Republican leaders tried to apply another lesson from the Hamlin campaign: keep the Maine Law out of politics. The Legislature chose Benjamin Peck, the editor of the Temperance Herald and a strong supporter of the Maine Law, to be the State Treasurer. Apparently, Republicans had struck a deal with Neil Dow and the other prohibition leaders that if Peck were elected, the prohibitionists would not attempt to force through the 1857 Legislature a new Maine Law.\(^{49}\) After the election of the state officers,

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\(^{48}\) Williams was the son of Ruel Williams, the former Democratic US Senator. Joseph had left the Democratic Party earlier over the slavery issue.

the next order of business was confirming, by voice vote, the election of Hamlin as the state’s governor.

A few weeks later, the legislators took up the issue of filling the vacant US Senate seat. By a decisive majority, they re-elected Hamlin. When he resigned as Governor, the President of the State Senate – Joseph Williams -- replaced him, as the constitution required. Now two former Democrats – Hamlin and Williams – made up much of the Republican Party’s public persona. With this image, Republicans believed that they might be able to keep the Democrats who had voted for Hamlin voting Republican in the future. In fact, these Democrats would become the “swing voters” that both Republicans and Democrats would fight for in the coming years. Because of the decades of Democratic rule in Maine, a majority of the state’s voters would likely have considered themselves Democrats and thus had a instinctual loyalty to that party. But many of them had become fearful of the Slave Power, and these were the men the Republicans would attempt in every election to win over.

Towards the end of the legislative session, the announcement by the US Supreme Court on March 6th of what would be called the Dred Scott Decision shocked the Legislature and the Maine public. Few expected such an all-encompassing opinion so sympathetic to the South. The Court ruled that blacks sold as slaves could never be citizens of the United States and could have no legal rights, and that the federal government had no authority to regulate or prohibit slavery in the territories.\textsuperscript{50} The decision astonished the North, making its voters fear, for the first time, that the South might want to expand slavery into the northern states.

Soon after the Legislature ended its session, events far away in Ohio and New York would set off an economic recession in Maine that would affect the state’s politics for nearly four years.

\textsuperscript{50} Jean Baker, \textit{James Buchanan}, p. 85.
years. The New York branch of a well-known Ohio corporation had suspended payment when it could not successfully call in its bad loans. By the fall, nearly 1,400 state banks and thousands of business, including railroads, had failed. The Panic of 1857 set in. Land values fell. In the North, men and women were out in the street seeking work. The South, on the other hand, escaped the worst of the Panic because of its stable plantation system and the confidence of British factors in the high price of cotton. The South saw in its immunity from the worst of the Panic evidence of the power of the region and the superiority of its economy.

Republican Focus on “Swing Democrats”

On June 25th 1857 the Republicans assembled in Bangor for their state convention. John L. Stevens, the recently chosen Chairman of the Republican State Committee, opened the meeting. In selecting Stevens, the Committee had chosen a man who was experienced in running a party organization and state campaigns. Stevens had learned these skills as a minister, an anti-slavery activist, a Know-Nothing leader, and as Chairman of the Fusionists State Committee. Choosing a man with organizational and management experience was unusual for a Maine political party. Both the Whigs and the Democrats had in the past picked State Committee Chairs to solve internal factional issues, rather than to build its organization. Perhaps at the urging of his partner at the Kennebec Journal, the convention chose James G. Blaine to be a member of the prestigious Resolutions Committee.

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51 Baker, James Buchanan, p. 89-90.

52 Stevens had been elected to the State Committee at the 1856 Convention, and at some point during the year, the Committee had elected chairman.
At this convention, Republicans would deepen their commitment to the strategy of making their party attractive to the state’s “swing Democrats.” Republicans wanted to replicate in 1857 the “Hamlin coalition,” that had brought the party its victory in 1856. For the Republicans, this was essential; they had no “core” voters, men who had voted with the party for decades. Instead, this new party was a fluid ad-hoc coalition that had come together just a few years earlier to support prohibition and oppose the Kansas Nebraska Act. Loyalties to the Republican Party were weak at all levels. Its leaders were men who had long careers in other parties, as Democrats, as Whigs, and as members of the Liberty Party, the Free Soil Party and the Know-Nothing Party. And its rank and file were not “core” Republicans either. They were “peripheral voters” – men whose primary loyalties had recently been elsewhere. Some were loyal to specific politicians, such as the Fessenden, Morrill, or Hamlin. Others were loyal to a cause, such as the Maine Law, Know-Nothingism, Free Soil, or abolition. Some men were long time Whigs. Republicans had won the support of these people in recent elections, but they could just as easily lose them. The group that was the most unpredictable were the men who brought Hamlin his great victory – the Democrats who had crossed party lines to vote for their hero. These men were much like Hamlin, traditional Jacksonian Democrats, but angry and fearful at the pro-South and pro-slavery policies of the Buchanan administration. Welding these disparate leaders and people together was doubly hard because of mutual suspicions, born and nurtured by decades of conflict.

What could the Republicans do at the convention to remobilize the Hamlin coalition for the 1857 campaign? The most important decision was the man that party choose to be its candidate for governor. Three men had decided to make a run for that nomination. One was the incumbent governor, Joseph Williams. He would have seemed to have the advantage since the
standard practice in Maine had been to allow an incumbent governor to serve at least three terms. But many questioned whether he had such a right since he had been given the office by party leaders who needed someone to fill in when Hamlin resigned. The other candidates were J. J. Perry, a former Whig and now a Republican Congressmen, long an anti-slavery activist, well-known speaker, and editor of an influential Republican newspaper. The third was Lot Morrill, a leader up until a year earlier of the Democratic Party. It appears that Republican Party leaders decided early that they did not want Williams as their candidate. But they later decided that Perry was not a good choice since he was a well-known former Whig and strong anti-slavery man, who most likely would not be acceptable to swing Democrats.

The political drama occurred just before the voting began. Perry took the floor and announced that he would not be a candidate. Then a friend of Governor Williams stood up and said that Williams did not want to be considered as a candidate. The drama ended as quickly as it had begun. Morrill was the only candidate left, and the convention delegates immediately chose him, without opposition. Republicans again had a former Democrat as their standard-bearer for the 1857 campaign.

The next step in the strategy of appealing to Democrats was crafting the party’s platform. On the recommendation of the Resolutions Committee, the party decided again that it would have one dominant message – stop the South and the Slave Power plan to dominate the national government. And once again, the party would ignore state issues, particularly the controversial

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53 In fact, Morrill had been Chairman of the Democratic State Committee. He had left the party, as had Hamlin, to protest Buchanan’s nomination and the Cincinnati platform. *Portland Advertiser*, June 24, 1856.

Maine Law. 55 Most likely with the agreement of the Temperance Union, the Resolution Committee proposed language – adopted by the convention – which postponed that issue until 1858. The platform asked the Legislature to submit to the voters a referendum on prohibition at a date before the 1858 September elections.56 This stratagem was designed to keep the Democrats from making the Maine Law an issue in the upcoming state election.

But Maine’s Democrats were also facing problems of their own making. Cracks were appearing in the Democratic structure. Newly-elected President Buchanan had gone to war against the men who had supported Pierce and Douglas at the Democratic National Convention. Buchanan’s decision to attack was a conscious one. Intent on fulfilling the obligations he had to the South for its support for his nomination, he wanted to end any dissent within the party. “He decided to purge the government of all but the most dedicated doughfaces and pro-slavery politicos.57 Many Northern Democrats resisted. The Maine Democratic Party started to divide as well, as was clear at the state convention that convened on June 30th in Portland. On one side were the men who had supported the nomination of Senator Douglas. On the other side were those, often the beneficiaries of presidential patronage, who aligned themselves with President Buchanan.

55 On an unrelated point, the text of the resolution against the expansion of slavery into the territories indicates how racist much of the free soil ideology was. The Republican Party at that time had little concern for the plight of the slaves themselves. One resolution explained the reason for stopping the expansion of slavery: “the natural increase of the white race on this continent demands the widest possible area for its expansion, and thus requires the confinement of the degrading character and influence of African slavery to its narrowest limits.” See Portland Advertiser, June 30. 1857


57 Landis, Northern Men with Southern Loyalties. p. 169.
At the Portland convention, three bruising ballots pitting the two groups against each eventually produced a victory for the Buchanan forces. The nomination went to their candidate, a relatively unknown lawyer, Manassah H. Smith of Warren. The Buchanan majority also pushed through an uncompromising platform that put the Maine Democratic Party on record in favor of Buchanan’s pro-South policies. It supported a pro-slavery constitution for Kansas, called on everyone to accept the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott Decision, made clear its opposition to the Maine Law, and called for the annexation, by legal means, of additional foreign territory.58

The 1857 Election

In the September state elections, Lot Morrill won the race for governor, but his margin was less than half of Hamlin’s in the previous year’s election. As it was not a presidential year, voter turnout was less than it was in 1856. Most importantly, however, the Democrats seemed to have been more motivated than the Republicans. The Republican vote had decreased by 15,000, while the Democratic vote had fallen by just 1,000.59 The Democrats’ success in motivating their voters was especially telling because the growing conflict within the Democratic Party should have reduced their turnout. Hamlin’s absence from the ticket turned out to be telling. Many Democrats who had voted for Hamlin either stayed home or returned to their old party.

Clearly putting a former Democrat on the top of its ticket and keeping the Maine Law out of the campaign were not sufficient to recreate Hamlin’s margin of victory. Maine Democrats


59 The Republicans were successful, still, in retaining control both of the Legislature and all of the state’s congressional seats.
continued to be a powerful and popular force.\textsuperscript{60} In addition, because so many of the state’s voters grew up as Democrats, most of them had views on the tariff, manufacturing, banks, internal improvements, prohibition, and the role of government which better matched the views of the Democratic Party than those of the new Republican Party. In fact, if the slavery issue somehow had disappeared, and an election gave the state’s voters a straight up or down vote on core Democratic issues, the majority would likely have come down on the Democratic side.

On October 9\textsuperscript{th}, a month after the election, James G. Blaine reaped some of the rewards of the Republican’s success. He sold, most certainly at a good price, his one-half interest in the *Kennebec Journal* to John S. Sayward of Bangor.\textsuperscript{61} Blaine was not leaving politics or journalism. He had accepted a better-paying job as a political writer with the *Portland Advertiser*, the other major Republican paper in Maine. He would continue to live and work in Augusta. Stevens retained his half-ownership of the *Journal*, and now would combine his responsibilities as State Committee Chair with being solely responsible for the *Journal’s* political coverage.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{60} The Democrats had another advantage, though their success at exploiting it was limited. There were Maine Whigs who supported Buchanan’s pro-southern policies and opposed prohibition and abolitionism and did not follow Fessenden, Washburn, and Kent into the Republican Party. These were the “Straight Whigs” with which the Democratic Party tried to build alliances, including by offering Buchanan administration patronage.


\textsuperscript{62} With Sayward, Stevens would form the firm of Sayward & Stevens which would control the *Journal* and hold the valuable state printing contracts.
Keeping the Swing Democrats on Board

During the 1858 Legislature, the Republicans worked to address what was a major problem. If Republican candidates were too closely identified with the Maine Law, swing Democrats might turn against them. By various deals and stratagems, they had been successful in keeping the Maine Law out of the 1856 and 1857 elections, and they had done the same in 1858. Now they would try do it again. They had a fine line to walk, because they had promised the prohibitionists that they would pass a strong new Maine Law. Such a bill was drafted, but instead of passing it, they submitted it as referendum side-by-side with the weak law passed by the Democrat-Whig Legislature of 1856. The stratagem was that the Republican Legislature was not making a decision on this controversial issue; they were asking the voters to make that choice themselves. And, as the Republican platform had asked, they scheduled the referendum for June 1858, three months before the state election. Republican candidates would not be forced, therefore, to have to take a stand on an issue on which the people had already spoken. Since everyone expected the voters to choose the tough Maine Law, this stratagem not only protected the Republican candidates but kept the highly motivated Maine Law supporters loyal to the Republican Party.

In the run-up to the popular referendum, the anti-Maine Law Democrats and Whigs knew that the odds were against them, and they decided to boycott the referendum. This was a

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65 For further description of the politics behind the Republican strategy see Hatch, *Maine: A History Vol II*, pp. 411-412
mistake. In that first week of June, the voters passed into law the tough Maine Law. The vote was 28,864 in its favor of the Maine Law and 5,912 in favor of the 1855 law. The Democrats had lost for a generation one of their most potent issues.

**Buchanan’s Kansas Policy**

The Democratic Party had won back some swing Democrats in the 1857 election, but the policies that Buchanan adopted and the events out in Kansas would further weaken the Democratic Party organization. The specific cause in this case was President Buchanan’s attempt to create a Democratic pro-slavery state out of the Territory of Kansas. Ignoring the results of a popular referendum that had rejected a constitution adopted in the town of Lecompton by a pro-slavery minority, Buchanan still gave this constitution his full support. This put him on a collision course with the most popular Democrat in the North, Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois. Since the passage of the Compromise of 1850, Douglas had pushed a policy of “popular sovereignty” to try to end the controversy over how and under what conditions slavery could expand into the territories. In Douglas’s plan, the citizens of each territory would make the decision on whether their state would be “free” or “slave” by popular vote. The unpopular Lecompton Constitution directly contradicted the principal of popular sovereignty. Douglas broke with Buchanan on the issue and fought his plan in the Senate. This conflict was echoed in Maine. Douglas’s supporters followed his lead and Buchanan men, who had control of the state party, turned on the men in Maine who sided with Douglas.

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Buchanan made the situation worse by making support for his Kansas policy a test of a Democrat’s party loyalty. To enforce party discipline, he could count on the hundreds of Buchanan patronage holders in the states, but he went beyond them. He opened up the spigots on newspaper subsidies, on contracts granted to his supporters, and on money to help certain Democratic campaigns.68 Using the full resources of the presidency, he was able to keep many of the Northern Democrats in line, but some defected. “Even the Democratic officeholders who had supported the Southern agenda throughout their careers announced their opposition.”69 Opposition to Buchanan grew rapidly in the free states, putting Northern Democrats in a tightening vise. On one unyielding side were Buchanan and the pro-Southern party leaders in Washington who demanded loyalty to an increasingly unpopular policy, and on the other were the northern voters who were increasingly fearful of an aggressive South. Buchanan’s efforts did bear fruit. Congress approved the Lecompton Constitution in 1858.70

Buchanan supporters in Maine, moreover, were able to maintain their control of their party. At its 1858 convention, held Augusta, the keynote speaker was Buchanan’s most powerful supporter in the state, Moses McDonald, the Collector of Customs in Portland.71 Other men who played important roles at the convention were also Buchanan men, such as the

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68 See pages 189-190 of Landis. *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties* to get a sense of the extent that Buchanan went to help his supporters.


70 Buchanan’s victory would turn out to be pyrrhic. The US House of Representatives inserted a provision in its approval that required a new public referendum in Kansas on the Lecompton Constitution before Congress would admit the proposed state. Later in 1858 it was soundly rejected by a vote of 10,226 to 138

71 Buchanan had rewarded Moses for his loyalty. He was the only Maine Congressman who had voted for the Kansas Nebraska Act and was defeated in his re-election campaign.
Collectors of Customs in Bangor, Waldoboro, Castine, and Eastport; Leonard Jones, the Bangor Postmaster; Virgil Parris, the US Marshall; and the man who was the Naval Store Keeper at the patronage-rich Kittery Naval Yards. For governor, the Buchanan forces again nominated Manassah Smith.

Stevens and the Republican Organization

The 1858 Republican Convention also met in June in Augusta. In the run-up to the event, it was clear that party leaders wanted Morrill to be re-nominated. Yet, they did not take the normal path: convening a Legislative Caucus. Instead they decided to convene a convention. They no doubt saw the value in mobilizing all the local party leaders and energizing them for the campaign. Yet this decision was also a major development in the evolution of the Republican Party. It would be the party organization, representing party activists, which now would decide the party’s candidate for governor, not a caucus of office-holders.

At the convention, John L. Stevens, the State Committee Chair, once again opened the proceedings. Once again James G. Blaine won appointment to the Resolutions Committee. He then won the prestigious job, probably with Stevens’ help, of reporting out to the full convention the Resolution Committee’s Report. Once again, Stevens was elected to the State Committee.

The convention adopted as its platform the resolutions presented by Blaine, making it clear that the party would maintain the same message that had worked so well for them in the

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72 *Kennebec Journal*, July 9, 1858.

73 Interestingly, the Democrats followed the example of the Republicans. Manassah Smith would be their candidate in 1857, 1858, and 1859. In each case the Democrats decided to hold a state convention to make the nominations.

1856 and 1857 campaigns. Republicans would pay no attention to state issues, but would campaign against “the pro-slavery rulers at Washington.” They would oppose the present administration which supported “the re-opening of the African slave trade, the restoration of slavery in the West Indies, and was actively engaged in schemes to obtain several more free provinces to make future slave states.” It was the Republican’s duty “to unite and take possession of the federal government at the expiration of Mr. Buchanan’s term.” Moreover, the Resolutions Committee also seized on an opportunity to take advantage of the depressed business conditions caused by the 1857 Panic to get their focused message out in a new way. It was the South and Buchanan who were responsible. “The present prostration of every branch of industry in the country is in a great measure owing to the errors, corruption, and weaknesses of the dominant party arising from their devotion to a single idea – Slavery.”

As expected there was no debate at the convention on who would be the party’s nominee for governor. It once again chose the former Democrat Lot Morrill.

Sometime after the convention, the Republican State Committee met and re-elected John L. Stevens as its Chairman. The fact that Stevens was re-elected reflected another major change in the evolution of the Republican organization. The party clearly wanted a State Chair who would bring continuity, skill, energy and experience. By re-electing Stevens for another term, they were creating, perhaps without knowing it, a State Chairman’s office with considerable power and authority.

As the campaign progressed, the Republicans continued to tar the Maine Democrats with the brush of the unpopular Buchanan. They attacked Maine’s Democratic leaders as being subservient to Buchanan and attacked Buchanan as being subservient to the South. Maine

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75 “Resolutions of the Republican Convention” *Portland Advertiser*, June 29, 1858.
Democratic leaders, they said, did not represent the people of Maine but were "mere tools, the hewers of wood and drawers of water to the slave oligarchs who control Buchanan's administration."\textsuperscript{76}

**Republicans Keep the Focus on the Swing Democrats**

In re-nominating Morrill, Republicans revealed again their anxiety about what would happen to the Democrats who had voted for Hamlin. If these Democrats returned to the Democratic Party, the Republicans could lose everything. We tend to think, in hindsight, that Republican’s successes were inevitable, but at the time it seemed equally likely that the Democrats could return to power after a brief Republican interlude. One of the factors that helped the Republicans respond to this threat was that they did not have to worry about the rest of their coalition.

The powerful and once independent single-issue movements had been absorbed and defanged. The prohibitionists were satisfied because the voters had just months earlier passed the Maine Law in a public referendum. The leaders of the Free Soil Party and the Know-Nothing Party had been absorbed into the Republican organization. The Liberty Party abolitionists had lost their activist base as the Republicans captured public attention with their assault on the Slave Power. Republicans also did not have to worry that the Maine’s Whigs might put up a candidate. The most prominent Whigs in the state – Fessenden, Kent, Washburn, as well as the most active younger men, such as Stevens and Blaine – were all now leaders of the Republican Party. And Whig businessmen were unlikely to defect, as many remembered the hostility that Democrats had had in the 1830s to banks, manufacturing, and railroads.

\textsuperscript{76} *Kennebec Journal*, July 9, 1858.
Republicans Governing Like Democrats

The goal of winning over swing Democrats had certainly motivated the Republicans to nominate Democrats for top offices and to avoid state issues, but it also pushed them towards governing as if they were Democrats. The legislatures of 1856 and 1857 had been overwhelmingly Republican, but party leaders backed away from any controversial legislation. A few weeks after taking office, Governor Hannibal Hamlin in his “Address to the Legislature” indicated the direction the party would take. He dismissed those in his party who wanted to pass new legislation. Speaking like the traditional Democratic politician he was, Republican Governor Hamlin called on the Legislature to avoid the "evils" of "excessive and useless legislation."77 Former Democrat and then Republican Governor Lot Morrill echoed Hamlin’s strategic advice to the Republicans in 1858, when he addressed the Legislature. Speaking again like a traditional Maine Democrat, he called for "the most exact economy in every branch of the public service."78 In subsequent addresses before the 1859 and 1860 legislatures, Morrill continued the same minimalist approach, proposing no new programs or taxes.

So worried were the Republicans about keeping the swing Democrats with them, they even ignored powerful business elements in the party. In 1857, the state's merchant and manufacturing leaders, worried at the slow pace of economic development, had petitioned the Republican government, calling for a comprehensive plan of railroad development, financed in


part by state subsidies.\textsuperscript{79} Although Whigs and Republicans had long advocated investments in internal improvements, Governor Morrill and the Legislature turned their backs on the state's business leaders. The most likely reason was a fear that Democrats could exploit the conflicts between the state’s power centers that an ambitious internal improvements program might set in motion.

Pragmatic politics, however, was not the only reason that Maine Republicans after 1856 acted like Democrats. Inside the new Republican Party, there were many hostile to Whig policies. The new party had large numbers of former Democrats at all leadership levels, men who retained their old ideals. Democrats bulked large among the founders of the Republican Party because Maine’s Republican Party, unlike those in most other states, emerged from a split within the Democratic Party. More Democrats, furthermore, entered the party when former Democrats, such as Governors Hamlin, Williams, and Morrill, recruited them and gave them positions of influence in the party and the state government. These men might have walked away from their old party but not from the ideas and beliefs they had learned from childhood. Former Democrats, holding Democratic views, were everywhere in the Maine Republican Party, in the town caucuses, county committees, the state committee, in the Legislature, and in the governor’s office.\textsuperscript{80}


\textsuperscript{80} The Democratic origins of the state's Republicans party were unique among the northern states. In most other states, the Republican Party's origins lay within the Whig or Free Soil party.
Stevens, Discipline, and Organization

One of the key developments in the Republican Party beginning in 1858 was the emergence of a strong Chairman of the State Committee. It was an enormous step for the Republican Party, and its impact would last for generations. It certainly could have started earlier, but it is in 1858 that we find the first written evidence of buildup of the power of the State Committee and the State Committee Chair, an initiative led by John L. Stevens.81

Steven’s goal appeared to be to turn the party into a centralized and disciplined organization.82 He did not think that politics belonged to amateurs and reformers. He wanted a party with "organization, discipline, and courage" modeled on the military. In one article in *Kennebec Journal*, a newspaper read by Republicans leaders throughout the state, he attacked the anti-party and anti-professional politicians’ attitudes of his former Fusionist colleagues. He believed that the Republican Party should embrace patronage and use it rigorously. He hoped that “in the future the Republicans will not throw their places away.” Patronage was inevitable. “A party which is partially or wholly successful at the polls, necessarily has officers and patronage at its control. It can carry out is principles only by elevating some of its members to

81 There are no written records of the Republican State Committee. The evidence that we have is in articles published in the *Kennebec Journal* and in “circulars” sent to town and county committees that directed them to act in certain ways. These circulars were published in 1859 by the Rockland Democrat and Free Press. Most certainly, there were far more circulars issued, and hopefully a future scholar will be able to unearth them.

82 He was not the Chair of the state party during the Hamlin campaign, however. The reasons are not clear, but possible explanation was party leaders did not someone with such a personal identification with Know-Nothings and the 1855 Fusionist legislative program to be the new party’s leader.
places of power and trust." Placing its loyal men in public office had many benefits, one being to help the party pay the costs of perfecting an "efficient party organization."83

Stevens, moreover, also wanted the party to institutionalize its fundraising and take advantage of the Republicans who occupied public offices in the counties, cities and towns. Again, in a letters probably written in Augusta in late July 1858 and sent out through the county chairmen, the party’s office-holders were put on notice. The party wanted to make sure that “THOSE WHO SHARE THE PATRONAGE of the party are entirely willing to contribute liberally the MATERIAL AID.” To make the point even more personal and stronger, the county was expected to send individual letters to each job-holder which included a specific dollar amount that each person would be “assessed.” Stevens also believed that the party had to be coldblooded. If men were “unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices,” he wrote, "the sooner all these drones are weeded out, the better.” There is no place in the party for "lazy and useless members."84

He did not shy away from expecting the party’s top officials to set an example. As Chairman of the State Committee, he aggressively pursued those whom the party had elevated to places of power and trust. He was willing to go after the most powerful. One target was Senator William Pitt Fessenden, who enjoyed an annual $3,000 salary and generous fees that he earned in a law practice that included appearing before the US Supreme Court. But Fessenden did not take the pressure well. He complained to another prominent party leader that "the State

83 Stevens laid out this plan for the party in an editorial titled "Party Organization" in the July 16, 1858 issue of the Kennebec Journal.

Committee ... have taken the liberty to assess me $500 more, I have already paid more than $1,000 which they conceded to be fairly strong.”

While Stevens outlined his broad goals in the pages of the Kennebec Journal, it was in the “circulars” that his office sent out to the Republican town and county party committees that we gain a clearer perspective of the organization that he was trying to build. We only have some of these directives, those that the opposition Rockland Democrat and Free Press had acquired in some manner and published during the 1859 campaign. Stevens had a top down view. He expected the town committees to report directly and regularly to the state committee. Sometime in August 1858, for example, he instructed the town committees to return a report to him by the specific date of August 25, 1858, answering the questions: “Have there been any changes in your town from the Democratic to the Republican Party since September last? If so, how many?” He also wanted to be told of any men who switched from the Republicans to the Democrats.

But interestingly when the town committees had assembled the information, they were to return it to the State Committee in Augusta. Stevens was gathering intelligence on the political developments in the towns to help him and the State Committee to decide on strategy and message.

But Stevens was just as much interested in making sure that the town committee kept their focus on getting out the Republican voter. Just days before the state election, on September 7, 1858 Stevens dispatched a circular to all town Republican committees. He reminded them of seven specific actions they should complete in preparation for Election Day, including creating a

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85 Quoted in Charles A Jellison. Fessenden of Maine: Civil War Senator p. 110. Fessenden to Pike, August 24, 1858 in Pike Papers, Calais, Maine.

86 Rockland Democrat and Free Press, June 20, 1860.
list of all favorable voters, and then told them to send these lists to the Chairman of the State Committee, “JOHN L. STEVENS at once.”

Despite their internal problems, the Democrats’ September 1857 results were an improvement over those of 1857, cutting Morrill’s margin to 8,000 votes. Still, the Republican governor did win re-election. The Republican message was indeed popular, but the Democratic message of maintaining national unity and stopping the North’s interference in the internal matters (slavery) of other states was also well-received. If the Republicans had not had a former Democrat on the top of their ticket and if they had not been governing as if they were Democrats, most likely they would have lost. Democrats were still a powerful and threatening force. However much Republicans did to attract the swing Democrats, long-time party loyalties continued to pull them back towards their fathers’ party. In spite of Morrill’s narrowing margin, Republicans were able to maintain control of the Legislature and also win all of the state’s Congressional seats. James G. Blaine had his own reasons to celebrate; he had run for and won a seat in the Legislature from his city of Augusta.

**Building the Republican Organization**

When the 1859 Legislature met, it easily passed resolutions against slavery and the Dred Scott Decision, and strongly endorsed the right of Congress to control slavery in the territories. For the first time since 1855, the Maine Law was not on the legislative calendar, since the voters had approved it in a referendum six months earlier.

While the Legislature was quietly going through its calendar, John L. Stevens was busy in the nearby offices of the Republican State Committee. He was continuing his efforts to build

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87 *Rockland Democrat and Free Press*, June 20, 1860
the Republican organization and at the same time to increase the power of the State Committee and its Chair. The upcoming March town meetings presented an important opportunity. The town meetings elected the selectmen, and the selectmen managed the town’s voting and supervised the counting. Mobilizing the town committees in February and March would also get them prepared earlier for the September elections. Controlling the voting process could also, obviously, help the Republicans. To put the town committees to work, Stevens, in one of his circulars, directed the town committees to run slates of candidates for selectmen. He called on them to work to “HAVE THE BALLOT BOX PLACED UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE REPUBLICANS.”

On June 30th the 1859 Democratic State Convention convened in Bangor. Buchanan’s war on Senator Stephen Douglas had been intensifying. The result was a raucous and angry meeting. For the convention, the Buchanan Administration turned out “every federal office holder in the state” to be a delegate. Douglas’s supporters turned out as well. The split in the party was so severe that the convention had difficulty agreeing on its rules and organization. The Douglas group was stronger than it had been in 1858, but the Buchanan men were in the majority. For governor, they re-nominated Manassah Smith, while Douglas Democrats supported Ephraim K. Smart of Camden. On the first ballot, neither candidate gained the needed majority. Smith received 304 votes and Smart 284, with three other candidates receiving a total

88 See Republican State Committee Circular dated February 18, 1859 reprinted in the Rockland Democrat and Free Press of June 20, 1860

89 For description of the specifics of this internal battle, see Portland Advertiser, June 14, 1859

90 See Portland Advertiser, July 5, 1859. For partial list of the many federal patronage holders who were delegates to the convention, see Kennebec Journal July 8, 1859
of 77 votes. On the second ballot, Smith won by 367 to 274. The Buchanan loyalists left the convention again in control of the party, but because of the growing unpopularity of Buchanan, the Douglas faction was growing in strength.

A few days later, the Republicans met in Portland for their state convention. Though everyone expected and hoped that Governor Morrill would be re-nominated, the Republican leaders again decided to nominate Morrill through a convention, rather than through a legislative caucus. The Republicans continued their steps to create a more popular and institutional political party. In fact, convening an annual state convention had many benefits. This more participatory model energized much of the party’s base of activists. It also made clear the importance of the party’s organization. It was the party members, not the party’s state legislators, who nominated their candidate for governor and who adopted their platform. And, since it was the party convention that elected the State Committee, an annual convention also ensured that the State Committee would be responsive to any changing dynamics within the party.

Unlike the Democrats who had met a few days earlier in a bitter convention, the Republicans were united on their strategy and their message. In fact, this convention itself would take another major step towards a more professional organization. The meeting opened with John L. Stevens, the Chairman of the State Committee, again calling the delegates to order. James G. Blaine, once again a member of the Resolutions Committee, also acted as one of the floor leaders for the State Committee.

James S. Pike, the Chairman of the Washington County Committee was one of the leaders of the state party. From the floor, he moved a resolution, certainly with the approval of Stevens, that would bring more professional and skilled management of the party’s political

91 One of best accounts of Democratic Convention can be found in Kennebec Journal, July 8, 1859
campaigns. It easily passed. Prior to the passage of Pike’s resolution, the term of the new State Committee would have started immediately following the convention. This schedule had presented a problem. Each new State Committee had just five months to organize itself and run the party’s campaign. However, Pike’s resolution would shift the date for the new State Committee to take office to January of the following year. That would give each new State Committee nine full months to plan their campaign. The result would be that every Republican campaign would now be run by an experienced group.

In the resolutions Blaine helped to draft, the party kept its message focused on opposition to the South. It denounced slavery, the attempts of some Southerners to reenact the African slave trade, the Democratic Party’s role in the “spread of slavery,” and the Democrats’ campaign to give the Federal Government “the power to strengthen and enlarge the basis of this ruinous and accursed system.”\(^92\) When the delegates turned to the nomination of the candidate for governor, the convention quickly and easily re-nominated Lot Morrill – the former Democrat – once again.

The most surprising event at the convention was that John L. Stevens failed to win a seat on the State Committee. As a result, the Committee, even if it wanted to, would not be able to choose him to serve another term as its Chairman. What had happened is that the Kennebec County delegation meeting at the convention chose another man to be their member on the State Committee. Stevens, the man who had built the State Committee into a powerful leadership body in the party and the State Committee chair as the strong leader, was out. The record is incomplete, but Stevens had apparently rubbed many Republicans, including their top leaders,

\(^{92}\) For accounts of the Republican Convention, see *Kennebec Journal*, July 8, 1859 and the *Portland Advertiser*, July 8, 1859
the wrong way. He seems to have acted as if he as the State Chair could give orders to the state’s top elected officials. Still, because of Pike’s resolution changing the term of the State Committee, the party did not have to immediately find a Chair capable of replacing John L. Stevens. His term as Chair would not end until the new State Committee took office in January, and thus Stevens would be running the Republicans’ 1859 campaign.

In the campaign, the Republicans expanded their attack on the Slave Power, the South, and Buchanan. They set out to demonize the Maine Democratic leaders, calling them “Buchanan’s henchmen.” They continued to hang the millstone of Buchanan’s unpopularity around the Democrats’ necks. An easy target was what Republicans derisively called Buchanan’s "Board of Trade" – four of the most prominent state Democratic Party leaders. Buchanan had chosen them to keep the Maine Democratic Party in line and loyal to his policies. Each received a prestigious and powerful patronage position. The most powerful was Moses McDonald, the Collector of Customs in Portland, a former Congressman, a strong opponent of the Wilmot Proviso, and an equally strong supporter of the Kansas Nebraska Act. The others included: John Appleton, the former editor of Democratic Argus who Buchanan appointed to be Assistant US Secretary of State; Wyman B. S. Moor, a former US Senator and state Attorney General, who won the position of Consul General to Canada; and Nathan Clifford, a former speaker of the state House of Representatives, Congressman, opponent of Hannibal

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93 Stevens had his critics. James Shepard Pike, the Washington County Republican leader, called him “arbitrary and secretive” See Pike to Fessenden, August 31, 1858 William Pitt Fessenden Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Hamlin in the race for the US Senate, US Attorney General, and recently appointed by President Buchanan to a seat on the US Supreme Court.\footnote{Clifford had run as a loyal national Democrat against Hannibal Hamlin in 1846 and 1850, attacking him for his half-hearted support for James Polk, the Democratic President. Buchanan nominated Clifford for the Supreme Court in December 1857.}

The Board alienated the Douglas wing of the Democratic Party because it was the group that led Buchanan’s war on Douglas in Maine. It used national patronage ruthlessly to keep the Maine Democratic Party loyal to Buchanan. But the Board was also a godsend to Republican campaigners who were appealing to swing Democrats, many of whom liked Douglas. It was a stark reminder of the subservience of the state’s Democratic leaders to Buchanan.

Although his term as Chair would soon end, John L. Stevens managed the September campaign with gusto. He continued to use every opportunity to further strengthen the Republican organization and enhance the power of the State Committee and its Chair. For example, in a new circular he issued on July 28th, he outlined to the town committees how they should organize themselves in the campaign. “We must not underestimate the strength of our opponents. They have a trained corps of nearly ONE THOUSAND NATIONAL OFFICE HOLDERS in this state whose duty to their pro-slavery masters compels them to spend time and efforts to get their followers to the polls.” In this struggle, Stevens called on the town committees to divide their towns into smaller committees, one for each ward or [school] district and to get every Republican voter to the polls.\footnote{See circular titled CONFIDENTIAL: TO THE REPUBLICAN TOWNS COMMITTEES OF MAINE dated July 28, 1859, published in the \textit{Rockland Democrat and Free Press} of June 20, 1860.} Stevens continued to emphasize organization.
For him it was the means to “keep our party in majority in coming years and render Maine an influential Republican State in the great Republican party of the Union.”

Stevens continued to see the party as most important. He did not shy away from giving instructions to top Republicans, including its Congressmen and Senators. To press the point on those who he must have felt were reluctant, he sent out a circular to the state’s top elected officials asking them to give the State Committee some of their time for the last three weeks of the campaign. The circular asked them to “inform the Chairman immediately how many days that you can spend on the stump, as we want to arrange the appointments [to speak].” Stevens instructed them in clear language to “please let us hear from you at once.” In creating a more disciplined party, Stevens centralized the collection of strategic information in the State Committee and strengthened the office of the State Chairman.

Although the state’s economy and its government might be fragmented, Stevens wanted the Republican Party to be centralized. Organization, campaigns, and resource allocation should be handled in Augusta. The Democrats were not able to match the Republican’s new structural forms. They still operated with a highly decentralized party organization built around independent centers of power.

As the 1859 campaign moved into its final phase, the Republicans maintained their focus on the South and on Buchanan. They also kept up their efforts to turn swing Democrats away from the Maine Democrats. They did not call their opponent the Maine Democratic Party, but Buchanan’s Party. They tried to link the Democratic Party directly to the Slave Power. The

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97 Rockland Democrat and Free Press of June 20, 1860.

Democrats know, the *Kennebec Journal* editorialized “the demands and expectations of their Southern Masters. They are the appointed agents of the Slave Power which is always vigilant and alive to its main purposes”\(^99\)

Then two weeks before the election, the *Kennebec Journal* linked the threat from the South to the need for organization. A *Journal* editorial titled “ORGANIZE, ORGANIZE” called on “FRIENDS OF LIBERTY AND NATIONAL REFORM! Are you ready for another encounter with the well-drilled cohorts of the Lecompton Administration and the minions of the Slave Power? Do you fully realize the importance of the coming election to the Republican Party of the Union.” And later: “A decisive victory on the 12th of September \([is needed]\) to gain ascendency against the Slave-Breeding and Slave-Trading Democracy.”\(^100\)

On September 12th election day, 102,652 men went to the polls, and Lot Morrill won again, this time with 57,230 votes to the 45,387 for Democrat Manassah Smith. Morrill’s margin of 12,000 votes was a substantial improvement over 1858, yet still far lower than what Hamlin received in 1856. The Republicans also won control of the Legislature. Among the victors was James G. Blaine who had run for re-election. The Democrats might have lost by a slightly larger margin, but they certainly remained competitive. A shift of just 6,000, for example, would have elected Manassah Smith.

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\(^99\) These quotes are all from a lead editorial in the August 19, 1859 issue of the *Kennebec Journal*

\(^100\) These quotes are from the lead editorial in the August 26, 1859 issue of the *Kennebec Journal.*
The Republicans’ “Democratic State”

Republican rule had some immediate but little long term consequences for structure of Maine state government. For reasons of politics, they had accepted Hamlin’s and Morrill’s admonitions to keep new legislation at a minimum and to rigorously control state spending. In fact, from the day when Republicans first took power in January of 1857, they made few changes to the structure, programs, or tax policies of Maine’s state government. As mentioned before, the Republicans did not want to offend rank-and-file Democrats.

The lack of change in Maine state expenditures following the Republican’s first victory in 1856 highlights this fact. In 1860, after four years of Republican budgets, the state would spend $337,000, excluding interest, debt repayments, cash-on-hand, and one-time miscellaneous expenditures. That was $25,000 less than was spent in 1853, following 12 years of Democratic governors and Democratic legislatures.101 In addition, the makeup of expenditures changed little. Spending for the state constitutional officers and legislators, for managing the “defectives” at the prison and the insane asylum, for Indians, pensions, and agriculture remained largely the same. The only major difference was the amount of state support for the town’s primary schools. In 1860 the state would spend $98,000, which was more than the $54,000 spent in 1853. But that increase was not a result of decisions that Republicans made; it was the consequence of unexpected increases in a dedicated fund created back in 1841.102

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102 See Jewett. p. 40. Banks paid a "tax" based on the amount of currency they issued. The revenues from this tax were dedicated to state support for town schools. An increase in the number of banks issuing currency in the 1850s had produced greater revenues.
The Republicans also did not touch the Democratic-written state’s tax laws. As was true since Maine separated from Massachusetts, nearly all governmental revenue, for towns, cities, counties, and the state, came from a general property tax which town officials assessed on all property.\(^{103}\) The Republicans had also continued the Democratic policy of paying down the state’s debt. By 1860 the state owed only $63,500.\(^{104}\)

Although most Republicans, as did the Whigs before them, supported increased federal spending for internal improvements—highways, canals, and railroads—the Maine Republicans in the years between 1856 and 1860 made no efforts to begin a state-sponsored program of internal improvements. Nor did they invest state money to help build railroads. Their refusal is especially noteworthy since many of the state’s business leaders had actively petitioned the Republicans to develop an aggressive state economic development policy backed by state authority.\(^{105}\) Because any development policy would naturally target money to certain areas, Democrats could have taken advantage of the anger of regions that had received nothing and they could have mobilized that resentment into a winning coalition.

With little additional spending and no new programs, Augusta, under Republican control, was the same sleepy place it was when the Democrats were in control.\(^{106}\)

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\(^{103}\) The Legislature annually determined an amount of money that each town had to collect from its property owners to pass back to the state to meet its expenses. While only a small portion of what the town collected passed back to the state, the political consequences of this system were profound. As every resident of every town paid part of this property taxes to the state, governors and legislators were under constant pressure to keep the state's expenditures low.

\(^{104}\) Jewett, *A Financial History or Maine*, p. 38.


\(^{106}\) The State Capitol Building was busy only in January, February, and March when the 180 representatives and senators were in town. For the rest of the year, the only official activities were the monthly meetings of the Governor and the Executive Council. When the Governor was not meeting with
passed no major pieces of legislation, made no attempt to deal with the fragmented political system, and made no changes to the state’s constitutional order.

As was the case under the Democrats, the main products of the Republican legislatures were private acts, especially corporate charters. An analysis of the Acts and Resolves of 1860 offers a clear view of the Legislature’s priorities. In that volume, the Private and Special Laws occupy 134 pages, while the Public Laws, laws that were broadly applicable to the citizens, businesses, towns, counties, and the state, required just 48 pages.

The sorts of people who spent significant time in Augusta were the same under Republican rule as under the Democrats. As before, many businessmen came to town to ask for a corporate charter or a revision to a previous one. The Legislature remained generous with these charters. Because opportunities abounded in this undeveloped state, the legislature "distributed" them to whoever petitioned. As was true in the 1840s, the one group of people that spent considerable time in Augusta was politicians. In the 1840s most of these were

the council, he was rarely in Augusta; more often at home elsewhere in the state or travelling on personal business.

107 Some of the charters passed in 1860 include the Grand Falls Dam Company, the East Machias Manufacturing Company, the Augusta Manufacturing and Water Power Company, the Portland Mutual Fire Insurance Company and the Somerset Railway Company. There were also charter changes for Androscoggin Railroad, the Penobscot Railroad, the Portland Union Railway Company, the Aroostook Railway Company, and special bills to allow the City of Bangor to invest in the Aroostook Railway Company.


109 The annual legislatures did not appear to use any political tests in granting charters. One often finds the names of prominent Democrats on the list of incorporators in charters approved by Republican legislatures. For example, Shepard Cary, the vehement anti-abolition and anti-prohibition Democrat who had run against Anson Morrill in 1854 was approved as an incorporator of the Aroostook and St. Andrews Branch Railroad Company.
Democrats as their party controlled the state. But after Hamlin’s victory in 1856, most of those spending time in Augusta were former Whigs, Morrill Democrats, former Know-Nothings, and prohibitionists, all now calling themselves Republicans. Their interest, just as it had been for the Democrats, was to influence decisions on jobs and contracts – the lifeblood of political parties.

"The intensely competitive political parties," wrote Theda Skocpol, "that mobilized this mass electorate colonized all levels of public administration, and used the spoils of office to motivate party cadres."  

The politicians were also at the Legislature because it was the body that set the rules for how politicians and political parties competed for the state's resources. It established the "rules of the game": who could vote, who counted the votes, when elections were held, the boundaries of elections districts, and the powers of the cities, towns, counties.

Augusta was also important to the Republicans because it was the home of the Republican State Committee, whose power within the party was increasing. State Committee members, no doubt, involved themselves in patronage decisions to make sure that hard-working party loyalists and representatives of the various county and regional power centers all shared in the state's largesse.

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110 See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, p. 49.

111 Constitutions created the most important rules of the game -- what American Political Development scholars call the "constitutional order," that is the powers of the executive, legislature, and the court and what citizen rights exist, such as universal suffrage and free speech. In Maine the constitutional order was established by the Constitution of 1820. This constitution was relatively short and general, and legislature wrote and rewrote more detailed "rules of the game" as the years went on.
The Fusionists’ Legacy

The structure of governmental power, however, did change significantly in the years from 1856 to 1860. The executive branch and the governor’s office became weaker, and the Legislature and the county governments stronger. The result was a further fragmentation of political power and a strengthening of the many competing power centers in the state. These changes, however, were not made by the Republicans, but were a legacy that their Fusionist founders left to them. The Fusionists had drafted in 1855 two major constitutional amendments and pushed them through that same year by public referendum. Fusionists were reformers and each of the amendments had the goal of weakening the power of professional politicians.112 The first amendment stripped from the governor, who usually had a state-wide perspective, the power to nominate the state's attorney general, land agent, and adjutant general (commander of the militia) – three of the five most powerful figures in the executive branch.113 Under the amendment the Legislature, which generally reflected local concerns, won that power. Under the second amendment, he lost the power to nominate hundreds of local officials – county judges of probate, sheriffs, and the local municipal and police judges. The referendum gave that power to voters of the counties themselves.114

112 See Wescott’s, *New Men, New Issues*, pp. 130-131, for more detail on the Fusionist goals and the amendments. Under the Democrats, the Governor, thanks to his control over appointments, was a key man in the Democratic political machine.

113 The precedent for this amendment was strong. The 1820 Constitution established the offices of secretary of state and state treasurer and made them elective by the Legislature.

Not only did the amendments weaken the power of the governor, they also weakened the power of the state government to enforce its own laws. County attorneys and county sheriffs since 1820 had been the law enforcement arm of the state: there was no state police force nor any states attorneys. Chosen by the governor, they reflected his state-wide perspective. But, after the referendum, the county attorneys and county sheriffs no longer “reported” to the governor, but instead to the voters in their own counties. The enforcement of state laws would now reflect the priorities of regional power centers rather than that of the state as a whole. These constitutional changes not only weakened the governor’s power within state government, but they also weakened his authority in his political party. After 1855, the governor himself had less patronage to distribute. At the same time, however, the Republican Party was becoming more centralized, with more defined executive, with greater financial and patronage resources at his command. The state was growing weaker but the Republican Party stronger.

115 The approval by the voters of the new Maine Law in 1858 was a major victory for the prohibitionists. But the 1855 constitutional amendment stripped the governor of his control over law enforcement. This change created nightmares for the Maine Law people. While a Republican governor was often a strong friend and ally of theirs, the counties often were less supportive. In many cases county sheriffs and attorneys refused to use the powers they had been given by the Maine Law, knowing that the Law was very unpopular with their voters. The new independence of the county attorneys and county sheriffs also shifted away from the state and to the counties, the debate over prohibition. Those who wanted tough enforcement and those who wanted milder policies fought, not to elect legislators, but to elect sympathetic sheriffs and county attorneys.

116 In future years, the President of the United States and Maine’s US Senators – because of their power to approve presidential appointments – would become the dominant political figures in Maine state politics because the number of federal officials, and thus the scope of patronage, expanded dramatically during and after the Civil War and afterwards. The power of the governor would not grow until the number of state employees began to expand and that would not take place until the 1890s.
Slavery Moves to the Center of National Politics

In 1860 the issue of slavery would be central to all the national political conventions, as well as all of the state party conventions. Van Buren’s plan to keep the issue of slavery out of national politics had collapsed. Even the party that Van Buren created, the Democratic Party, was being consumed. In the presidential year of 1860, the first national party to meet was the Democrats. They convened on April 23rd in Charlestown, South Carolina, probably the most pro-slavery city in the country. The delegates arrived deeply divided, and the events in Charlestown and elsewhere intensified the split. Senator Douglas, a moderate pro-slavery man, probably had the largest number of delegates, but the Southern delegates were the most united and they decided to push a strongly pro-slavery platform, including an attack of “popular sovereignty.” The convention went on for six increasingly bitter days. Interestingly, most of Maine’s delegation was strongly for Douglas. When the delegates rejected the southern-authored platform, many of the southern delegates walked out.

But, because of the two-thirds rule, Douglas was unable to win the nomination of the depleted convention. To salvage the situation, the Douglas men convened six weeks later in Baltimore. At that convention, Douglas was quickly nominated. The Douglas convention’s platform endorsed the Dred Scott Decision, the construction of a transcontinental railroad, and the acquisition of Cuba from Spain. A few weeks later, the southern delegates, convening in Baltimore as well, nominated John C. Breckenridge, Buchanan’s Vice President as their candidate for President.117

When the Republican delegation from Maine left for Chicago for their national convention, they were optimistic. They knew they had an excellent chance that their nominee would become president since the opposing party was fragmenting. Maine’s delegation included most of the leaders of the state party. John L. Stevens was a member and went pledged to support the strongest anti-slavery candidate, Senator William H. Seward of New York. James G. Blaine also went to Chicago, not as a member of the delegation, but to help Hannibal Hamlin in his effort to nominate Lincoln, who Hamlin thought was the most electable.\(^{118}\)

When the delegates arrived in Chicago, there was no clear front-runner. Four formidable men were running: William H. Seward; Governor Salmon Chase of Ohio; Senator Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania; and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. Stevens supported Seward. Blaine, on the other hand, was working, at Hamlin’s direction, to nominate Lincoln. On the train to Chicago, he worked on Governor Morrill to convince him to support Lincoln.\(^{119}\)

The convention was contentious. Seward led on the first and second ballots, but on the third many delegates abandoned him to support Lincoln who was then nominated. The shift away from Seward reflected tough bargaining by the leaders of the state delegations and a general sense that Seward was too “anti-slavery” to be elected. Hard feelings abounded, but tasting a victory, Republicans quickly united behind their nominee. Directly after it chose its presidential candidate, the convention chose Maine’s own Senator Hannibal Hamlin as its candidate for Vice President. Just as Maine’s Republicans had picked the former Democrat Hannibal Hamlin to be their candidate for governor, the national party, knowing they too needed

\(^{118}\) Hamlin did not attend the convention.

\(^{119}\) One description of this lobbying effort is included in H. Draper Hunt, *Hannibal Hamlin of Maine: Lincoln’s First Vice President*, pp. 113-114.
Democratic votes to win the November election, chose a former Democrat to “balance” their ticket.

The platform that the Republicans adopted reflected the same message that had worked so well for their state parties – ringing attacks on slavery and the South. But the national party’s platform was quite different from the ones adopted in recent years by Maine Republicans. The national party called for a protective tariff, a Homestead Act, freedom of immigration, internal improvements, and construction of a Pacific Railroad. In their campaign for Lincoln and Hamlin, Maine’s Republicans would ignore these issues as they would likely alienate the swing Democrats.

When John L. Stevens returned to Maine from the convention, he was bitter and angry at Blaine. Certainly a major reason was the work that Blaine did for Lincoln and against Seward in Chicago. Another reason might have been suspicions that Blaine had played a role in his ouster from the State Committee, and the loss of his position as State Committee Chair. When they saw each other in Maine, Stevens’ hostility was obvious. “Here, you have got your man,” Stevens said: “Now take your d---paper and run it.” He would not go near Blaine for weeks.120

**James G. Blaine**

Less than a month after Chicago Convention, the Maine Republicans gathered on June 7th in Bangor for their state convention.121 For the first time in years, John L. Stevens did not call the convention to order. Instead, it was a new Chair of the State Committee, Josiah H.

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121 Both the *Kennebec Journal* and *Portland Advertiser* covered in detail the formal proceedings of the state convention. See *Kennebec Journal*, June 15, 1860 and *Portland Advertiser*, June 9, 1960.
Drummond, who called the meeting to order. The major issue before the convention was choosing its candidate for governor. The issue was an open one because Lot Morrill had announced he that would not be a candidate. He expected that Hamlin would be elected Vice President, and he wanted the Legislature to elect him to the US Senate seat which Hamlin would have to vacate. Morrill would have an excellent chance at winning the seat since the Republicans would not risk alienating the swing Democrats by rejecting him. Republicans apparently, however, did not feel that they had to replace Morrill in the governor’s office with another former Democrat. With Maine’s own Hamlin on the national ticket, and with the prospect that Morrill would win his Senate seat, swing Democrats would likely be satisfied.

When the delegates turned their attention to choosing a candidate for governor, they were in the unusual place of being able to choose between two former Whigs. One was Abner Coburn, a lumberman, one of the wealthiest men in the state, and the son of a former Federalist. He was Blaine’s choice. The other was Israel Washburn Jr. a well-known five-term Congressman who had represented the Bangor area. He was also probably more anti-slavery than either Lot Morrill or Abner Coburn. Most likely Stevens would have been supporting him.

Blaine supported Coburn and that support was helpful. Since his election to the Legislature, Blaine had become an influential force in the party. He had long enjoyed close friendships with Senators Fessenden and Hamlin, and as a legislator he had successfully handled two complicated political assignments that had been fraught with danger to the party. The first was an investigation of the Republican State Treasurer who had been caught using the state’s funds.

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122 Drummond had been elected at the 1859 convention to the State Committee by the Kennebec County delegation. Sometime in early the State Committee had chosen him to be its Chair.

revenues for his own personal investments. The second was a scandal at the State Prison at Thomaston. But Blaine’s support for Coburn was not enough. The delegates were more anti-slavery than many of the party’s leaders. If the nomination had been made by the Republican Legislative Caucus, Coburn might have won, but the convention delegates picked Washburn. Yet, once Washburn was the selected, Blaine did not lash out or walk out; he quickly endorsed him. The platform produced little debate. Ignoring prohibition, the protective tariff, the Pacific Railroad, and a national internal improvement program, the Republicans once again focused on their successful message of opposing the South and the Slave Power. The platform, of course also strongly supported Lincoln, Hamlin, and Washburn as well as the national platform adopted in Chicago.

In the final hours of the convention, party leaders took a surprising action, one that would have both short term and long-term consequences. James Pike, the Washington County party leader who had complained about John L. Stevens in his 1858 letter to Senator Fessenden, took the floor. He called for James G. Blaine’s election as the Kennebec County member of the State

124 For more detail on Blaine’s handling these problems, see Rolde, Continental Liar, pp. 64-68.

125 Kennebec Journal, June 15, 1860. The vote was nevertheless close: 429 for Washburn and 342 for Coburn. After the convention, Coburn remained Blaine's friend and ally. With Blaine’s help, Coburn won the Republican nomination for governor in 1862 after Washburn decided not to run for re-election for a third term. Coburn was unpopular. In 1863, worried the Coburn would be defeated in the upcoming election, Blaine engineered a coup at the state convention and gave the Republican nomination instead to Samuel Cony, a long time Democrat who had joined the Republicans a year earlier in 1862.
Committee, the seat that John L. Stevens had occupied for many years.\textsuperscript{126} The convention quickly took up Pike’s motion and elected Blaine to the State Committee. What was so exceptional was the fact that just a few hours earlier Kennebec County had chosen Josiah Drummond, who had become State Party Chair during the year, as its representative on the State Committee, and that the convention had just elected a State Committee that included Drummond. Pike told the delegates that Drummond had unexpectedly resigned.

The written record is silent on why Drummond resigned the seat he was elected to just a few hours earlier. The best explanation is that party leaders were worried that Drummond was not up to the job of running the party and its all-important 1860 campaigns. Blaine, however, had the skills that the party felt it needed. He had worked with John L. Stevens for years, and no doubt understood the party structure that Stevens had built and how to use the expanded powers of the State Committee and of the State Party Chair. And he shared Stevens’ view that the Republican party should be centralized. Blaine had other advantages. He was clearly ambitious and hard-working. He was also close to the party’s powerful Congressmen, Senators, and the likely Vice President of the United States. And Blaine’s work at the Chicago Convention in helping to nominate Lincoln and as a state representative in burying the Republican scandals made it clear that he was a skilled and resourceful political leader both in front of a crowd and in a backroom.

The record is also silent as to how John L Stevens felt about Blaine’s elevation. But we do know that he was no less angry than he had been when he returned from Chicago. The day after the convention ended, Stevens issued a statement printed in his \textit{Kennebec Journal} announcing his resignation from his editorial duties at the paper for reasons of “ill-health,” and

\textsuperscript{126} See Portland Advertiser report on state convention, June 9, 1860.
that he had “secured the services of James G. Blaine who will have the principal charge of the political columns in the *Journal.*”\textsuperscript{127}

On June 28, Maine’s Douglas Democrats met at their convention in Portland. They unanimously nominated Ephraim K. Smart of Camden. They emphasized the importance of maintaining national unity and attacked the Republicans for supporting policies that might destroy the Union. They endorsed the 1856 National Democratic Platform, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and both the principles of “popular sovereignty” and “non-intervention” in slavery. Of course, they strongly endorsed Stephen Douglas for President.\textsuperscript{128} Interestingly, as an indication of the continued strength of the Democratic Party, despite its splits, 849 men attended the Douglas Democratic Convention, nearly 200 more than attended the Republican Convention.

The state’s Democratic officeholders, as well as Democrats who believed in a strong pro-South policy, met at separate site and ratified the nomination of John Breckenridge for President. They did not nominate a candidate for governor. The Maine supporters of John Bell of the Constitutional Union Party had a separate convention as well. They did not nominate a candidate for governor either.

\textsuperscript{127} *Kennebec Journal*, June 8, 1860. It is not clear whether Stevens was sick or party leaders wanted to make sure that *Journal* would follow the party’s line. They may have worried that Steven’s would not be sufficiently enthusiastic for Lincoln, or that his anger at Blaine might color the *Kennebec Journal’s* political coverage during the campaign. The record is silent, but one fact is true. Party leaders could tell Stevens what to do. They had the upper hand. The *Kennebec Journal* depended heavily on profits from the state printing contract which the Legislature granted to the *Journal*.

\textsuperscript{128} *Republican Journal*, July 6, 1860.
Blaine and the 1860 State Election

Taking the reins of the centralized organization that John L. Stevens had built up in his years as State Committee Chair, Blaine led the Republicans in an all-out campaign.\(^\text{129}\) He had the advantage that he inherited a strong party organization, a State Committee with significant resources and power, and a State Chairmanship with real authority.

Blaine kept the party’s primary message the same as it had been under Stevens – stop the South and the expansion of slavery. State issues were ignored and those voicing them silenced.\(^\text{130}\) Republicans turned the campaign into a crusade. Hamlin, Lot and Anson Morrill, Washburn, and Fessenden barnstormed the state. Senators Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and John Hale of New Hampshire made special trips to speak at mass meetings. Young men’s marching clubs, such as the Lincoln Wide-Awakes, the Lincoln Guards, and the Republican Continentals, took to the streets. Bedecked in uniforms, they marched and counter marched. At night their torch-lit parades escorted speakers to mass meetings.\(^\text{131}\) In an editorial aimed at Republican town and ward committees, the *Portland Advertiser* warned against overconfidence: "Do not think that you are to lay still this campaign, and win the victory by these outside shows

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\(^\text{129}\) The State Committee had elected Blaine to be its Chairman sometime after the Convention. It is not clear exactly when. Neither the *Kennebec Journal* nor the *Portland Advertiser* reported on the meetings or the actions of the Republican State Committee.

\(^\text{130}\) The state platform for 1860 was extremely brief. It endorsed the platform of the National Convention and indicated its enthusiastic support for the Lincoln-Hamlin ticket and for Israel Washburn as governor. See *Kennebec Journal*, June 8, 1860.

\(^\text{131}\) See *Portland Advertiser*, September 5, 1860 for articles "Tremendous Republican Meeting in Portland" and "Grand Torch-light Procession in the Evening."
and popular demonstrations. Go to work at once and organize every school district in your town, just as thoroughly as if we were in a minority in this State.\textsuperscript{132}

Blaine devoted extra time to the campaign’s finances. The party did not have the army of national patronage workers that the Democrats commanded nor the assessments on their salaries, but the Republicans could assess state, county, city, and town officials. Blaine made use of whatever resources were available. Since Congressmen could send out mail at no cost, Maine's entire congressional delegation – all Republicans – flooded post office boxes with reprints of their speeches. Besides managing the State Committee, Blaine found opportunities to elevate himself and widen his contacts around the state. As the campaign progressed, the speaker lists for mass rallies which featured Senators Sumner and Fessenden and Governor Morrill, began to include Blaine.\textsuperscript{133} He also took to the stump, going up and down the state, following the Democratic candidate for governor, Ephriam K. Smart, wherever he went.\textsuperscript{134} More and more Republicans began to hear the name “James G. Blaine.”

In the September election, the turnout was the highest in history. More than 124,000 men voted. The Democrat’s message simply did not resonate with as many men. The Republican’s northern nationalism continued to be a winning message. Washburn won with a big 18,000 vote majority.\textsuperscript{135} The Republicans again won solid majorities in the Legislature.\textsuperscript{136}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[132] \textit{Portland Advertiser}, July 20, 1860
\item[133] See \textit{Kennebec Journal} for June 1, 1860 for report on Lincoln and Hamlin ratification meeting in Augusta on June 1, 1860 and \textit{Portland Advertiser} of August 31, 1860 for report on Republican mass meeting in Portland.
\item[135] See \textit{Maine Register: Maine State Yearbook and Legislative Manual for the Year 1879-80}. (Portland: Hoyt, Fogg & Donham, 1877). In the 1860 elections, the few remaining active Whigs did run a separate candidate, but he only received 1,735 votes. After that election, the Whigs completely disappeared as a party.
\end{footnotes}
margin was helped by the fact that this was a presidential year, one when more peripheral voters would turn out. Yet, even after the election, the Democrats remained a threatening force. Washburn’s margin in 1860 was still less than Hamlin’s in 1856. Washburn did get 1,000 more votes than Hamlin did in 1856 but the Democratic candidate received 9,000 more votes. If the Democrats had been able to keep the loyalty of only 9,000 of the former Democrats who had strayed to the Republican candidate, they would have won the election. And if the campaign had been fought on state issues, rather than slavery, most likely the Democrats would have one.

The Republican Organization in Full Flower

Within days of the September victory, Republicans turned their energies to the presidential campaign. As it had in September, the well-disciplined and unified Republican Party again ran against the South and the expansion of slavery. It made no mention of the other planks in National Republican Platform: protective tariffs, internal improvements, the rights of naturalized citizens, or a Pacific Railroad.

Republicans also benefited from the actions of Democratic Senators and the inactions of President Buchanan. Republicans claimed that they were the real friends of the cod fishermen. They celebrated the fact that while 30 of the 35 Democratic Senators had voted in 1858 against the Cod Bounty Program, Republicans had voted 17 to 0 to maintain it.\footnote{O’ Leary, Maine Sea Fisheries, p. 82, 373.} And Buchanan’s lack of response to the Panic of 1857 made it easy for Republicans to appeal to businessmen throughout the North. They were eager for an economic recovery and were frustrated at

Buchanan’s ideological opposition to federal actions which might have stimulated the economy, such as the Internal Improvements bill and the Homestead Act.\textsuperscript{138}

In the last days of the campaign, the Republicans intensified their crusade. "To Your Tents, Oh! Israel!" the \textit{Portland Advertiser} told its readers the day before the election: "Let every man who loves FREEDOM, do his duty now....Do not suppose that we can spare a single vote because the victory is already secure. We must prove that our candidates, when elected, have the strength of the people to support them. Let every man who believes in Republicanism now rally to the support of our principles. The day, the hour and the man are here: shall we falter?"\textsuperscript{139}

When the results for the November election were counted, it was clear that Republicans had won another major victory. The Lincoln-Hamlin ticket won Maine with 62,811, or 62.2\% of the popular vote, outpalling Stephen Douglas by 33,118 votes. The Lincoln-Hamlin ticket’s margin of 29,000 votes was far wider than Washburn’s margin over Smart and even a bit larger than Hamlin’s margin in 1856. The two other presidential candidates – Bell and Breckenridge – received just 8,510 votes between them. When the votes from the other states came in, Abraham Lincoln was the new President of the United States, winning 180 of the 303 possible electoral votes.

The Republican campaign was successful everywhere, winning majorities in the six congressional districts, all sixteen counties, all the cities, and virtually all the towns.\textsuperscript{140} Republicans were ecstatic. "Victory is Ours! Lincoln Elected! Freedom Triumphant! We Have

\textsuperscript{138} Landis, \textit{Northern Men with Southern Loyalties}, p, 239.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Portland Advertiser}, November 5, 1860.

\textsuperscript{140} For a more detailed analysis of the results of the 1860 election in Maine, see Desmond. "Maine and the Elections of 1860." pp. 455-475.
Met the Enemy and They are Ours," headlined the *Portland Advertiser*. Despite the close connections between Maine’s shipping, shipbuilding, and cotton textile manufacturing interests and the South, Lincoln won majorities in all the cotton mill towns as well as in all of the coastal towns, with the exceptions of Thomaston and Waldoboro.

**Conclusion**

In the days after Lincoln's election in November of 1860, Maine Republicans were euphoric. By winning the state elections, they held the Governor's office, the Legislature, and the Executive Council, giving them control of all the state patronage. And they would for the first time control all of the national patronage, thanks to Abraham Lincoln’s election as President.

A number of factors helped the Republicans win this landslide election: the deep split in the national and state Democratic parties; the widespread unpopularity in the North of President Buchanan; and the growing anxiety in Maine at the designs of the South, heightened by news of Bleeding Kansas, the attack on Massachusetts Senator Sumner, and the Dred Scott decision of the US Supreme Court.

There were other equally important factors. One was that the Republicans had relentlessly put forward a compelling and all-embracing message. Beginning in 1856 and continuing right through 1860 they talked of little else but the fact that the South was trying to open up the West to slavery, weaken the North, and take control of the national government.

They also told the voters that the Republican Party was the only body that could be trusted to

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141 *Portland Advertiser*, November 7, 1860.
stop this southern aggression. Their jeremiad was drummed in by their newspapers and by their candidates, just as Jackson had done in his campaigns against the Money Power in the 1830s. A majority of Maine voters responded enthusiastically to their call for northern nationalism. Another factor was that the Republicans refused to talk about state issues. They knew that debates about restrictions on Catholics, abolitionism and the Maine Law would hurt them.

If there was a single architect of the Republican Party’s new structure, it was John L. Stevens. Sometimes in life and political affairs, individual men make a great difference. Their actions seem independent from the broader institutional trends of history, but they have profound and long lasting consequences. John L. Stevens was one such man. He learned about politics in the single-issue movements. He was strongly anti-slavery. He was a leader among the Know-Nothings and the Morrill Democrats. He had wide experience. His experience in the single-issue movements helped him become Chair of the State Committee of the Fusion Party. In 1857 Republicans chose this experienced organizer to be their State Committee Chair.

Whether the Republican’s leadership had known his views when they chose him or not, Stevens believed that the Republicans needed a centralized and disciplined political organization. He thought the party should have "organization, discipline, and courage" and should model itself on the military. Stevens built up the party organization, putting party activists in charge and weakening the power of office holders and their legislative caucuses. State conventions were held every year, even if there was an incumbent seeking re-election. It was the convention that drafted and approved the party’s platform. This more participatory model of party organization energized and empowered the party’s base of activists. When he encountered resistance, he had pushed forward relentlessly.
The election of a State Committee was regularized. Each year a State Committee would be elected which insured that it would be responsive to the changing dynamics within the party. Stevens had turned the State Committee into a powerful body with many responsibilities. Active throughout the year, it ceased to act like the temporary committees that Whigs and Democrats had created in the past, when their sole task was organizing the state convention.

The State Committee also became the storehouse for the party’s data on voters. It regularly surveyed the towns during campaigns to find out how voters were responding. The Committee managed the assessments the party placed on its office- and patronage-holders. This put the Committee in a position to control how the party’s resources were spent and gave the party a regular and consistent source of money. As a result of the assessment system, the Republicans no longer had to depend on wealthy individuals or businesses for campaign money; nor did they have to choose wealthy men, capable of financing the party’s campaigns, as their candidates for governor. On top of this institutional pyramid was the John L. Stevens, the State Committee Chair.

Despite these Republican advantages, the Democrats had remained a formidable force and were a constant threat. Even with an increasingly unpopular president, in the elections of 1857, 1858, and 1859, the Democrats came very close to defeating the Republicans. A reversal of just 10,000 votes would have given them the governor’s office in those elections.

In the five years following 1855, the Democrats paid some attention to strengthening their party structures, but they did not have the equivalent of a John L. Stevens. They did follow the Republican’s lead and convened state conventions each year, and at each convention they elected a State Committee. Their State Committee was active in negotiations with the collapsing Whigs, but they did not strengthen the structures of the party. There was no strong Democratic
State Committee Chair, for example. The Democrats did have their own message, but it turned out to be not as compelling as that of the Republicans.

Republicans were acutely aware of the Democratic threat, and their political strategy in the state election campaigns was to appeal to those Democratic voters who were anxious about the growing power of the South. But Democrats did not like Whigs, the Maine Law, abolitionism, or aggressive government. Thus, Republicans tried to avoid angering these Democrats.

By refusing to pass any new programs or taxes, they tried to convince their Democratic targets that they were not Whigs. In fact, they advanced no new major public policies and enacted no new taxes. Consistent with that, they made no attempt to repeal the constitutional amendments that their Fusionist forebears had passed which had weakened state government and the role of the governor. To win elections and remain in power, the Republicans were more than willing to accept as their own the limited and weakened state that the Democrats had created. They believed that Democratic voters would be willing to vote for Republicans, if they looked like Democrats.

In 1859, the party leaders that Stevens had alienated saw to it that he was not reelected to the State Committee. He was angry, yet he had left the party a substantial legacy – a highly structured and disciplined political party, with a powerful State Committee and State Committee Chair waiting to be filled. In 1860, Republican leaders chose as Chair James G. Blaine, a state representative and Smith’s former partner at the *Kennebec Journal*. Using the party structure that Stevens had created, Blaine orchestrated Maine’s landslide Republican victories in September and November of 1860.
Blaine was re-elected Chairman of the State Committee in 1861, just a few months after the Civil War began. Throughout the War, Blaine would be year-after-year re-elected Chair as the State Committee. Like Stevens, Blaine believed in a strong and centralized party and he changed little of the party structure that Stevens had put in place. State conventions were held each year, nominating a candidate for governor, adopting a platform, and electing a State Committee. Blaine strengthened the system of assessing Republican Party patronage- and office-holders. He continued the Republican’s single-issue message and strategy, but it was now to “Save the Union.” He continued to try to make the party attractive to Democratic voters, particularly those who believed that saving the Union was most important. He demonized the regular Democratic Party, accusing it of committing treason by seeking a peace treaty with the Confederacy. And under his leadership, the Republicans avoided pushing any controversial laws, except for those needed to prosecute the War.

Following the War, Blaine went on to a fabled career. He was a Congressman, then Speaker of the US House, and then a US Senator. He sought the Republican nomination for President three times and won it once, though he lost the election to Democrat Grover Cleveland. Through all this time he remained Chairman of the Republican State Committee, using it to control the Maine Republican Party and the State of Maine.

Maine would seem to have been an unusual place for a disciplined and highly centralized political party. Geography fragmented the state, creating many varied centers of economic and political power, each one always willing to take offense at anything that might benefit another region. The Democratic Party recognized that reality, and the state government it created was purposefully weak and made no effort to challenge provincialism and regionalism.
Unlike Republican parties in most other states, Maine Republicans never tried to replace the “Democratic state” with a more aggressive and powerful one – either in period between 1856 and 1860, during the Civil War, or in the Gilded Age. It was perhaps one of the essential reasons why the Republicans succeeded for so many decades. The Republican commitment to small government would not end until the Progressive Era.

Forged in the aftermath of the collapse of the Whigs and the Democratic parties, the Republican Party was able, with a compelling and clear message, an acceptance of small government, an avoidance of state issues, and with the constant demonization of Democrats as tools of the South, to dominate Maine politics, with only a few minor interruptions, for more nearly a century.
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BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Lee Dunham Webb was born on November 6, 1941 in Brookline, Massachusetts. He attended Lawrence Grammar School in Brookline and graduated from Phillips Andover Academy in 1959. In the fall of 1959 he entered Boston University and received his Bachelor Arts Degree in political science in June of 1963.

From 1963 to 1964 he was National Secretary of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In the late 1960s he was a student and then a Fellow and then a Board Member at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington D. C. and he was the Washington Editor of Ramparts Magazine. He was a member of the faculty of Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont from 1970 to 1977, teaching economics and history. He was also a member of the college’s Board of Trustees.

He received a Masters Degree (Economics) from Goddard College 1974 and a Ph. D. (Public Policy) from the Union Institute Ohio in 1976. He moved to Washington D. C., in 1977 joining the staff of Senator George McGovern. From 1977 to 1984 he founded and then was President of the Conference on Alternative State and Local Policies, a public policy research center on state and local government policies. He continued as President of the National Center for Policy Alternatives when the Conference expanded its mission. In the course of his work at these organizations, Lee wrote or edited numerous books on state and local government policy issues.

In 1984, Lee, working as a senior official in Governor Mario Cuomo’s administration, became Senior Vice President of New York State Urban Development Corporation and later, also the Acting Director of New York State Job Development Authority. In 1994, Governor
Cuomo was defeated. Lee took a one year assignment as Director of the Dance Theatre of Harlem beginning in 1995. From 1996 to 1999 he was Vice President for Real Estate and Development at Partners Health Care in Boston. He moved back to New York in 2000 where he was appointed Vice President for Real Estate and Development at New School University in New York City.

In 2004, Lee and his wife moved to Union, Maine and he enrolled for graduate study at the University of Maine in Orono. At different times from 2004 to 2017 he was a Senior Fellow at the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center at the University of Maine, and a board member of the Maine Health Access Foundation, Maine Health & Higher Education Facilities Authority, Pen Bay Hospital, Coastal Health Care Alliance, Abbot Academy Fund, Maine Historical Society. At times he was Chairman of the Board of the Maine Health & Higher Education Facilities Authority. He is now Chairman of the Board of the Maine Center for Economic Policy.

Lee Webb’s research files on Maine History and his personal papers are in the archives of the Maine Historical Society in Portland, Maine.

He is a candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in History from the University of Maine for May 2017.