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FULTON COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Publication No. 15



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James C. Matheny
Sketch By Jimmy Matheny

THE JOHN WHITSETT CHILDRESS HOUSE

(Alice And Kelley Ray)



Summer 1980

Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37130

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RUTHERFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

PUBLICATION NO. 15

Published by the

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Q U E R I E S

IMPORTANT: Publication of queries in this column is free to all members as space permits. Each query must appear on a full sheet of paper which must be dated and include member's name and address. Please type if possible. Queries should give as much pertinent data as possible, i.e. approximate/actual dates of birth, marriage, death, etc. Queries must refer to RUTHERFORD COUNTY, TENNESSEE FAMILIES and immediate connections. Address all correspondence relating to queries to the Society, P. O. Box 906, Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37130.

- No 1 WILLIAM HENRY MARLIN b ca 1805 Rowan Co. N. C. & d after 1880 Rutherford Co. Tenn.; (son of Margaret McCracken & Joseph Marlin); married 1st 4 July 1832 Lucinda Miller, (daughter of Elizabeth Prestridge & Isaac Miller). Had children, Isaac & Elinor Marlin. William married 2nd 29 Nov 1839 in Rutherford Co. by Edward Waller J. P. to Mary Rebecca Jacobs b ca 1816 TN & d, after 1880 in Rutherford Co. We believe M. Rebecca Jacobs to be the daughter of Greenberry Jacobs b July 1778 Md. & his wife Sarah, listed age 58 b Va in 1850. In 1870 Sarah Jacobs, listed age 90 b. Va. lives with William & Rebecca Marlin. We find no other elder Sarah Jacobs b. Va. in 1850 Tenn. census, except Greenberry's wife. William & Rebecca Marlin named a son Greenberry. Sarah Jacobs is not listed in Rutherford, Bedford or Coffee county census of 1860. Is part of Rutherford county 1860 census missing? Would like to learn Sarah's maiden name. Did Greenberry Jacobs die in Rutherford county, Tenn? Mrs. R. H. Johnson
615 Webb St., Lafayette, La 70501
- No 2 In the book, Miller's of Millersburg, by J. B. Nicklin Jr., published 1923, there are some errors. Tenn. State Archives has a copy of this book. On page 141 it states Burrell Perry Johnson (1808-1901) was married to Elizabeth Miller, daughter of Kate Claytor and James R. Miller. The wife of Burrell Perry Johnson was Elizabeth Blakely b. 19 Nov. 1812 TN d. 10 Mar. 1892; buried Old Miller cemetery #100 near Christiana, TN. She was the daughter of Catherine Claytor (1791-1864) and James H. Blakely. (d. prior to 20 Feb. 1830 Rutherford Co.) Though no marriage record was found for Burrell Perry Johnson and Elizabeth Blakely, on the back of B. P. Johnson's handwritten marker is "Married Life 61 yrs 1 month." Subtracting this from Elizabeth's death shows they were married Feb 1831. Also see pages 21 & ?? of Miller book. James R. Miller, widower of Rebecca Johnston, married 2nd in 1831 Mrs. Katherine Blakely, nee Claytor, widowed daughter of Carter Claytor. Catherine's two daughters, Elizabeth & Nancy Blakely are listed as daughters of James R. Miller and his first wife. Catherine also had a son, William Rucker Blakely b. ca 1815. He married in Rutherford Co 6 Feb. 1843 to Lucinda B. Jones. He is not listed in 1860 census of Rutherford Co. Did he move west? Burrell Perry Johnson b. 2 Oct 1808 d. 8 Jan 1901 is listed son of Mary McMinn and Edward Johnson in the book, Miller's of Millersburg and also in the estate records of Edward dated Jan. & Feb. 1853. We are puzzled by other records naming one

No 2 continued---

Burrell Perry Johnson as grandson of Burrell Perry and wife Esther. Deed of gift, Oct. 1814 Rutherford Co. Burrell Perry gives to grandsons, Burrell Perry Johnson and William Henry Johnson, to remain in Matthew Johnson hands, their father or his certain attorney until William comes to age 21. Delivered July 13, 1815 to Matthew Johnson. Burrell Perry d. 1851, wrote Will 21 Oct 1840 of Rutherford Co. recorded Mar. 1852 Davidson Co. He names same two grandsons. Does anyone know anything about another Burrell Perry Johnson b. prior to 1814? Edward Johnson had a brother Matthew, said to have died 1816. Could Edward have adopted his brother's son?
Mrs. R. H. Johnson, 615 Webb St. Lafayette, La 70501

No 3 DAVIS/MARTIN/McCLARY-McCLEARY: Am researching the Presb, minister Rev. Williams Cummins Davis born 16 Dec. 1760-died 27 Sept. 1831 in S. C. Did he live or preach in Rutherford Co. Tenn? If so, where? Did his wife Isabel (McCLARY-McCLEARY) die in Tenn? If so, when and where? His son, David (1798-1875) and wife Mary (MARTIN) Davis (1806-1889) left Rutherford County, Tenn, the 7th of October 1828 for Macon county, Il. Mary (MARTIN) Davis's father Josiah (1757-17 Sept. 1835) and wife Mary (McCLARY-McCLEARY) (1765-1852) both died in Rutherford county, Tenn, and are buried in the Cannon cemetery, Smyrna, Tenn. Isabel Davis and Mary Martin are both daughters of Robert and Abigail (McDOWELL) McClary-McCleary.
Cheri Hunter 2625 E. Olive, Decatur, Il 62526

No 4 COOK, WILLIAM D. COOK (1825-190_) who married Margaret J. Hunter, daughter of Robert N. Hunter (1787-1864). Would like to know any of William's blood relatives--parents, siblings, cousins. Bill lived in the 5th district and was a blacksmith at Lamar on Spring Creek. Write Thomas L. Russell, 5019 Colemont La., Huntsville, Ala., 35811.

A member of our society is a genealogist: Mrs. Lalia Lester
1307 West Northfield Blvd.
Murfreesboro, Tenn 37130
PHONE: (615) 896-9089

Alice K. Ray

The Cover

On the cover of Publication Number 15 is the Childress House, home of Mr. and Mrs. Kelly Ray at 225 North Academy Street in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Mr. and Mrs. Ray are members of the Rutherford County Historical Society and Mrs. Ray is the corresponding secretary and treasurer. Another member of our society, Mr. James Matheny of the Murfreesboro Art and Frame Shop drew the cover from a photograph made by Mr. Bealer Smotherman.

The house on the cover was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 1, 1979.

The Childress House gained its name and place in the history of Murfreesboro by being the home of John W. Childress, brother of Sara Childress Polk.

John W. Childress was a leading citizen of Murfreesboro, as his father Joel Childress had been before him. A native of Sumner County, Tennessee, his family moved to Murfreesboro in 1819. Later he attended and was graduated from the University of North Carolina and was admitted to the Tennessee Bar.

In 1824 his sister, Sara married James K. Polk, who became the eleventh president of the United States. John Childress was elected attorney general pro tem in 1829. Twenty years later he moved to a farm on the Shelbyville Pike and lived and farmed there until the outbreak of the Civil War. Besides operating his farm and practicing law, Childress served as director of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, director of the Bank of Tennessee (1854-1856), president of the Planter's Bank of Tennessee in Murfreesboro (1859-1861) and president of the First National Bank of Murfreesboro (1872-1880).

During the Civil War John W. Childress and his family took refuge in Griffin, Georgia. At this time a bit of history was being made due to the romance of his daughter, Betty and General John Calvin Brown, Commander of a regiment under Colonel J. B. Palmer. A military wedding

was performed and upon Col. Brown's return at the end of the war, the family came back to Murfreesboro and found the Childress farm in shambles and moved to Nashville. Here Col Brown would later become governor of Tennessee.

John W. Childress was elected circuit judge in the capitol city and formed a law partnership with Arthur and John Colyar.

In 1874 he purchased the brick house at 225 North Academy Street in Murfreesboro, now known as the Childress House. His sister, Sara, then the widow of the president, was living in Nashville and visited the house often. Her arrival for one of these visits was always the signal for social calls, parties and sumptuous meals. Mrs. Polk had been, as First Lady, one of the great hostesses of her day. She had entertained a great majority of the famous, including one of the most famous hostesses in the country, Dolly Madison, also a former First Lady.

When John W. Childress purchased the two story brick house, it had already had several owners, being built in 1847 by a contractor named Jim Fletcher for a Mr. Jim Bivins. Several houses built by Mr. Fletcher are still standing in Murfreesboro today.

In 1856, Mr. Bivins sold the house to Jefferson Leatherman, a merchant, whose great grandson, Charles, is a merchant in Murfreesboro at the present time. Mr. Leatherman sold the house in 1874 to John W. Childress and the Childress family owned it until 1900, even though John W. died in 1884, his widow and family continued to live there until it was purchased by P. R. Miller. Mr. Miller was an undertaker and furniture dealer. A larger door was opened in the old kitchen in back of the house and the hearse was kept there. Furniture was sold in part of the first floor while the family lived on the second floor.

Barclay Rucker, circuit court clerk bought the house from Mr. Miller in 1920 and in 1927 the Thomas B. Newsom family purchased it and it has

remained in the Newsom family since that time. Mr. and Mrs. Kelly Ray are the present owners, Mrs. Ray being the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Newsom.

The Childress House, the residence of Major John Whitsett Childress, a man who played an important role in nineteenth century Tennessee business and government. He held important leadership positions in a railroad, three banks, operated a large farm, and was a successful attorney and jurist.

Originally, the house was constructed in the Greek Revival style. The facade was altered in 1874-75 and columns on the porches were replaced with ornate gingerbread trim of the day. In 1913 a tornado damaged the house. The porches were repaired and the present clean lines and fluted pillars were used which reflect the influence of the Colonial Revival Movement at that time.

The house is built with hand made brick, laid in stretcher bond on a cut and coursed limestone foundation. All interior woodwork and floors are yellow poplar while the window frames, lintels and sills are cedar. The walls are plastered directly onto the brick and the ceilings have wood laths. The stairway ascends in the center hall and was designed using the turned balusters and large newell post, found in most Greek Revival houses in this area; these elements are primarily walnut with some mahogany.

The low gable roof is presently covered with tin shingles. These shingles were used in 1913 to replace the standing seam roof that was destroyed by a tornado. The standing seam roof remains on the porches and lower parts of the building.

At the rear of the main house stands two one-story rooms with one chimney and one fireplace, these rooms were the original kitchen and smokehouse. Also southwest of the house stands a one-story brick

dependency, the precise use being uncertain, but it was probably used for storage of food or wine, since it contains a sunken, brick lined cavity.

Plaques have been placed on the house by the Association for the Preservation of Tennessee Antiquities and Murfreesboro Architectural and Zoning Society. In December 1979 the United States Department of Interior placed the house on the National Register of Historic Places. A bronze plaque denoting this has been placed on the building.

The Rutherford County Historical Society appreciates the work of Jim Matheny, County Executive Ben Hall McFarlin, Gene Sloan, Bealer Smotherman, Mrs. Kelly Ray, Mrs. Ladelle Craddock, and the author Van West in preparing this publication for printing.

Carroll Van West

RUTHERFORD COUNTY:

The Evolution of a Whig Stronghold
1835 - 1845

Carroll Van West

College of William and Mary
1979

Edwin A. Keeble in his Murfreesboro Central Monitor,
September 6, 1834

Mr. Bell must either be against a national bank or against General Jackson; there is no alternative, the President will admit him amongst the number of his friends, upon no other terms.

Governor Newton Cannon at Murfreesboro, April 11, 1839

I used to think that General Jackson was a tyrant by nature and education. I have witnessed his movements on many occasions--seen his various plans of operations, but when he had his clans about him--and he always would have his clans, but no man in them to follow him, who would not be his tool and his slave.

William R. Rucker to James K. Polk, April 10, 1840

This county as you know seems to be in the peculiar keeping of the Whigs. They appear to be determined to do all they can to get a majority.

James C. Jones at Murfreesboro, March 15, 1841

. . .if I should be elected the Governor of Tennessee, and the Legislature should remove the seat of Government to any point in the state, I would not express a regret, no ask to remain a moment at Nashville, but would cheerfully pack up a bag and baggage and go alone with it.

James K. Polk to Samuel H. Laughlin. October 19, 1842

The central position of that County (Rutherford) makes it more important that we should preserve our strength there, than in any other County in the State.

S. G. Heiskell. 1921

We, in our day, think that we have had some hot politics, but if the historians who tell the political story of the days when the Whig party was to be reckoned with in the United States ...correctly state the facts, there can be no comparison between those days and ours: especially in Tennessee politics furor and turbulence that must have meant practical insanity characterized elections . . . throughout the country.

INTRODUCTION

This study's purpose is to conduct a detailed and exhaustive investigation into the formation of the Whig and Democratic parties of Rutherford County. One of the study's primary goals is to ascertain just how this single county reflected past conclusions about political activity in Tennessee during the Jacksonian period. But, the molding of political parties in Rutherford County is more than a mere scholastic enterprise. Here is a story that is often more fantastic than fiction--a tale of drama and excitement, of fist fights and murder, of swaggering bullies, public barbeques and "coon burials." In other words, the following saga deals with men actively forging their own political existence in a very partisan world. You might say this is a story of democracy in action.

Cleavage within Tennessee's Democratic party began in 1834 when "a combination of personal rivalries and antagonism to Van Buren served as a basis for partisan divisions."¹ Institutionalized political parties, however, did not crystalize until 1840. Neither did the formation of national partisan organs begin at the best of times, for in 1835 a new state constitution had been ratified. Yet, until the mid-1830's, "no party" politics, with the Democrats in control nationally, but seriously divided on state and local matters, was normal. Personalities, not party loyalty, usually commanded the voters' attention. Therefore, national electoral contests prior to 1835 held little interest for Tennesseans. For example, in the 1832 Presidential campaign, voter participation was lower

than thirty percent. Thus, the Old Hero's huge electoral majorities in the state did not translate into state political control as one might expect; instead

Jackson had little or no control over politics in Tennessee, where nominal Jacksonians continued their intricate factional and personal contests. After 1832, with the prospect of Jackson's political retirement in view, the opportunity was provided for politicians to array themselves into opposing camps, ostensibly on the basis of national issues and the question of the succession to the presidency.²

What helped to amplify this split between the Jacksonians into a chasm from which separate and distinct parties appeared? Personal rivalries, the National Bank issue, the presidential question, and the candidacy of Hugh Lawson White have been the standard historical answer. Yet, since both factions still "protested their fidelity to Jackson and purported to differ only over the question of a successor," formal parties did not exist in Tennessee until after 1836. Nevertheless, the election of 1836 "was extremely influential in establishing lasting political loyalties in Tennessee. But the parties had yet to acquire distinctive platforms and regular machinery for making nominations and conducting campaigns."⁴

These vital ingredients were not added until the presidential campaign of 1840 when party conventions and committee organizations became common place. Nearly ninety percent of the electorate voted in 1840--a signal that Tennessee politics "had at last been placed on a new basis, characterized by competition between two parties that defined themselves essentially in terms of their positions on national issues."⁵ The party alignments assumed in 1840 remained fairly stable

until the dissolution of the Whig party in 1852. Few counties changed their loyalties and the Whigs won every presidential election until 1856 while the Democrats captured the state-house in 1839, 1845, and 1849.

But did the political activity within Rutherford County match this broad interpretation of party formation in Tennessee during the antebellum period? In a number of instances, Old Rutherford was typical, but despite the consistent Democratic dominance of Middle Tennessee, the county became a Whig stronghold. Even though James K. Polk had strong family and personal ties in Murfreesboro, he failed to carry the county in 1839 and 1844; in fact, from 1835 to 1845 Rutherford did not vote Democratic in any gubernatorial or presidential campaign. Some county Democrats did capture state offices until 1839 and the party continued to fare well in local contests, especially those involving militia offices, but as the fourth decade of the nineteenth century opened, the Whigs were assuming political control of Rutherford County.

I. PRELIMINARIES

In 1834 the population of Murfreesboro was 1,000 and according to the 1830 census the county numbered 26,134 souls. The days of rapid population growth were over; in 1840 the town had 1069 inhabitants and there were 24,280 Rutherford citizens. Economically, the county survived by its agricultural output.⁶ Cotton and corn were the lifeblood of the area; yet one could find artisans and mechanics since Murfreesboro had two cotton factories and two gins. The county underwent considerable economic growth during the Jacksonian age. In 1834 there were ten stores in Murfreesboro, by 1840 there would be twenty. Murfreesboro also expanded its boundaries by fifty percent in 1837.⁷ That same year, the town's first grocery store along with a carriage manufacturing factory opened. Yet, Rutherford was overwhelmingly rural and agrarian. In 1840, 630 citizens were engaged in manufacturing or commerce and sixty-five professionals were in the county, but the occupation of over 7500 men in Rutherford was agriculture.⁸

An accurate picture of the county's politicians can be obtained by undertaking a collective biography of the Whig and Democratic "party leaders" at the time of party formation in

Rutherford.* Democratic county leaders tended to be slightly older than their counterparts. They also lived more often in Rutherford's rural areas. Indeed, only one-seventh of the Democrats lived in Murfreesboro while one-fourth of the Whig leadership lived in the town. Democratic claims, therefore, that their political support was strongest in the backcountry were not without some validity. But, overwhelmingly, Rutherford's partisans were rural-oriented.

The social elite did not dominate the county's political hierarchy. Only one-fourth of the leaders were recognized as esquires. Neither did the professional and commercial classes control the parties. One-half of the Whigs and Democrats were farmers with seventeen percent of the Whigs and twelve percent of the Democrats were planters. Only one-fifth of the county's partisans were engaged in professional or commercial enterprises. Overall, Whigs and Democrats proportionately shared the same occupations. But, the Whigs tended to be doctors, lawyers, and planters more than Democrats.

*

A "party leader" has been defined as being either 1) party chairman 2) party secretary 3) party committeeman 4) party delegate 5) party nominee or 6) a correspondent with a major national political personality. This characteristic must have been exhibited from 1838 to 1843. According to these requirements, biographical information was located for 272 party leaders, 177 of this total being Democrats. Complete individual data was found for 138. Due to the destruction of evidence, the county tax list for 1849 has been utilized for the tables dealing with land ownership and land value. This tax list provided a sample of 156, comprising ninety-nine Democrats and fifty-seven Whigs. For further explanation of the calculations, consult the tables I thru VII.

Neither did experience in local government translate into party leadership. One-fourth of the Whigs and one-third of the Democrats held at least one local office with the Democrats being especially prominent among the county's militia officers. Whig leaders, however, did have more experience in state government.

Significant differences appeared between the parties when an economic profile of the leaders was made. Using the measurements of slave ownership and land value, Whigs were wealthier than Democrats, but according to the index of land ownership, little variation between the parties was found.

Eighty-six percent of the Whigs owned slaves compared to sixty-nine percent of the Democrats. Furthermore, while only forty percent of the Democrats had more than five slaves, three-fifths of the Whigs owned five slaves or more.

While the percentage of party leaders with land worth more than \$1,000 was roughly equal, only one-fourth of the Democrats owned land valued above \$5,000 compared to nearly one-half of the Whigs. Land holdings worth more than \$10,000 owned by the county's political leaders were concentrated in Whiggish hands. Thirty-five percent of the Whigs, compared to only seventeen percent of the Democrats, owned such valuable acreage.

Yet, by comparing roughly equal state convention delegates from both parties, the picture of who were the Whigs and who were the Democrats in Rutherford County shifts somewhat. Whigs are decidedly older and town-oriented than their opponents, but significant differences in wealth are not apparent. One-third

of the Whig representatives held local offices, but over half of the Democrats had been involved in local government with thirty-five percent holding some sort of rank in the militia. The Democratic delegates were also much more commercial-oriented than their counterparts while the Whigs (over eighty percent) tended to be agriculturalists. The occupational profile, therefore, is nearly opposite that of the county party leaders.

This Democratic and Whig leadership lived in a politically active county, a Rutherford trait since the days Murfreesboro had served as the temporary state capital. The two strongest political personalities, aside from Jackson in Middle Tennessee James K. Polk and John Bell, both had valuable allies within the county. David Dickinson, the area's Congressman in 1834, was Bell's brother-in-law. John W. Childress, a prominent lawyer and former attorney general, was Polk's brother-in-law and Dr. William Rucker was married to one of Sarah Polk's sisters. Edwin A. Keeble, newspaper editor and attorney, and Henderson Yoakum, lawyer, were other important Democratic operatives in the county. Whigs would be able to rely on Charles Ready, a lawyer, and William Ledbetter, another attorney, as their leaders.⁹

In 1833-34, the Middle Tennessee Democracy was nearly torn asunder over the succession of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The two combatants were Polk and Bell. When Felix Grundy delivered an August 1834 address in Murfreesboro attacking Bell, Rutherford County found itself in the middle of the bitter rivalry. Why the town was chosen as the first battle-

ground is difficult to answer; yet, a fair conjecture is that while Murfreesboro was certainly not Nashville, it was close enough so that Bell could clearly appreciate the motives and warning of Grundy's speech.

Arriving in Murfreesboro on August 6, Senator Grundy agreed to give a speech on the Bank controversy and his address disappointed no one since the county at this time was largely anti-bank. Reviewing the various facets of the question, Grundy gave the National Bank its own "funeral dirge."¹⁰ Praising a gold and silver currency, the Senator concluded that "we would enjoy in jingling (in) our pockets the money our fathers were accustomed to," but implied that John Bell did not support these principles.¹¹ By identifying Bell as a pro-Bank man, Grundy hoped to hurt his political chances in Washington that fall.

Answering Grundy's allegations, David Dickinson attested that both he and Bell were true Jacksonian Democrats, but his comments were ignored by the Polk faithful. "The lamest I ever heard from any man," John Childress told Polk, "The people received (sic) it with no marks of approbation and seemed to be displeased that he had obtruded himself upon them."¹² But during the night's volunteer toasting, the real fireworks began. Testimonials in honor of Polk, Jackson, Grundy, and White received loud cheers; however, the remainder of the state's Congressional delegation were not so saluted "Except for a toast to this amount, 'the Friends of the Administration, we judge them by the company they keep.'"¹³ Since everyone knew that the allusion was veiled reference to Bell's escort to the

speaker's chair after his election by John Quincy Adams, they "assented to the sentiment heartily!"¹⁴ Naturally, the Bell faithful were upset by the events at Murfreesboro:

After Grundy left here the whole hive (of Bell's friends) was in an uproar and battle lines were written, and messengers dispatched to head quarters at Nashville giving information of Mr. G movements. The Speaker and his friends could see nothing in the circumstance of Mr. G visit here, than an attempt at his distraction (sic).¹⁵

Throughout August and September, the columns of the Murfreesboro Central Monitor continued to ring with the Polk-Bell controversy. One Bellite reminded Grundy that on the question of a National Bank, the people of Rutherford County did not even need his "time and talents to keep us orthodox upon that subject."¹⁶ Editor Keeble answered curtly: "Mr. Bell must either be against a national bank or against General Jackson; there is no alternative, the President will admit him amongst (sic) the number of his friends, upon no other terms."¹⁷ What began earlier as an intra-party quarrel now threatened to split the state Democracy. John Bell came out swinging when he visited Murfreesboro to answer his critics.

The Nashville Congressman arrived in the first week of October to see his in-laws; just when (and definitely not a coincidence) the county court was in session. Declining a public dinner, Bell did accept a resolution from his friends to speak at the courthouse on October 6. With "all his kinfolks and few (sic) friends assembled to grace his triumph" as a sarcastic partisan reported, Bell began what would become one of the most important speeches of his career.¹⁸

Reaffirming his devotion to Jacksonian principles, the Congressman said he followed principle before men. Arraigning those who maintained that he had endorsed the Bank by his silence during the last Congressional session as mere hypocrites trying to push him into opposition, Bell claimed the support of the President and pledged to defend Jackson when necessary. As Bell began the last part of his speech he left this dependable ground and unable to control his temper, the Nashvillian uttered intemperate words which seriously threatened the already fragile unity of the Tennessee Democracy.¹⁹

The Speaker claimed that only his talent and influence had provided clear sailing for the President's measures-- measures which he did not see the wisdom of, but supported out of party loyalty. Bell also boasted that the opposition had supported him against Polk in the Speakership race simply because he was the best man. Addressing the Bank issue, he promised, unless failure was eminent, to support Jackson's "experiment" of removing the federal deposits from the Bank of the United States. Construing the Constitution as granting Congress the power to establish a National Bank, the Congressman admitted that the states could refuse to have Bank branches established within their boundaries. Although the majority of Rutherford countians believed the bank was unconstitutional, Bell continued his harrangue, rendering an even more drastic opinion on the hard-soft currency issue. Grundy desired a return to the currency of the founding fathers. Bell, asserting that a gold and silver basis eliminating paper money would be a failure, disagreed, concluding that "the great clamor about

such a circulating medium was a humbug, a trick by politicians" --a charge that directly touched Jackson.²⁰

After listening to the Nashvillian's lecture, many Democrats left dumbfounded. One thought it "a most vehement & flaming tirade . . . the most intemperate and ill advised defence I ever heard" and described the Speaker's temper as "bitter & revengeful" combined with "stomping, raving, and the most pugnacious thrashing & sawing with his hands and arms."²¹ Another reported that Bell had been "very excited" and soon became "very furious applying harsh and unbecoming epithets to those who had questioned the correctness of his course in Congress."²² According to William Brady, the speech was delivered in a "refractory spirit" and was marked by a "bad temper and a weak manner" along with "the most consummate arrogance... and cringing servility."²³ Concluding that Bell had made "an indiscriminate slaughter of all his enemies," Brady was so enraged about the speech that he immediately wrote Andrew Jackson.²⁴

Shocked by Bell's excesses was Daniel Graham of the county. "Did he not say Humbug of Jacksons metallic experiment? If not what idea did he apply Humbug to? If to the President's scheme, who can excuse the insolence?" he asked Polk.²⁵ Indeed, Polk's cadre was upset--but neither was it well disposed toward Bell in the first place. However, this outrage was not mere partisan reaction for even Bell's friends considered the speech poor, and later historians have rendered the same verdict.²⁶

Brady's report to Jackson further damaged Bell's standing among state Democrats. Brady wrote to explain the parts of the

speech that were "variant from the truth." According to the former state representative, Bell asserted that only a few of the party faithful were opposed to him and that he could have been Speaker much earlier if his enemies had not plotted to destroy him. Jackson was not involved in the conspiracy, but had been ill served "by designing and intriguing individuals." Bell had described the gold and silver currency experiment as as "a Humbug" explaining that "he had never tricked the people with such fallacies." He did admit, however, that he was not for "the Bank or a Bank" until they were seen as necessary-- which in the Speaker's opinion, inferred Brady, would be soon enough. Bell had closed by asserting that he had heard no complaints about his silence during the Congressional debates; therefore, he felt he had offended no one by staying quiet.²⁷

Brady's letter was not the only evidence Jackson had of Bell's recent "misbehavior." Disappointed that Polk had not been elected Speaker, the President had written Martin Van Buren in early August predicting that if Bell did not end his silence on the removal of the deposits, he would be damaged politically. On August 9, Bell, Major John Eaton, and Congressman Forester, Dickinson, and Peyton went to the Hermitage attempting to convince Jackson that Bell remained loyal, but the mission failed to reverse Bell's disfavor in Old Hickory's eyes. The Murfreesboro speech and Brady's subsequent letter made up the President's mind. "Mr. Bell is incapable of the truth," he jotted on the back of Brady's communication: a reaction which seriously threatened Bell's career in the Democratic party. The Old Hero had little need for an untrustworthy lieutenant.²⁸

Bell and his followers realized that a serious mistake had been made. The Speaker admitted to the President that he had been carried away by the heat of the political battle in Murfreesboro. Leaving for Natchez to allow temperatures to cool, he promised one old Democrat that he was still an administration man and pledged to prove his orthodoxy upon his return to Washington.²⁹ But the promised speech was never made; instead John Bell emerged at the head of a Hugh Lawson White for President movement. White, a United States Senator, was the only Tennessean to approach Jackson in popularity. Yet, the President had already indicated that the Democratic candidate was Martin Van Buren. The party faithful not only in Rutherford County but throughout Tennessee were either confused or unsure about which candidate to support. But the citizens of Rutherford had one other factor to consider: a vote for White would be a vote for Bell and against Polk. White-Bell and Van Buren-Polk--who would control the loyalties of Rutherford countians in the upcoming elections?

Chart I: Comparison of Whig and Democrat Convention
Delegates from Rutherford County

1843 Democratic delegation, n = 34

1841 Whig delegation, n = 29

A. Occupation (in percentages)

	<u>Profession als</u>	<u>Commerce/ Manu- facture</u>	<u>Planters</u>	<u>Farmers</u>	<u>Farmers Business</u> ¹
Democrats	5.9	11.8	14.7	47.1	14.7
Whigs	10.3	6.9	20.7	62.1	0.0

¹ derived from combining those farmers who also listed household members as occupied in commerce or manufacturing

B. Age (in percentages)

	<u>under 30</u>	<u>under 40</u>	<u>over 40</u>	<u>over 50</u>	<u>over 60</u>	<u>unknown</u>
Democrats	8.8	38.2	26.5	17.6	2.9	
Whigs	10.3	27.6	34.5	20.7	6.9	

C. Geographical location (in percentages)

	<u>Murfreesboro</u>	<u>rural county</u>	<u>unknown</u>
Democrats	8.8	82.4	8.8
Whigs	17.2	72.4	10.3

D. Esquire recognition (in percentages)

Identified as an Esquire

Democrats	26.5
Whigs	27.6

Sources: Nashville Union, Oct. 19, 1843; Murfreesboro Tennessee Telegraph, Feb. 6, 1841; The 1840 Census of Rutherford County, Tennessee (Murfreesboro, Tenn., 1974).

Chart II: Comparison of Whig and Democratic Convention Delegates from Rutherford County

1843 Democratic delegation, n = 34
1841 Whig delegation, n = 29

A. Slave Ownership (in percentages)
unknown

Democrats	76.5		5.9		
Whigs	86.2		3.4		
	<u>More than 5</u>	<u>% of actual owners</u>	<u>More than 20</u>	<u>% of actual owners</u>	<u>No Slaves</u>
Democrats	67.6	88.5	14.7	19.2	17.6
Whigs	65.5	76.0	20.7	24.0	10.3
	<u>Total Slaves</u>	<u>% of County's Slaves</u>	<u>Avg. per Owner</u>		
Democrats	413	4.5		15.9	
Whigs	338	3.7		13.5	

B. Local Officeholding (in percentages)

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Militia Office</u>	<u>Justice of Peace</u>	<u>City Official</u>
Democrats	52.9	35.3	14.7	2.9
Whigs	34.5	27.6	10.3	0.0

Sources: Nashville Union, Oct. 19, 1843; Murfreesboro Tennessee Telegraph, Feb. 6, 1841; The 1840 Census of Rutherford County, Tennessee (Murfreesboro, Tenn., 1974); "Mayors of Murfreesboro," Rutherford County Historical Society Publications, No 2 (1971), 37; Rutherford County Marriage Records, 1838-1845; Nashville Union, March 14, 1842.

Chart III: Comparison of Whig and Democrat "Party leaders" from Rutherford County

Whigs , n = 95
 Democrats, n = 177

A. Occupation (in percentages)

	Profession- als	Commerce/ Manu- facture	Planters	Farmers	Farmers Busi- ness	Military Pension- ers
Whigs	10.5	6.3	16.8	51.6	5.3	0.0
Democrats	6.8	8.5	11.9	51.4	6.8	2.8
	<u>Editors</u>		<u>Reverend</u>		<u>Unknown</u>	
Whigs	2.1		1.1		7.4	
Democrats	0.6		0.6		10.7	

B. Age (in percentages)

	under 40	over 40	<u>Unknown</u>
Whigs	46.3	42.1	11.6
Democrats	39.5	50.3	10.2

C. Geographical location (in percentages)

	<u>Murfreesboro</u>	<u>Rural County</u>	<u>Unknown</u>
Whigs	25.3	64.2	10.5
Democrats	13.6	69.5	16.9

D. Esquire recognition (in percentages)

	<u>Identified as an Esquire</u>
Whigs	27.6
Democrats	26.5

Sources: Nashville Union, Sept. 5, 1838, Sept 20, 1839, Feb. 10, 1840, April 8, July 1, August 9, 1841, March 14, 1842, Feb. 3, Oct. 19, 1843, April 5, 9, June 11, 1844; Nashville Whig, June 6, 1838, Sept. 4, 1839, Sept. 12, 1840, Dec. 27, 1842, Nashville Republican Banner, Jan. 18, 1839, Jan. 25, 1843, April 19, May 15, 1844; Murfreesboro Tennessee Telegraph Feb. 6, 1841; The 1840 Census of Rutherford County, Tennessee (Murfreesboro, Tenn., 1974).

Chart IV: Comparison of Whig and Democrat "Party leaders"
from Rutherford County

A. Office Holding

	<u>State Offices</u>	<u>Local Offices</u>	<u>Militia Office</u>	<u>Justice of Peace</u>	<u>City Official</u>
Whigs	7.4	25.3	12.6	11.6	4.2
Democrats	1.1	31.6	20.3	9.6	3.4

Sources: Nashville Union, Sept. 5, 1838, Sept. 20, 1839, Feb. 10, 1840, April 8, July 1, August 9, 1841, March 14, 1842, Feb. 3, Oct. 19, 1843, April 5, 9, June 11, 1844; Nashville Whig, June 6, 1838, Sept. 4, 1839, Sept. 12, 1840, Dec. 27, 1842; Nashville Republican Banner, Jan. 18, 1839, Jan. 25, 1843, April 19, May 15, 1844; Murfreesboro Tennessee Telegraph, Feb. 6, 1841; The 1840 Census of Rutherford County, Tennessee (Murfreesboro, Tenn., 1974).

Chart V: Economic Profile: Whig and Democrat "Party leaders"
in Rutherford County

Slave Ownership

Democrats, n = 177

Whigs, n = 95

A.	<u>% of leaders who owned slaves</u>		<u>Unknown</u>	
Whigs	86.3		8.4	
Democrats	68.9		9.0	

B.	<u>More than 5</u>	<u>% of actual Slaveowners</u>	<u>More than 20</u>	<u>% of actual slaveowners</u>	<u>No Slaves</u>
Whigs	62.1	71.9	16.8	19.5	5.3
Democrats	41.8	60.7	11.9	17.2	22.0

	<u>Total Slaves Owned</u>	<u>% of leaders population¹</u>	<u>% of County Slaves owned</u>	<u>Average/leader²</u>	<u>Average/Slave³ Owner</u>
Whigs	1043	2.8	11.5	10.98	12.7
Democrats	1458	5.2	16.1	8.2	11.95

Land. Ownership

Democrats, n = 99

Whigs, n = 57

A.	<u>More than 150 acres</u>	<u>More than 500 acres</u>	<u>More than 1000 acres</u>
Whigs	73.7	31.6	12.3
Democrats	77.8	31.3	8.1

B.	<u>Total Acres County</u>	<u>Total acres Democrats</u>	<u>Total Acres Whigs</u>	<u>% of leaders/population</u>
Whigs	338,888		27,912	1.7
Democrats		43,120		2.9

	<u>% total owned by Democrats & Whigs</u>	<u>% total owned by Whigs</u>	<u>% total owned by Democrats</u>
	20.98	8.3	12.7

Land Value

Democrats, n = 99

Whigs , n = 57

A.	<u>More than \$ 1000</u>	<u>More than \$ 5000</u>	<u>More than \$10000</u>	<u>More than \$15000</u>
Whigs	87.7	45.6	21.1	14.0
Democrats	85.8	24.2	14.1	3.0

B.	<u>Total Value/ County</u>	<u>Total Value/ Party</u>	<u>% total party</u>	<u>% total owned by parties</u>	<u>% of leaders, population</u>
Whigs		\$490,179	15.9		1.7
Democrats	\$3,072,761-	\$452,498	14.7	30.7	2.9

¹Computed by dividing the total number of leaders (n = 177 or n = 95) by the number of adult white males (3392)

²Computed by dividing the total number of slaves per party by the number of leaders in that party

³Computed by dividing the total number of slaves per party by the actual number of slaveowners in that party

Sources: 1840 Census of Rutherford County, Tennessee (Murfreesboro. Tenn.. 1974): 1849 Tax List. Rutherford County, Tennessee. The 1849 tax list was the only one of this era to survive the ravages of time and its data were utilized only on the charts dealing with land ownership and land value, thus accounting for the smaller sample used in those calculations.

II. THE ELECTION OF 1836: The Grand Political Caravan and Eating Menagerie Comes to Town

When the Tennessee Congressional caucus in late December 1834 nominated Senator White for the presidency, the political union between Bell and White was made public. Bell believed that his feud with Polk had ended his career as a Jacksonian Democrat. Stripped of his patronage powers, Bell was prepared to switch his allegiance to a more profitable cause. So in becoming the acknowledged leader of the state opposition, the Nashville Congressman had one of two goals in mind: "to force the Jackson party to take up White as a candidate in 1836 rather than face a split in the party, or to form a new party in Tennessee with himself and White at its head."³⁰ Just as personalities were destined to play a major role in Tennessee during the election of 1836, so rivalries and emotions, not political issues, were the dominant factors in Rutherford's campaign activity. Many countians did not recognize that they were participating in a political evolution, but today it "is evident that many citizens of the state who supported White in the struggle of 1836, were being transferred, without realizing it, to a new party."³¹

Just as soon as White's acceptance of the congressional caucus nomination became known, the presidential sweepstakes began in the county. Rumours were afloat by early February that Abram P. Maury planned to use the issue of White's candidacy to his advantage in the congressional contest against William Brady since the Senator's support seemed strong throughout Middle Tennessee.³² While Jackson was adamantly against Bell.

the President's feelings seemed to mean little to the county. White's "consistent course and political doctrine" meant that in Murfreesboro an "unanimity of sentiment" for the Judge prevailed.³³ The Old Hero might be convinced that Bell planned "to destroy this administration and all it has accomplished," but Rutherford remained to be persuaded.³⁴ As Bell told one of his colleagues, "Here the war will be better sustained on the side of Judge White than I supposed."³⁵ Yet, those who supported Polk would not be easy victims, for they were ready to "war to the knife" during the upcoming elections.³⁶

Bell's Nashville headquarters flooded the county with propaganda that implied that Polk was the only Tennessean out-of-step with administration policy. When this argument was swallowed by the people, the Van Buren Democrats were horrified. "They are not willing to be convinced that they have been imposed upon but obstinately persist in their errors," Dr. Rucker wrote in late April, "They are not willing to have it understood that they have been foolish."³⁷ "The Grand Political Caravan and Eating Menagerie,"³⁸ (as the Van Burenites called the White candidacy) despite the error of the Charles Cassidy letter, gathered strength in the county. Once the exploits of Murfreesboro's Edmund Rucker, who was charged with voting fraud at the 1835 Democratic National Convention, were exposed by the Whig press, their position became even stronger.³⁹

In early June 1835, the White faction published the first number of the Murfreesboro Central Periscope, edited by Peter G. Warren. The paper stood for strict construction of the Constitution and its principles called for an end to monopolies,

"especially Banking monopolies." The White organ also advocated the quick dispersal of the public lands and opposed any change in the electoral college.⁴⁰

Suddenly, a serious outbreak of cholera spread throughout Murfreesboro to bring political activity to a standstill. The epidemic took the life of William Brady, the Democratic Congressional candidate, leaving a gap that could not be adequately filled. With only a month until the election, Robert Jetton was chosen as a replacement, but Brady's death significantly diminished the Democrats' chances of replacing Dickinson with a loyal administration man. The 1835 state election was an ominous sign for the county's Van Burenites. Before the next election, many difficult obstacles had to be overcome. Newton Cannon, the anti-Jackson candidate, carried the county in the governor's race by a two to one margin over William Carroll. Maury defeated Jetton within the county by over 200 votes, while the Van Buren and White factions divided the two legislative seats between Granville Crockett (Van Buren) and Charles Ready (White).⁴¹

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Chart VI: 1835 State and Congressional Elections

<u>Race</u>	<u>Contestants</u>	<u>Party Identifi- cation</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Governor	N. Cannon	White	1820	64.8
	W. Carroll	Van Buren	961	34.2
	Humphreys	?	29	2.0
U. S. Congress-	A. P. Maury	White	1637	51.7
	R. Jetton	Van Buren	1530	48.3
State Senate	W. Ledbetter	White	1277	46.1
	A. P. Gowen	?	1052	38.1
	Trott	?	436	15.8
State House (vote for 2)	G. Crockett	Van Buren	1658	29.7
	C. Ready	White	1483	26.5
	W. C. Burris	White	1016	18.2
	H. Norman	White	793	14.2
	R. Weakley	Van Buren	328	5.9
	Stewart	?	294	5.3
	Seward	?	14	0.0

Source: Nashville Republican Banner, Aug. 11, 1835

The Democrats were not distraught over their losses. Two weeks after the election the Democrats unveiled Keeble's newest paper, the Murfreesboro Monitor which declared that "we believe Mr. Van Buren to be the candidate of nearly the whole Republican party, and that therefore we, shall sustain his pretensions."⁴² Democratic party leaders throughout Middle Tennessee were pleased at Keeble's weekly, and Polk urged Francis P. Blair, the powerful editor of the Washington Globe - the Democratic party mouthpiece - to cooperate with Keeble because "He is a man of some talents, and with some encouragement will be ardent in our cause . . . His paper is located in an important part of the state, and cannot fail to be useful to us."⁴³ Yet, support for White increasingly grew. Local Whigs would not even concede that they opposed Jackson's policies. Rather, they concurred with John Bell who alledged that "the most insidious artificies are constantly employed to induce Gen. Jackson to give the

sanction of his great name and influence" to the Democrats.⁴⁴ By the end of October, Democrats within the county were pessimistic once again. Keeble was forced to sell the Monitor to Peter Warren. According to John Childress, Keeble's paper had failed because of Democratic apathy. "There is not a man in the county of our side," he told Polk, "that is the least active, and there are neighborhoods of wealthy Van Buren men where not a single copy of the Monitor was taken."⁴⁵

But Democratic optimism returned with the new year. In a straw poll of the county grand jury, five supported Van Buren, four backed White, and three were undecided. Since the "Jurors were brought from all parts of the county without any regard to their politics," Democrats believed that "They may be considered a fair sample of the whole county."⁴⁶ A leading Democrat noticed that those who preferred Van Buren lived "remote from town & town influence." "In conversing with people about the Court House," he had discovered "that a large share of those living in the Hills at a distance from town are with us, and it needs but the exertions of some active influential men to give us a majority." (This observation agrees with the rural-urban split between the two parties summerized in Chart III.) Hopes were high and "if we had a talented leader in this county I should not fear the result."⁴⁷ When the county learned that Polk had defeated Bell in the new Congress's Speakership race, Democrats were euphoric. "The news operated here like wormwood & gaul upon Colo. Bells friends & supporters," reported William Rucker. "Completely chop fallen" in appearance, "A Great many have admitted that it (Polk's election) is conclusive

evidence of the utter hopelessness of Judge White's prospects of success and they are coming around to the support of Van Buren."⁴⁸ The Democrats even believed that the time is right to ask for new federal patronage and Polk tried to obtain for Edwin Keeble the position of U. S. District Attorney for the Western District of Tennessee.⁴⁹

Throughout the early months of 1836, Democratic chances were improving. Seemingly, "The People here are beginning to see things in their proper light" and with earlier Democratic blunders forgotten, only "a little exertion and some talents to explain matters" could enable Van Buren to carry Rutherford.⁵⁰ The vast majority of the county was seen as Democratic in spirit. If they could be convinced that White could not win, "they will immediately leave their deluding leaders and come warmly in the support of a Democratic Candidate."⁵¹ In April, the Van Burenites held their first political meeting in Murfreesboro. The about one hundred in attendance resolved, with a number abstaining, to support the "Magician." Yet, their speeches in support ignored Van Buren's own record; instead they asserted that a vote against Van Buren would be one against Jackson. Democrats obviously wanted the public to identify the contestants as Jackson and White. Only Old Hickory was a match for White and loyalty to Jackson became the Democrats' major political issue.⁵²

In late April Whigs from Rutherford and Williamson counties met in Murfreesboro to choose the district nominee for Presidential elector, Thomas Hardeman, a wealthy Williamson countian, was selected. Resolutions expressing "the unshaken confidence

of the meeting in the integrity of Judge White" were submitted and approved. White's formal campaign in Rutherford was enjoying an auspicious beginning.⁵³ Despite the Democratic resurgence, the Whigs stayed in control. A White meeting in September planned a public dinner for early October and resolved that the county approved "his course, particularly during the last two sessions of Congress, and say to him emphatically, go on thou good and faithful servant."⁵⁴

On October 7, Bell and White's combined talent gave Murfreesboro its biggest political event of the year--700 to 1000 partisans attended the dinner, "for the novelty of the business brought all parties together to hear the speeches."⁵⁵ Balie Peyton, Bell, and White all addressed the crowd. The Judge spoke only on the surplus distribution bill while Bell and Peyton, in tough partisan addresses, abused the characters of Van Buren and Polk and tossed some barbs in the direction of the Hermitage. These proceedings were quite a sight for formerly "no-party" Rutherford. "The Caravan was with us on Friday last," said John Childress, "and in imitation of the manner of shewing (sic) wild Beasts, were fed in the presence of the Spectators."⁵⁶

To Democrats, the dinner did not make the splash its sponsors had hoped. Some informed Polk that the Whig speeches left many "mortified at the abuse they gave you."⁵⁷ The Democratic consensus was that Van Buren might carry the county and that the party should receive around 1000 votes in November.⁵⁸ Indeed, by October the contest was probably too close to call.

Four days after the White public dinner, the district's Whigs met again in Murfreesboro and selected a new electoral nominee, Andrew J. Hoover of Rutherford County. This switch was probably undertaken so to insure that White would carry Rutherford. On election day, the Democrats received their predicted totals, but their accuracy meant little since White carried the county with 1178 votes.⁵⁹

Chart VII: 1836 Presidential Election

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party Identification</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
White	Whig	1178	53.9
Van Buren	Democrat	1008	46.1

Source: Nashville Republican, Nov. 12, 1836

White's easy victory in Rutherford, and the state in general, created a permanent division within the ranks of the state Democracy. The election was a stunning defeat for the Democrats and Andrew Jackson, disgusted with White, was beside himself. From the Hermitage, the denunciation came forth: "I now believe that Judge White has been acting the hypocrite in politics, all his life, and individually to me There is no character I abhor more than the liar & hypocrite."⁶⁰ But the Democrats could take solace in the fact that nationwide White's candidacy had little success.⁶¹

Although Hugh L. White carried the county convincingly, Rutherford was not without its strong Van Buren supporters. Throughout the state, White had an overwhelming edge in newspaper weeklies; however, Keeble's Central Monitor strongly

supported Van Buren. In the 1835 Congressional elections, only four of the thirteen districts contained Van Burenites who contested the "White nominees": Rutherford's district was one of those four. Thus, the county was not transformed overnight by White's victory into a Whig stronghold.⁶²

But, the state Democratic leadership courted Rutherford in the opposition column. When Rutherford's Democrats informed Polk of their desire for a Rutherford countian to run for Congress in 1837, the *Columbian* ruled out such a possibility because of the pro-White strength in the county. However, the optimism of the county leaders remained undimmed. Those who voted for White, they were now convinced, had realized their mistake and were ready to return to the Democratic fold.⁶³

III. 1837-1838: "There is a complete political revolution in Rutherford."

For the next two years, Rutherford County remained fertile Whig territory. Contrary to Democratic hopes, those who voted for White in 1836 did not flock back to the Democrats, but despite their recent setbacks, the party anxiously awaited the 1837 campaign. Robert Armstrong, the Nashville postmaster and close friend of Jackson, was the party gubernatorial nominee. However, Armstrong, who was also a close ally of John Bell, proved to be a poor candidate and hardly provided Rutherford's Democrats the needed drawing card to stage a comeback. Yet, the lack of a name candidate did not deter the Murfreesboro Weekly Times from giving the postmaster a warm reception: "Nothing short of a pure and patriotic devotion to the interest of the

state . . . could have induced him to make such a sacrifice of his private interests."⁶⁴

The first months of 1837, nevertheless, were politically dominated by continued repercussions from the late presidential contest. A newspaper war between the Monitor and one Van Burenite, John R. Laughlin, began as a vocal sparring match, but soon turned into a violent farce. After one particularly nasty exchange, William H. Sneed, the Monitor's editor, set out to cane young Laughlin, "but Lachlin (sic) disarmed him, threw away his cane and dragged him by the hair into the mud & was about to beat him severely when he was pulled away from him by one of his enemies."⁶⁵ This political brawl was neither the first nor last in the county and such spirit convinced state Democratic leaders that "Rutherford is herself again."⁶⁶ Indeed, their possibilities for a resurgence were strong. In early February, Sneed's Monitor folded and was replaced by the Democratic Weekly Times, edited by Stephen B. Jones, who was ready "to maintain and support correct political principles and the doctrines of sound morality."⁶⁷ Murfreesboro's Democrats only wanted the state leadership to work harder. "I do not think Mr. Grundy has sent documents to 100 men in this county within the last four years." Childress chided Polk, "We receive none from anyone else, and of course the people see but one side. Mr. Maury, Bell & others keep the P. O. full."⁶⁸ Grundy was warned that if he desired re-election, Rutherford should be canvassed: "He could if he would do us great service and by the bye it may be requisite for his own success."⁶⁹ Yet, state leaders knew that, since the county had exhibited such strong

Whig tendencies in 1836, Grundy could better spend his time in other parts of the state.

Nevertheless, the state leadership was concerned about the political loyalty of Old Rutherford. Desiring detailed news about local political affairs, Polk wrote Dr. Rucker, "Our opponents are becoming more and more violent in their exertions to carry the elections in August, and thus transfer the State to the ranks of the opposition."⁷⁰

That summer, the Democrats worked at a feverish pitch, trying to reverse the trend of 1836. Adopting new campaign rhetoric, the party threw out the strict construction and anti-bank attitudes of just a few months ago: "Col. Crockett, Maj. Keeble & all the other candidates here declare themselves in favour of a Bank if the people desire it."⁷¹ Worries over the financial panic of 1837 that was sweeping the nation had reached Middle Tennessee. With only five weeks to the election, one Democrat reported to Polk:

Politics is as unsettled in this County as the waves of the sea. The failure of the Banks to pay specie, although a Whig measure (has been blamed). . . to the measures of the last & the present administration of the general government and have induced a good many of our party to believe it because, as they think, their pecuniary interests are affected by it Our candidates are all now alarmed and have partially at least conceded the necessity of establishing some form of a Bank to 'regulate the currency' our merchants & those under their influence are all bitterly opposed to Crocket (sic) & in favor of Maury.⁷²

The nationwide depression and Armstrong's poor political abilities seriously damaged the Democratic chances for victory. Not only should Newton Cannon carry the county easily in the

gubernatorial race, Rucker concluded, but "The times have operated very much against our County elections for the legislature."⁷³ Armstrong's candidacy was a disaster. "I have not heard a dozen persons speak of the election for Gov. It is impossible to stir up our friends upon that election," Childress told Polk and without an effective candidate, the party banner floundered.⁷⁴ Abram P. Maury's pamphlet, which circulated far and wide and attacked Jackson's removal of the deposits, his creation of "pet banks," the compromise tariff of 1832, and Van Buren's administration, significantly improved his chances for Congressional reelection against the popular Granville Crockett. In fact, James K. Polk was warned that "the possibility is that you may return to Washington alone instead of having a majority."⁷⁵

But, the election of 1837 caused no major shifts in the county's political balance. While Cannon carried the county by a three to one majority and William Ledbetter defeated Edwin Keeble decisively in the State Senate contest, Granville Crockett defeated Maury by almost 400 votes in the county (yet, failed to unseat the incumbent when his campaign ran poorly in the district) and John D. Fletcher captured one of the state house seats for the Democrats.⁷⁶

Chart VIII: 1837 State and Congressional Elections

<u>Race</u>	<u>Contestants</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Governor	N. Cannon	Whig	1880	74.8
	R. Armstrong	Democrat	634	25.2
U. S. House	A. Maury	Whig	1097	42.4
	G. Crockett	Democrat	1488	57.6
State Senate	W. Ledbetter	Whig	1491	59.0
	E. Keeble	Democrat	1034	41.0
State House	A. Hoover	Whig	1399	28.1
	J. Fletcher	Democrat	1315	26.4
	L. Wade	Whig	1275	25.6
	J. Laughlin	Democrat	986	19.8

Source: Nashville Republican, Aug. 8, 1837

For the rest of the year, the political fortunes of the Rutherford Democracy continued to be bleak. Out of antagonisms developed during the election, John B. Laughlin was murdered. Laughlin, a candidate for the State Assembly, was told that during the election Alfred Blair of Bedford County had toured the county charging Laughlin with fraud and corruption. The young Democrat hunted down Blair, getting the best of the brawl that ensued. But at a horse race at Bradley's track, a drunken Laughlin and Blair met again "and Blair sought an opportunity to avenge himself, got engaged in a combat and stabbed him in many places in the bowels & groin of which wounds he died on the eighth day."⁷⁸ Local Democrats had little hope for Blair's prosecution--and none resulted.

1838 was a busy off-year politically. Rutherford's electoral life was spiced by Polk's announcement, at Murfreesboro in late August, of his entry in the 1839 gubernatorial contest. Also, while the county showed an increased zeal for banks, the Whigs began to consolidate their forces for the elections in 1839-40.

Complacency marked the activities of the Democrats during the early months of 1838. "The friends of the Administration hereabouts," complained John Childress, "seem to be desponding and have come to the conclusion that we are certainly to be defeated at the end of Mr. Van Buren's first term unless the current now setting against us can be stayed."⁷⁹ Even John Bell's triumphal tour of Whiggish New England failed to awake the Democrats, despite Andrew Jackson's prediction that his speeches there had "fully opened the eyes of the democracy in Tennessee."⁸⁰

Old Rutherford's Whigs, however, were very active. The Murfreesboro Tennessee Telegraph reprinted editorials blaming Jackson and Van Buren for the recent financial panic. Defending Bell's New England trip, the paper asserted that "Tennessee is a Whig State," and We are in favor of a National Bank, upon such principles, as will secure to the people a sound and uniform currency."⁸¹ The Congressman from Nashville was particularly the hero of the hour in the eyes of the county's Whigs. "This gentleman has had more party slang to contend with, than perhaps any other politician of the present day," the Telegraph editor reminded his readers,

General Jackson but a few years ago visited the Yankee States, and had some attention paid to him Mr. Bell goes to the same States, mixes with the same people, all wrong, pollution, Federalism, barter intrigue, corruption, management, and the whole artillery of editorial vituperation is cast at him from the Globe down to the Weekly Times. Mr. Bell's unflinching patriotism and talents are of too high an order to be sullied by the slime and filth of such vulgar attacks.⁸²

Affection for Henry Clay was also strong in Rutherford's Whiggish hearts and Bell and Clay's abilities, along with the necessity of a national bank, were the persistent issues raised by the Tennessee Telegraph.⁸³

These hurrahs for Henry Clay finally awoke the slumbering Democrats. Believing that only James K. Polk could stop the Whigs from totally dominating state politics, they urged Polk to take over the party leadership and even offered their own meager aid.⁸⁴ "Should you wish, at any time, to lash them for their temerity and presumption," William S. Haynes of Murfreesboro promised Polk, "you have only to signify the sources from whence I can get the necessary correct information, in order to then having it done."⁸⁵

Nevertheless, the Whigs had increased their popular support by favoring government-supported banks. When the State Bank of Tennessee was chartered, its Middle Tennessee branches were located in Nashville, Columbia, Shelbyville, and Clarksville--not Murfreesboro. While the Whigs were probably incensed over the political damage such an omission could cause them, the town's citizens were outraged. Partisan wounds quickly healed as Murfreesboro's perception that the legislature's action had been a deliberate move to weaken their chances of becoming the permanent state capital (a decision constitutionally mandated to be settled by 1843) grew in intensity. In a public meeting on June 4, attended by leading politicians from both parties, the town angrily resolved that the branch banks had been located "with clearly sectional and personal views: to the promotion of the few, to the injury of the many."⁸⁶ But, state

Democratic leaders understood that the branches' locations were designed to further promote Whig supremacy by helping to defeat James Polk (Columbia) and Cave Johnson (Clarksville) in next year's congressional elections. As Polk told Jackson, "the New State Bank is about to be converted into a political machine."⁸⁷ Therefore, the failure to place a state bank in Murfreesboro indicated just how strong the Whig cause was in the county. State Whig leaders gambled that the absence of a bank would not hurt their Rutherford support. Just a few days after the emotional town meeting, the Telegraph reported that "We meet but few in any crowd, who are not warm supporters of Mr. Clay. We would think almost three-fourths of our acquaintances are friendly to Mr. Clay. Nor are we surprised in the least."⁸⁸

Democrats now pressed Polk to announce his candidacy in Murfreesboro. The Columbian was asked to accept a public dinner in his honor at Murfreesboro on August 30.⁸⁹ As Dr. Rucker told the Speaker, the White followers of Rutherford "will not go for Clay; and this is an important time to make an exertion for their recovery to the Republican fold."⁹⁰ Polk accepted. At Sand Spring, with over 2000 in attendance, the county most spectacular political dinner yet was held. However, the usual fistacuffs must have been missing since one reporter said that "the strictest order was presented throughout the day.--Indeed, there was no necessity for restraint of any kind, for a more decorous assemblage never met upon an occasion of public festivity."⁹¹

Polk spoke for two hours, an effort his admirers considered as "one of the most masterly expositions of the present state of parties" and as "emphatically a speech of public men and public measures. Never have we seen a more attentive audience. Perfect silence prevailed . . ." Indeed, "the cool, close, argumentative style, the keen sarcastic expression of his features, and the melody of his voice, must be seen and heard to be properly appreciated." Reminding his audience of Henry Clay's "Corrupt Bargain" of 1825, Polk began his address by tying Clay to the Federalist party, particularly the policies of John Quincy Adams. Alledging that the Whigs were merely federalists in disguise, the Congressman asserted that their leaders believed in "a system of deliberate hypocrisy, and a total abandonment of principle, disgusting to all honorable minds."⁹²

Turning to financial questions, Polk implored the people to look at England's trials with a national bank and blasted the entire notion of government-supported banks. Instead, the country needed the administration's proposed Independent Treasury since it would be "a bank. without any of the attributes or privileges of a bank." The Columbian then virulently defended the Democrats' budgetary proposals. "The expenditures of the Government have increased," he admitted, "but only in a corresponding ration with the growth of the country."⁹³

Afterwards, the meeting adjourned while the crowd devoured the prepared feast: "Forty fat sheep, forty fine shoats, six beeves, 300 lbs. of fine ham, and bread and vegetables without limit. Nor was the generous juice of the grape, whiskey, and

Old cognac, wanting to give life and animation to the scene." Toasts complimented the dinner. Former Governor William Carroll toasted the countians: "On no occasion (sic) had he ever found them wanting, unwilling to assume the post of danger, or to bear with fortitude their share of the privations of war." Some in the crowd urged him to be the party's gubernatorial nominee, but Carroll refused. Of course, Polk said yes to the same question and his acceptance received "such unanimous and universal shouts of deafening applause as we have never before witnessed on any similar occasion." The crowd left with big anticipations--Polk would redeem Tennessee!⁹⁴

The Speaker of the House was also in high hopes. Writing Jackson, he reflected that "Judging from all I saw and heard, there is a complete political revolution in Rutherford, and so it will be all over the State, if proper exertions are used."⁹⁵ But, Rutherford's Whigs moved quickly to counteract any gains the Democrats had made. Within days of Polk's announcement, plans were finalized for an even bigger Whig celebration in the county. Every major party leader was invited; William B. Campbell's attendance was solicited so to undermine the "various great and powerful influences" now at work in the county.⁹⁶ With the date set for September 27, the local partisans pushed hard to outshine their opponents.⁹⁷

The extravaganza began with a march to the speaker's podium, located just outside of Murfreesboro. Charles Ready, after his opening remarks, introduced the state's top Whigs: "Could the leaders of the power and authority party at Washington have witnessed the enthusiasm of public feeling (for them). . .

it would startle them from the unholy dreams of usurped power."⁹⁸ The crowd of 2500 to 4000 proved that "Rutherford is decidedly Whig."⁹⁹ Bell and Ephraim Foster's speeches received "the most respectful attention: particularly by the grey-headed fathers of the country. . . . This shows that the true Whig spirit is up in the land."¹⁰⁰

U. S. Senator Foster concentrated on the Whigs' desire for a bank and after two hours, gave way to John Bell who spoke for the remainder of the day in "one of the most able and searching investigations into the measures" of Van Buren yet heard in Murfreesboro. The Nashville Congression "laid bare the corruption that lurks in the administration of the FEDERAL Government, disguised under the pretence of democracy."¹⁰¹

Quite naturally, the Democrats were enraged. According to Samuel H. Laughlin, a former Murfreesboro attorney, Foster "disgusted many" with "a long, ranting, funny, ridiculuous speech," and when Bell began his monologue

the people, having dined, and having come from curiosity, began to drop off and go away in scores, and before he was done, not more than enough were left to make a common militia musterThe whole was a cold heartless affair and really, I have no doubt, strengthens our cause here.¹⁰²

The Weekly Times laughed at the proceedings: "Six and half mortal hours (of speeches) was too much for even Whig patience to endure." Of course, "the whigs tried hard to cut a great dash" and "whenever the Master of the Ceremonies (Ready) thought either of the speakers said any thing smart, he winked at the Bass Drummer, who immediately gave two or three taps upon his sheep skin, the audience half opened their drowsy eyes,

and closed them again with a yawn."¹⁰³ Evidently, both parties perceived the upcoming elections as their decisive battle.¹⁰⁴

IV. 1839-1841: Democracy's Last Gasp

The 1839 election was "the hardest political battle the state of Tennessee had yet seen."¹⁰⁵ In Rutherford, optimism sprang eternal for the Democrats. Murfreesboro's postmaster believed that the party's cause was "gaining ground daily."¹⁰⁶ Democrats realized that the county could be carried by a razor-thin margin. "Ready and Yoakum (candidates, State Senate) will have a hard race," thought Samuel Laughlin, "and the chances for Yoakum I think best. Childress and Gentry (candidates, Congress) will have it hip and thigh."¹⁰⁷ Polk's opponent in the governor's race was the incumbent, Newton Cannon and James Smith and John D. Fletcher would contest the Whigs William Gooch and Henry Norman for the State House seats.

The campaign "officially" opened in Murfreesboro on April 11 when Polk and Cannon began their famed series of debates at the courthouse. Nearly 2000 people crammed the square that day and the courthouse was full of jealous partisans with "a great many, left out for want of room, were collected around the windows on the outside of the house."¹⁰⁸

Polk spent most of his two and half hours, not on state issues, but on questions of national politics. Castigating the presidential hopes of Henry Clay, Polk called the Kentuckian the "second Hamilton" and compared the Whig party to the Old Federalists. The Congressman next defended the policies of the administration and heartily endorsed Van Buren's sub-treasury proposal.¹⁰⁹

However, according to the Whigs, Polk's antics did not bother Cannon. Instead, the Governor "triumphantly" overthrew his leading points. Cannon complained about Polk's negligence of state issues and pledged his support for continued state improvements. Asserting that "I have always been a Democrat," the Governor outlined his philosophy: that "the cheapest government is the best," that the press was "a valuable auxiliary in the cause of Republicanism," and that he never believed the Bank to be "a Federal Monster." Cannon felt that Polk's pride over his friendship with Jackson was misplaced; he should rather wish to be a free and independent man. Jackson had long ago "put his mark upon him" when the Governor, as a young man, had been a member of the jury that acquitted Patton Anderson in 1813 and Cannon wore that mark proudly. He had never followed Old Hickory and considered anyone who did as a tool and a slave. With that heated remark, Cannon indicted most of the state's Whig leadership, particularly Bell and White. But he continued to attack Jackson, calling him a "Despot by nature and by education."¹¹¹

Polk then added a blistering rejoinder which "literally tore the Governor all in pieces."¹¹² If Cannon's words were true, Polk insisted that the Whigs' beloved Judge White must also be a slave. Using the "power of ridicule with his argument until the roof rang again," he sarcastically analyzed the Governor's effort

and as peal succeeded peal of laughter, and shout re-echoed shout, the half dozen who had attempted to raise applause to the dull peroration of the Governor, were seen escaping with ludicrous haste, through the returning tide. It was a perfect

demolition--and Democracy was triumphant. . . . His Excellency attempted a rejoinder in vain; the assembly broke up and retired, and the last words heard from him above the hum and laughter of the receding crowd was, 'The removal of the depositories (sic) was without law and a lawless act!'¹¹³

Polk's victory rekindled "The fire of Republican liberty. . . in Rutherford--and it is spreading with the rapidity of lightning from one end of the county to the other."¹¹⁴ Whigs wished for a new candidate. "Our Gov. Cannon is too sluggish and self-sufficient," John Bell complained to Clay.¹¹⁵

The debate left Murfreesboro "in a considerable state of excitement" and when the Tennessee Telegraph began to slash at the characters of Polk and Edwin Keeble, emotionalism was transformed into violence. Keeble hunted down the Telegraph's E. J. King "and chastised him most handsomely with a small hickory stick (or rather sword) and he did not offer the least resistance." Keeble, however, did not receive a challenge from King which convinced many that the Whig was a coward.¹¹⁶

Whig retaliation, however, was soon undertaken. Frustrated by their recent setbacks, the Whigs convinced the "town bully" to attack William Rucker, but "greatly to the surprise of everyone, the Dr. was in a fair way to give the fellow a sound drubbing when they were separated." John Childress told his sister that he understood that the county's candidates "are greatly excited and sometimes come near to blows. I presume this state of things will cease however when two or three of them are flogged."¹¹⁷ Obviously, the campaign had reached the stage of the absurd. Personalities eclipsed all issues, even that of Henry Clay and whether or not, in the words of John Bell, he was "the greatest man in America, and worthy of all trust."¹¹⁸

Democratic optimism was never higher than that summer. Henderson Yoakum conducted an effective campaign for the State Senate against that powerful county Whig, Charles Ready. Yoakum and Ready verbally dueled throughout Rutherford, but the Democrat invariably emerged the winner. Yoakum became a rallying point for the party faithful--and the target for Whig barbs.¹¹⁹ The Tennessee Telegraph demanded to know whether Yoakum had once "advise(d) and consent (ed) to the BURNING OF GENERAL JACKSON in effigy?" and the Whig paper broadly hinted that "living witnesses" in Murfreesboro could support their allegation. But, the West Pointer replied that the charge was "utterly false in every particular." The Telegraph then dropped the matter.¹²⁰

Democratic hopes were further buoyed by the Whigs' inability to erase the stigma of Cannon's disastrous April appearance. By July, Democrats were predicting victory in the county and according to the official records,

Chart IX: 1839 State and Congressional Elections

<u>Race</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Governor	Polk	Democrat	1749	51.6
	Cannon	Whig	1643	48.4
U. S. Congress	W. Childress	Democrat	1704	51.0
	M. Gentry	Whig	1639	49.0
State Senate	Yoakum	Democrat	1693	51.2
	Ready	Whig	1615	48.8
State House	J. Fletcher	Democrat	1698	25.7
	J. Smith	Democrat	1666	25.2
	H. Norman	Whig	1632	24.7
	W. Gooch	Whig	1615	24.4

Source: Nashville Whig, Aug. 5, 1839; Nashville Union, Aug 5, ;839
 their boasting was not hot air. The Democrats had defeated their

opponents by one hundred votes or less and by this narrow margin, the county, seemingly, had returned to the Democracy.¹²¹

Yet, newly discovered evidence proves that the Democrats did not carry the geographically-defined boundaries of the county. One must remember that in 1835, Cannon County had been carved out of the lower part of Rutherford and that Cannon remained, in election tabulations, a political district of Rutherford until after the 1840 election. According to a precinct by precinct tabulation of Polk's county vote, the Democrat lost the county by ninety-seven votes, but he "officially" carried Rutherford because the Cannon County precincts had given him a 230 vote majority. No doubt, the Democrats of Cannon had given their Rutherford brothers the victory they had so long awaited.¹²²

And it was a lustily celebrated victory, one that cost the Whigs "more money and property than has been bet in the county for the last 10 years."¹²³ Sam Houston of Texas was the guest of honor at a Murfreesboro dinner celebrating the election and before a crowd of 700, Houston praised the county for returning to the party fold.¹²⁴

While the Democrats savored the outcome, Whigs were certain that the returns reflected voter corruption, fraud, and bribery. The elections had been fixed! Convinced that in Cannon "the most illegal votes were cast," the Whigs asserted that "At least frauds will be exposed which will astonish the world."¹²⁵ The losses had shocked all Whigs. John Bell moaned to William Campbell, "I am done done, as a public man, unless we can have some better understanding with each other all agree to give the

Chart X: Precinct Returns, 1839 Gubernatorial Race

<u>Precinct</u>	<u>Polk</u>	<u>Cannon</u>	<u>% Polk</u>	<u>% Cannon</u>
Sanders	40	60	40.0	60.0
Burnet's	78	82	48.8	51.2
Hart Spring	54	47	53.5	46.5
Mechanicsville	78	83	48.4	51.6
Jefferson	48	123	28.1	71.9
Wilkerson's Crossroads	70	47	59.8	40.2
Murfree's	40	52	43.5	56.5
Sulpher Spring	10	49	17.0	83.0
Armstrong	6	22	21.4	78.6
Bairfield's	40	40	50.0	50.0
Salem	62	20	75.6	24.4
Murfreesboro	155	239	39.3	60.7
Middleton	63	107	37.0	63.0
Valley	9	69	11.5	88.5
Milton	62	71	46.6	53.4
McKnight's	50	38	56.8	43.2
Fox Camp	32	11	74.4	25.6
Tennison's	57	46	55.3	44.7
Fosterville	82	25	76.6	23.4
Bushnell Creek	38	54	41.3	58.7
Raleigh	13	64	16.9	83.1
Youree's	71	36	66.4	33.6
Big Spring	149	36	80.5	19.5
Millersburg	107	16	87.0	13.0
<u>Totals: Rutherford</u>	<u>1438</u>	<u>1535</u>	<u>48.4</u>	<u>51.6</u>

Cannon County Precincts

Nichols'	62	39	61.4	38.6
Alexander's	62	14	81.6	19.4
Brown's	44	31	58.7	42.3
Williams'	23	10	69.7	30.3
Pattons'	120	14	89.5	10.5
<u>Totals: Cannon</u>	<u>311</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>74.9</u>	<u>25.1</u>

Source: Nashville Whig, Nov. 6, 1840

working men more assistance than we have heretofore had. A few of us have to bear the brunt all the time. . . ." Bell reminded his colleague that the state leadership must have "a pretty full council and hear all that can be said and then make up our minds as to what we ought to do."¹²⁶

Rutherford's Whigs decided on their course of action quickly. On August 24 meeting in Murfreesboro, chaired by David Dickinson, they resolved that "gross and alarming frauds have been committed upon the ballot box" in the recent election. So to eliminate such corruption, the Whigs pledged to appoint a three-man committee in each district so to ascertain "as far as possible the frauds that have been committed in the late election." They also called for all Whig counties to follow suit.¹²⁷ The Democrats blasted this proposal and worked to convince the county folk that the Whig committees were "to be overseer of the people, and are to be selected from the wealthy with the view of operating by means of their money upon poor & dependent persons."¹²⁸ Indeed, the Whigs' committees were a tactical error and embarrassed their presidential campaign activity. A Democratic meeting promised "to resist a system of espionage, and party control to be established over the good people of this county."¹²⁹ "The freemen of Rutherford county, are believed to be capable of managing their own political concerns without the aid, direction or control of the aforesaid committees of vigilance," the party further resolved.¹³⁰ Soon thereafter, county Whigs dropped the committee idea completely.¹³¹

Yet, the Whigs continued to publicize the alledged voting frauds which had cost them the election. In the State Legislature, a resolution demanding a full investigation was introduced. Of course, Yoakum in the Senate, and Fletcher and Smith in the House described the resolution as a cheap Whig electioneering trick. Asserting that "he could not for a moment suppose the Whigs of Rutherford had ten times the honesty of the

democrats," Yoakum argued that the Whigs were not interested in an investigation; rather, these charges "were to be filed away, without investigation, and to be referred to hereafter, as proof not to be controverted."¹³² No inquiry took place, but this sparring indicated that "the campaign of 1840 began immediately after the election of 1839."¹³³

While the Weekly Times exhorted its readers to hurry the preparations for the Democratic State Convention in Nashville, the Whigs were also busy. Both parties, in the 1840 canvass, used monthly party meetings to organize political activities. But the well-laid plans of the Democrats were crushed when the county learned that the Democratic controlled legislature had failed to move the state capital to Murfreesboro. The controversy surrounding the permanent location of the capital dominated local politics, usually to the great advantage of the Whigs, until 1843.¹³⁴

Following the legislature's decision to keep the capital in Nashville, Governor Polk told his brother-in-law not to blame the party because the decision was not partisan but due to local feelings. Realizing that the issue had brought about "so much feeling in your town," Polk regretted the outcome; yet he "was ready as a public officer, cheerfully to obey the will of the Legislature" if its decision could be reversed. Childress should tell Murfreesboro that the Democrats were not at fault; instead, it was the "whole Whig party who mainly defeated" the removal to Murfreesboro.¹³⁵ But when The Democrats failed to move the capital to Murfreesboro, the Whigs were given a powerful advantage in local politics and they used it to its fullest.

Whig propaganda was simple: Murfreesboro had been selected as the capital, but because Governor Polk would not move during the middle of the session, the removal was rescinded and the capital stayed in Nashville. 136

Democrats attempted to counteract the sensible Whig "explanation" by denying that Polk and the legislature had neglected their friends. "Nothing can be more destitute of foundation in fact" than the Whigs' explanations.¹³⁷ The Weekly Times charged that the Whigs were trying to manufacture political capital out of thin air: "The Banner would doubtless be glad to have the people of Rutherford believe that Gov. Polk was in favor of Nashville, and to have the people of Davidson believe that he was in favor of Nashville, and to have the people of Davidson believe that he was in favor of Murfreesborough."¹³⁸ But, as the countians increasingly accepted the Whig explanation, the future of the Whig party appeared brighter, more secure, and chances for victory in 1840 seemed certain.

That spring the Whigs mounted a ceaseless offensive against their opponents. In early March, David Dickinson, the Whig presidential elector in the district, castigated William G. Childress, the Democratic nominee, at the courthouse over the capital removal and other national issues. Charging that Dickinson had invoked a "gag" law by speaking so late into the day, Childress, leaving in haste, refused to speak. The Whig warhorse then proceeded to talk for another hour.¹³⁹ Early the next month, Dickinson again "debated" Childress at the courthouse even though the Democrat had failed to appear. Democrats were upset by the proceedings. They believed that "the

Thersites of the Federal Party" had "completely run the thing into the ground" by comparing Jackson's military exploits to Harrison's campaigns, and finding "that the former when compared with the latter dwindled into utter insignificance."¹⁴⁰ A few days later, Gustavus A. Henry, Whig elector-at-large, spoke alone at Murfreesboro. Henry avoided the mistake of discussing Jackson disrespectfully, but did not spare the General's Democratic colleagues. He blasted Van Buren's financial policies.¹⁴¹ The Whigs were not even worried about the rumoured vice presidential candidacy of Polk since that circumstance will make the war hotter here, but not more doubtful or uncertain.¹⁴²

Not surprisingly, Democrats were very much concerned about the election. The Weekly Times' circulation was dropping steadily; political activity was near a standstill. "Our friends have been very much disheartened on account of the numerous Whig speeches and the great confidence manifested by the Whigs at this place," William Rucker told his brother-in-law, "there has not been a single speech made by the Democratic Electoral candidates." Dr. Rucker reflected that "there is danger of delaying too long to disseminate the proper arguments among the great body of the people." But this leading Democrat wondered if the state leaders were as interested in the county as the Whigs. "This County," Rucker thought, "seems to be in the peculiar keeping of the Whigs--They appear to be determined to do all they can to get a majority."¹⁴³ During the early summer, the particular targets of the Tennessee Telegraph were the administration of Van Buren and the exploits of the "Electioneer-

ing Governor," James K. Polk.¹⁴⁴ And there was little blocking the Whigs' march.

Attempting to rally the Democracy, Edwin Keeble spoke throughout the county. At Jefferson, the ex-editor met an opponent, William Sneed, who talked about Harrison's war record and Van Buren's poor currency policies. Keeble feigned surprise over Sneed's high evaluation of General Harrison, then produced Sneed's November 1836 editorial in the old Monitor that attacked Harrison severely. The Democrat's evidence jarred the Whig who now "looked bad, his friends felt bad and those politically opposed to him felt sorry for him." The Democrats savored this minor victory, declaring that the "stern yeomanry are too proud to truckle at the feet of the Nashville aristocracy."¹⁴⁵

As one student of the 1840 election has noted, politics that summer were, once again, intense, emotional, and at times, irrational.

The political excitement ran so high in the summer that violence was predicted. The State was described as being alive with stump orators and one politician wrote: 'There never has been anything to compare with it, in the world before, of the kind. The very children are as deeply imbued with the party spirit as the grown people . . . !'¹⁴⁶

If possible, county politics also increased in intensity during the hot summer.

Recognizing how ineffectual their campaign had been, Rutherford's Democrats turned for assistance to their tower of strength in 1839, Henderson Yoakum, who was selected in a June district meeting in Murfreesboro to replace William Childress as the Democratic electoral candidate. The State Senator quickly entered the field by engaging Dickinson at Millersburg.

The Whig, his standard speech changing little, attacked the extravagance of Van Buren, the Sub-Treasury, and the state legislature's treatment of Hugh Lawson White. The former Congressman claimed "that the price of produce had fallen-- the currency had become deranged, and the only safety could be found in a resort to a United States Bank." Yoakum demanded proof that the Bank's destruction had caused financial havoc. Remembering that when the Bank was removed, cotton prices had risen, he supported the Independent Treasury. The Senator also asked for a clarification of Harrison's policies, since as far as he knew, the Whig had no stand on the issues.¹⁴⁷ A verbal slugfest broke forth as both men asserted that their opponent's nominee had no specific stands on the issues. If Harrison had no definite principles, Dickinson insisted, then he wanted to know what Van Buren supported. Yoakum promised to write Van Buren for an answer if Dickinson sent the same inquiry to Harrison. The answers both eventually received were political masterpieces: vague, general and uninformative.¹⁴⁸ But this campaign of the correspondence enabled county Whigs, as Dickinson told Harrison, to put "down the charge that you were desirous of concealing your sentiments."¹⁴⁹

Edwin Keeble's efforts to carry the county for Van Buren continued to inexhaustible. On June 20, he debated James C. Jones, a Lebanon Whig, at Buchanansville and "His battery of ridicule was most successfully played upon the Whigs extolled processions of banners, log cabins, hard cider, coon-skins, &c."¹⁵⁰ At the courthouse two weeks later, Keeble faced the

former State Senator, William Ledbetter. Ledbetter argued that Harrison was neither an abolitionist nor a federalist and he was not fuzzy on the issues. The Whig indicted Van Buren for "tinkering with the currency." Keeble rebutted that his opponent's conversion to Whig principles was political hypocrisy, since he had voted against the National Bank for the removal of the deposits as State Senator in 1835. Despite Ledbetter's denials, the Democrats once again claimed that Harrison was both a Federalist and an abolitionist.¹⁵¹

However, Keeble and Yoakum were unable to contest every Whig who crisscrossed the county. The Whigs' campaign never lacked momentum. Before "a great gathering" at Booth's Spring, Jones of Lebanon "showed conclusively that the charges against Harrison were false, and proved them false by the testimony of (the) monarchists themselves."¹⁵² The Tennessee Telegraph even alleged that "one of the Governor's objects is to set the country against the towns. This is one of the lowest steps in demagoguism" since Polk lived in Columbia.¹⁵³

Democratic state leaders recognized that Old Rutherford was not particularly a party haven. And Felix Grundy, who had turned the tide in Rutherford six years earlier, was once again dispatched to Murfreesboro to meet an old nemesis, Balie Peyton. After announcing that he would return to Nashville as soon as his time was up, Grundy spoke on the standard party issues. Harrison, the Senator claimed, was an abolitionist, a federalist and insubordinate in the War of 1812.¹⁵⁴ His address, however, did not arouse the crowd and as Grundy left, Peyton tried to draw him into a debate.

I hope . . . Mr. Grundy will stay and hear me . . . I hope Mr. Grundy will not be like the lame Captain. The lame Captain went out to fight the Indians, and coming upon them unexpectedly, 'Boys,' said he, 'there they are--they are very numerous--my own opinion is, they'll whip us--but said he, fight hard,--retreat in good order--as I'm a little lame, I'll go now--and away he went.'

Here a shout went up that rent the air and shook the hills. Mr. Peyton, after expressing the hope that the other Van Buren men present would not follow the example of their lame captain, proceeded to address the audience, who remained until sundown, in a speech replete with sound argument, impassioned eloquence, rich humor and biting sarcasm.¹⁵⁵

In the campaign's last months, the Whigs assumed the dominant role in county politics. When the news leaked out that the Democrats planned a barbeque, featuring Polk as speaker, at Weakley's Springs, the Jefferson "Tippecanoe Club" first demanded equal time for their speaker and then hoped to upstage the event with a similar celebration the next day. Polk was asked to speak, but the Governor turned down the opportunity. "Why then should he fear to meet John Bell, or any other champion of Republican Whig principles, in free discussion before the people," the Tennessee Telegraph wondered out loud, and then concluded: "Gov. Polk has the ability and ingenuity to speak well and argue well--but not to sustain his lame and halting cause, against a Whig speaker armed with truth."¹⁵⁶

In the week prior to the Weakleys' Springs dinner, the Whigs agitated the Democrats with twin attacks by Spencer Jarnagin and E. J. Shields at various locations throughout Rutherford. Keeble and Shields debated before 130 at Readyville

on the 12th of September and "The speeches of both gentlemen were marked with ability, and gave much satisfaction to the friends of the speakers respectively." Two days later, Jarnagin and Yoakum were paired in the seventh district. The major issue was Yoakum's role, while a State Senator, in forcing the resignation of Hugh L. White from the Senate. Jarnagin criticized his opponent for treating White "hyena-like and hunting him from the councils of the nation." Shields and Jarnagin both spoke the following day at Fosterville and that night at the courthouse, the latter harangued "a large audience of ladies and gentlemen--much to their edification and amusement." On September 16, the Whigs once again appeared together at Jefferson barbeque and Shields completed his tour by the stump by speaking "in his best style" at Mechanicsville and Murfreesboro.¹⁵⁷

Despite these efforts at undermining the Weakley Springs' celebration, the barbeque was held as planned. The cream of the Democratic party leadership were in attendance: Jackson, Carroll, and Polk. Before the crowd of 2000, General Carroll severely censured Harrison's claims of military glory "and the wet eyes of many old soldiers around him gave evidence that they felt deeply what he said."¹⁵⁸ Colonel Craighead "cut log-cabins, coons, and the factions paraphernalia (sic) of whigism into shreds and tatters, with biting sarcasm and withering ridicule." After a dinner "of good shoat, mutton, ham &c.," Henry Watterson "gave a thorough exposition of the infinite variety of devices resorted to by the opposition to prevent the people from thinking and deciding the questions at issue for themselves." Their

confidence buoyed, Rutherford's Democrats left confident that victory could be achieved.¹⁵⁹

But that confidence was not matched by accomplishment: Harrison carried Rutherford County, officially, by 213 votes. And the Whigs were stunned by the magnitude of their victory. "We have at least 10,000 of a majority!" exclaimed John Bell. "Murfreesborough was very handsomely illuminated on Wednesday night last Nov. 18, the Telegraph reported, "in honor of the election of Tippecanoe and Tyler, too!" Along with these celebrations, the Whigs looked ahead to the upcoming state elections. After such a defeat, Bell did not believe Polk would run for re-election, but if he did, "we will have to beat him."¹⁶⁰ According to the Nashville Congressman, Robert Caruthers, James C. Jones, Meredith Gentry, and David Dickinson would be the best candidates, but he admitted "the question to be 'who can do it with the greatest certainty.'" In Rutherford, Dickinson, of course, was the favorite.¹⁶¹

Chart XI: Precinct Returns, Presidential Election of 1840

<u>Precinct</u>	<u>Van Buren</u>	<u>Harrison</u>	<u>% V.B.</u>	<u>% Harrison</u>
Sanders	38	56	40.4	59.6
Hart Spring	65	82	44.2	55.8
Burnet's	78	81	29.1	50.9
Mechanicsville	68	73	48.2	51.8
Jefferson	24	88	21.4	78.6
Wilkerson's Crossroads	52	71	42.3	57.7
Murfree's	35	52	40.2	59.8
Sulpher Spring	7	49	12.5	87.5
Armstrong	6	31	16.2	83.8
Bairfields	35	73	32.4	67.6
Salem	64	28	69.6	30.4
Murfreesboro	94	167	36.0	64.0
Middleton	51	85	37.5	62.5
Valley	14	74	15.9	84.1
Milton	51	61	45.5	54.5
McKnight's	41	41	50.0	50.0
Fox Camp	13	62	17.3	82.7
Tennison's	52	43	54.7	45.3
Fosterville	66	54	55.0	45.0
Bushnell Creek	65	52	55.5	44.5
Raleigh	4	95	4.0	96.0
Youree's	116	44	72.5	27.5
Big Spring	111	27	80.4	19.6
Millersburg	89	31	74.2	25.8
<u>Totals: Rutherford</u>	<u>1260</u>	<u>1550</u>	<u>43.3</u>	<u>56.7</u>
<u>Cannon County Precincts</u>				
Nichols'	28	46	37.8	62.2
Alexander's	50	14	78.1	21.9
Brown's	43	34	55.8	44.2
Williams'	23	25	47.0	52.1
Pattons'	80	23	77.7	22.3
<u>Totals: Cannon</u>	<u>224</u>	<u>147</u>	<u>60.4</u>	<u>39.6</u>
<u>Official County Vote:</u>	<u>1484</u>	<u>1697</u>	<u>46.6</u>	<u>53.4</u>

Source: Nashville Whig, Nov. 6, 1840

At the Hermitage, Jackson was predicting that John Bell "will in two years be abandoned by all those in Tennessee who he has deluded." But the Old Hero was not the only Tennessean disturbed

by the current Secretary of War--and they were not all Democrats. Indeed, many delegates at the first state Whig convention at Murfreesboro were angry with the Nashvillian. Bell, despite earlier disclaimers, was attempting behind the scenes to secure the gubernatorial nomination for David Dickinson. Most delegates cared little for this bold push for influence which "eventually cause the other candidate to unite in a stop-Dickinson movement."¹⁶²

Maintaining unity was not the only problem the party faced in Murfreesboro. A meeting place had to be secured. After asking for the local Methodist church, they discovered that the minister was a Democrat who barred their entrance. But the Presbyterian church welcomed the Whigs even though Polk's mother-in-law, Mrs. Childress, said "she never would feel at home in her own church again," and braided her minister for allowing the Whigs to meet there.¹⁶³

During the convention's first day, the Rutherford delegation realized the animus held toward Dickinson and decided to withdraw his candidacy. Charles Ready read a letter from Dickinson asking the convention, in the interests of party unity, not to consider his name. With Bell's handpicked candidate removed, the convention nominated James "Lean Jimmy" Jones of Lebanon as the party's gubernatorial candidate. In light of their past devotion to the party, county Whigs had been given a bitter pill to swallow.¹⁶⁴

Why was Dickinson's nomination so desired? First, the county ticket could easily ride to victory on Dickinson's coat-tails. Second, the combination of Dickinson and a Whig-controlled

state assembly could guarantee that Murfreesboro would be made the permanent state capital. Third, Dickinson's elevation would mortify James K. Polk. Goals like these, so long in the minds of Whigs throughout the county, were not easily surrendered. Probably, Jones was selected as the nominee so to smooth the ruffled feelings left in Murfreesboro. The Lebanon legislator, known and liked in the county, would benefit the party ticket and the Rutherford Whigs could accept him as a compromise nominee. Furthermore, as Jones carefully guaranteed, he would not threaten Murfreesboro's campaign to become the permanent state capital.

On March 10, the Weekly Times boldly charged that Jones was chosen as the nominee because "he had given evidence of his pliancy in the last Legislature by opposing the removal of the seat of Government to Murfreesborough, and by sustaining, the measures and views of the Nashville clique."¹⁶⁵ Murfreesboro Democrats knew this claim was false, yet they also recognized that such a statement, uncontested by the Whigs, could only but help their cause. Thus, Jones' sudden visit to Murfreesboro, two weeks before the canvass was to officially open, was not surprising--his mission was to console the fears of his colleagues.¹⁶⁶

Alleging that his first speech was in Murfreesboro because David Dickinson had so patriotically withdrawn his nomination at the state convention, Jones stated that the forthcoming debates should be on state, not national, issues. But he then proceeded to endorse Harrison's inaugural address as an accurate reflection of his principles. Favoring "a sound National Bank,"

Jones promised to keep the "status quo" in state internal improvement. But, to his audience, Jones left the most important pledge to the last:

he promised all those who heard him that, if he should be elected the Governor of Tennessee, and the Legislature should remove the seat of Government to any point in the State, he would not express a regret, nor ask to remain a moment at Nashville, but would cheerfully pack up a bag and baggage and go alone with it.¹⁶⁷

With their fears soothed, the Whigs prepared for the struggle of 1841.

The gubernatorial debates again opened in Murfreesboro in late March. The candidates awoke to one of those frequent curses of Murfreesboro during the spring--rain. Yet, the weather did not discourage each nominee's partisans and a large crowd gathered at the courthouse. Taking the offensive, Jones charged that the Governor had been in public office too long and if he believed his party's principles, Polk should "rotate" out of office. Furthermore, Lean Jimmy believed that Polk's pride in his consistency was silly. "He said," attacking the Governor through an anecdote, "some witness had been examined in court and stated that a certain horse was seventeen feet high. 'Seventeen feet,' said the Judge? 'Did I say seventeen feet? Well, if I said it, I stick to it; he was seventeen feet high.'"¹⁶⁸

Caught off-guard by his opponent's debating techniques, the Governor tried to discuss issues and not anecdotes,"but if his friend Jones went into that business he would tell what few ditties he could command, and when he got through he would borrow Jones' joke book." Admitting that his opponent was a

'promising young man," Polk reminded his audience that "as for his being Governor that's all a notion." But the State Democracy would soon painfully learn that young Jones' campaign certainly was more than "a notion."¹⁶⁹

The special elections to Congress interrupted the early summer months of the campaign. Thomas Hogan, editor of the Weekly Times, faced the incumbent Meredith Gentry. Despite the Democratic high hopes, Hogan was defeated decisively 2813 to 1200 in the district and by 1413 to 861 in Rutherford. By mid-May, the Democrats knew the obvious--that a difficult road lay ahead.¹⁷⁰ But it was a road that the party bandwagon could never traverse. Using the state capital issue to full advantage, the Whigs gained a complete victory that fall. The entire Whig

Chart XII: 1841 Congressional Elections

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
M. Gentry	Whig	1413	62.1
T. Hogan	Democrat	861	37.9

Source: Nashville Union, May 17, 1841

ticket "was carried . . . by upwards of one hundred majority."¹⁷¹

Chart XIII: State Elections, 1841

<u>Office</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Governor	Jones	Whig	1711	51.1
	Polk	Democrat	1635	48.9
State Senate	Ledbetter	Whig	1707	51.5
	Yoakum	Democrat	1606	48.5
State House	H. Burton	Whig	1729	25.6
	H. Norman	Whig	1721	25.5
	J. Fletcher	Democrat	1667	24.7
	E. Keeble	Democrat	1624	24.1

Source: Nashville Republican Banner, Aug. 7, 1841

By the 1841 election the Cannon County districts were no longer available to boost the Democratic party past the Whigs. These votes were probably crucial. Evidence of political activity within the county by Democrats was slight, possibly because the 1840 election was considered as "the handwriting on the wall." Rutherford's Democracy had reached a nadir; even the new mayor of Murfreesboro was a Whig, George Sublett. In politics and principles, Rutherford was a Whig county.¹⁷²

V. 1841 - 1845: Democratic Disintegration

Democratic prestige in the county, despite the Whigs' failure to deliver the state capital to Murfreesboro, had significantly decreased by 1842.¹⁷³ When Martin Van Buren visited Tennessee in April and May, he did not, despite the pleadings of county Democrats, come to Murfreesboro. "He has many very warm friends here," Yoakum asserted, "If he (would) come and show that he is like other men--would have many more. Some very foolish prejudices might be removed by a visit from him." But state leaders probably felt that a visit would be a waste of the President's time.¹⁷⁴ That fall, the legislature undertook to gerrymander the state Congressional districts and the Democratic leadership was prepared to sacrifice Rutherford to the Whigs, placing it in a district with Wilson and Williamson. Yoakum begged Polk that the county be spared such a fate.

If they put our county in a Whig Senatorial and Whig Congressional District you may readily see that we must fall--and I hope that the galantry with which we have fought, in times past, will win for us, at the hands of our friends, a better fate. And you can readily see also, that the fall

of Rutherford, which has hitherto been the barrier against Nashville federalism, will open the way to the subversion of democracy in all the counties South & east.¹⁷⁵

Evidently, the Columbian believed that Yoakum's argument had some merit. "I know the difficulties attending the subject," Polk told Samuel Laughlin, "but still hope that she (Rutherford) may be saved The Central position of that county makes it more important that we should preserve our strength there, than in any other County in the state."¹⁷⁶ Yet, this plea was ignored and the county was redistricted. A chagrined Yoakum wrote Polk of the local party reaction:

I have watched with some attention the course of some of our friends in the Legislature on the question of districts--and have come to the conclusion that they were more particular to secure & guard their own particular interests than to provide for the general welfare. They have acted the part of Webster in the Ashburton treaty. In securing their own sections, they have left to the enemy other sections that justice, services rendered, and sound policy required should be protected.

But we love our country better than our own local advantages. We fight for the good doctrines still--they are our doctrines, we cherish them, and hope to live to see their triumph in every part of the country. ¹⁷⁷

As an additional problem, the county Democracy suffered from internal bickering. Angry over David Wendell's removal as Murfreesboro postmaster, Edwin Keeble could be seen in the town streets "denouncing all Democrats from Gen. Jackson on down to a district committee man and declares publicly to everybody, that he will never vote for another."¹⁷⁸ While John Childress believed that "His leaving us will create no sensation, the party could ill afford to lose such a valuable stump orator."¹⁷⁹

The disabled Democrats, however, might have mounted a rally if they could exploit the issue of the permanent location of the state capital. "The seat of Government will be a serious question with us," Yoakum reminded Polk, "Yet we will not be foolish about it."¹⁸⁰ A Murfreesboro subscriber to the Union simply said that the capital should not be in Nashville: "Ought not the Legislature to sit away from the abode of such contaminating influences?" he asked, the asserted that the Legislature must be "free from the money-corrupting and mob-controlling influences of a large commercial city."¹⁸¹ The best evidence of the county's seriousness toward this issue was that the Whigs and Democrats even considered forming a compromise 1843 ticket in order to have greater influence in the Assembly.¹⁸²

The Democrats were the first to use the issue for political advantage. Polk was urged to come to Murfreesboro early that year because "a declaration for the location of the Seat of Gov. at some legible point near the centre of the territory and population" would not only please the Rutherford countians, but such a statement could be vague enough to satisfy other nearby towns.¹⁸³ David M. Currin, Democratic legislative candidate, published a broadside asserting that the only way Murfreesboro would receive the capital would be "at the hands of a Democratic Legislature," but he reminded the people that even "if the democrats should have the ascendancy in that body, of what advantage will it be to us, if WE are represented by Whigs?" Currin called for every citizen to "act together for the accomplishment of a common end, of equal importance to both Whigs and Democrats."¹⁸⁴

Yet, that winter the agitation for the capital remained a bipartisan effort. On February 9, the county's leading citizens, from Henderson Yoakum to William Lytle, resolved that Murfreesboro be named the permanent capital. Stating that the capital had been originally moved from Murfreesboro in 1826 in order to save money and utilize the State Bank, these citizens asserted that "Seventeen years of experience have tested the truth or unsoundness of these reasons," and concluded that the original rationales were invalid. The bank had failed, the legislature met for longer sessions, and the costs of government were much higher. So, why not make Murfreesboro the permanent capital? They argued that a legislature's actions reflected the characteristics of the town where it met and insisted that

If they (the citizens) of the town abound in wealth, extravagance, trade and speculation, the law-maker in mingling with them soon catches the tone, becomes social, desires to please, forgets his constituents, their economy and poverty, and votes for charters, appropriations and schemes utterly foreign to his views when he first took his seat.

There, to rid the legislature of corruption and vice, the state capital had to be placed in Murfreesboro.¹⁸⁵

Nevertheless, any bipartisan effort soon disappeared once the Democrats continued to blast the Whigs for failing to change the capital site in the last Assembly. Playing a more cagey game, Rutherford's Whigs reminded the electorate late in the contest that Polk and the Democrats had moved the capital to Murfreesboro, then suddenly rescinded the order. Of course, Polk received full blame for the rescission. On August 1, the Union told its readers to ignore any reports

tying Polk to the 1840 rescission because "The stories about his interfering with it in 1839-40 are utterly unfounded." But the Whig charges were probably the decisive factor in the margin of the Whig victory since their opponents were unable to counteract the excitement the allegations had caused.¹⁸⁶

However, more issues were involved in the campaign than just the seat of government. The "Immortal Thirteen", the upcoming Presidential contest, the viability of the National Bank, the national bankruptcy law and the tariff were just few of the questions bandied about by local politicians.¹⁸⁷

When the Whigs encountered some intra-party bickering over organization in the spring, the Democrats suddenly believed their opportunities for victory had increased--"And will not that be doing something." a surprised Yoakum exclaimed. But once the Whigs settled the division between the Ledbetter and Dickinson factions of the party by nominating Dickinson as the district's Congressional candidate, Democratic aspirations diminished.¹⁸⁸ Dickinson's selection was well received by the state leadership and by the first of July, any factionalism among the Whigs had evaporated.¹⁸⁹ "The Whigs here are as firm to their principles as the anvil to the beaten stroke," a county Whig bragged, "I do not entertain a doubt but all candidates will come out ahead, without any difficulty."¹⁹⁰

Governor Jones and James K. Polk closed the 1843 gubernatorial debates in Murfreesboro on July 31. Before an estimated 3000 people, both candidates rehashed the same political issues they had debated at about ninety other locations. Evidently, Jones gave one of his better efforts while Polk lacked his usual

passion "and he closed his talk manifestly dissatisfied himself."¹⁹¹ Yet, even an overwhelming address by the ex-Governor would not have turned the tide in Murfreesboro. Again, the entire Whig ticket was elected.¹⁹²

Chart XIV: State Gubernatorial Election, 1843

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Jones	Whig	1586	53.7
Polk	Democrat	1367	46.3

Source: Nashville Republican Banner, Aug. 11, 1843 (No other election results could be uncovered.)

At last, Whiggery appeared completely triumphant. But even as they celebrated, the Whigs carefully began plans to carry Tennessee for Henry Clay in 1844. In Rutherford, it seemed that, no matter who the Democratic nominee would be, the task would be simple.¹⁹³

Democrats, downhearted but not out, immediately began to plan for the November state convention in Nashville. On October 13, a Friday, they nominated their delegates and resolved that the campaign would be dedicated to measures, not men, and to the defeat of Henry Clay. While they hoped for a Van Buren-Polk national ticket, they announced their unqualified support for any nominee of the party.¹⁹⁴

The 1844 canvass, no doubt, was "one of the most bitterly contested" in the state's history.¹⁹⁵ The Whigs were subjected to their severest test yet¹⁹⁶ and both sides believed that victory in 1844 would seal the county's political allegiance.

Yoakum, because the Democrats were better organized than ever before, had renewed confidence. In early March, the

prominent attorney told Polk that Rutherford "has in her limits the unconquerable elements of democracy. These elements are now in a glow."¹⁹⁸ Democratic Associations abounded throughout the county and at a March meeting, the Star Spangled Banner was adopted as the party's banner. Samuel Rucker, "in an animated speech suggested the propriety of learning & singing the patriotic and national song which has that name."¹⁹⁹ Signs that the party had healed its winter wounds were apparent the next month when Edwin Keeble headed the committee that presented the Banner. Chairman Yoakum gave the flag to David Currin, the Democratic seventh district electoral candidate and said, "Take this flag--let no dishonor soil its stripes, let no disunion dim its stars . . . and return it to us with victory perching upon its folds." Currin accepted the flag and then proceeded to speak against any national bank and argued that the Whigs' failures had vindicated Van Buren's former presidency.²⁰⁰

Disrupting the Democratic momentum, the Whigs held in mid-April their "most enthusiastic meeting" of the year at the courthouse. Charles Ready, president of the Rutherford Clay Club, as three speakers, William L. Murfree, a long-time town resident, William Henry Smith, editor of the Telegraph, and David D. Bell, son of John Bell, took turns blasting Jackson, Amos Kendall, and Martin Van Buren.²⁰¹ And the Democrats were crushed when Van Buren's letter opposing the Texas annexation became public. "The course of Mr. Van Buren has thrown us flat on our backs," Yoakum so informed Polk,

The leading democrats throught Rutherford...are calling upon me daily to know my views--I can tell them nothing, but to wait. I am satisfied

that Mr. Van Buren will get few votes hereabouts and for no other cause than his late letter, making, as we conceive, concessions to the abolitionists. We are all true democrats, as I honestly believe, so also, are we friends to the South.²⁰²

Further agitating this Democratic dilemma was the large Whig rally in May. Never "under more auspicious circumstances than those which signalized the meeting," had a Whig campaign begun in Rutherford. Boasting of their dominance, party regulars cried out, "'As goes Rutherford so goes Tennessee.'" ²⁰³ The Whigs had used the recent nominations of Clay and Frelinghuysen as an excuse to have a day-long celebration--and state leaders rushed in support. John Bell, introduced as "an old and well known acquaintance and friend.... who, in various distinguished positions, had battled nobly for the great cause to which they were devoted," reminded his audience that the Democratic and Whig struggle continued because "their doctrines and measures (are) incompatible with our prosperity, and safety, and the preservation of our institutions." Asserting that the corrupt bargain of 1824 never happened, Bell vindicated Clay's character and Frelinghuysen's nomination.²⁰⁴

Before the "abundant and substantial Barbecue", some of the county clubs joined together on the podium to sing party songs. But, just "as they were closing their melodies..... the weight of those who had crowded upon the state proved too much for it, and down it came with a noisy crash." After the stage was repaired, Gustavus A. Henry produced "a splendid eulogy upon Henry Clay" while arguing that "the mischievous principles of modern democracy must be opposed." Like his

colleague, Henry defended the tariff and the party's nominations.²⁰⁵ That night, county Whigs were entertained for two more hours by Robert Caruthers and Mr. MacLeod. They also passed a resolution supporting the annexation of Texas "whenever it can be done without violating our national faith, and endangering the union."²⁰⁶

The early hopes of the Democrats had evaporated. Their opponents managed to negate the corrupt bargain as a political issue and had increased the importance of the Texas question and the party resorted to virulent attacks on Henry Clay. But the news of Polk's presidential nomination transformed the local Democrats into political animals.²⁰⁷ "The effect here and as far as I have heard," Polk told his unofficial campaign manager, Cave Johnson, "has been to inspire a new spirit in our party."²⁰⁸

On June 6, the Murfreesboro Democratic Association passed special resolutions seconding the nominations of Polk and Dallas. At last, local Democrats had a candidate who followed the county's sentiments on the annexation of Texas. Hooray for Polk! Hooray for Texas! cried the Democrats.²⁰⁹ Later that month, the party held "one of those immense uprisings of the people which only take place they are resolved that their voice shall be heard and that the fabric of republican freedom shall be preserved." A crowd of about 10,000 was harangued for nearly seven hours by such prominent Middle Tennessee Democrats as Hopkins Turney and A. O. P. Nicholson and leading locals like Edwin Keeble and David Currin. The Whigs' pet raccon was captured, hanged, "placed in a fine walnut coffin . . . and buried with all the honours of whiggery" so to symbolize the Democratic resurgence.²¹⁰

After Polk's nomination, county Whig leaders headed for the stump--and stayed there. David Dickinson was very active "defending the good old democratic conservative principles of the Whig party, and attacking the destructive tenents and exposing the malversations in office of the Loco foco party." Dickinson pledged he would rather die than see Polk elected and obviously the county did not want him to give up the ghost because Henry Clay defeated Polk by 230 votes.²¹¹

Chart XV: 1844 Presidential Election

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Henry Clay	Whig	1730	53.6
James K. Polk	Democrat	1500	46.4

Source: Nashville Republican Banner, Nov. 11, 1844

Polk's decisive defeat in a county where he had many personal ties was stunning. Yet, if Clay had not carried Rutherford would have been the real surprise because the Democrats, for a decade, had been unable to match the Whig political machine. Thus, the Democrats remained the county's minority party until after the Civil War. Their party leader, Henderson Yoakum, was so disappointed that he left the state and sought his fortune in Texas. Even with the Columbian as President, county Democrats fared no better in the 1845 elections, as the Whig ticket once again swept Rutherford. No doubt, the center of Tennessee was a Whig stronghold.²¹²

Chart XVI: 1845 Gubernatorial Election

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Votes</u>	<u>% Votes</u>
Ephraim Foster	Whig	1599	52.3
Aaron Brown	Democrat	1457	47.7

Source: Jonesborough Whig and Independent Journal,
September 10, 1845

A CONCLUSION

The story of the formation of two separate and distinct political parties in Rutherford County began with a rivalry between two Middle Tennessee politicians, John Bell and James K. Polk, over the coveted position of Speaker of the House. The county provided these two men with their spouses and the resulting family connections, along with the rivals' joint decision to fight their first public battles on Rutherford podiums, drew the citizens of the county into a furious debate. The county Democracy split over the claims of these two rivals, with the pro-Bell faction emerging as the Whig party.

By 1845 the Democrats were conquered and its leadership was scattered and fleeing for greener pastures. The Whigs in 1844 had defeated Polk in his own backyard; their ascendancy and superiority was unchallenged. What factors led to one party dominance? National issues such as the National Bank, the presidential contests, and the annexation of Texas were hotly debated. But, these issues provided only the foundation for disputes. The divisive issues in county politics were more local in nature: the exploits of Edmund Rucker, the Polk-Bell rivalry, loyalty to Jackson, personality clashes, and particularly,

the permanent location of the state capital. The irrational behavior that often characterized the political life of Rutherford County was only produced when the local partisans could closely identify with the issues.

Chart XVII: Voter Participation, Rutherford County Elections, 1835 - 1845¹

<u>Year</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>% Nationwide</u>	<u>% County</u>
1835	73		92.7
1836	55.2	55.2	71.8
1837	73		82.9
1839	86-89		87.6
1840	89.6	78	82.8
1841	84-87		98.6
1843	87 - 90		87.1
1844	89.6	74.9	95.2
1845	85- 88		90.1

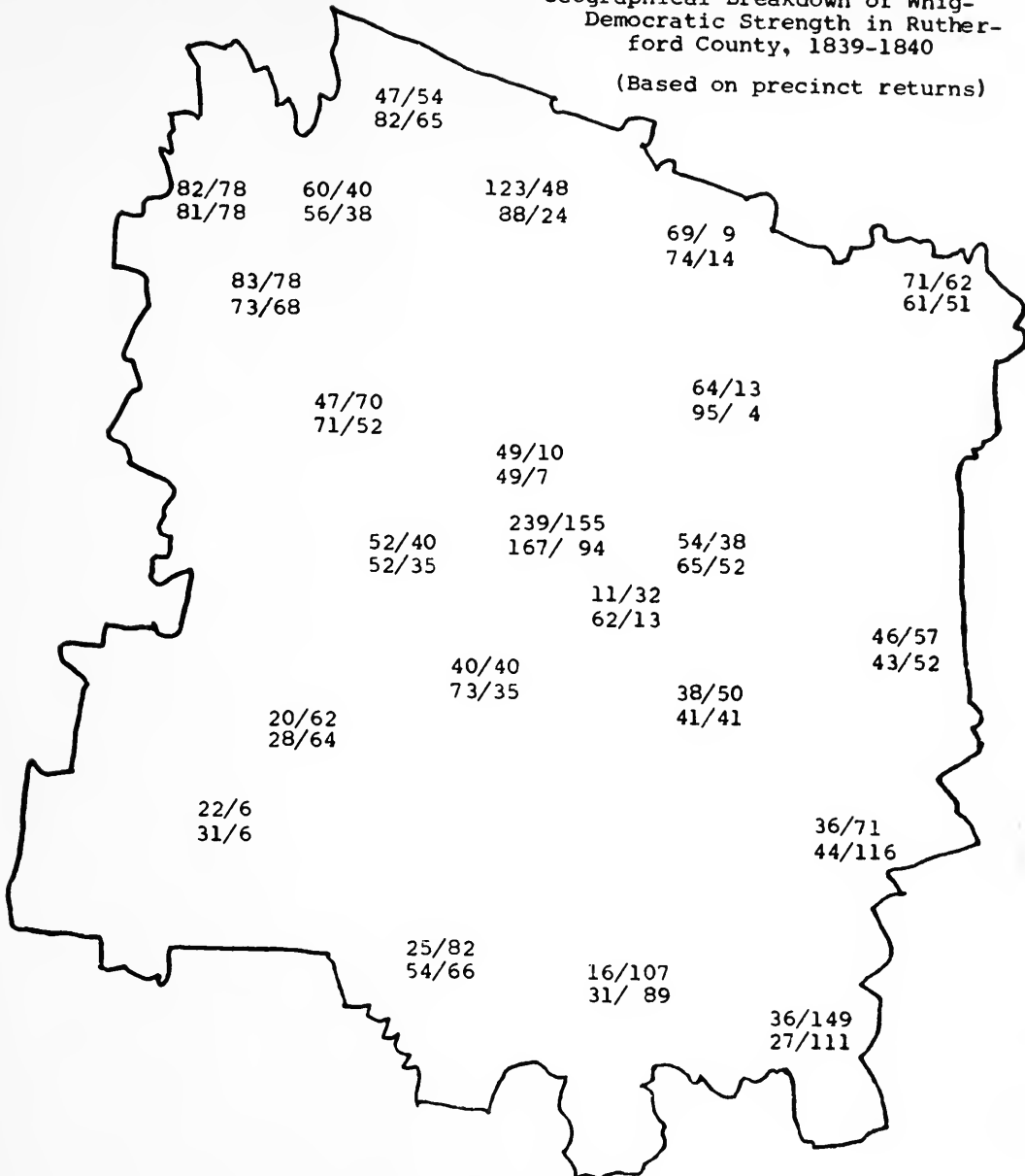
¹County turnout from 1835-37 is based on General Assembly statistics placing the number of qualified voters in Rutherford County in 1837 at 3032. County turnout from 1839-45 is based on General Assembly statistics placing the number of qualified voters in 1839 at 3392. Therefore, in the elections after 1840, the actual turnout is probably lower than indicated.

Sources: Brian G. Walton, "The Second Party System in Tennessee", East Tennessee Historical Society Publications, No 43 (1971), 19; Richard P. McCormick, "New Perspectives in Jacksonian Politics," American Historical Review, LXV (Jan., 1960), 289; Nashville Union, Jan. 1, 1840; Nashville Republican Banner, Aug. 11, 1835, Nov. 12, 1836, Aug. 8, 1837, Aug. 7, 1841, Aug. 11, 1843, Nov. 11, 1844; Nashville Whig, Nov. 6, 1840; Jonesborough Whig & Independent Journal, Sept. 1, 1845,

Chart XVIII

Geographical Breakdown of Whig-Democratic Strength in Rutherford County, 1839-1840

(Based on precinct returns)



1839: Votes for Cannon/Votes for Polk

1840: Votes for Harrison/Votes for Van Buren

Not located: Middleton precinct (14th district)

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This study is a basic summary of his prospective Ph. D. dissertation. Any additional information that you know about would be greatly appreciated by the author. If you have information or comments, please write Mr. West by way of the Department of History, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va 23185.

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