"Men and Measures": The Creation of the Second Party System in New Jersey

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Abstract
During the Jacksonian Era, politicians frequently framed election contests as choices between "men and measures." On one side, the argument ran, were politicians who cared only for the spoils of office. On the other, one found those who cared about "real" issues that mattered to voters. Voters, in this context, had a simple choice to make. [excerpt]

Keywords
Jacksonian Era, political elections, political party, spoils of office, voter interest

Disciplines
History | Political History | United States History
“Men and Measures”: The Creation of the Second Party System in New Jersey

MICHAEL J. BIRKNER AND HERBERT ERSHKOWITZ

During the Jacksonian era, politicians frequently framed election contests as choices between “men and measures.” On one side, the argument ran, were politicians who cared only for the spoils of office. On the other, one found those who cared about “real” issues that mattered to voters. Voters, in this context, had a simple choice to make.

Historians of the past generation agreed no more than do contemporaries about the stakes involved in the party game. In writing and teaching political history, modern scholars have generally taken one of two distinctive interpretive approaches. One school argues that the nineteenth-century political system featured controversial issues, usually tied to economic policy, that were decided rationally by partisans who expected particular policies to flow from their choices at election time. Another school of historians finds few substantive differences between parties. This school focuses attention on conflicting “subcultures” in the constituencies, which it argues were the foundation of the second and third party systems. In this behaviorist-oriented approach, which has gained increasing sophistication and influence over the past two decades, the traditional “rationalist” model of politics is rejected. Mass voting behavior, a central concern of revisionists, is interpreted less in terms of conflict and debate over public policy than what Paul Kleppner calls “internalized, group-imparted perspectives.” Autonomous voters, reading the newspaper, listening to speeches, and making choices on election day, are replaced in this analysis by “reference groups” whose behavior is conditioned by “belief systems” stemming from their ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Neither of these approaches dominates current scholarship on Jacksonian politics. But the debate touched off in 1961 by the publication of Lee Benson’s Concept of Jacksonian Democracy has undeniably provoked a new sensitivity to the perceptions of voters,
and to the many sides of political behavior in the respective states. Indeed, if it has accomplished nothing else, the long-running controversy over cultural influences on politics has highlighted the complexity of partisan behavior in nineteenth-century America. It has also supplied a useful dose of realism about the possibility—indeed, the desirability—of constructing a broad synthesis encompassing political action and attitudes throughout a heterogeneous nation.\textsuperscript{3}

Our work on New Jersey has inevitably been influenced by recent historiographical controversies. A reexamination of New Jersey politics in this context suggests some lines of analysis that transcend the "men and measures" and "economic versus cultural divisions" themes that dominated much of the scholarly debate of the 1960s and 1970s. Focusing on the evolution of the second party system in one state, we will argue that New Jersey's distinctive polity in the Jacksonian Era emerged in three stages beginning in 1823.

During the first period of partisan realignment, between 1823 and 1828, the political organizations of the first party system disintegrated and were replaced by factions. In phase two, lasting from 1829 until 1834, politicians organized increasingly regimented parties emphasizing personalities rather than issues in most instances. After 1834 the final phase of party building occurred in New Jersey. Modern, generally issue-oriented parties functioned in the state and fought intensely to gain or hold power.

The two emergent parties, Whig and Democratic, remained remarkably stable until the Whigs' decline in the mid-1850s.\textsuperscript{4}

In each of the three phases there was a constant interplay among leaders, voters, and issues. The initial choice made by political elites during the 1824 presidential election or in the 1826 congressional contests focused on support for or opposition to the persona and later the administration of John Quincy Adams. These choices hardened remarkably swiftly, as early opponents of Adams coalesced in the camp of Andrew Jackson and stayed there. Initial preferences expressed by voters in 1824 also hardened into voting patterns that did not change for a generation.

It took longer for the parties to clarify the issues that divided them. Not until 1834 were New Jersey parties clearly fixed on distinctive values and policies. A new class of professional politicians needed time to organize their cadres into sophisticated mass parties.\textsuperscript{5} New methods for mobilizing voters, for example, were not fully exploited until the mid-1830s. Once they were, however, politics in New Jersey became a remarkably vibrant spectacle in which thousands of voters, along with the political professionals, became deeply involved in the campaigns and elections.

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Phase One: Party Development

During the first period of party development, from 1823 to 1828, New Jersey voters recast their political loyalties in the context of presidential elections and the collapse of the long-standing competition between Federalists and Jeffersonian-Republicans. Party conflict in New Jersey had been declining in intensity and importance since the end of the War of 1812, and political activity was primarily concerned with office and influence.\textsuperscript{6}

This began to change in the early 1820s, when Republican leaders in Washington could not agree on a successor to Pres. James Monroe. A vigorous contest for the presidency ensued, waged among several candidates and focused primarily on regional or personal preferences. In New Jersey, leaders and voters supported different candidates for president on the basis of personal appeal or, not infrequently, out of simple expediency. The opportunity to rejoin the political mainstream encouraged many New Jersey Federalists to support John Quincy Adams or Andrew Jackson, who had emerged by early 1824 as the most popular presidential candidates in the state.

The presidential campaign that year in New Jersey marked the germination, not the flowering, of a new party system. It was largely devoid of substantive disagreements over national or state issues like tariffs, internal improvements, and strict or loose construction of the Constitution.\textsuperscript{7} Neither the Jacksonians nor the Adams men built a particularly sophisticated organization. Voter turnout was low, in part because campaigning was sporadic and in part because the state lacked a recent tradition of highly competitive presidential politics. Some 31 percent of white adult males cast votes, a 22 percent increase over 1820, but less than half the number recorded in 1800, 1808, or 1814—three years of intense Federalist-Republican competition.\textsuperscript{8}

Nonetheless, the presidential campaign had set the stage for new alignments that were refined and tested in subsequent national and local elections. By 1826 the denominations "administration men" and "Jackson men" had become commonplace in New Jersey with both sides still claiming the Republican mantle. The increased voter turnout in that year's congressional elections presaged truly massive turnouts a decade later. Those who had, for whatever reason, initially expressed an aversion to Jackson now constituted the bulk of the Administration party, which would eventually become the Whig party.\textsuperscript{9}

During the Adams presidency, the two new factions solidified and expanded, taking on the appellations of Adams or Admin-
istration party on one side, and on the other, the Jacksonian party or simply Jacksonians. Secretary of the Navy Samuel L. Southard and U.S. Sen. Mahlon Dickerson, respectively, were pivotal figures in those organizations. Although only 38 years old in 1825, Southard was already a political veteran, having served on the state supreme court, in the U.S. Senate, and as navy secretary under two presidents. Having aligned himself squarely behind Adams in 1825, Southard worked diligently to build a statewide machine in support of the administration’s interests. Among Southard’s allies in this endeavor were long-time New Jersey Gov. Isaac Williamson of Elizabeth, most of the state’s congressmen, U.S. Sen. Joseph McIlvaine, and the editors of the major Republican newspapers in New Jersey, the Trenton True American, the Newark New Jersey Eagle, and the Morristown Palladium of Liberty. Having backed a losing candidate in 1824, Dickerson doubled his efforts thereafter. He drew his greatest support for Jackson from among his own friends in the ill-fated William H. Crawford campaign of 1824 and from former Federalist leaders. Included among the latter were Garret D. Wall, a shrewd, Trenton-based attorney who had flirted with Southard’s camp in the early 1820s; Peter D. Vroom, Jr., the son of a former political power in Somerset County; and Stacy G. Potts, the acerbic young editor of the Trenton Emporium. They were joined by the canny businessman James Parker and at least briefly by the powerful family of former U.S. Sen. Richard Stockton. If political elites found it easy to choose sides during the Adams years, so did voters. Between 1824 and 1828 realignment became an accomplished fact. Voting behavior in 1828 followed lines set in 1824, and remained fixed until the breakup of the second party system in the decade before the Civil War. An analysis of voting in New Jersey in 1824, 1828, and 1829 reveals a remarkably high correlation between state and federal election contests. In the late 1820s there were fourteen counties in New Jersey. If the election of 1828 is taken as the critical election, none of the counties show a positive statistical correlation of over .9 for the five federal elections between 1828 and 1836. These correlations range between a positive .9673 for Monmouth County to a .1579 for Sussex. Sussex County showed the lowest positive correlation for these elections as it moved increasingly into the Jackson camp. Somerset County was very much the exception. Thirteen counties participated in the 1824 presidential election. (Warren County was carved out of Sussex prior to the 1826 congressional campaign.) Seven of the counties showed a positive correlation over .9 when elections from 1829 through 1836 are compared. Others nearly matched this consistency. The reasons for such an early and pronounced political realignment are not clear. Perhaps the answer lay in the lack of intense, grassroots competition for statewide offices that helped define the party systems in neighboring states such as Pennsylvania and New York. In New Jersey, it took nearly a decade for state elections to duplicate party voting in presidential and congressional elections. Furthermore, these elections produced no clear-cut issue dividing the two parties. Although the pro-Administration press stressed the need for New Yorkers to align with a northern—Adams—rather than a representative of slave-holding interests, neither side made much of an issue of slavery. The good and bad personal qualities of the presidential candidates were the main subjects of speeches and polemical essays. Adams’s alleged personal pecadillos, such as the profligacy purportedly exemplified by his purchase of a billiard table for the White House, were central Jacksonian themes in 1828. Similarly, Adams supporters hit equally hard, asailing the Tennessee general as an undisciplined, uneducated “military chieftain” who had no reasonable or rightful claim to the presidency. Nationwide, the Jacksonians prevailed in both the argument and the election. Jackson won a convincing electoral college victory, 178 votes to 83 for Adams. The defeated president’s New Jersey backers could take some solace from having backed the national trend; Adams carried the state by some 1,400 votes in a 73 percent turnout of eligible voters. The 1828 New Jersey returns show distinctive geographic patterns in support of the competing political forces. Jacksonians gained much of their support in northwestern New Jersey, particularly in Warren and Sussex counties and adjacent townships in Hunterdon and Morris counties. In the presidential election Warren County gave Jackson a striking 62.8 percent of the vote; Sussex registered an only slightly less impressive 61.8 percent for Jackson. Hunterdon’s 54.6 percent and Morris’s 52.0 percent support for Jackson reflect Adams’s strength in the more heavily settled communities of those two counties. Jackson had something close to a lock on the rural vote. In the election of 1828 the Administration party showed its greatest strength in the five southernmost counties: Burlington, Gloucester, Cumberland, Salem, and Cape May. Burlington’s strong vote for Adams—61.6 percent, combined with Cape May’s 64 percent, Cumberland’s 57 percent, and 52 percent in Gloucester and Salem—provided the foundation for Adams’s victory in the state. As in the north, voting was often concentrated. The Adams forces
carried almost every township on the Delaware River. Other strongly pro-Adams constituencies included the industrializing areas of Essex County and towns adjacent to Essex in both Morris and Middlesex counties. Since Essex County was home to the state's major cities—Newark, Elizabethtown, and Paterson—it saw 59.4 percent vote for Adams proved essential to his statewide victory in 1828. Other regions were more competitive. The central corridor of New Jersey, running from Perth Amboy to Trenton, for example, proved to be a major battleground in 1828 and later. Somerset County gave Jackson a bare 50.1 percent margin in 1828; in subsequent elections its loyalties varied. Voters in the shore areas tended to support Jackson, but not to the same extent as those in the rural northwest. Monmouth, the largest Atlantic Coast county, gave Jackson 53 percent of its vote. Except for 1830, it gave the Jacksonians small pluralities in each election. These voting patterns are congruent with historians' findings in other states, including Massachusetts and North Carolina. The northwest region of New Jersey was comprised of generally prosperous farmers of German descent. In this respect it was similar to several adjoining areas of Pennsylvania that also voted for Jackson. Jackson also won support from another ethnic group, the Dutch, who lived along the Raritan and Passaic rivers in Middlesex, Somerset, and Essex counties, and in the prosperous farming enclaves of Bergen County. The New Jersey Dutch, who had until recently kept slaves themselves, had no difficulty supporting a slaveholder in the White House. The fact that a prominent politician of Dutch ancestry, Martin Van Buren of New York, was a leading Jacksonian operative, undoubtedly further inclined New Jersey Dutchmen towards the Jacksonian camp. So did the Jacksonians' increasing emphasis on hard money policies. Jackson also garnered substantial support from Methodists living in the counties of Monmouth and Gloucester.

By contrast, support for Adams derived from the Quaker townships along the Delaware River in West Jersey. In 1828 and subsequent elections anti-Jacksonians consistently carried every river township from Trenton to Cape May. Quaker opposition to Jackson was pronounced. As a slaveholder, Indian fighter, and military officer, Jackson represented the antithesis of Quaker values. Hard-fisted anti-Jackson campaign literature in 1828 made an appeal directly to these issues. Not surprisingly, from 1828 until the Civil War, the Quakers were the single most reliably anti-Democratic voting bloc in New Jersey. Another locus of anti-Jacksonian politics was Essex County, which had been settled by New Englanders who were increasingly oriented toward commerce and industry. The Essex elite and workers alike supported Adams in 1828, Clay in 1840, and Whig presidential candidates thereafter. This phenomenon, which ran counter to the pro-Jacksonian trend in New York City, was evident elsewhere in New Jersey. Every manufacturing center in New Jersey opposed the Jacksonians.

Finally, the second-party system's voting patterns showed significant consistency with those seen during the days of Federalist conflict with Jeffersonian-Republicans. Constituencies that had been Republican during the Jeffersonian Era usually voted Jacksonian, while Federalist strongholds became Adamsite, and later Whig, centers. The movement by former Federalist and Republican political elites into the new parties did not follow this pattern. Anti-Jacksonian leaders included staunch Jeffersonian-Republicans like Samuel L. Southard and ambitious former Federalists like Theodoro Frelinghuysen. The Jacksonian leaders were also a mixed lot. One faction was led by U.S. Sen. Mahlon Dickerson of Morris County, whose main political objective seems to have been to thwart his long-time rival Samuel Southard. Another faction of Federalists, from central and southern New Jersey, was led first by Garrett D. Wall and included Peter Vroom, Dr. Ferdinand Schenck, and James Parker. Wall, one of the state's leading attorneys, was born in Monmouth County and used his influence there on Jackson's behalf. Wall eventually moved to Burlington where he did his best to undercut anti-Jacksonian sentiment. Another important former Federalist, Robert F. Stockton of Princeton, represented the politics of expediency that was commonplace in this era. Depending on his personal interests, Stockton was variously an Adams supporter, a Jacksonian, a Whig, and, later, a Democrat during his long and checkered political career.

Phase Two: The Jacksonian Years

With the inauguration of Andrew Jackson as president in March 1829, the second stage of party development commenced in New Jersey. The signal was given shortly after the fall elections by Trenton newspaper editor Stacy G. Potts. Writing to his mentor, Garrett Wall, that unless the new political alignments were certified and strengthened partisan conflict would remain on the level of simple personality contests, Potts observed: "We can no longer be 'Jackson' or 'Adams' men—both parties must settle down under definite names." They did, as Jacksonian and National Republican party identification became common usage. By 1834, National Republicans and a smaller faction of Anti-Jacksonians joined
forces under the Whig banner. New party names were only part of the conception of partisanship that Potts, Wall, and their colleagues intended to advance. Following the 1828 elections, the Jacksonians began to build an organization that would encourage party cohesion not only in the selection and election of candidates, but also within the legislature and the constituencies. Many of the innovations in party organization were initiated at the national level. A group of Jackson supporters in Congress led by Martin Van Buren of New York and John Eaton of Tennessee developed a sophisticated apparatus that encompassed a chain of newspapers across the nation promoting the general’s political fortunes. Van Buren and Eaton, working with Richmond Enquirer editor Thomas Ritchie and other southern supporters of the general, raised money to sustain and enlarge the Jacksonian newspaper network. They operated an effective information center for pro-Jackson politicians around the nation.

In New Jersey, such Jacksonian papers as the Trenton Emporium carried articles written in Washington, and through newspaper exchanges made their own propaganda available to editors in other states. The election itself produced no noteworthy innovation in local party organization, however. Both the Jacksonians and the Administration forces held state conventions to choose electors and congressional candidates, modeled on gatherings held earlier in the century by Jeffersonian politicians. Local committees of correspondence were appointed by county conventions to get out the vote, but they do not seem to have operated with any greater efficiency than such organizations did in earlier elections. In general, these conventions tended to follow the procedures used by Republicans since 1800. Because they gained their legitimacy from their connection to the party that had once dominated the state, using Republican symbols and rituals was important to the two new parties.

With Jackson in power in Washington, the two New Jersey parties moved quickly to establish more sophisticated political operations. These organizations, headed by Wall and Vroom on one side and Southard on the other, performed an array of functions associated with modern parties. They nominated officeholders on both the state and local levels; they raised and distributed money for political campaigns; they wrote and circulated campaign literature; and, after victories, they distributed offices to party loyalists.

The most important structural innovation instituted by the Jacksonians was the creation of a state central committee which directed party affairs year-round. Jacksonians also established a legislative caucus which dispensed patronage and shaped party positions on legislation. A state convention, whose delegates were chosen at county gatherings, selected congressional candidates every two years and presidential electors every four years. These gatherings, which were genuine conventions and not merely legislative caucuses, drew crowds in the hundreds.

In the interest of promoting voter turnout, the Jacksonians’ organizational pyramid extended downward to the county and township levels. This was not a new approach. Local organization, notably the county convention, had been part of New Jersey politics in the Jeffersonian Era. But the extent of the organization—the sheer number of citizens involved—was substantially greater after 1829. Scores of citizens attended township meetings; many of them participated in campaigns as members of township committees of correspondence, or as delegates to countywide meetings that chose nominees, or both. This marked a change from the large county meeting common during an earlier era. The political leadership embraced change for at least two reasons. First, party managers could manipulate conventions more readily than township meetings. Second, there was a legitimate complaint that township meetings tended to favor people in the township chosen for the meeting. Under the new system this would be rectified. The dissemination of party propaganda was one of the primary concerns of the new organization. Newspapers were central to this operation, and here the Jacksonians had a clear edge. Trenton Emporium editor Stacy Potts was one of the most clever and
hard-working political writers in the state. He wrote much of the strongest Jacksonian material and helped plot tactics behind the scenes. Another part of the new organization focused on patronage—rewards for loyal party workers. When Jacksonians took control of the state legislature in 1829, they substantially increased the number of minor state positions in each county. Most of these jobs, such as justices of the peace and county judges, were distributed to loyal Jacksonians. Before 1837 there does not seem to have been any significant purge of officeholders at either the state or federal level. Most postal workers, for example, remained in place even when one party displaced the other in power. New appointments in 1829, however, went to Jacksonians. The few higher-level jobs, including collector of customs at Perth Amboy, federal attorney, and diplomatic posts to which New Jersey could lay claim, went to members of the dominant party. The emergence of a mature Jacksonian organization was essentially replicated by the National Republicans led by Southard. In this respect New Jersey differs from other states, particularly in the South, where anti-Jacksonians were sometimes slow in organizing. Following a brief period of apathy after Adams’s defeat in 1828, the National Republicans established party committees in most townships and counties. A state committee was elected at biannual conventions. Samuel Southard stood at the top of this organizational pyramid. Because of his links to Henry Clay and his personal prestige as a leading attorney and officeholder in New Jersey (Southard was successively state attorney general, governor, and U.S. Senator after his return from Washington), he dominated the state organization. Southard acted as a liaison between New Jersey and Jackson’s national foes, raised campaign funds, organized newspapers, and often chose candidates for state and local races. Both sides maintained a high degree of cohesiveness between presidential elections. The game of faction in New Jersey was yielding to a more professional brand of politics. Intraparty feuds, although never absent, were generally subordinate to the overall welfare of the party. One consequence of expanding party activity was a substantial increase in voter turnout. In 1824 only 18,718 voters went to the polls. The numbers increased to 38,525 in 1828, 47,829 in 1832, and 51,729 by 1836. The congressional election of 1834, one of the most hotly contested of the era, attracted 55,576 voters. The competitiveness of this new system was evidenced not only by increased turnout, but also by a remarkably consistent alignment of voters. The Jacksonians gained 49.2 percent of the vote in 1828, 48.67 percent in 1830, 49.67 percent in 1832 (enough to win that year, given the Anti-masons’ one percent), 51.1 percent in 1834, and 49.5 percent in 1836. In their competitiveness, New Jersey parties were more advanced than other states. By 1836 Pennsylvania and New York approached the parity evident in New Jersey elections, while most of the states in the South, Midwest, and New England never achieved the close balance between parties that was seen in New Jersey during the 1830s.

**Phase Three: The Maturing Parties**

Alignment of national parties with state and local organizations marked the final stage of party organization in New Jersey. This was not always easy. Divergent local priorities and internecine disputes—exemplified by the Hickite schism among the Quakers—frequently caused problems for political leaders. The eventual realignment of voters depended on convincing them, and keeping them convinced, that the fate of the nation depended on their allegiance in state elections. In the voters’ eyes, local issues had to have a connection to a national cause, even if historians would view such apparent relationships differently. This evolution was both complex and asymmetrical during the decade in which realignment took place. In 1828 questions of character pervaded campaign propaganda. But gradually and ineluctably, efforts were made to turn a clash of personalities into something more substantial. Jackson’s supporters, for example, portrayed him as a Democrat and a reliable Old Republican who would clean up corruption in Washington and return government to first principles. Supporters of Adams, by contrast, emphasized that the incumbent’s political values were more akin to New Jersey’s needs than were those of a strict constructionist Tennessee slaveholder.

Between 1829 and 1834, character questions evolved into issue questions. Jackson’s foes argued that his administration was governing badly. Cited were his removal of the Indians west of the Mississippi River; his militancy in relations with Congress; his fight against the Bank of the United States; his use of “rotation in office” to reward allies and punish political foes. The Bank War was the impetus for a new nomenclature—Whig—among Jacksonian foes. They were appealing to the voters’ recollection of Revolutionary War days and the fight against British tyranny. It was no accident that Jackson was portrayed in Whig prints as “King Andrew” and often compared to Louis XIV, the absolutist French monarch.
Jackson supporters in New Jersey also assumed a new name, adopting the term Democrat for their party. Building on the rhetoric of 1828, New Jersey Jacksonians contended that the general’s administration had reformed the government by turning aristocrats out of office, and by bringing the “Monster Bank” to heel. By removing deposits from the Bank of the United States, Jackson’s adherents argued, he was attacking special privilege and returning control of the people’s money to the people.89

Indeed, Jackson himself made opposition to the Bank of the United States virtually synonymous with membership in his party. This meant that local leaders had to support the administration’s war on the bank, be silent on the issue, or leave the party. Hard-money New Jersey Democrats like Peter Vroom warmly embraced Jackson’s cause. Mahlon Dickerson and Garret Wall, who privately had few problems with the bank, quickly fell into line for reasons of expediency. At least one important New Jersey Jacksonian, Robert F. Stockton, temporarily kept his peace and then bolted the party. In subsequent years he would be joined in his apostasy by Congressman Ferdinand S. Schenck and James Parker. Both these men, like Stockton, had substantial ties to the state’s business community.88 Whigs, for their part, embraced the bank’s cause with gusto—at least until 1835, when it became clear that there were no elections to be won on this platform. Gradually the Whigs’ fire focused on “executive tyranny” and the Jacksonians’ alleged fiscal incompetence. The latter issue took on special resonance with the onset of a financial panic and depression in 1837.87

Local politics was linked to the emerging national party system in some measure through legislative resolutions and the elections of U.S. senators. For example, the issue of a set of “instructions” given by the Jacksonian legislature to Whig senators in 1834 served to rally Jackson supporters behind the president’s policies and against the opposition to them voiced by senators Frelinghuysen and Southard. Not surprisingly, neither senator buckled under this assault. Instead, Whigs launched a grass-roots campaign to show that the senators’ opposition to Jackson’s economic policies had support in New Jersey.90 In this highly charged atmosphere the legislative elections of 1834 were fought. They produced the highest voter turnout of the Jacksonian Era, and showed a marked congruence between state and federal election returns. In both arenas the Democrats won strong victories. Consequently the next state legislature replaced Frelinghuysen in the Senate with Garret D. Wall, while continuing to pressure Southard to support Jackson.91

During the 1830s New Jersey state issues increasingly intersected with national ones. Perhaps the most significant economic development during the decade was the rapid expansion of banking corporations chartered by the state and the explosive growth of chartered businesses in general. When corporations became a politically charged issue, it was inevitable that the Jacksonians would find themselves differing strongly with Whigs. Beginning in 1833, introduction into the legislature of bills of incorporation produced intense debate in Trenton and throughout the state. Democrats attempted to block the passage of bank charters and to prohibit banks from issuing small bills. They also tried to remove from corporate charters the limited liability provisions that relieved stockholders from debts incurred by a corporation, so that they could lose only what they had invested in corporate stock. In debates over this and related issues, Whigs generally took a pro-banking and pro-corporation stance.92

Not all Democrats opposed banks or corporate charters generally. Legislators usually favored banks from their own counties and some Democratic legislators voted freely and often for corporate charters that seemed likely to encourage economic growth in their own backyards. Nevertheless, a review of the legislative record shows a pattern of Democratic opposition to incorporations. By 1835, 63 percent of all votes in the General Assembly followed party lines, as compared to 40 percent in the 1831 assembly. As late as the 1844 Constitutional Convention, New Jersey Democrats were still taking a forceful negative position on banking and incorporations.93

What explains the correlation between positions on state and national issues? Surely it would have been unnatural for politicians who violently opposed each other on, for example, the Bank of the United States to join with their rivals on state issues. Politicians
believed their own rhetoric—or at least voted consistently with it. Recent research suggests that other states were similar to New Jersey on economic issues. Throughout the nation, Democrats opposed banks and charters of incorporation, and favored specie over paper money. As Michael Holt and William G. Shade have shown, this division of parties was particularly evident after the nation sank into depression in 1837. New Jersey Democrats simply reached the hard-money position earlier than their allies in other states.

The leading factor that retarded the consolidation of parties during the period from 1835 to 1837 was the Hickite schism that sundered Whiggery in western New Jersey. The Society of Friends, a powerful force in the Delaware River region, had, from the beginning, been opposed to Jackson and his party. When Hickite Quakers and Orthodox Friends began a bitter feud that culminated in a separation of their financial resources, Jacksonian leaders like Garret Wall sensed there was political advantage to be won. In a suit involving the division of a Quaker school fund, Wall took the side of the Hickites in opposition to Theodore Frelinghuysen, the advocate for the Orthodox. Frelinghuysen won the case but lost politically; Hickites, the dominant Quaker sect in New Jersey, held a grudge. When Wall promised Democratic support in the legislature to aid their cause, Hickite defections from Whig ranks contributed heavily to Jackson electoral triumphs in 1834 and 1835. It was only with the resolution of the Hickite controversy in 1836, through the passage of a statute providing for an equal division of property in religious disputes, that Hickite Quakers returned to “their first love,” as Joseph Fitz Randolph put it, and once again voted for anti-Jacksonian candidates. With the Quakers back in line, New Jersey politics settled into a remarkably stable pattern. Indeed, the resolution of the Hickite controversy marked a watershed in state politics—from 1837 to 1843, Whigs dominated in New Jersey. By 1836, then, the third phase of politics in the Jacksonian era reached fruition. The system was remarkably well integrated. Parties divided sharply on national and state issues. The public’s interest in political questions, as a steady stream of letters and petitions to legislative and congressional leaders attests, was considerable. High voter turnout was the rule.

If there was any oddity in the system it was the paradox of intense politicking on issues having relatively little impact on voters’ choices during elections. Voting was primarily a function of party loyalty, of getting out the vote of one’s own partisans. There were few independent voters to persuade. As a consequence, township returns for national elections from 1826 through 1836 were remarkably consistent. Fewer than 10 percent of New Jersey townships outside of Burlington County evidenced any significant fluctuation in voting from year to year. National issues, like the Bank of the United States and the fight over Martin Van Buren’s independent treasury scheme, tended to deepen and harden loyalties already formed, and to encourage increased voter turnouts. But they evidently had only a marginal influence on the results. The patterns established in the mid-1820s held for more than a decade, in spite of the changes in leadership and issues that occurred as time passed.

In retrospect it does not appear to have been simply a fortuitous accident that national issues fit the interests and values of the constituencies which had gravitated to Jackson and Adams in the years of partisan realignment. The bank issue seems to have been carefully chosen by Jackson and his associates to rally, not alienate, his hard-core supporters. The townships that gave Jackson his strongest support had few banks and harbored a deep suspicion of banking and the moneyed economy. The townships and cities that were more comfortable with banking were the ones that had opposed Jackson since 1828 anyway.

Unlike the situation in other states, where a shacking out of parties occurred in the wake of the Bank War, New Jersey experienced no major upheaval aside from the defection to Whigery of a handful of prominent business-oriented Jacksonians. Original alignments endured and were evidently well adapted to the rhetorical and substantive differences expressed during the mature phase of New Jersey’s second party system.

Notes
An earlier version of this article was presented at the Duquesne History Forum, Pittsburgh, Pa., in October 1982. The authors wish to thank Professor Lawrence Kohl of the University of Alabama for his comments on it.

1 This perspective has been most influentially expressed, in somewhat differing tones, in the work of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Charles C. Sellers, Robert V. Remini, and Richard B. Ellen.


Much helpful information on the professionalization of politics can be found in Philip G. Davis, "Political Officeholders, Elitism, and Conformity in New Jersey: 1849-1860," in Paul A. Sellheim, ed., Jacksonian New Jersey (Trenton, 1979), 41-74. Davis's emphasis on lingering "patricians" attitudes into and beyond the Jacksonian era remains persuasive, however.


"The correlations between 1824 and 1836 are: Bergen County, 35.97; Essex, 35.84; Morris, 35.67; Sussex/Warren, 35.64; Middlesex, 30.59; Somerset, 84.50; Monmouth, 79.84; Hunterdon, 50.27; Burlington, 49.62; Gloucester, 91.29; Cumberland, 73.75; Salem, 86.57; Cape May, 77.93. These results were reached by taking the percentage of votes for Jackson/Crawford in 1824 and correlating them with the votes for Jackson in 1828 and 1832 and Van Buren in 1836. Unfortunately, returns by township for the 1824 election are fragmentary. But the records are complete for Somerait, Burlington, and Gloucester counties. There were twenty-two townships in these three counties, seventeen of which voted the same way in the elections of 1828, 1832, and 1836 as they had in 1824. Seven townships were less consistent. Three townships reversed their position in subsequent elections. See Joseph Poole, New Jersey Register, for the Year Eighteen Hundred and Thirty-Seven. . . . (Trenton, 1837), 387-401; New Jersey Journal and Elizabeth.

56 / MEN AND MEASURES

MEN AND MEASURES / 57
Administration Assembly in Convention at Trenton, Feb. 22, 1787 (Trenton, 1829);  
Newark New Jersey Eagle, June 20, 1829; Proceedings and Address of the New Jersey  
State Convention Which Nominated Andrew Jackson for President, John C. Calhoun for  
Vice-President of the United States (Trenton, 1828).

Erskine, Origins, 75–77.

Ibid. 98–104.

Michael Birkner, “Journalism and Politics in Jacksonian New Jersey: The  

Ibid., for example, Birkner, Southard, 129–37.

Historical Review 72 (January 1967): 455–68, captures older Whigs’ reluctance  
to engage in the rough and tumble of grass-roots politics. This was not so in New  
Jersey, where anti-Jacksonians were generally quick to embrace popular politics.

On the factional maneuvering in 1829 that cost the National Republicans  
a U.S. Senate seat, see Birkner, Southard, 115–18. Robert Stockton’s disaffection  
with the Jacksonians’ growing anti-bank, anti-incorporation position in the  
1830s is discussed in Birkner, “Peter Vroom and the Politics of Democracy,”  

Shade, “Political Pluralism.”

On the problems engendered for anti-Jacksonians by the Hickite schism  
see Michael J. Birkner, “The Politics of Resentment: Quakers and Party Conflict  
in Jacksonian New Jersey” (Unpublished paper for the Annual Conference of  
the Society of Historians of the Early Republic, July 1982).

Birkner, Southard, 142–43.


Ibid.

Erskine, Origins of Whig and Democratic Parties, chap. 8. For a discussion  
of party ideology and rhetoric late in the Jacksonian era, see John Behout, ed.,  
Proceedings of the New Jersey State Constitutional Convention of 1844 (Trenton, 1945),  
xxxvii–xxxviii. Also relevant are Ruth Welter, The Mind of America, 1820–1860 (New  
York, 1975), esp. parts 2, 3; John Ashworth, “Agrarians” and “Antislavery”: Party  
Political Ideology in the United States, 1837–1846 (London, 1983); and Lawrence F.  


Birkner, Southard, 146–47, 153.

Cate and Proceedings of the 46th General Assembly of the State of New Jersey  
(Freehold, N.J., 1835), 20, 130, 340, 345, 405, 445, 466, 470, 523; Proceedings of  
the 48th General Assembly of the State of New Jersey (Trenton, 1835), 416–17, 525,  
540. That the incorporation issue marked a new stage in New Jersey legislative  
politics is stressed by Peter D. Levine, Levine’s The Behavior of Legislative  
Parties in the Jacksonian Era, New Jersey, 1829–1833 (Rutherford, N.J., 1977); shows  
that early in the 1830s the two parties in joint meeting of the legislature divided  
primarily over choosing legislative officers and other patronage positions, but  
that this changed with the injection of new economic issues after 1833.

Levine, Behavior of State Legislative Parties, chap. 6.

William G. Shade, Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics,  
1832–1863 (Detroit, 1972), 45–60; Michael F. Holt, The Political Career of the 1830s  
(Ann Arbor, 1974), 5, and as panelist at a session on “Jacksonian Democracy: A  
Reassessment” American Historical Association Annual Meeting, Chicago, Illinois,  
December 1986.

On the problem engendered by the Hickite schism see Michael J.  

Joseph F. Randolph to Samuel L. Southard, January 25, 1836, Lewis Coun-

58 / MEN AND MEASURES

MEN AND MEASURES / 59